TOURISM IN DÜZCE:

FROM LOCAL IDENTITY TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Current Situation, Challenges and Proposed Solutions

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Editors

Prof. Dr. Muammer MESCİ

Lecturer Dr. İrina Adriana CHİURCİU

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CHAPTER ONE - ARCHAEOLOGICAL VALUES OF DÜZCE AND TOURISM,
Dr. Nihan ÖZKAN and Prof. Dr. Muammer MESCİ

CHAPTER TWO - HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF AKÇAKOCA WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF TOURISM,
Tuba HOŞCA

CHAPTER THREE - DÜZCE'S SMART CITY APPLICATIONS: CURRENT SITUATION, PERCEPTIONS AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES,
Ahmet ÖZUSTA and Prof. Dr. Muammer MESCİ

CHAPTER FOUR - EVALUATION OF DÜZCE IN THE CONTEXT OF PROMOTION AND ADVERTISING
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CHAPTER FIVE - EVALUATION OF DÜZCE IN THE CONTEXT OF DESTINATION MARKETING,
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CHAPTER SIX - OVERTOURISM WITH TÜRKİYE AND EXAMPLE DESTINATIONS; DÜZCE AS AN EXAMPLE OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM,
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CHAPTER SEVEN - AGRICULTURAL TOURISM,
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CHAPTER EIGHT - ADVENTURE TOURISM IN DÜZCE,
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CHAPTER NINE - BIRD WATCHING TOURISM AND DÜZCE,
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CHAPTER ELEVEN - CRUISE TOURISM AND DÜZCE,
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CHAPTER TWELVE - THE RECREATIONAL POTENTIAL OF DÜZCE AND RECREATION MANAGEMENT,
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CHAPTER THIRTEEN - REVALORIZING INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE THROUGH RURAL TOURISM: THE CASE OF ADA KALEH AND COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES FROM TÜRKİYE,
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PREFACE

The present volume brings together a series of scholarly contributions devoted to the theme of sustainable tourism, with a particular focus on the valorization of local heritage and the development of alternative forms of tourism. The chapter authors - academics and researchers from leading universities in Türkiye and Romania - advance an interdisciplinary and applied approach, highlighting local specificities, underutilized tourism potential and viable pathways for sustainable development. The academic inquiry is centered on the Düzce region in Türkiye, which provides a relevant model of tourism diversification through the effective use of its broad range of available resources. These experiences serve as examples of good practice for destinations with comparable potential, such as the Romanian coastline, where diversifying tourism offerings beyond mass summer tourism could support sustainable development and contribute to extending the recreational season. The volume concludes with a case study of Ada Kaleh Island, a cultural heritage site of exceptional value that has been lost beneath the waters of the Danube, yet whose memory and cultural significance can be reactivated through innovative approaches to memorial and intercultural tourism. From a transnational perspective, the analysis also incorporates the experience of the Halfeti area in Türkiye, which has likewise been affected by submersion, thus offering a comparative view of the ways in which lost heritage can be reconnected with communities and transformed into a tourism resource grounded in collective memory and historical narrative.

The volume is structured into 13 chapters that address a wide range of tourism forms and dimensions of tourism development, ranging from archaeological heritage and local identity to smart city applications, destination marketing, promotion and advertising, as well as alternative types of tourism, including agricultural, adventure, birdwatching, winter, cruise, and recreational tourism. The first twelve chapters examine the current situation, identify specific challenges and propose practical solutions for the sustainable development of tourism in the Düzce region. By contrast, Chapter 13 broadens the analytical perspective through a case study of the intangible cultural heritage of Ada Kaleh Island in Romania, offering a comparative model for the tourism-driven reactivation of lost memory and identity by drawing on experiences from the Halfeti area in Türkiye.

The academic inquiry begins, in Chapter 1, with an examination of the relationship between the archaeological values of the Düzce region and tourism, emphasizing

the importance of protecting archaeological sites within the context of tourism development. The authors highlight the need for integrated policies that ensure both the conservation of historical and cultural resources and their responsible use for educational and economic purposes, providing concrete examples of how archaeological heritage can be transformed into a key driver of sustainable local development.

Chapter 2 focuses on the analysis of the historical and social structure of the town of Akçakoca in relation to tourism, highlighting its urban and cultural evolution as well as its potential for sustainable tourism development. The activation of built heritage and local identity is presented as a set of essential resources for tourism revitalization, underscoring the role of historical heritage in strengthening the attractiveness of small and medium-sized urban destinations.

The technological dimension of tourism is examined in Chapter 3 through the lens of smart city applications implemented in Düzce, analyzing how digital technologies can support sustainable tourism and the management of urban heritage. The smart solutions adopted to improve urban infrastructure, access to information and citizen engagement illustrate their positive impact on the tourist experience as well as on the protection and preservation of local heritage.

The role of promotion and advertising in cultural tourism, addressed in Chapter 4, gains particular relevance in the context of enhancing the visibility of Düzce's local heritage. The analysis focuses on the influence of promotional campaigns on public perception and on marketing strategies tailored to cultural heritage, with an emphasis on local identity, authenticity, and sustainability, offering practical insights for the development of effective communication strategies for tourist destinations.

Chapter 5 examines the process of building and consolidating Düzce's image as a tourist destination, with a strong emphasis on the promotion of local cultural heritage. Tourist perceptions, the factors influencing destination choice, and the importance of coherence between place identity and promotional strategies are discussed in depth, highlighting the crucial role of local communities in shaping an authentic and sustainable destination image.

The phenomenon of overtourism is addressed in Chapter 6 through a critical analysis of its negative impacts on tourist destinations, drawing on examples from Türkiye. The chapter highlights the imbalances created between tourism demand, destination carrying capacity, and heritage conservation, presenting Düzce as a reference point for sustainable tourism practices. It further proposes strategic

directions for the sustainable management of tourist flows, with the aim of safeguarding the cultural and natural resources of the regions concerned.

Agricultural tourism is explored in Chapter 7 as a means of integrating traditional farming activities into the tourism offer of the Düzce region. The chapter analyzes the potential of agritourism to support the sustainable development of rural communities through the preservation of authentic lifestyles, the promotion of local products, and the diversification of local economies. These aspects are examined in relation to the challenges posed by globalization, highlighting both the benefits and the limitations of this form of tourism.

Subsequently, Chapter 8 presents adventure tourism as an alternative and sustainable approach to the valorization of Düzce's natural resources. The analysis focuses on the specific activities associated with adventure tourism and their role in diversifying the tourism offer, attracting new visitor segments, and stimulating local economic development, while adhering to principles of environmental protection and safety.

Ecotourism finds its expression in Chapter 9 through birdwatching tourism in the Düzce region, highlighting the potential of this form of tourism for the sustainable harnessing of local biodiversity. The chapter examines the importance of natural areas and avian habitats, emphasizing the role of birdwatching in attracting specialized visitors, increasing environmental awareness, and supporting local economic development under conditions of environmental protection.

Winter tourism is analyzed in Chapter 10 as an opportunity to diversify the local tourism offer, drawing attention to favorable natural conditions, existing infrastructure, and opportunities for developing activities specific to the cold season. The contribution of this form of tourism to stimulating the local economy and extending the period of recreational activity is emphasized, in accordance with the principles of sustainable development.

Chapter 11 addresses cruise tourism from the perspective of its role in the development of Düzce's riverine and coastal destinations. The economic and tourism-related impacts of cruise activities, along with the opportunities and challenges associated with this form of tourism, are analyzed with particular emphasis on infrastructure, visitor flow management, and the necessity of integrating sustainable development principles into destination planning.

Chapter 12 examines the recreational potential of the Düzce region and the management of recreational activities in relation to destination development and quality of life enhancement. The importance of leisure infrastructure, green spaces,

and outdoor recreational activities is highlighted, emphasizing their contribution to diversifying the tourism offer and promoting sustainable tourism practices tailored to the needs of both local communities and visitors.

The volume concludes with Chapter 13, which adopts an integrative and reflective approach and is devoted to the revalorization of intangible cultural heritage through tourism, with particular emphasis on the case study of the lost island of Ada Kaleh in Romania. The cultural legacy of this submerged territory - still vividly present in the collective imagination of local communities - is examined, highlighting its symbolic meanings and its potential for tourism reactivation through processes of cultural revalorization. From a comparative perspective, relevant examples from Türkiye are incorporated, with particular reference to the Halfeti area, which has also been affected by submersion, in order to illustrate modes of symbolic revitalization and cultural reconstruction. The chapter emphasizes the role of intangible heritage, multicultural identity and international cooperation in the development of alternative forms of sustainable tourism grounded in memory, narrative and the re-signification of lost heritage. Drawing on an analysis of fragments of lived experience, personal narratives and testimonies that contributed to shaping the cultural identity of the island, the final chapter is dedicated to the memory of the places and communities that once inhabited these now-vanished landscapes. It should be acknowledged, however, that this chapter occupies a more personal place than the editorial voice of this preface might suggest. It is grounded in my own childhood memories - the people I knew, the voices I listened to, the stories told to me at a time when the island survived only in the memory of those who carried it symbolically with them. In this spirit, the chapter is dedicated to the Ada Kaleh community: to those who lived on the island, to those who loved it and to those who kept it alive, through words.

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More than a mere collection of studies, the volume represents a symbolic endeavor of heritage recovery, demonstrating that sustainable tourism can function as a powerful instrument for cultural re-signification, intercultural dialogue and the reconnection of past, present, and future.

The book makes a substantial contribution to the scholarly literature, addressing researchers and academics as well as practitioners in the fields of tourism and cultural heritage, policy-makers, and all those interested in the interdependence between culture, memory, and sustainable development. Through its interdisciplinary perspectives and its grounding in concrete case studies from the Düzce region, the volume offers valuable theoretical insights and practical frameworks for understanding how cultural heritage can be effectively integrated into responsible, long-term development strategies.

The Romanian - Turkish dialogue that underpins this volume, together with the wide range of topics addressed, reinforces the understanding of cultural heritage not merely as a tourism resource, but as a foundational element of community identity, continuity, and social cohesion. In this respect, the volume invites readers to engage in critical reflection on the value of cultural memory, to assume responsibility for heritage protection, and to cultivate respect for the shared heritage of humanity, understood as an essential form of cultural capital for the construction of sustainable and socially cohesive societies.

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CHAPTER ONE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL VALUES OF DÜZCE AND TOURISM

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INTRODUCTION

Archaeological remains such as objects, structures, artifacts, and inscriptions constitute the fundamental and primary sources of information on the earliest periods of human history. Each tangible remain embodies profound narratives that strengthen intercultural connections and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of human origins. Ranging from ancient architectural structures and excavation sites to museums displaying historical artifacts and human remains, this material heritage, enriched by artworks reflecting the aesthetic and cultural values of past societies, attracts millions of visitors each year. These historical treasures have become one of the most valuable components of the tourism industry, offering individuals the opportunity to experience and engage with the cultural accumulation of the past.

Located in the ancient lands of the Western Black Sea region, which has hosted numerous civilizations throughout history, the city of Düzce holds a significant place with its rich archaeological heritage. From Antiquity to the Middle Ages, Düzce possesses a diverse historical legacy that includes the ancient city of Prusias ad Hypium, bearing traces of the Roman period; the Genoese Castle from the Medieval era; and cultural assets such as mosques, baths, and tombs from the Ottoman periods. This rich heritage contributes to the diversification of Düzce's

touristic components, enabling the evaluation of its archaeological values as an important tourism resource. Since 2013, archaeological excavations have been meticulously conducted with the aim of uncovering and preserving the region's historical and cultural heritage.

In this study, the definition of archaeology and its relationship with tourism will be discussed, followed by an examination of Düzce's historical development from antiquity to the present day. Subsequently, the significant cultural assets of Düzce will be evaluated, and information will be provided on the archaeological excavations and recent findings in the city. The following section will present details about the existing museum and address the preservation of archaeological heritage through tourism. Finally, the current situation regarding the evaluation of archaeological heritage as a tourism product will be analyzed, and proposed solutions to the challenges encountered will be presented.

1.1. TOURISM AND ARCHAEOLOGY

The term archaeology derives from the Ancient Greek words *arkhaios*, meaning "ancient" or "original," and *logos*, meaning "study," "discourse," or "theory." Although the concept of archaeology began to take shape in the 17th century, its establishment as a distinct scientific discipline is generally dated to the 19th century (Sevin, 1999). Archaeology is a field of study that seeks to gain knowledge about the past activities of human societies through the analysis of material remains obtained from fieldwork. All tangible evidence of human activities considered historically, culturally, or scientifically significant is regarded as an archaeological source. The examination of these sources contributes to understanding the past, preserving cultural heritage, enriching historical narratives, and analyzing human behavior and social development (Fagan & Durrani, 2016).

Archaeology is an interdisciplinary field of research that draws upon various scientific disciplines such as anthropology, physics, architecture, geography, chemistry, botany, and history. The interdisciplinary approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the complexity of archaeology. Archaeological findings also constitute a rich source of data for questioning or advancing existing theories and interpretations within these related disciplines (Renfrew & Bahn, 2005).

Archaeological sites serve as an important source of information for much of human history. In this context, the physical remains found in historical and archaeological areas may represent the only surviving evidence of past human activities; therefore, the destruction of these remains can lead to an irreversible loss of knowledge (Green, 2001). An archaeological site refers to any location

containing the physical remains of past human activities. The study of archaeological remains enables a scientific understanding of fundamental events and phenomena in human history such as when, where, and how humanity emerged; the development of art, technology, and writing; and the origins and spread of agriculture, societies, and urbanization (Bahn, 2012).

Since prehistoric times, human communities have used a wide variety of materials to produce tools. After employing various natural materials-both mineral (such as stone, flint, clay, and ochre) and organic (such as wood, bone, leather, and shell)-they later developed new materials such as pottery, glass, and metal through the transformation of natural substances under the influence of fire (Sciau, 2016). Archaeology seeks to understand the human past by examining the remnants of these materials through various methods, including exploration and excavation (Sevin, 1999). Archaeological exploration aims to identify and document archaeological sites using systematic methods, while archaeological excavation refers to the process of uncovering, retrieving, and analyzing cultural and biological remains buried in the soil (Uçankuş, 2000). Following fieldwork, data analysis is conducted in order to interpret the material remains discovered (Fagan, 2006). Each of these methods requires a carefully planned and well-documented process. Every discovery made throughout these stages contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of human history.

The practice of visiting ancient monuments began in ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, coinciding with the transformation of travel into tourism, and later developed in Europe (Díaz-Andreu, 2024). For instance, in antiquity, it is known that people traveled long distances to see archaeological sites such as the Egyptian pyramids, temples, and monuments. Likewise, during the 17th and 18th centuries, as part of the journey known as the "Grand Tour," young aristocrats traveled along specific routes to visit major works of art, historic cities, and ancient ruins (Timothy & Tahan, 2020).

Tourism centered on archaeological sites is commonly referred to in the literature as "archaeological tourism," "archaeo-tourism," or "archaeology-based tourism" (Giraudo & Porter, 2010; Afkhami, 2021). In general terms, archaeological tourism can be defined as the visits made by tourists to archaeological sites and museums who long for the past, seek to establish an authentic connection with it, wish to experience the excitement of discovery, or aim to gain deeper knowledge about different societies (Giraudo & Porter, 2010).

The relationship between archaeology and tourism represents an important area of collaboration that contributes both to the preservation of archaeological heritage

and to the generation of economic value from these sites. While the tourism industry focuses on developing archaeological areas to achieve economic benefits and to fulfill tourists' desire to connect with the past, the discipline of archaeology prioritizes the scientific significance of these sites and their transmission to future generations. Today, both sectors increasingly recognize the importance of preserving the integrity and authenticity of archaeological sites in response to an informed and demanding audience (Walker & Carr, 2016).

Archaeological resources, created throughout human history and gradually acquiring cultural, historical, and economic value over time, are unique assets that possess the potential to constitute a tourism activity in their own right. With these characteristics, archaeological resources hold great significance for tourism (Afkhami, 2021; Yiğin & Akay, 2023). In addition to offering tourists profound and meaningful experiences, these resources encourage local communities to take pride in their cultural past, helping them to explore their cultural identity and strengthen their sense of belonging to cultural heritage (Willems & Dunning, 2015; Timothy, 2024). The tourism industry, by increasing the visibility and recognition of archaeological sites, fosters public interest and participation in these areas, thereby contributing both to the achievement of sustainable development goals and to the generation of broader social benefits (Gürsu, 2020).

In general, archaeological tourism can be defined as a series of touristic journeys that meet the following requirements (Moreno & Sariego, 2017, p. 173):

- The main motivation of the trip is the archaeological tourism resources found in the visited destination and the experience derived from engaging with these resources.
- The tourist possesses a desire for self-development and demonstrates an eagerness to understand and learn about the meaning of the archaeological heritage being visited.
- The provision of essential services that enable the tourist to gain deeper knowledge about the archaeological tourism experience they are about to undertake.

The first step in making an archaeological site or monument accessible to tourism is to identify the elements that can transform the site into a touristic experience and to analyze the motivations and expectations of potential visitors (Willems & Dunning, 2015). The fundamental challenge for archaeological sites lies in developing them for tourism without compromising their archaeological integrity (Walker & Carr, 2016). The design process should aim to ensure the preservation of these cultural assets while simultaneously providing economic, social, and

cultural benefits for society. This process must be carried out within the framework of interdisciplinary collaboration and a holistic understanding of "archaeological heritage and tourism management" (Erdoğan, 2020).

1.2. DÜZCE FROM ANTIQUITY TO THE PRESENT DAY

Düzce and its surrounding region have served as a settlement area for various cultures since prehistoric times. Findings discovered in a cave settlement near the Black Sea coast of Türkiye, dated to the Early Bronze Age, have provided significant data contributing to the understanding of the prehistoric period (Ekmen, 2020; Yaman & Ekmen, 2023).

From antiquity to the present day, Düzce has been a favorable and preferred region for settlement due to its geographical features and strategic location. The history of this area, which bears traces of various civilizations, can be examined under four main periods: the Bithynian Period, the Roman Period, the Ottoman Period and the Republican Period.

The Kingdom of Bithynia, which existed between 377 BCE and 64 BCE, was located in northwestern Turkey, encompassing the eastern part of the Marmara Region and the western part of the Black Sea Region (Rémy, 1989). According to ancient authors such as Herodotus, Xenophon, and Strabo, the Bithynians were a population who migrated from Thrace to this geographical region around 1200 BCE (Paganoni, 2019). It is difficult to provide an exact number of cities that existed in the Bithynian region during antiquity. The vast geographical extent of Bithynia and its changing political and administrative boundaries over time make it difficult to determine their precise number. Consequently, both ancient sources and modern scholars offer differing perspectives on this matter. Pliny's *Historia Naturalis (Natural History)* is regarded as one of the most significant sources for understanding the ancient world (Bostock & Riley, 1856). Gaius Plinius Secundus, more commonly known as Pliny the Elder, was among the most prominent intellectual figures of the Roman period. His nephew, Pliny the Younger, held administrative and judicial positions in the Province of Bithynia and contributed significantly to the understanding of the historical and social structure of that era (Bennett, 1997).

Many of the cities within the Kingdom of Bithynia were known by more than one name. In Pliny's *Historia Naturalis*, the ancient cities located in the Kingdom of Bithynia are listed as follows (Bostock & Riley, 1856): *Nicomedia* (İzmit/Kocaeli), *Nicaea/Illyria* (İznik/Bursa), *Prousa/Prussa/Prusa/Prusias ad Olympum* (Hisar/Bursa), *Cius/Prusias ad Mare* (Gemlik/Bursa), Chalcedon (Kadıköy/İstanbul), *Byzantium* (İstanbul), *Myrleia/Apameia* (Mudanya/Bursa),

Cierus/Prusias ad Hypium (Konuralp/Düzce), *Bithynion/Bithynium* (Bolu), *Prainetos/Preietos* (Karamürsel/Kocaeli), *Caesarea/Germanice/Germanicopolis* (Bursa/Tirilye), *Cratia/Crateia/Krateia/Flaviopolis* (Gerede/Bolu) and *Juliopolis* (Nallıhan/Ankara). These ancient cities are among those mentioned by Pliny in his work.

Bithynia, distinguished by its geographical diversity, well-established settlements, and development as a trade center, was also an economically prosperous region due to its abundant natural resources such as timber, stone quarries, agricultural products, and vast pastures (Lenger, 1996). The strategic location and mountainous terrain of Bithynia enabled the region to control the passage between Asia Minor and Europe while also providing a significant advantage in military defense (Storey, 1998). The Hellenistic heritage of Bithynia left enduring traces on the region's architecture, literature, and art. The geography, strategic position, cultural richness, and natural resources of the region provided the context that shaped Bithynia's preparation for Roman domination and formed the background for many significant events in its history (Ross, 2022).

In 74 BCE, the Roman Senate, based on the terms of the will of Nicomedes IV, the last king of Bithynia, decided to annex Bithynia as a province, thereby bringing the region under Roman rule (Lewis, 1973). As a result of the ongoing conflicts between Rome and the Kingdom of Pontus, a new province named *Pontus et Bithynia* was established in 64/63 BCE through the unification of the Kingdom of Pontus with the Province of Bithynia (Magie, 1950; Wesch-Klein, 2001). Consequently, Düzce and its surrounding region became part of the Roman province of *Pontus et Bithynia*.

During the Roman Empire, the city underwent significant development, marked by the construction of aqueducts, a theatre, and numerous other public buildings. The region was integrated into the administrative and commercial framework of Roman Anatolia, holding particular importance, especially for agriculture and trade (Ramsay, 1890). The city's location along the Hypios (Melen) River and its proximity to the Black Sea coasts contributed to its emergence as a strategic and economic center during the Roman period. Serving as one of the key stops for emperors during their eastern campaigns, the settlement began to decline in the late third century CE due to the impact of economic crises, ultimately losing its former prominence (Ramsay, 1890; Zeyrek & Çelik, 2005).

The defeat of the Seljuks by the Mongols in the Battle of Kösedağ in 1243 weakened Seljuk dominance in Anatolia, creating conditions that allowed regions near Constantinople, such as Düzce, to once again fall under the influence of the

Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire (Özçelik, 2013). During this period of Byzantine control, it is believed that the Akçakoca region effectively came under Genoese supervision (Gümüş, 1967). Akçakoca Bey, one of the commanders of Orhan Gazi, the son of Sultan Osman, incorporated Akçakoca into Ottoman territory in 1319, while Konuralp Bey captured Konuralp in 1323 (Konukçu, 2014). Accordingly, it is understood that by 1323, the Düzce Plain had also come under Ottoman rule. Following these conquests, the region began to be referred to as "Konur Alp İli," "Konrapa," or "Konrâpâ" (Özlü, 2009). In subsequent periods of the Ottoman era, the area was frequently mentioned by the names Üskübî/Üsküblü/Üskübü, terms meaning "old vineyard" or "old garden."

An examination of Düzce's administrative organization process reveals that the first district center in the region was the settlement of Gümüşâbâd, known today as Gümüşova (Özlü, 2009). The earliest known record referring to Düzce appears in the 1530 Accounting Register of the Anatolian Provinces (Anadolu Vilayetleri Muhasebe Defteri), where it is mentioned as "Düzce Bazar." During this period, Düzce functioned as a marketplace and was administratively affiliated with the Konrapa District under the Bolu Sanjak (Özsoy, 2023).

Düzce held a significant position in the military strategy of the Ottoman Empire. The region was strategically utilized, particularly during military campaigns conducted toward Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia (Özlü, 2015). Over time, Düzce surpassed Gümüşâbâd and Üskübü in terms of both trade volume and agricultural land, becoming the leading settlement in the region. Until 1869, Düzce was a subdistrict (bucak) of Göynük Township, which was affiliated with the Bolu District (Mutasarrıflık) under the Kastamonu Province. During the reigns of Sultans Abdülmecid and Abdülaziz, the region experienced significant development as a result of intense migration. This process was supported by the allocation of free land titles and property grants to immigrants, ultimately leading to Düzce's designation as a district (kaza) under the Bolu Sanjak (Bozbıyık, 2015). As a result of these developments, it is understood that in 1871, the district center was officially transferred to Düzce (Bozbıyık, 2015; Dikmen & Toruk, 2017). Following the earthquakes of August 17 and November 12, 1999, Düzce was separated from Bolu and became Turkey's 81st province through Decree Law No. 584, published in the Official Gazette No. 23091 on December 9, 1999.

In conclusion, Düzce possesses a rich historical background that extends from the Kingdom of Bithynia to the Roman and Byzantine Empires, and from the Ottoman period to the Republic of Turkey. Throughout each era, the city has stood out due to its strategic location, fertile lands, and position as a transit route. With its administrative transformations, demographic changes, and architectural heritage,

Düzce today remains a distinctive settlement that continues to bear the traces of its past. This historical accumulation renders Düzce a place of great significance for both academic and cultural research.

1.3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL ASSETS OF DÜZCE

Düzce's archaeological and cultural assets represent a unique heritage, stemming from the city's role as a host to numerous civilizations throughout history. This section examines the archaeological and cultural remains identified in Düzce, spanning from Antiquity to the Middle Ages and the Ottoman period. Each subsection will evaluate the structures and remains that reflect the characteristic features of their respective historical periods.

1.3.1. Cultural Assets from the Ancient Period in Düzce

The Ancient City of Prusias ad Hypium

In the Latin expression "Prusias ad Hypium," the preposition "ad" carries meanings such as toward, near, opposite, beside, or in the direction of in Turkish. Accordingly, the name of the city Prusias ad Hypium can be translated as "Prusias opposite Hypios" or "Prusias located on/along the banks of the Hypium River" (Karakuş, 2017). Hypium refers to the ancient name of the Hypios River, known today as the Melen Stream, which flows through this region. It is considered that the fertile Hypios River played a crucial role in the establishment and development of the city and that the settlement derived its name from this river (Doğu Marmara Kalkınma Ajansı, 2013). Situated facing Mount Olympos, the settlement was most likely founded by colonists from Heraclea Pontica and was initially called Cierus (Kieros) (Bostock & Riley, 1856; Lenger, 1996; Doğancı, 2007). Subsequently, King Prusias I (230–183 BCE) recaptured the city and reestablished it under his own name. From the reign of King Prusias I of Bithynia onward, the city was named Prusias ad Hypium to distinguish it from other cities bearing the name Prusias, and it underwent significant development following its conquest (Zeyrek & Çelik, 2005; Karakuş, 2017).

Due to the lack of sufficient archaeological, philological, and epigraphic evidence, the founding period of Prusias ad Hypium remains uncertain. During the Hellenistic Period (323–30 BCE), the city became more prominent and, under the rule of the Kingdom of Bithynia, expanded significantly. In the Roman period, it became one of the twelve cities of the region through the implementation of the Lex Pompeia laws (Lenger, 1996). Located at the intersection of roads extending eastward from Nicomedia and southward from Heraclea, the city flourished rapidly during the 3rd century CE under the Roman Empire, owing to its rich forests, fertile plains, and rivers (Lenger, 1996; Karakuş, 2017). Prusias ad Hypium is

situated in the Konuralp District, approximately 8 kilometers north of the Düzce city center, along the Düzce–Akçakoca road in present-day Turkey. Remains that have survived to the present day within the ancient city of Prusias ad Hypium include a theatre, aqueducts, bridges, city walls, tumuli, and various small-scale archaeological structures.

The immovable cultural assets and the first- and second-degree archaeological sites in Konuralp were officially registered for the first time by the High Council of Immovable Antiquities and Monuments through a decision dated October 14, 1978. According to Decision No. 889, dated March 13, 2013, issued by the Kocaeli Regional Council for the Protection of Cultural Heritage, the settlement was designated as a second-degree archaeological site. Subsequently, with Decision No. 894, dated March 20, 2013, the same council reclassified the area into first-, second-, and third-degree archaeological sites (Tanrıverdi & Demir, 2015; Dikmen & Toruk, 2017). On February 19, 2013, the Kocaeli Regional Council for the Protection of Cultural Heritage granted permission for excavation works to be conducted under the supervision of the Konuralp Museum Directorate and the scientific leadership of the university (Dikmen & Toruk, 2017). Excavations at the Ancient City of Konuralp, which officially began in 2014, are still ongoing, and a significant portion of the archaeological research in various sections of the site has been completed.

The Ancient Theatre

The theatre, which forms part of the Ancient City of Prusias ad Hypium, is one of the most significant archaeological remains in the Western Black Sea region. The discovery of Hellenistic-period ceramics in the excavations conducted to the west of the theatre, along with a Hellenistic relief exhibited in Berlin, indicates that the theatre dates back to the early phase of the city (Okan et al., 2022). With its crescent-shaped plan, the theatre reflects the characteristics of Greek architecture, while the stage building and the cavea (tiered seating area) incorporate Roman architectural elements that date to the Early Hadrianic period (Türkiye Kültür Portalı, 2013).

Perrot et al. (1872), who conducted research in Anatolia in the 19th century, drew attention to the Ancient Theatre of Prusias ad Hypium in their work *Exploration Archéologique de la Galatie et de la Bithynie*. The authors noted that the theatre was built against the upper part of the hill on which the town was located, and that the slopes provided a natural foundation, creating an economical yet solid structure. In their assessment, not only the natural topography but also the theatre's remarkable form and its commanding view were decisive factors in its site

selection. They further observed that, like many ancient theatres, the structure was oriented directly toward the south, and that the white, hard, fine-grained, and densely veined limestone used in its construction had been carefully worked, with great attention paid to the profiles and ornamental details features characteristic of Greek theatres (Perrot et al., 1872). The seating areas of the theatre are adorned with lion's paw motifs (Kesim et al., 2009). In Roman culture, lion's paws were employed as decorative elements, symbolizing power, protection, and magnificence through their iconographic associations (Özdilek, 2022). Excavations have revealed that the theatre underwent a major renovation in the 2nd century CE, and that both the upper seating area and the stage building have been largely preserved to the present day (Okan et al., 2022). Until 2013, the theatre remained in a state of neglect and had been partially repurposed as a residential area. The orchestra section was converted into farmland by delimiting it with the seating blocks, a practice that caused some damage to the monument, though the central seating area survived relatively intact (Okan et al., 2022). Spectators entered the theatre, whose orchestra was larger than a semicircle, through arched doorways opened in the retaining wall. Of the seven original arch stones, only three have survived to the present. The vaulted galleries connected to the side retaining walls allowed spectators to access the theatre's ambulatory directly (Sağnak et al., 2022). Findings uncovered during the 2019 excavations suggest that the keystone on the vault's façade facing the orchestra, featuring a shield relief surrounded by a wreath, indicates that the theatre might have been used for athletic contests or gladiatorial games (Sağnak et al., 2022; Okan, 2022). Furthermore, an inscription discovered at Aphrodisias, mentioning the cities of Nicomedia, Nicaea, Claudiopolis, and Prusias ad Hypium in the Bithynian region as venues for a boxer's competitions, supports the idea that the theatre was used not only for cultural performances but also for athletic and sporting events (Pınarcık & Berkant, 2024).

The Horseman Gate and the Adjacent City Walls

The "Horseman Gate," distinguished by its architectural features, decorative elements, and inscriptions, served as one of the entrance structures of the ancient city. The gate possesses a large lintel made of local limestone, which bears a depiction of a horse accompanied by a Greek inscription. It is believed that the inscription was commissioned by a citizen of Prusias as a funerary epitaph dedicated to his mother. The city wall extending southeast from the gate is connected to a square-planned tower (Doğu Marmara Kalkınma Ajansı, 2013).

It is known that the southern part of Prusias ad Hypium contains remains of city walls dating back to the Bithynian period. This is attributed to the Gothic invasions, which lasted for nearly a decade and prompted many cities in the

Kingdom of Bithynia to strengthen their defensive structures (İhtiyar, 2022). Several cities, including Nicaea, Apamea, Prusa, and Nicomedia, were plundered and severely damaged by the attacks of the Gothic tribes. Inscriptions discovered in Prusias ad Hypium, dating to the 3rd century CE, indicate that the city walls were reinforced during this period as protection against Gothic assaults (Okan & Aydın, 2024). While some sections of the western and southern fortifications are still visible today, depictions on coins suggest that the city gate dating from the reign of Emperor Gallienus featured multi-storeyed towers and an arched architectural design (Karakuş, 2017). The French painter and traveler Jules Laurens, who visited the city in 1874, also produced an illustration depicting the condition of the fortification remains at that time (İhtiyar, 2022). The surviving portions of the city walls, built with spolia stones bearing inscriptions, extend for approximately 200 meters along the southern and western sides of the city and provide valuable insights into its historical development. However, these walls, now at risk of disappearing, extend along the Akçakoca road, starting across from the ancient bridge and continuing toward Hamam Street. Some segments have become enclosed within private gardens, while others have been repurposed as foundations or garden walls (Kesim et al., 2009).

The Roman Bridge

It is known that Prusias ad Hypium reached the peak of its cultural, commercial, and political relations with neighboring cities particularly during the Roman period (Zeyrek & Çelik, 2005). The Roman army is known to have used the routes passing through the Bithynian region during its eastern campaigns (Ateş, 2021). One of Rome's main roads extending eastward, the Northern Route, is believed to have passed through the Prusias Plain, as evidenced by the remains of a bridge constructed over the Melen River (Zeyrek & Çelik, 2005). Located northwest of Konuralp, within the Tabak Stream bed along the Düzce–Akçakoca road, the Roman Bridge was unearthed through rescue excavations conducted before it was completely buried (Pınarcık & Berkant, 2024). The bridge was constructed by assembling white marble blocks without mortar, and it is notable for its arched design. The design of the arches provided both resilience against flooding and enhanced load-bearing capacity (Düzce Taşınmaz Kültür Varlıkları Envanteri, 2014). Over the centuries, the bridge suffered severe damage due to natural disasters, environmental conditions, and human-induced destruction. The structure was originally double-arched, but only the fill section dating to the Medieval period and some brick band remains have survived to the present (Belke, 1996). Excavations around the historical bridge uncovered a human skeleton, suggesting that an earthquake in the ancient city may have caused the collapse of structures

and resulted in loss of life and property (Ateş, 2021). In 2022, detailed work on the bridge was carried out within the scope of rescue excavations conducted by museum directorates under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Turkey. The bridge was restored in accordance with its original form and has been preserved as an important element of the region's cultural heritage (T.C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 2022).

The Aqueducts

Water held great importance in Roman culture. Although some aqueducts were supplied by surface water, most were fed by springs whose flow was enhanced through tunnels constructed to channel groundwater. The abundant water provided by these aqueducts not only ensured the growth and prosperity of Roman cities but also represented a remarkable technical achievement of Roman engineering (Deming, 2019). Only limited remains of the aqueducts belonging to the ancient city of Prusias ad Hypium have survived to the present day. Built in the 1st century CE during the Roman period and repaired in the 2nd and 3rd centuries, this structure, located along the Nicomedia waterway route is considered one of the rare and significant examples of its kind (Aksoy, 2023). The existing remains can be observed around the ancient theatre and in Kemerkasım Village. Within the central district, only eleven supporting piers of the aqueducts have survived (Karakuş, 2017). These remains are thought to be connected to the aqueducts located in Kemerkasım Village, approximately five kilometers from Prusias ad Hypium (Aksoy, 2023). The aqueduct in Kemerkasım Village appears to have been a double-tiered, arched structure, compared to the remains located in Konuralp District (Bilir, 2013). The largest pier of the aqueduct is positioned in the center of the stream bed, standing 14.5 meters high. The structure, which extends approximately 102 meters in length, varies in width 3.70 meters at its widest point and 1.10 meters at its narrowest (Aksoy, 2023). The Roman-period aqueducts in Düzce were constructed at low elevations and supported with tunnels and piers, due to the region's seismic activity. It is believed that these aqueducts collapsed over time as a result of the deterioration of rubble stones and the earthquakes generated by the Düzce Fault Line (Ateş, 2023).

The Mosaics

In the 1950s, mosaics were accidentally discovered in a field located to the south of the city of Konuralp, and they are believed to have adorned the floor of a Roman villa. The mosaic in Area 1, which extends across the rooms of the villa, depicts the theme of Achilles and his mother Thetis, while the mosaic in Area 2 portrays the Orpheus motif (Düzce Taşınmaz Kültür Varlıkları Envanteri, 2014). The mosaic,

dated to the mid-3rd century CE, illustrates the scene of Odysseus revealing Achilles, who was hiding in the palace of King Lycomedes on the island of Skyros. Around the central depiction, scenes of hunting and banqueting drawn from daily life are represented. Consisting of 32 panels and covering an area of 6.6 m², the mosaic reflects the artistic and cultural richness of the period, with similar examples found in Zeugma (Sezer, 2018). The Orpheus-themed mosaic, measuring 8.10 × 5.30 meters, was conserved in 2012 and is currently on display at the Konuralp Museum (Sezer, 2015). Based on stylistic and decorative similarities, it is concluded that the mosaic was either crafted by a mosaic master from Antioch (Antiocheia) or by a local artisan working according to a pattern book (Sezer, 2015). The mosaic depicts Orpheus at the center, shown playing his lyre, surrounded by scenes symbolizing the seasons. Around the central figure are animal motifs, such as lions, tigers, and peacocks, while the four corners feature female heads personifying the four seasons (Türkiye Kültür Portalı, 2021). Orpheus is one of the most significant figures in Greek mythology. His origins are uncertain; in some accounts, he is described as the son of Oeagrus, King of Thrace, while in others, he is the son of Apollo, the god of music. Renowned for his extraordinary musical talent, Orpheus occupies an important place in mythology as a symbol of the power of music, capable of moving stones and taming wild beasts with his songs and lyre (Segal, 1989).

Another artwork of significant artistic value is a mosaic panel depicting Aphrodite, measuring 1.28 meters in height and 1.02 meters in width. The composition features a standing female figure, accompanied by a young woman positioned behind her and a winged child (Bilir, 2024). In 2015, the mosaic was intercepted within the borders of Düzce while being smuggled from Syria to Europe, and it was subsequently confiscated and added to the collection of the Konuralp Museum (Bilir, 2024).

The Necropolis Area

Necropolises were burial areas constructed in antiquity to honor the dead and reflect the distinctive artistic and architectural styles of each civilization. These structures are significant as they preserve the traces of ancient culture and history to the present day. In the ancient city of Prusias ad Hypium, necropolis sites were located to the east, west, and north, known as the Tepecik and Binbirtepe necropolis areas. These areas have been designated as third-degree archaeological sites (Dikmen & Toruk, 2017). The Beyciler–Çavuşlar Necropolis, dated to the Hellenistic and Roman periods, is reported to consist of at least three distinct burial zones, which have been registered as first-degree archaeological sites (Bora, 2015). This indicates that designated burial grounds outside the main settlement area were

used systematically in the city's funerary practices. Within the necropolis area, remains such as slabs associated with church architecture, double columns, and several Early Byzantine funerary inscriptions have been identified. These inscriptions provide valuable insights into the social structure, military and religious affiliations, and notable individuals living in Prusias ad Hypium during the Early Byzantine period (Belke, 1996).

A group of metal vessels in the Greco-Persian style, dated to the second half of the 4th century BCE and believed to have originated from the Prusias Necropolis, was identified at the Istanbul Antique Market. These artifacts are considered evidence of Persian influence in the region (Okan et al., 2022). The findings demonstrate that the necropolis was not merely a burial area, but also provides significant insights into the lifestyle, religious beliefs, and artistic preferences of the period.

In 1937, a sarcophagus dated to the 1st century CE was discovered in the necropolis area located west of Konuralp. The long side of the sarcophagus features reliefs of garlands supported by bull heads, with an uninscribed tabula ansata positioned at the center. The lower section of the sarcophagus is decorated with various depictions of animals (Düzce Valiliği İl Kültür ve Turizm Müdürlüğü, 2017).

1.3.2. Cultural Assets from the Medieval Period in Düzce

The Genoese Castle

Akçakoca has a rich historical background, having hosted various civilizations since 1200 BCE, including the Thracians and Phrygians, followed by the Kingdom of Bithynia, the Persians, the Roman and Byzantine Empires, the Seljuk State and the Ottoman Empire (Düzce Valiliği İl Kültür ve Turizm Müdürlüğü, 2010). In ancient times, the city was named Dia, a term meaning "brightness" or "star," inspired by the white rocks along its coast. During the Byzantine period, the suffix "-poly" (meaning city) was added to its name, resulting in Diapolis (Bozkurt & Altundaş, 2017).

Situated on a cliff between two coves, the Genoese Castle is one of the most renowned historical structures in the Akçakoca district of Düzce Province. There is no definitive information regarding the exact date of its construction. However, studies have shown that the construction techniques and materials used in the castles recorded as being renovated by the Genoese are associated with the specific conditions, local features, and architectural practices of the Late Medieval Period (approximately the 13th to mid-15th centuries) (Sur & Serin, 2023). Chemical analyses of the bricks and plaster used in the construction of Akçakoca Castle indicate that it was built during the same period as the Yoros Castle and Amasra

Castle. This finding supports the view that the structure was indeed used by the Genoese (UNESCO, 2020).

During the Middle Ages, the Genoese Republic established numerous coastal colonies on Byzantine territories along the Mediterranean and Black Sea coasts for commercial and strategic purposes (Khvalkov, 2017). Some of the fortresses built during the Byzantine period in these coastal regions later came under Genoese control or were reconstructed by the Genoese (Yılmaz, 2021). In order to ensure the safe navigation and supply of warships and merchant vessels operating in the Black Sea, the Genoese repaired these fortresses and enabled them to serve multiple functions-such as protecting local populations from pirate raids and enemy attacks, guiding ships, and providing provisions (Yerlikaya, 2001). With the establishment of Turkish rule in the region during the Ottoman period, these fortresses and walled settlements continued to exist through restoration efforts, and today they are regarded as examples of tangible cultural heritage that embody the architectural characteristics of multiple civilizations (Yılmaz, 2021).

The term "Genoese Castle" is a general designation used for numerous coastal defense structures in Anatolia and Eastern Thrace that were under Genoese control for certain periods (Sur & Serin, 2023). Among the prominent Genoese fortifications in Turkey are those located in Akçakoca, Amasra, Sinop, Cide, Istanbul, Foça, Çeşme, Bodrum, Alanya, and Kaş. Together with the Genoese Castle in Akçakoca, structures such as the Galata Tower and Yoros Castle in Istanbul, the Foça and Çandarlı Castles in İzmir, and the Bartın, Amasra, and Sinop Castles were included in the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List on April 15, 2013, under the title "Genoese Trade Route from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea: Fortresses and Walled Settlements" (UNESCO, 2020).

The Genoese Castle and its surroundings, including the area where the beach is located, were officially registered and placed under protection as a cultural property by the High Council of Immovable Cultural and Natural Assets of the Republic of Turkey Ministry of Culture and Tourism through Decision No. 2527, dated July 31, 1986 (Mavi Bayrak Türkiye, 2018). The castle, situated within a first-degree archaeological site, covers an area of 12,464 m² (Türkiye Kültür Portalı, 2015). On the western side of the castle, there are semi-circular projections, while on the southern side, a tower rises in the middle of the east–west-oriented fortification walls. Within the inner courtyard, there is a water cistern, locally known as the "Wishing Well," measuring 5.30 × 5.30 × 5 meters. The fortification walls were constructed using rubble stone and brick, and an entrance gate was placed on the landward side (Yaylı et al., 2014).

Cultural Assets from the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Period in Akçakoca

The Black Sea has historically served as a contact zone between East and West and as a bridge connecting Europe and Asia. Through its trade routes, the Sea of Azov, Western Europe, Byzantium, the Near East, Italy, and the Mediterranean coasts were interconnected (Burak, 2021). Consequently, the port of Akçakoca has been an important stopover for merchant ships navigating the Black Sea since antiquity (Okan & Önemli, 2017).

In Akçakoca, archaeological findings have revealed the remains of a basilica-plan church measuring 5.50 × 24.60 meters, whose flooring was covered with bricks measuring 40 × 40 × 4 cm. It was determined that the original structure was destroyed by fire, after which a new three-nave church was constructed on the same site (Düzce Taşınmaz Kültür Varlıkları Envanteri, 2014). It has been determined that the first church was constructed in the 6th century, while the second church was built in the 8th or 9th century, and it is believed that the site remained in use until the 13th century (Düzce Taşınmaz Kültür Varlıkları Envanteri, 2014). During the rescue excavations of the church, three coins dating to the reigns of Emperor Justin II and Emperor Mauricius Tiberius were unearthed (Gökalp, 2011). These findings shed light on the religious and architectural significance of Akçakoca during the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) period. Moreover, the discovery of archaeological remains associated with church architecture in the villages of Altunçay and Kepenç, as well as the presence of place names such as Kiliselik, Ala Kilise, Kızılca Kilise (Nazım Bey), and Gebe Kilise (Aktaş) in the vicinity of Akçakoca, further indicate the existence of religious structures in these areas in earlier periods (Mesci & Öztürk, 2017; Karakuş, 2017).

Remains from the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Period in Gölyaka

Within the boundaries of Güzeldere Village in the Gölyaka District of Düzce Province, there are remains of a church dating to the Late Eastern Roman (Byzantine) period. This structure provides significant archaeological evidence of the architectural characteristics of the period and constitutes a notable example of its kind (Düzce Valiliği İl Kültür ve Turizm Müdürlüğü, 2014).

1.3.3. Cultural Assets from the Seljuk and Ottoman Periods in Düzce

Düzce, which served as a significant settlement center during the Ottoman period, stands out with its diverse range of cultural heritage assets, including mosques, baths, fountains, tombs, and cemeteries from that era. Although architectural and archaeological remains from the Seljuk period are not as common or as well-documented as those from the Ottoman period, it is still possible to trace elements from the Seljuk era within the region's historical development (Özçelik, 2013). By the late 14th century, Düzce and its surrounding districts Gümüşova, Çilimli,

Yığılca, and Cumayeri had become important centers of Turkish settlement. It is known that numerous religious structures were constructed during this process in the name of Sultan Orhan, although some of these works have not survived to the present day (Özçelik, 2013). Within the borders of Düzce Province, a large number of immovable cultural properties dating to the Ottoman period are registered in the inventory of the General Directorate of Cultural Heritage and Museums. These structures represent historically, architecturally, and culturally significant elements that must be preserved within both urban and rural settlement contexts, and detailed information on these assets is presented in Table 1.

Düzce Province also stands out for its traditional examples of vernacular civil architecture, particularly concentrated in Akçakoca and Konuralp, which together form the core of the region's historic residential fabric. These houses generally date from the 19th and 20th centuries. Among the registered immovable cultural properties in Düzce, there are 117 examples of civil architectural heritage (Düzce Valiliği İl Kültür Ve Turizm Müdürlüğü, 2014).

Table 1. Cultural Assets from the Seljuk and Ottoman Periods in Düzce

Cumayanı Evliya Mosque and Tomb	Located in the Cumayanı area of Göktepe Village in the Akçakoca District of Düzce Province, the site includes the Evliya Mosque, a bath dated to the Seljuk period, and the Tomb of Secaaddin Ebu Ahmed Dede. The rectangular-plan mosque, constructed of rubble stone, features an entrance, windows, and a mihrab dating from the 20th century. During the restoration process, a wooden minbar, a last congregation area, and a paneled wooden ceiling were added, while the structure was completed with a plastered exterior façade and a hipped roof.
Korfa Mosque	The Korfa Mosque, located in the Hacı Yusuflar Neighborhood of Akçakoca District, Düzce Province, was constructed in the 18th century using a timber-frame and brick masonry technique. During the 20th-century restoration works, the windows, ceiling, and roof of the structure were renewed; a wooden minaret covered with zinc was added to the entrance section, and the hipped roof was covered with Marseille-type tiles.
Cumayeri Ottoman Hammam	The Ottoman Hammam in Cumayeri, believed to have been constructed in 1500, is one of the most significant Ottoman-period structures in the region due to its historical and architectural characteristics. The building, with its well-preserved original fabric, continues to serve an important function in the preservation and presentation of cultural heritage to visitors.

Akçakoca Çayağzı Village Orhangazi Mosque	It is believed that Orhan Gazi visited this village in 1323, where he stayed and commissioned the construction of a mosque bearing his name. Recorded in official documents as the Sultan Orhan Mosque, this cultural heritage site was restored by the General Directorate of Foundations in 2007 and reopened for worship and visitation. The mosque, constructed 687 years ago using the traditional çantı (timber interlocking) technique without nails, is notable for the presence of tombstones with turban motifs in its surrounding area.
Hemşin Village Mosque	Located approximately 15 kilometers from Akçakoca, the Hemşin Village Mosque was constructed by the Hemşin settlers who migrated to the region following the Ottoman–Russian War of 1877. As one of the early examples of wooden mosques in the area, it has preserved its traditional architectural features and continues to function as a place of worship today. The structure, built with a stone ground floor and an upper floor constructed using the çantı (timber interlocking) technique, stands out as a significant example of cultural heritage, notable for its wooden minaret, as well as its mihrab and minbar details.
Uğurlu Village Yeni Meze Mosque	Located 16 kilometers from Akçakoca, the Yeni Meze Mosque in Uğurlu Village, built in 1885, stands out as a significant example of cultural heritage, distinguished by its stone craftsmanship and Ottoman-era calligraphic inscriptions.
Gaziler Village Mosque	Located in Gaziler Village of Yığılca District, Düzce Province, this mosque, estimated to be approximately 300 years old, exhibits architectural features similar to early Ottoman çantı-type wooden mosques. The square-planned, two-story structure was built using interlocked wooden logs. The mosque's door surface, adorned with floral and wheel-of-fortune motifs painted with natural dyes, as well as carved crescent decorations, and its geometric ceiling medallion, make it a remarkable example of traditional craftsmanship. In the mosque's courtyard stands the Tomb of Sheikh Ismail (Şıh İsmail Türbesi).
Sarıçökek Village Orhangazi Mosque	Located in Sarıçökek Village of Kaynaşlı District, this çantı-type mosque, dated to the reign of Orhan Gazi, was constructed without the use of nails, by interlocking long timber logs on a stone foundation. The rectangular-plan structure, which exhibits early architectural characteristics, is identified as a Friday mosque from the 14th century, with its original roof covering later replaced by a hipped roof.

Ozanlar Village Mosque	Although the exact construction date of the mosque is unknown, the tombstones in its cemetery, dated 1774, suggest that the structure dates back to the 18th century. Restoration work commenced in 2022, during which dismantling procedures were carried out as part of the conservation process.
Terzialiler Neighborhood Tekke Mosque	Located in the central district of Düzce Province, this square-planned mosque, constructed with rubble stone masonry, is dated to the 19th century. Its wide wooden eaves have been renewed with Marseille-type roof tiles; the women's gallery has been positioned above the last congregation area, and the mihrab has been reconstructed using concrete material.
Pınarlar Village Mosque	Located in Pınarlar Village of Düzce Province's central district, the mosque, dated to 1922, is a rectangular-plan structure constructed with rubble stone up to the plinth level, while its upper sections were built using timber framing and brick masonry. The building largely preserves its authentic architectural features, including its original fountain (şadırvan), wooden domed ceiling with lozenge-patterned panels, distinctive mihrab arrangement, and semi-circular arched windows.
Konuralp Central Mosque	Located in the Çiftepınarlar neighborhood of Konuralp district in Düzce province, the mosque was converted into a mosque during the reign of Orhan Gazi, repaired in the 17th century, and restored in 1986. Distinguished by its rubble stone walls, double-row windows, and pitched roof, the structure acquired its present form in the 1940s with the addition of a last prayer hall.
Murat Bey Village Mosque	Located in Muratbey Village, Kaynaşlı district of Düzce province, the mosque dates back to the 19th century and is a rectangular structure built on wooden logs without a foundation. It features brick walls with a wooden frame, a pitched roof, and original mihrab and minbar; the floor and ceiling coverings are also made of wood.
Grand (New) Mosque	Located in the city center of Düzce and originally built in 1912, the Grand (New) Mosque is a rectangular-plan structure with rubble stone walls and ashlar stone corners. The central dome, supported by four main piers, is flanked by vaulted side domes. The mihrab was crafted from plaster, while the minbar was made of walnut wood panels assembled using interlocking techniques. The mosque was destroyed in the 1999 earthquake and subsequently reconstructed with two minarets and four domes, during which it largely lost its original architectural character.

Ottoman Period Cemetery	In Çiftepınarlar Neighborhood of Konuralp, Düzce Province, four Ottoman-era tombstones have been identified. Among them, the 1821-dated tombstone of Topçuoğlu Mehmet Bey, decorated with turban motifs and floral ornamentation, is particularly notable for its wreath designs resembling Ancient Age motifs. In the Azmimilli Neighborhood City Cemetery, 16 Ottoman-period tombstones featuring Ottoman inscriptions, turban carvings, and floral decorations have also been documented. Similarly, in the Osmaniye Neighborhood Cemetery of Akçakoca District, several Ottoman-era tombstones with turbaned, headdressed, and floral motifs are present. These tombstones, dating from the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, include the earliest example inscribed in 1217 AH (1802 CE) and the latest dated to 1308 AH (1890 CE), reflecting the artistic diversity and epigraphic heritage of the Ottoman period in the Düzce region.
Tomb of Konuralp Gazi	The Tomb of Konuralp Gazi, located in Konuralp Neighborhood within the central district of Düzce Province, belongs to Konur Alp, one of the prominent commanders who played a significant role during the foundation period of the Ottoman Beylik. Within the tomb are also the graves of Ali Hamza Efendi, known to be a comrade-in-arms of Konuralp Bey, and Sheikh Hacı Hafız of Baghdad. The current structure of the tomb was reconstructed in 2022 under the leadership of the Düzce Municipality and reopened to visitors after being rebuilt in accordance with its original architectural features.
The Hammam	Located in Yukarı Neighborhood of Akçakoca District, Düzce Province, the hammam, dated between the 16th and 19th centuries, was constructed of rubble stone with lime mortar and measures 8.50 × 11.70 meters. The structure features pointed-arched brick openings and follows a multi-domed hot room (sıcaklık) plan type, covering an area of 97 square meters. The domes have collapsed, and only the foundation remains of the cold section (soğukluk) have survived to the present day.
The Fountain	Located in the Osmaniye Neighborhood of Akçakoca District, Düzce Province, the single-faced fountain is adorned with small columns (sütunçes) on its sides and tulip motifs on the capitals. According to the inscription on its pediment, dated 1327 AH (1909 CE), the structure was commissioned by Hacı Ahmet, son of the late Hacı Ahmet İskender.
Selamlar Village Fountain	Located in Selamlar Village, within the Gümüşova District of Düzce Province, the three-bowl fountain constructed of limestone (küfeki stone) contains two inscriptions dated 1906 and 1908. The fountain stands out as a monumental structure

	with its round-arched central section and small columned (sütunçe) design.
Kapkirli Hammam	Located in Akçakoca District of Düzce Province, the twin private-room (double-halvet) bath, constructed in 1922, features a transverse hot section plan with a central dome. Covering an area of 230.18 m², the bath has largely preserved its original architectural elements, although additions were later made to the entrance and furnace (külhan) sections.
Şemsi Pasha Inn	Located on the major routes connecting Anatolia to Istanbul since antiquity, Düzce has hosted the development of various cultural structures throughout history due to its strategic position. In this context, the Şemsi Pasha Inn (Han), situated in Sarıçökek Village of Kaynaşlı District, represents a rectangular-plan structure reflecting the classical Ottoman architectural style. Constructed in the 16th century along the Silk Road, adjacent to the Orhan Gazi Mosque, the inn was built using the alternating masonry technique with lime mortar. Today, only wall remains of the structure have survived.

Source: (Türkiye Kültür Portalı, 2024; Tunçay ve Yavuz, 2023; Düzce Valiliği İl Kültür ve Turizm Müdürlüğü, 2014).

1.4. DÜZCE ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM

The Konuralp Museum, located in the Konuralp Neighborhood of Düzce's central district, is a significant archaeological museum that showcases the rich historical heritage of the region. Opened to visitors in 2003, the museum houses artifacts excavated from the ancient city of Prusias ad Hypium.

The Düzce Konuralp Museum preserves a collection of 4,070 coins from the Bithynian, Roman, and Ottoman periods, which offer significant information about the economic, religious, political, and social history of the region (T.C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, t.y.). Coins are among the most significant primary sources of historical information. Although knowledge regarding the economic activities of ancient Prusias ad Hypium during the Roman Empire is limited, the coins unearthed from the site suggest that the city possessed considerable agricultural wealth (Bilir et al., 2015). Archaeological findings such as coins, figurines, and inscriptions indicate that divine cults held an important place in the city and that various forms of worship were practiced. The chief deity of Prusias ad Hypium was Zeus, while Athena, Heracles, Dionysos, Tykhe, Hygieia, Hermes, Artemis, Helios, Asklepios, and the Egyptian-origin cults of Serapis and Apis also appeared on coin

depictions, reflecting the city's religious and cultural structure (Lenger, 1996). The cults of Demeter and Aphrodite were likewise prominent in Prusias ad Hypium (Karakuş, 2017). Although no temple or similar structure has survived in the city today, architectural fragments such as columns, capitals, and friezes possibly belonging to a temple are scattered across the area. Moreover, while coins depict altars, temples, and city gates that provide insight into the city's architecture, these structures have not survived to the present day (Karakuş, 2017). Before the establishment of the museum, many archaeological artifacts unearthed in and around the city were transferred to museums in nearby cities, where they are still exhibited today. Among these artifacts, the most remarkable is the monumental statue of Tykhe, the protective goddess of the city, which is currently displayed at the Istanbul Archaeological Museum. Discovered in 1931 within the ancient city of Prusias ad Hypium and dated to the 2nd century CE, the statue stands 2.65 meters tall in total (Okan, 2016). The influence and significance of Tykhe for the city are clearly reflected in the erection of this statue, which also underscores her prominent role in the religious and cultural life of the ancient settlement (Karakuş, 2017).

The museum, which exhibits 1,904 archaeological artifacts, displays objects from the Neolithic, Bronze, Hellenistic, and Roman periods, with the majority of the collection consisting of findings from the Roman era. Among the exhibited items are terracotta objects, flasks, oil lamps, unguentaria, amphorae, jewelry, glass vessels, and ceramic pots (T.C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, t.y.). In addition, the mosaic depicting Aphrodite housed in the museum's main storage area, as well as the Orpheus Mosaic and the Achilles Mosaic displayed in the Stone Artifacts Hall, are among the most remarkable works in the collection. In the museum garden, there are architectural elements with inscriptions, tomb stelae, statue bases, sarcophagi, columns, and column capitals dating from the Roman period (Doğu Marmara Kalkınma Ajansı, 2013).

Another section of the museum is dedicated to ethnographic artifacts, where 497 objects are exhibited. The Ethnography Hall showcases items representing traditional Ottoman–Turkish culture from the 19th century to the present day. This section features handcrafted textiles reflecting traditional local motifs, regional costumes, ornamental objects, kitchen utensils, lighting instruments, weighing tools, personal belongings, swords, and rifles. Additionally, a reconstructed traditional home interior and a bridal room, brought to life with mannequins, offer visitors an immersive cultural experience (T.C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, t.y.).

1.5. PRESERVATION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE THROUGH TOURISM

Archaeological heritage sites serve as vital evidence reflecting the lifestyles and socio-cultural structures of past societies, shedding light on the developmental processes of civilizations and constituting an integral component of the shared cultural heritage of humanity. Recognized as a rare and irreplaceable treasure of humankind, archaeological remains of outstanding universal value face multiple threats, including natural disasters, environmental degradation, climate change, and human-induced damage. Sustainably managed tourism activities emerge as an important mechanism for the protection, support, and enhancement of archaeological heritage sites. While tourism serves as a significant tool for safeguarding such areas, it can also cause deterioration through factors such as excessive visitor density. Therefore, archaeological sites should not be conceived merely as entertainment venues where visitors spend extended periods, but rather as museum-like spaces that emphasize the fragile nature and cultural significance of the remains (Comer & Willems, 2012).

Through tourism, archaeological heritage sites highlight the value of the historical legacy accumulated by past generations and encourage the recognition of this heritage as a fundamental element for both individual and societal development. Tourism also generates economic resources for the maintenance and restoration of historical sites. Moreover, by creating new employment opportunities, businesses, events, and attractions, it contributes significantly to the diversification of local economies and supports sustainable development. From an environmental perspective, tourism contributes to the preservation of cultural and natural sites by actively participating in their maintenance and restoration. It can also raise environmental awareness among visitors and promote responsible and respectful behavior during travel (Afkhami, 2021). Additionally, the use of digital technologies in tourism-such as virtual and augmented reality (VR/AR) applications and virtual tours-can support the conservation of heritage sites without causing physical harm to archaeological areas (Boboc et al., 2022). When implemented within the framework of well-planned management strategies, tourism provides technological, financial, educational, and social contributions to the transmission of archaeological heritage to future generations, thereby serving as a crucial mechanism for sustainable conservation.

1.6. EVALUATION OF DÜZCE'S ARCHAEOLOGICAL VALUES AS A TOURISTIC PRODUCT

1.6.1. Current Situation

The historical background of Düzce stands out as a defining factor in the formation of the city's identity. The urban identity of Düzce has been shaped by its historical heritage, which extends from antiquity to the present day. The influences of the Ancient and Medieval periods, observable in the settlement areas, are also reflected in the naming of structures (Pınarcık & Berkant, 2024). Düzce's archaeological sites, particularly the ancient city of Prusias ad Hypium and the Genoese Castle, possess remarkable potential as touristic attractions. The Prusias ad Hypium Ancient Theatre, the only surviving ancient theatre in the Western Black Sea Region, holds a prominent place within the cultural heritage of the city. It is anticipated that the ancient city, and especially its theatre structure, will make significant contributions to the cultural heritage tourism of the region as a touristic product.

Furthermore, immovable cultural assets from the Ottoman period, including mosques, baths, fountains, tombs, and cemeteries, also enrich Düzce's historical and cultural fabric, reinforcing its status as a city of multi-layered heritage.

The excavation works, initiated in 2013 with the permission of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, are still ongoing under the supervision of the Konuralp Museum Directorate, in collaboration with the Department of Archaeology at Düzce University and the Düzce Municipality. Following the substantial completion of the excavation activities, it is planned to proceed with the restoration phase of the ancient theatre. Upon completion of the restoration process, the theatre is expected to be integrated into tourism and to host various cultural events, thereby contributing to the region's cultural and touristic development (Düzce Belediyesi, 2025). The implementation of management and development plans designed for the region's ancient heritage aims not only to preserve these areas but also to promote them culturally and touristically. Each new finding uncovered during the numerous archaeological excavations, which offer significant opportunities in terms of culture and tourism, further strengthens the historical and touristic value of the region. This process requires a comprehensive analysis encompassing not only the preservation of historical heritage but also its social significance, economic impact, and environmental dimensions. From an economic perspective, these discoveries have the potential to attract tourists, enhance the appeal of the region, and make substantial contributions to the development of local tourism.

1.6.2. Problems and Solution Proposals

The evaluation of Düzce's archaeological assets as touristic products necessitates careful attention to the delicate balance between conservation and utilization. Archaeological sites opened to tourism may suffer environmental damage due to the expansion of roads and facilities, while mass tourism can lead to the degradation of these fragile areas. Therefore, an effective management approach should be adopted that focuses on the principles of sustainable tourism, balancing the preservation of cultural heritage with its economic use. During urban development processes, traditional characteristics should be maintained, the historical context should be preserved, and awareness-raising initiatives should be strengthened. A healthy balance between tourism and heritage should be established through the protection, management, and sustainable utilization of cultural assets. In this regard, special attention should be given to the carrying capacity of cultural sites and values, and necessary studies should be conducted accordingly. Considering carrying capacity is of utmost importance to ensure the long-term sustainability of these heritage resources.

The limited knowledge of tourists regarding the significance of archaeological sites may lead to an insufficient appreciation of this heritage. To enhance awareness of historical values, interactive communication strategies should be implemented. This process fosters a sense of belonging and responsibility among local communities toward cultural heritage sites, while their perspectives and support play a critical role in ensuring sustainability. Moreover, through effective communication and collaboration with local residents, a planning approach should be adopted that not only meets the requirements of preservation but also provides economic and social benefits. In addition to such planning, it is essential to ensure that accurate information is disseminated both through printed materials such as brochures and via social communication channels, and that these efforts are systematically monitored and maintained.

Enhancing the attractiveness of Düzce's archaeological sites requires ensuring visitor comfort, which necessitates the development of supporting facilities. In this context, the establishment of tourism-oriented enterprises such as souvenir shops, dining venues, and accommodation facilities designed in harmony with the historical fabric is essential. Equally important is the provision of adequate infrastructure to facilitate access to archaeological sites, which plays a crucial role in promoting the region to a broader audience. This includes the construction of accessible roads, the provision of regular transportation services, the installation of sufficient lighting, the expansion of parking capacity, the creation of rest areas, and the implementation of effective security measures. Furthermore, it is recommended

to strengthen informational and directional systems (such as brochures and route panels) and to enrich them with audio guides and mobile applications that enhance the visitor experience. The Konuralp Museum could also benefit from an increase in its physical capacity and an update to align with modern museological standards through the use of digital technologies, thereby improving the overall visitor experience. Comprehensive landscaping and site management should be undertaken in the ancient city to ensure the preservation and proper display of archaeological remains. In addition, it is proposed to establish new museums in Düzce alongside the existing ones, such as a gastronomy museum or a children's museum, to diversify the region's cultural offerings. These museums should also feature functional websites incorporating interactive tools such as 360-degree virtual tours, thereby expanding accessibility and engagement with the region's cultural heritage.

Transforming archaeological sites into touristic attractions requires a well-structured promotional process that enhances public appreciation of these areas. In this context, it is essential to identify the target market accurately and to develop effective promotional strategies based on comprehensive market research and data analysis. Promotional activities can be carried out through various communication channels, including social media, digital marketing, travel platforms, and traditional media. In addition, thematic tourism routes should be developed and special events and festivals organized to effectively convey the unique history of the archaeological sites. Furthermore, to highlight regional identity, it is recommended to integrate local artisans into the tourism experience, thereby strengthening the connection between cultural heritage and community participation.

Findings obtained from recent excavations reveal that the archaeological sites in Düzce are multilayered and have served various functions across different historical periods. High-quality artifacts such as the Medusa head, the statue of Apollo, and the portrait head of Alexander the Great indicate that the area has the potential to be integrated into tourism through thematic archaeological routes. However, merely exhibiting these artifacts is insufficient; the information presented to visitors should be enriched with contextual and narrative interpretations. In this regard, visitor experiences can be enhanced through digital storytelling, augmented reality applications, and interactive information systems that reflect the mythological and historical context. Moreover, it is of great importance that the excavated artifacts be preserved under appropriate physical conditions and displayed effectively in local museums and open-air exhibition spaces. From the perspective of integrating archaeological values into the local

economy, associating this heritage with sectors such as gastronomy, handicrafts, and souvenir production would contribute to the diversification of tourism in the region.

The sustainable development of tourism in archaeological sites is a complex process that requires comprehensive and strategic planning. This process not only ensures the preservation of cultural and historical elements but also provides benefits for both present and future generations. Effective strategic planning requires interdisciplinary expertise, along with a thorough analysis of local conditions and consideration of regional dynamics. In this context, collaboration and coordination among governmental institutions, local administrations, academic organizations, and non-governmental organizations play a crucial role. Through institutional cooperation, the preservation and integration of cultural heritage into tourism can be managed more effectively, resources can be utilized efficiently, and regional development can be promoted. Consequently, it becomes possible to establish and implement sustainable tourism policies that respect historical heritage and deliver long-term benefits.

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CHAPTER TWO

HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF AKÇAKOCA WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF TOURISM

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INTRODUCTION

Located on the coast of the Western Black Sea Region, Akçakoca has stood out as a significant settlement center throughout history, owing to both its geographical location and cultural fabric. Having hosted various civilizations from antiquity to the present, the district has attained the character of an economic center on a regional scale through Black Sea trade, fishing, and agricultural activities.

The district of Akçakoca is bordered by Sakarya to the west, Zonguldak to the east, and Düzce to the south. The Black Sea coastline to its north has been the fundamental element shaping the city's socio-economic dynamics throughout the historical process. This coastal connection has played a critical role in the region gaining identity as a center of cultural interaction.

The historical development of Akçakoca serves as a model reflecting the socio-economic dynamics specific to coastal settlements in northern Anatolia. Possessing a structure where different faiths and cultures blend-much like many port cities-the district holds critical importance for understanding the general developmental history of the region. Research conducted on the city transcends local boundaries, offering academic depth on issues of regional economic history and cultural continuity.

This book chapter analyzes the socio-economic, cultural, and spatial fabric of the city by addressing the historical development of Akçakoca through a chronological trajectory. The primary objective is to analyze the processes that constructed Akçakoca’s historical identity and to explain the fundamental dynamics decisive in this evolution within an academic framework. The study also aims to provide a historical basis and a scientific ground for sustainable tourism approaches and

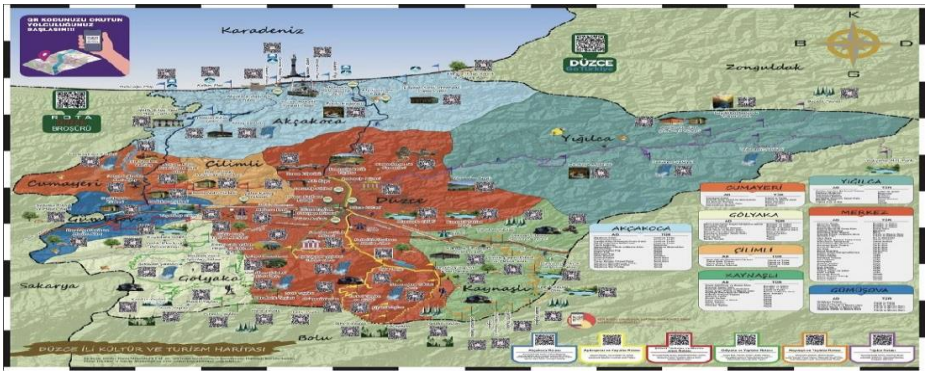
strategies for the preservation of cultural heritage, which are among the contemporary issues of the region. As with many settlements in Anatolia, the establishment and growth of Akçakoca are based on geographical opportunities and natural resources. The development of the district has been shaped by the combination of advantages provided by its coastal location and agricultural production in the hinterland. These historical economic and geographical ties continue to define the fundamental structure of the district even today.

From this perspective, the history of Akçakoca is not merely a chronological narration of events but an analysis of how geography, economy, and social structure have influenced one another. The transformations the city has undergone from Antiquity to the present help us understand how today's economic and social structure was formed. In particular, the opportunities and challenges brought by being a coastal city are the most fundamental elements constituting Akçakoca's historical identity. The most important factor determining the historical character of Akçakoca is the opportunities provided and the limitations imposed by being a coastal settlement. This book chapter aims to examine the changes and continuity in this process by addressing the city's journey from the past to the present with a holistic approach. Thus, the city's current problems and its potential for the future are more clearly contextualized through a historical lens.

2.1. GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION AND NATURAL STRUCTURE OF AKÇAKOCA

Strategic Location and Physical Environment Akçakoca is a strategic port town located in the Western Black Sea coastal belt of Türkiye, situated at the intersection point of two major metropolises, Istanbul and Ankara. While the Black Sea surrounds the district to the north, its southern borders are defined by dense forest cover unique to the region and a rugged topography. This geographical structure has directly determined the city's settlement decisions and economic orientations throughout history.

Figure 1. Tourism Map of Düzce and Akçakoca



Source: Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism (2025a)

While its coastline has enhanced transportation and trade opportunities, the mountainous terrain in the interior has caused the settlement to concentrate along the coastal strip. The region's cliffed coastline and natural bays have provided a sheltered harbor area since ancient times, granting the city a military and commercial advantage (Akçakoca District Governorate, 2025). Economic Reflections of Climate and Natural Resources The region possesses a transition climate type between the Marmara and Black Sea climates, characterized by precipitation in all seasons and balanced temperature differences. This climatic structure has enriched the vegetation, paving the way for hazelnut cultivation and forestry to become the primary sources of livelihood. The agricultural potential in Akçakoca's hinterland, combined with the marine resources along the coastline, has created a multifaceted economic model for the local population. Throughout history, the district has not relied solely on maritime activities or agriculture; instead, it has developed a resilient socio-economic structure that integrates fishing, agriculture, and small-scale trade (Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2025).

Spatial Development and Sustainability The natural environment has been the fundamental factor both guiding and limiting the physical growth of the city. The direct relationship established by the first settlements with the sea has entered a process of expansion towards the interior and the slopes due to today's increasing population and tourism impact. However, preserving this delicate natural balance of Akçakoca is of vital importance for the future sustainability of the city (Akçakoca Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2025).

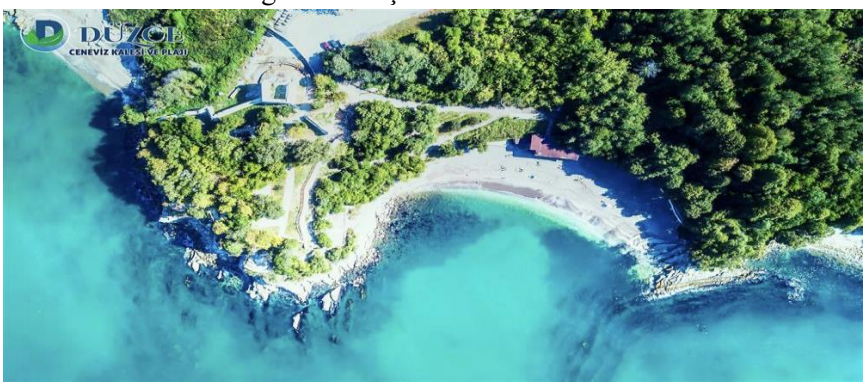
2.2. AKÇAKOCA DURING THE ROMAN AND BYZANTINE PERIODS

The history of Akçakoca dates back to a coastal settlement known in antiquity as Dia (Diapolis). Situated on the Western Black Sea coastline, Dia was considered a strategic settlement during the Roman Empire in terms of maritime trade and coastal transportation. Architectural remains belonging to the Roman period, unearthed as a result of archaeological research conducted in the district center of Akçakoca, indicate that the region was continuously inhabited during this period and possessed urban characteristics. In particular, the identified structural remains reveal that Dia was integrated into the Black Sea coastal trade network during the Roman era (Okan and Kartal, 2017).

During the Byzantine period, Black Sea coastal settlements assumed a critical role in both the security of trade routes and military defense. The fortress structures located in and around Akçakoca (Dia) demonstrate that the region served defense and surveillance functions throughout the Middle Ages. These structures are

evaluated as part of Byzantium's military and strategic settlement policies aimed at monitoring the Black Sea coastline (Verim, 2025).

Figure 2. Akçakoca Genoese Castle



Source: Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism (2025b)

In summary, Akçakoca (Dia) was not a mere coastal settlement during the Roman and Byzantine periods; it was a center of great importance from both military and commercial perspectives. Thanks to its geographical location, it stood at the very heart of maritime trade and cultural exchange. Thus, the identity of present-day Akçakoca has not been formed by coincidence but has been shaped by this deep-rooted past and strategic positioning.

2.3. TURKISH SETTLEMENT IN THE REGION AND AKÇAKOCA IN THE OTTOMAN ERA

The process of opening Akçakoca and its surroundings to Turkish settlement is closely related to the expansion of Turkish sovereignty in Anatolia. Turkish raids directed toward Anatolia during the Seljuk period extended to the northern and western regions from the 11th century onwards; this process supported the settlement of the Turkish population reaching the Western Black Sea coasts. These initial periods of expansion increased the mobility of the Turkish-Byzantine border line in the region and paved the way for an increase in the Turkish population in coastal settlements such as the vicinity of Akçakoca. During the founding years of the Ottoman Principality, many settlements under Byzantine rule on the Western Black Sea coasts were captured by Ottoman armies. The transition of Akçakoca, then known as Diapolis, to Ottoman rule occurred in 1319 with the conquest of the region by Ottoman units under the command of Orhan Gazi, along with Akçakoca Bey and Konuralp. After this date, the settlement began to be referred to as "Akçaşar" or "Akçaşehir" and was incorporated into the Ottoman administrative system (Akçakoca District Governorate, 2025).

Throughout the Ottoman period, while Akçakoca was an administrative district (*kaza*) affiliated with the Sanjak of Bolu, it played a role in both coastal trade and regional agricultural production in this context. Due to its position as a port, the region established active economic relations with the sea; it became a regional actor in terms of the transportation of natural products such as timber and firewood, and in its connections with surrounding settlements (Akçakoca Municipality, 2025b).

2.4. AKÇAKOCA IN THE REPUBLICAN ERA

Following the proclamation of the Republic, Akçakoca, like every corner of Türkiye, experienced social, economic, and administrative transformations. The Republican administration reorganized the administrative statuses of settlements; in this context, on June 23, 1934, Diapolis (Akçaşehir), which was then a sub-district (*nahiye*), was elevated to the status of a district (*ilçe*). This change was significant in terms of the region's maritime connection, agricultural production, and the development of transportation networks (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of National Education, 2025).

In the early years of the Republic, the impact of state policies in Akçakoca was reflected down to the street level. In line with Republican principles, the development of education and cultural infrastructure was aimed for, and accordingly, public buildings constructed in the First National Architectural Style-such as educational facilities like Orhan Gazi Primary School-reflect the architectural and social transformation of the period (Sahtiyancı and Yıldız, 2020).

These structures are important in terms of both the dissemination of education and the transport of modernization projects to rural areas. In the daily life of Akçakoca during the Republican era, agricultural and maritime economic activities still held an important place. The region began to draw attention particularly through hazelnut production and maritime transportation; these production and transportation activities frequently appeared in the national press to an extent that gained significant coverage. National newspapers reported on Akçakoca's social life areas, such as agricultural products, transportation routes, and cultural events; these reports are essential sources for understanding the economic and social structure of the period (Üstündağ, 2025).

The transformations carried out in the first half of the Republic were decisive in Akçakoca gaining both a district identity and the strengthening of its social infrastructure. This process brought along important steps that did not leave

Akçakoca merely as a historical settlement but turned it into a part of modern Türkiye.

2.5. SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

From the Republican era to the present, Akçakoca has undergone a process of gradual transformation in terms of its population structure and social fabric. The demographic composition of the district has been influenced by both the seasonal mobility brought about by being a coastal settlement and economic activities based on agriculture and tourism. Particularly during the summer months, the increasing population leads to periodic densities in Akçakoca's social structure; this situation creates temporary pressures on education, healthcare, and municipal services.

Characterized by a tranquil pace of life on the Black Sea coast, Akçakoca is one of the districts that reflects this modest structure through its population size. According to the Address Based Population Registration System data of the Turkish Statistical Institute, the population of Akçakoca was recorded as 41,233 for the year 2024 (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2024). This population size indicates a structure where face-to-face relations remain strong, and neighborhood and community ties hold a significant place in social life. While a large portion of the population maintains a year-round settled life in Akçakoca, where agriculture and tourism coexist, the temporary population increase-especially during the summer months-contributes to the seasonal revitalization of social life. In this respect, Akçakoca's population structure presents a balanced social profile that embodies both static and periodic mobility.

2.6. ECONOMIC STRUCTURE: AGRICULTURE, FISHING AND TOURISM

The economic structure of Akçakoca has been shaped throughout the historical process in line with the opportunities offered by the natural environment; agriculture, fishing, and recently, tourism activities have emerged as the primary economic elements. The advantages provided by being a coastal settlement, combined with the presence of agricultural lands in its hinterland, have paved the way for the formation of a multifaceted economic structure in Akçakoca.

2.6.1. Agriculture

Agriculture is one of the traditional and continuous fundamental activities of the Akçakoca economy. Specifically, hazelnut production holds a central position in the district's agricultural structure. As in the general Black Sea Region, hazelnut in Akçakoca is evaluated as both a source of income for the local population and a significant element of the regional economy. It is stated that hazelnut cultivation in

the Black Sea coastal belt plays a decisive role in preserving the rural economic structure. In addition, the production of corn, vegetables, and fruits are among small-scale agricultural activities. The fact that agricultural production is largely carried out by family businesses has contributed to the preservation of the rural lifestyle in Akçakoca. However, structural problems experienced in the agricultural sector and the distancing of the young population from farming bring along discussions of sustainability in this field (Ünver, 2023; Karayiğit, et al., 2023).

2.6.2. Fishing

As a natural consequence of Akçakoca's location on the Black Sea coast, fishing holds an important place within the economic structure. Coastal fishing is widespread in the district, with species such as anchovy, whiting, and horse mackerel standing out in local fishing activities. The biological diversity of the Black Sea has ensured that fishing has been a reliable source of livelihood for the local people for many years. However, factors such as changes in the marine ecosystem in recent years, overfishing, and environmental pollution adversely affect fishing activities. It is emphasized that ecosystem-based management approaches should be adopted for the sustainability of coastal fishing. In this context, the protection and sustainable continuation of fishing activities in Akçakoca emerge as an environmental necessity as much as an economic one (Yağlıoğlu, 2013; Akçakoca District Governorate, 2025c).

Figure 3. A Fisherman Fishing in Akçakoca



Source: Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism (2025c)

2.6.3. Tourism

Tourism activity in Akçakoca gained significant momentum particularly from the 1950s onwards. The establishment of the 'Tourism Promotion Association' in 1954-at a time when the Ministry of Tourism had not yet been founded-proves the district's pioneering role in this field. Over time, home pensioning (homestays), which emerged as accommodation facilities became insufficient, turned the district into one of the most popular tourism centers of its era by offering guests a more

intimate and boutique service. Despite hosting many famous artists and state officials, Akçakoca lost its former charm over time due to reasons such as infrastructure inadequacies, the proliferation of alternative tourism centers, seasonal constraints, and a lack of promotion (Hoşca, 2023).

Today, Akçakoca remains a significant destination for domestic and foreign tourists, thanks to advantages such as its proximity to metropolitan cities and ease of transportation. Its long coastline and diverse beaches make the district an attractive route for those seeking sea, sand, and sun vacations.

Figure 4. A View from Akçakoca Beaches



Source: Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism (2025d)

Particularly, the sea-sand-sun-oriented tourism approach has led to an increase in the number of visitors during the summer months, contributing to the development of the service sector. Accommodation, food and beverage, and retail activities have enabled an increase in economic diversity linked to tourism. Nevertheless, the seasonal character of tourism causes periodic fluctuations in the Akçakoca economy. It is noted that the failure to spread tourism throughout the year in coastal destinations creates vulnerability for local economies. Specifically for Akçakoca, the sustainability of tourism is closely related to product diversification and the development of alternative tourism types (Karagöz and Mesci, 2019; Aydemir, et al., 2015).

When evaluated in general, Akçakoca's economic structure exhibits a mixed composition where traditional elements shaped by agriculture and fishing coexist with new economic dynamics created by tourism. While this multifaceted structure enhances the district's economic resilience, it also brings planning and sustainability requirements to the forefront.

2.7. PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

The physical infrastructure and urban development of Akçakoca have been shaped throughout the historical process by population growth, diversification of economic activities, and particularly the impact of tourism. Spatial limitations inherent in being a coastal settlement have increased the need for planning in the district's urban development and have made the importance of infrastructure investments even more prominent.

Since the Republican era, the development of transportation infrastructure in Akçakoca has been one of the fundamental dynamics of urban growth. Altaban (2012) states that transportation infrastructure is one of the primary factors accelerating economic revitalization in coastal cities. A similar effect has been observed in Akçakoca.

In a study conducted in Akçakoca, Altanlar and Akıncı (2011) identified that regarding the tourism products in Akçakoca, deficiencies in infrastructure and services come to the fore the most. According to the results of the study, the general problems identified in Akçakoca are as follows:

- Unplanned urbanization,
- Lack of infrastructure and superstructure,
- Inadequacy of open and green spaces for alternative tourism and tourism activities,
- Lack of maintenance of existing facilities and environments for tourism activities,
- Inadequacy of informative signs and markers,
- Insufficient environmental cleanliness,
- Lack and inadequacy of accommodation facilities,
- Lack of promotion,
- Inadequacy of tours and organizations for tourists.

The development of residential areas also constitutes an important dimension of urban transformation in Akçakoca. The increase in summer houses has heightened construction density in areas close to the coast, which has occasionally created pressure on the natural environment. Particularly, construction along the coastline is a matter that must be handled carefully in terms of preserving the natural landscape and using coastal areas for the public interest. Keleş (2015) expresses that unplanned construction in coastal areas may lead to environmental and social problems in the long run.

When evaluated in general, Akçakoca's physical infrastructure and urban development process necessitate a delicate balance between tourism-oriented growth and environmental protection requirements. This balance can be achieved not only through technical infrastructure investments but also through an integrated

planning approach. In this context, the urban development of Akçakoca is considered an area directly related to a sustainable tourism approach.

2.8. CULTURAL STRUCTURE AND CULINARY CULTURE

The cultural structure of Akçakoca possesses a multi-layered character shaped by the influence of various communities that have inhabited the region throughout history. In addition to being a Black Sea coastal settlement, the historical ties it established with the interior parts of Anatolia have contributed to the enrichment of Akçakoca's cultural fabric. This cultural structure manifests itself in a wide range of areas, from daily life practices to traditions, and from social relations to culinary culture.

Culture is not composed solely of material elements; it is a dynamic phenomenon that reflects a society's way of life, values, and habits. Assmann (2011) states that cultural continuity is transmitted from generation to generation through collective memory. In Akçakoca, cultural values are preserved and maintained especially through family structures, neighborhood relations, and local traditions. Elements unique to the Black Sea Region are clearly visible in Akçakoca's cultural structure. The culture of solidarity, the tradition of collective labor (*imece*), and community-based social relations are among the fundamental components of the district's social fabric. However, with the influx of the summer population and tourism movements, cultural interaction has increased, and traditional lifestyles have become intertwined with modern practices. This situation makes it possible to observe both continuity and transformation simultaneously in Akçakoca's cultural structure (Düzce Governorate, 2015).

2.8.1. Culinary Culture

Culinary culture is one of the most significant cultural indicators reflecting a society's identity. While the cuisine of Akçakoca bears the general characteristics of Black Sea cuisine, it has acquired a unique quality through local products and traditional cooking methods. The natural resources of the region have been decisive in shaping the culinary culture. Fish, corn, green leafy vegetables, and local herbs are among the fundamental elements of Akçakoca's cuisine.

Fish consumption, a characteristic feature of Black Sea cuisine, is also prevalent in Akçakoca. Specifically, species such as anchovy, whiting, and horse mackerel hold an important place in daily culinary practices. Beşirli (2012) emphasizes that in Black Sea cuisine, fish is not just a nutritional element but also a cultural symbol. In Akçakoca, fish carries significant value in both economic and cultural terms.

Throughout history, Akçakoca has been a region receiving migration from many different cultures and communities. As a result of this diversity, it has acquired a multicultural character, which has enriched Akçakoca's cuisine. The culinary

landscape is dominated by Circassian, Abkhazian, and Black Sea cuisines, as well as the culinary culture of the Manav Turks. When it comes to culinary culture in Akçakoca, the following products are particularly prominent (Müfettişoğlu and Köşker, 2025):

- From Black Sea Culinary Culture: *Mancarlı pide* (chard flatbread), *mancar tepelemesi* (mashed chard), *laz böreği* (custard pastry), and *damat fındığı* (groom's hazelnuts).
- From Circassian and Abkhazian Culture: *Circassian mantı* (dumplings), *çiğ börek* (fried dough with filling), *mamursa* (maize flour dish), and *lepsi* (meat broth).
- From Manav Turk Culture: *Melengüççeği* dessert, *höşmerim* (cheese halva), and *dartı* (caramelized dairy sauce).

Figure 5. Akçakoca Melengücceği Dessert



Source: Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism (2025e)

2.9. EVALUATION OF TOURISM ENTERPRISES AND TOURIST DISTRIBUTION IN AKÇAKOCA IN THE LIGHT OF QUANTITATIVE DATA

The quantitative data and tables, prepared to reveal the structural characteristics of tourism activities in Akçakoca, clearly demonstrate how the relationship between tourism supply and demand in the district has been shaped over many years.

Table 1: Accommodation Enterprises in Akçakoca (2024)

TYPE	CLASS	FACILITY	ROOM	BED	FACILITY	ROOM	BED
	Grand Total	4	47	94	10	469	958
Hotel	Total Hotels	1	10	20	9	463	946
	5-Star				1	184	378

	4-Star				1	75	150
	3-Star	1	10	20	4	119	255
	2-Star				2	75	143
	1-Star				1	10	20
Special Facility		1	12	24			
Pension	(Unclassed)				1	6	12
					1	6	12
Camping	(Unclassed)	2	25	50			
		2	25	50			

Source: Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Culture and Tourism (2025)

According to the data in Table 1, although accommodation facilities in Akçakoca show diversity, the majority of the capacity is concentrated in hotel enterprises.

- Hotel Category: The total bed capacity of hotels in the region is over 900. In particular, the presence of a 5-star facility proves that the district possesses a qualified accommodation supply. On the other hand, 3-star hotels exhibit a balanced distribution in terms of both number and capacity.
- Alternative Accommodation: In addition to hotels, the existence of "Special Facilities," "Pensions," and "Camping" areas demonstrates the district's capacity to appeal to different tourist profiles. The recording of camping areas with a capacity of 50 beds represents the portion of the district's outdoor tourism potential reflected in official data.

Table 2. Akçakoca According to Tourist Overnight Stay Data (2024)

Number of Arrivals			Overnight Stays			Average Lenght of Stay			Occupancy Rate (%)		
Foreign	Domestic	Total	Foreign	Domestic	Total	Foreign	Domestic	Total	Foreign	Domestic	Total
936	55 986	56 922	2 052	113 020	115 072	2,19	2,02	2,02	0,41	22,52	22,93

Source: Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Culture and Tourism (2025). Tourism Statistics of Düzce Province

Visitor Profile: Of the total 56,922 tourists who visited the district in 2024, approximately 98% were domestic tourists. The number of foreign tourists remained limited at 936. This situation reveals that the district is a strong destination in the domestic market but possesses significant promotion potential in the international market.

Average Length of Stay and Occupancy: The average length of stay for both domestic and foreign tourists hovers around 2 days. This data supports the preference for Akçakoca as a "weekend getaway" or "short-term vacation" destination.

Occupancy Rates: The total occupancy rate of 22.93% indicates that facilities experience a capacity utilization problem spread throughout the year or that tourism activities are concentrated in specific seasons (seasonality effect). Notably, the foreign tourist occupancy rate remains remarkably low at 0.41%.

Although Akçakoca has the capacity to serve in various categories in terms of accommodation infrastructure, tourism mobility largely relies on short-term stays by domestic tourists. To increase occupancy rates and the number of foreign tourists, it is observed that there is a need for product diversification and destination marketing strategies, focusing on sustainable tourism efforts.

2.10. AKÇAKOCA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SUSTAINABLE AND ALTERNATIVE TOURISM

The rapid growth in tourism and the pressure created by the masses have begun to impose a serious burden on nature and culture. A vacation approach focused solely on "sea-sand-sun" now brings more harm than benefit to our coastal regions in the long run. At this point, sustainable tourism emerges as a holistic solution model that protects the environment, revitalizes the economy, and preserves local culture.

Sustainable tourism means not only protecting nature but also keeping local culture alive and making the local people a part of this process. The way to carry tourism into the future by preserving Akçakoca’s unique natural beauties is through adopting this locally-oriented approach as a fundamental strategy.

2.10.1. The Importance of Alternative Tourism Types in Akçakoca

Tourism activities in Akçakoca exhibit a seasonal structure, largely limited to the summer season. In order to overcome the economic stagnation experienced during the rest of the year, it is of strategic importance to spread tourism activities to different fields.

Alternative tourism types allow tourism in Akçakoca to spread over 12 months, preventing it from being confined to the summer months and ensuring that economic vitality dominates the entire year. Thanks to this diversity, the income of local tradesmen and residents increases, while the pressure of mass tourism on nature decreases, and the region's cultural heritage and natural resources are better preserved. Consequently, Akçakoca becomes a multifaceted and strong tourism destination standing out with its nature, gastronomy, and history rather than just being a seaside town (Hoşca, 2023).

2.10.2. Highland and Nature Tourism

The forests, highlands, and villages in the interior parts of Akçakoca are important for nature tourism. Activities such as nature walks, trekking routes, and bird watching offer great options for those who want to explore the natural beauties of the region. This type of nature-based tourism helps increase environmental awareness while saving the mobility in the region from being limited to the summer months and spreading it throughout the year (Mesci and Öztürk, 2017).

At the same time, highland and nature tourism is a very important power supporting local development in the villages of Akçakoca. These small-scale tourism activities in rural areas provide additional income by opening new job opportunities for the local people and reduce the need for young people to migrate to cities to find work. In this respect, nature tourism emerges as the most logical path that both protects nature and increases the welfare of society.

Figure 6. A Scene from Nature Tourism in Akçakoca



Source: Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism (2025f)

2.10.3. Camping and Ecotourism Activities

The people of Akçakoca frequently express how significant camping and caravan tourism were as a source of income and employment for the region during the 1960s and 1970s. Local residents point out that the declining interest today should be revitalized through modern regulations and comprehensive efforts (Akbaba,

2012). In recent years, camping and ecotourism have become increasingly popular among visitors who adopt a vacation approach intertwined with nature. When evaluated in a controlled and planned manner, Akçakoca's coastline and forested areas hold significant potential for camping tourism.

By its nature, ecological tourism involves social, economic, and ecological responsibility and sensitivity at every stage. Combining the natural environment with tourism activities, ecotourism requires all stakeholders to act with a sense of responsibility (Üzümcü and Koç, 2017). Camping and ecotourism activities, which encourage the rational use of natural resources, play a critical role in preventing ecological degradation. For the sustainability of these activities, planning and inspection mechanisms to be carried out by local governments are of great importance.

2.10.4. Gastronomy Tourism and Local Culture

Gastronomy tourism holds strategic importance within Akçakoca's alternative tourism supply. Local culinary heritage, regional product diversity, and traditional food culture are fundamental components that reinforce the destination's brand identity and increase its competitiveness. Branding the local culinary culture through festivals and events contributes to Akçakoca tourism achieving a sustainable structure by reducing seasonal dependency. The flavors of Akçakoca, promoted through festivals, have the potential to spread tourism across all four seasons. Through gastronomy tourism, the local population becomes a part of the process, and the income generated from tourism directly reaches the people of the region (Akkil, Kale, Kadam, 2024).

General Evaluation

Sustainable and alternative tourism approaches have the potential to spread the benefits derived from tourism over the long term by preserving Akçakoca's natural and cultural values. Developing alternative types such as highland, nature, camping, and gastronomy tourism reduces the problem of seasonality, limits environmental pressure, and supports local development. In this framework, it is of great importance that Akçakoca's future tourism policies are planned with an understanding centered on alternative tourism types and shaped in line with sustainability principles.

2.11. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Akçakoca exhibits a unique residential character on the Black Sea coast with its historical development, strategic geographical location, socio-economic structure, and cultural accumulation. The opportunities offered by the natural environment

and the social fabric shaped throughout the historical process constitute the main axis of the district's tourism potential. However, it is observed that there are various structural limitations in translating this potential into actual tourism activities. Specifically, deficiencies encountered in planning, product diversity, and sustainability during the development process make it difficult for Akçakoca to transform its existing resources into a long-term development tool.

When tourism mobility in Akçakoca is examined, the phenomena of seasonality and coastal orientation are dominant. The fact that tourist activities are largely confined to the summer months and that stay durations remain limited are the primary factors restricting the value added by the sector to the regional economy. While the fact that tourism enterprises in the district mostly exhibit a local and medium-sized structure offers a significant opportunity for supporting the local economy, it also brings along structural obstacles regarding institutionalization, service diversity, and the expansion of activities throughout the year. The current picture clearly demonstrates that Akçakoca needs to move its tourism strategy toward a much more sustainable and holistic development route.

In this framework, the following recommendations are proposed for Akçakoca:

- Diversification of Activities: The diversification of tourism activities is of critical importance. The current structure based on coastal tourism should be strategically supported by alternative types such as highland tourism, nature tourism, camping, and ecotourism. Natural areas and rural settlements in the interior should be evaluated in a planned and controlled manner.
- Gastronomy as a Strategic Area: Promoting local culinary culture and integrating local products into the tourism supply will contribute to both the preservation of cultural heritage and the sustainable structure of the local economy. Supporting the institutional capacities of local businesses and encouraging branding processes are essential.
- Institutional Capacity Building: Training programs for small-scale enterprises, raising service quality standards, and more effective use of digital marketing tools will directly increase the district's competitiveness. Creating local solidarity networks will foster a collective destination management consciousness.
- Spatial Distribution: To achieve a healthier balance of tourist distribution, areas outside the coastline should be included in the tourism ecosystem. Trekking trails and cultural routes in the interior will alleviate the environmental pressure concentrated on the coast during summer.
- Local Participation: Increasing the participation of local people in tourism planning processes should be handled as a strategic priority. Including the

public in decision-making mechanisms will strengthen sustainability awareness and increase social ownership of tourism.

In conclusion, when evaluated in line with sustainable, holistic, and alternative tourism models, Akçakoca possesses a strong potential to both protect its unique natural and cultural heritage and spread the opportunities offered by tourism over the long term.

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CHAPTER THREE

DÜZCE'S SMART CITY APPLICATIONS: CURRENT SITUATION, PERCEPTIONS AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES[1]

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INTRODUCTION

Today's increasingly complex urban life requires the simultaneous resolution of multidimensional issues, including environmental, energy, infrastructure, health, and security challenges. Rapidly advancing technologies have made smart city applications, which offer sustainable solutions to these problems, indispensable for cities. Smart cities promote efficient resource management, transparent governance, and stakeholder participation by utilising information and communication technologies. Düzce, with its post-1999 earthquake reconstruction process, strategic location between Istanbul and Ankara, and rich natural resources, presents both an opportunity and a necessity for smart city applications, paving the way for a resilient and sustainable future.

This study aims to examine smart city applications in Düzce and the local population's perceptions of these applications. It also aims to identify innovative applications for implementation in the city and to provide recommendations for the future. The key feature distinguishing this study from others is its comprehensive

[1] This study is derived from an unpublished master's thesis entitled "A Study on Smart City Applications in Düzce Province," conducted at the Department of Total Quality Management, Institute of Postgraduate Education, Düzce University.

assessment of Düzce's smart city potential, which focuses not only on the municipality's and its institutions' applications but also on citizens' needs and expectations. Düzce's rich natural resources and cultural diversity create a unique environment for innovative smart city projects, inspiring confidence in future development.

3.1. THE CONCEPT OF SMART CITIES AND THEIR COMPONENTS

3.1.1. The Concept of Smart Cities

The concept of smart cities first emerged in 1994 and gained popularity in 2010 through the European Union's sustainable smart city projects (Dameri & Cocchia, 2013, p. 4). A smart city is a city in which new technologies and innovative approaches are implemented through stakeholder collaboration, grounded in data and expertise, and that offers proactive solutions to future problems and increases urban well-being (T.C. Çevre ve Şehircilik Bakanlığı, 2019b, p. 20). For cities such as Düzce, which underwent a reconstruction process after the 1999 earthquake, this concept prioritises solutions such as safe building technologies and early warning systems.

The definition of smart cities is shaped by the integration of information and communication technologies (ICT) with physical and technical components such as infrastructure, energy, water and waste management, as well as social and human components such as education, culture and social life (Albino et al., 2015, p. 10). These cities aim to improve the quality of urban life by integrating technology and innovation with environmental, economic and social developments (Cocchia, 2014, p. 40). Düzce's strategic location between Istanbul and Ankara offers significant potential for smart transport systems and logistics solutions; this can support innovative applications ranging from traffic management to the optimisation of logistics networks.

Smart cities combine social capital and digital technologies to promote sustainable development (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2013, p. 7). Through multi-stakeholder collaboration, ICT-based solutions respond to public issues (Manville et al., 2014, p. 6). In Düzce, this approach is evident in environment-focused projects such as the Solid Waste Energy Production Facility. Furthermore, smart cities offer a sustainable future by integrating digital and physical systems (British Standards Institution, 2014, p. 3) and by reducing environmental damage through efficient use of limited resources (Eczacıbaşı, 2014).

Technologies such as the Internet of Things, cloud computing, and big data play a key role in the planning and management of smart cities (ISO/IEC JTC 1, 2014, p. 2). From an inclusive perspective, smart cities are those that put people at the

centre, protect data privacy, adopt ethical, transparent management practices, continuously learn, and anticipate future needs (Türkiye Bilişim Vakfı, 2016, p. 2). In Düzce, for example, applications such as the 'Accessible Pedestrian Signal' support inclusivity by increasing accessibility for individuals with disabilities.

3.1.2. Smart City Components

Because the concept of smart cities is complex, it is addressed through various approaches, including maturity assessment models, standards, and indices (T.C. Çevre ve Şehircilik Bakanlığı, 2019b, p. 20). The European Union defines smart cities along six axes: smart economy, smart mobility, smart environment, smart people, smart living, and smart governance. These components integrate human, resource, infrastructure, and energy networks to generate intelligent solutions to the challenges cities face (T.C. Çevre ve Şehircilik Bakanlığı, 2019a, p. 14). Cohen's Smart City Circle also focuses on these six components and includes sub-components such as entrepreneurship, green energy, ICT, and cultural vitality (Cohen, 2018). In Düzce, these components are shaped by local needs and the post-earthquake reconstruction process.

Smart Governance (Participation): A management model supported by digital technologies to improve the quality of public services and strengthen transparency and citizen participation. Its objectives are to ensure efficient resource use, foster social cohesion, and enhance the city's competitiveness (Treija et al., 2021, p. 1). In Düzce, the City Council supports this principle by encouraging citizen participation in decision-making processes. Its success depends on protecting data privacy and ensuring equal participation of all social groups.

Smart Environment (Natural Resources): It aims to maximise the sustainability of natural resources and optimise environmental conditions through data analysis (Albino et al., 2015, p. 22). It includes objectives such as waste reduction, energy efficiency, and water resource conservation (Mohanty et al., 2016, p. 5). The Solid Waste Energy Production Facility in Düzce contributes to this component by optimising waste management. Challenges include high costs and the need to ensure inclusive data collection processes in rural neighbourhoods (Anthopoulos, 2017, p. 270).

Smart Mobility (Transport, Information and Communication Technologies): This refers to the integrated use of ICT in transport solutions; it prioritises public transport, reduces carbon emissions, and improves accessibility (Batty et al., 2012, p. 498; Litman, 2011, p. 6). In Düzce, the City Card and smart bus-stop systems enhance the efficiency of public transport. Its strategic location between Istanbul

and Ankara makes Düzce a testing ground for logistics solutions. Cybersecurity is a key challenge in implementing this component.

Smart Economy (Competitiveness): Supports sustainable economic growth and encourages innovation and entrepreneurship (Caragliu et al., 2013, p. 6). Düzce Technopark contributes to this component by strengthening local entrepreneurship. Challenges include developing technological infrastructure and public-private partnership mechanisms (Caragliu et al., 2011, p. 68).

Smart Living (Quality of Life): It provides environmental sustainability and accessibility through human-centred technologies (Neirotti et al., 2014, p. 26). The Accessible Pedestrian Signal in Düzce enhances access to city services for individuals with disabilities. Data privacy and social equality are key challenges for this component (Bianchini et al., 2017, p. 134).

Smart People (Community and Human Capital): It prioritises citizens' educational level, access to technology, and social participation (Giffinger et al., 2007, p. 11). Düzce University's digital literacy training supports this component. Inclusive applications are critical to increasing citizens' access to technology, especially in rural areas (Smart City Barcelona, 2022).

3.1.3. Smart City Core Technologies

The formation and operation of smart cities rely on technologies such as big data, open data, artificial intelligence, blockchain, and cloud computing. These technologies support and integrate different dimensions of cities. In cities such as Düzce, which are strategically located and at high risk of earthquakes, these technologies offer solutions tailored to local needs.

Big Data: This is a technology that generates value by processing high-volume, fast, and diverse data using innovative methods (T.C. Çevre ve Şehircilik Bakanlığı, 2019b, p. 291). It is distinguished by characteristics such as volume, speed, diversity, accuracy, and value. It improves performance in sectors such as health and transportation in smart cities (Al Nuaimi et al., 2015, p. 15). At the Solid Waste Energy Production Facility in Düzce, big data analytics can increase energy production by optimising waste management. Strict privacy protocols are essential to protect citizens' personal data.

Open Data: Data that anyone can freely access and use (Open Definition, 2019). It strengthens cooperation among the public, private, and citizen sectors (Blockchain Türkiye Platformu, 2019, p. 11). Düzce Municipality's online platforms can enable citizens to offer solutions to problems such as air pollution through open data sharing. These platforms should be inclusive so that citizens in rural neighbourhoods can also access them (Bağlıkaya et al., 2019, p. 25).

Artificial Intelligence (AI): A field of science that develops machines that mimic human intelligence (Villani, 2018, p. 2; Finlay, 2020, p. 105). It works in conjunction with the Internet of Things and big data (Aboualmal, 2018, p. 5). Due to Düzce's earthquake risk, AI-based early warning systems can contribute to disaster management. AI solutions tailored to the needs of individuals with disabilities increase inclusivity.

Blockchain Technology: A decentralised database that records transactions securely and transparently (Euromoney Learning, 2020). In smart cities, it increases transparency in areas such as land registry transactions (Treiblmaier et al., 2020, p. 14). The use of blockchain technology in municipal services in Düzce can enhance the reliability of land registry transactions.

Cloud Computing: A model that provides fast and easy access to networks, servers, and applications (NIST, 2011, p. 2). It is used in smart traffic and healthcare services (Wang et al., 2020, p. 127). In Düzce, cloud computing within the City Card system enables secure, efficient processing of public transport data. These systems must be inclusive to increase access for citizens in rural areas.

3.2. GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT DÜZCE PROVINCE AND THE CURRENT SMART CITY STATUS

3.2.1. Düzce's Geographical and Demographic Structure

Düzce is a city in the Western Black Sea Region that has been home to various civilisations throughout history and is the only ancient city to have survived to the present day (Düzce Belediyesi, 2018). Surrounded by Bolu, Sakarya and Zonguldak, with a 22 km coastline on the Black Sea, Düzce is located at the intersection of the D-100 and TEM motorways. This strategic location provides a testing ground for smart mobility and logistics solutions. After gaining provincial status following the 1999 earthquake, Düzce prioritised smart disaster management and safe building technologies during its reconstruction process.

Düzce has a total area of 2,492 km² and an elevation of 150 m; its highest point is Kardüz Plateau (1,830 m). Its principal rivers are the Küçük Melen River, Asar Stream, Uğur Stream, Aksu Stream, and the Büyük Melen River; these rivers converge in Lake Efteni before flowing into the Black Sea (T.C. Düzce Valiliği, 2022a). Natural resources, such as Lake Efteni and the Black Sea coast, offer opportunities for advanced environmental applications, while challenges, such as air pollution, heighten the urgency of these technologies. The province's temperate and humid climate (average temperature 13.3°C, annual rainfall 822.6 mm, humidity 75.2%) and rich vegetation (maquis, hornbeam, beech, oak) support environmental sustainability projects (T.C. Düzce Valiliği, 2022b).

Düzce has a population of 405,131 and a population density of 378.27 people/km². 50.5% of the population is women, and 49.5% are men; the old/young ratio is 12.4%. The distribution of education levels is as follows: primary school (40%), secondary school (32%), university (18%), master's degree (6%), and doctorate (2%). The average number of people per household is 3.25; the per capita income is 3,555 ₺, and the household income is 8,062 ₺. There are 221,947 dwellings and 30,038 workplaces (Endeksa, 2023). This demographic structure, supported by digital literacy training, can increase participation in smart city technologies. In particular, the 12.4% elderly population and rural areas require an inclusive design of smart health and transportation applications. The protection of citizens' personal data is a priority for the ethical development of smart city applications.

3.2.2. Düzce's Governance and Natural Resources

Düzce's governance structure comprises central and local administrations, academic institutions, and civil society organisations (CSOs), providing a strong foundation for smart governance.

Central Administration: The Düzce Governor's Office is responsible for the province's security, public order and public services.

Local Administration: Düzce Municipality provides planning, infrastructure, transportation, environmental and social services. The City Council and online platforms support smart governance by encouraging citizen participation.

Provincial Assembly: It has planning and budgetary authority in areas such as urban planning, education, and health.

Academic Institutions: Founded in 2006, Düzce University, with over 30,000 students, increases participation in smart city technologies through digital literacy programmes.

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs): NGOs in Düzce contribute to the city's development through social and economic projects. The success of smart governance applications depends on protecting citizens' data privacy and ensuring equal participation in rural neighbourhoods.

Düzce offers opportunities for smart environment and tourism applications with its rich natural resources. Forests cover 49.91% (124,390 hectares) of the province's area (T.C. Düzce İl Tarım ve Orman Müdürlüğü, 2018, p. 7). Mineral resources include clay, brick and tile, copper, manganese, and geothermal resources. Water resources such as the Büyük Melen River, Efteni Lake, Güzeldere Waterfall, and Ceneviz Castle Beach are used for drinking water, irrigation, tourism, and recreation (T.C. Düzce İl Kültür ve Turizm Müdürlüğü, 2022a). Efteni Lake and

forests offer potential for smart environmental applications supported by data analytics, whereas areas such as Güzeldere Waterfall can be evaluated through augmented-reality-based smart tourism projects. The sustainable use of these resources should be made inclusive with the participation of local communities and disadvantaged groups.

3.2.3. Düzce's Transport and Information-Communication Infrastructure

Düzce is strategically located on the TEM and D-100 roads connecting Istanbul and Ankara, offering significant opportunities for smart mobility and logistics solutions (Düzce Belediyesi, 2022). Its proximity to Istanbul (180 km) and Ankara (3 hours) makes the city a hub for economic and social interaction. Sabiha Gökçen Airport (180 km) and Cengiz Topel Airport (100 km) are used for air travel. Akçakoca's pier shelter on the Black Sea coast supports commercial activities; the ports of Karasu (80 km) and Ereğli (70 km) also provide access.

For intra-city transport, there are buses (Düzce Municipality and Düzce Ulaşım A.Ş.), taxis and bicycles. Kentkart and smart bus stop systems support smart mobility by enhancing the efficiency and accessibility of public transport. Cycle paths and parking areas are being developed in line with the public transport master plan (Düzce Belediyesi, 2022). Ensuring that transport services are accessible to individuals with disabilities and older adults is critical to an inclusive smart mobility approach.

Turkey's major mobile operators support Düzce's information and communication infrastructure, which includes public free Wi-Fi hotspots (cafés and public areas). With cloud computing support, these hotspots can increase citizens' access to digital services. However, internet access is limited in rural areas (Düzce Belediyesi, 2022). Addressing these limitations ensures equal participation of all citizens in smart city services. Protecting data privacy in online transportation and Wi-Fi services is a priority for increasing citizen trust. Artificial intelligence-based smart intersection systems have the potential to reduce traffic congestion in Düzce.

3.2.4. Düzce's Economy and Innovation Ecosystem

Düzce's economy is supported by agriculture, industry, tourism and the service sector, providing a strong foundation for a smart economy and tourism (Düzce OSB, 2022).

Agriculture: Grain, fruit, and vegetable cultivation, as well as animal husbandry, are at the forefront. Forests (49.91% of the area) contribute to the economy with timber and wood products. Big data- and artificial intelligence-based agricultural applications can enhance sustainable production (T.C. Düzce İl Tarım ve Orman Müdürlüğü, 2018, p. 7).

Industry: Sectors such as food, textiles, furniture, automotive and metal manufacturing support employment and economic growth. Düzce Technopark strengthens the smart economy with digitalisation and innovative technologies (Düzce OSB, 2022).

Tourism: Güzeldere Waterfall, Ceneviz Castle Beach, and historical heritage sites offer opportunities for augmented-reality-based smart tourism projects. Activities such as mountaineering and camping diversify tourism (T.C. Düzce İl Kültür ve Turizm Müdürlüğü, 2022b).

Services: Restaurants, hotels, and shopping centres contribute to economic growth. The employment of women and young people in these sectors is important for an inclusive smart economy.

Innovation Ecosystem: Düzce has three active Organised Industrial Zones, 1 Technology Development Zone (55 companies, 327 employees), 10 R&D Centres (e.g., Nobel Pharmaceuticals, Sarsılmaz Arms), 2 Design Centres, and the Düzce University Scientific and Technological Research Centre (DÜ-BİT). (T.C. Düzce Valiliği Yatırım Destek Ofisi, 2022). Düzce University's digital literacy programmes increase young people's participation in smart city technologies. Protecting data privacy in R&D projects strengthens the reliability of the innovation ecosystem. Investments in digital infrastructure should support citizen participation in rural areas within this ecosystem.

3.2.5. Quality of Life and Human Capital in Düzce

The quality of life in Düzce is shaped by factors such as natural resources, health, education, cultural activities, security, transportation and climate, providing a strong foundation for smart living (Düzce Belediyesi, 2018).

Natural Resources: Düzce is surrounded by forests, rivers (Büyük Melen), lakes (Efteni), and waterfalls, providing a peaceful environment for nature lovers. These areas can be evaluated using augmented-reality-based smart tourism applications.

Health Infrastructure: Public and private healthcare institutions can strengthen smart healthcare services by leveraging artificial intelligence-based telemedicine applications.

Educational Opportunities: Düzce University (30,000+ students) contributes to the smart human component with digital literacy programmes.

Cultural Activities: Festivals and exhibitions support smart living by incorporating virtual tours.

Security: Low crime rates and adequate security measures ensure that citizens can live safely.

Transportation Opportunities: Proximity to Istanbul and Ankara, coupled with integrated smart transportation systems, can enhance the quality of life.

Climate: Mild summers and rainy winters allow for outdoor activities.

The accessibility of smart health and cultural services for individuals with disabilities and older adults is critical to an inclusive smart living approach.

Community and Human Capital: Düzce is characterised by ethnic diversity (Turkish, Kurdish, Circassian, Laz) and strong social ties (Düzce Belediyesi, 2018). Düzce University provides educational opportunities for young people while supporting academic and scientific development. A young, skilled workforce contributes to economic growth across sectors such as agriculture, industry, and tourism. Citizens' access to digital services in rural areas should be strengthened through inclusive education programmes. Strict privacy protocols should be implemented to protect health and education data in smart city applications.

3.2.6. Düzce in Smart City Indices

Düzce ranks 43rd among 81 provinces in the Turkey Inter-Provincial Competitiveness Index and 5th in the 7-cluster rankings. It ranks in the middle range in areas such as social life, infrastructure, and innovation, whereas it ranks in the lower range in areas such as transportation, health, and tourism (Şeker et al., 2023). Düzce Technopark and R&D centres enhance their innovation rankings, while smart intersection systems can improve their transportation rankings.

Düzce's ranking in the Turkey Smart Cities Index rose from 61st to 40th between 2020 and 2022. As of 2022, geographic information systems (GIS) rank in the top-middle range in the economy, governance, and environmental management, while ranking in the middle-to-lower range in transportation, disaster management, and information security (T.C. Çevre, Şehircilik ve İklim Değişikliği Bakanlığı, 2022). Düzce Municipality's use of GIS strengthens urban planning, while the Solid Waste Energy Production Facility contributes to environmental management. Artificial intelligence-based early warning systems can improve the disaster management ranking.

The inclusiveness of smart city applications increases access to health and transport services for individuals with disabilities and older adults. Access to information technologies for citizens in rural neighbourhoods is critical to strengthening communication and information security rankings. Protecting data privacy in GIS and health applications supports Düzce's success in the indices.

Table 1: Düzce Profile Summary (2023–2025 Data)

Category	Key Data	Smart City Potential / Weakness
Population & Demography	405,131 people Density: 378.27 people/km² F/M: 50.5%/49.5% Elderly/Youth Ratio: 12.4% Household: 3.25 persons Education: Primary 40%, Secondary 32%, University 18%	Elderly population (12.4%) → smart health & accessibility critical Rural access → Wi-Fi & digital literacy gap
Geography & Nature	Area: 2,492 km² Elevation: 150 m (max 1,830 m) Rivers: Büyük Melen River, Uğur Stream, Asar Stream Lake: Efteni Forest Cover: 49.91% (124,390 ha) Climate: 13.3°C, 822.6 mm rainfall, 75% humidity	Efteni & Güzeldere → AR-based smart tourism Forests & water → IoT environmental monitoring
Governance Structure	Governorship, Municipality, Provincial Assembly, Düzce University (30,000+ students), NGOs, City Council	City Council → digital participation platform University → digital literacy hub
Transport & ICT	TEM & D-100 (Istanbul 180 km, Ankara 3 hrs) Air: S. Gökçen (180 km), C. Topel (100 km) Sea: Akçakoca pier, Karasu Ports Urban: Municipal buses, taxis, Kentkart, smart stops Wi-Fi: Public areas; limited in rural zones	Kentkart & smart stops → smart mobility foundation Rural Wi-Fi → inclusivity gap
Economy & Innovation	Agriculture: Cereals, fruits/veg, timber Industry: Food, textiles, furniture, automotive Tourism: Güzeldere, Ceneviz Beach Innovation: 3 OIZs, 1 Technopark (55 firms, 327 staff), 10 R&D centres, 2 Design centres, DÜ-BİT	Technopark → smart economy core Agriculture + tourism → digital marketplace & AR tourism
Quality of Life & People	Natural assets: Forests, rivers, lakes, and waterfalls. Health: Public + private hospitals Education: Düzce Uni., digital literacy programmes Culture: Festivals, ethnic diversity (Turkish, Kurdish, Circassian, Laz) Security: Low crime rate	Ethnic diversity → culturally informed smart engagement Elderly & disabled access → smart living priority.
Index Rankings	Competitiveness Index: 43/81 (overall), 5/7 (cluster) Smart Cities Index: 40/81 (2022, up from 61) Strong: GIS, economy, governance, environment Weak: Transport, disaster mgmt, info security	40 → Top 20 target (2027) Disaster & info security → AI & GDPR investment

Sources: Endeksa (2023), T.C. Düzce Valiliği (2022 a,b), Düzce Belediyesi (2022), Şeker et al. (2023), T.C. Çevre, Şehircilik ve İklim Değişikliği Bakanlığı (2022)

3.3. ANALYSIS OF SMART CITY APPLICATIONS IN DÜZCE

This section presents the findings of a survey on citizens' perceptions of smart city applications in Düzce, as well as the results of interviews on the municipality's smart city strategies and applications.

3.3.1. Citizen Perceptions and Expectations (Survey Findings)

A survey of 422 citizens in Düzce reveals perceptions and expectations regarding smart city applications. 50.9% of participants have lived in Düzce for 12+ years, 61.1% are aged 25-44, and the gender distribution is 50.2% female and 49.5% male. The level of education is high, with 95.2% holding a university degree (bachelor's degree: 49.3%, master's degree: 33.4%, doctorate: 7.8%). 54.5% are employed (37.7% in the public sector, 16.8% in the private sector). Smart device usage is widespread: 97.4% use smartphones, 53.3% use smart TVs, and 20.4% use smart cards; however, smart bicycle/electric scooter usage (3.6%) is low. WhatsApp (96.4%), YouTube (95.7%) and Instagram (87.2%) are the most popular social media platforms. Düzce University (75.6%) and Düzce Municipality (46.9%) are the most followed institutional accounts. In mobile applications, Düzce University (43.6%) and Kentkart Mobile (34.4%) are at the forefront, while the White Desk application is considered inadequate. In terms of accessing information from web pages, Düzce University (81%) and Düzce Municipality (64.2%) stand out, and access to information is generally considered adequate. 61.6% of citizens see Düzce as a Green and Blue City in 2030, while 57.3% see it as a liveable and sustainable city. The main problems highlighted are air pollution (78%), public transport (45.7%) and affordable housing (41.2%). The Solid Waste Energy Production Facility could help reduce air pollution, while Kentkart Mobile could help address public transport problems. In terms of smart city perception, smart mobility (73.5%), smart living (67.8%) and smart environment (44.5%) are priorities. In terms of application priorities, smart infrastructure (91.94%), disaster management (91.23%), and smart health (90.52%) are in the highest demand. Applications such as the Accessible Pedestrian Signal can make mobility inclusive for people with disabilities. Climate change (70.38%) and energy efficiency (65.64%) initiatives are considered insufficient, while disaster management (57%) is deemed adequate. Artificial intelligence-based early warning systems could meet Düzce's expectations regarding earthquake risk. Regarding access to data, 65.64% viewed the data-sharing platform positively, whereas 61.86% viewed open data positively. However, wireless internet (70%) and ICT infrastructure (54%) were deemed insufficient; increasing Wi-Fi hotspots in rural areas would enhance inclusivity. Data privacy is critical to increasing citizen trust in applications such as Kentkart and White Desk. In the innovation ecosystem, Düzce is open to new ideas (56.87%), while start-ups (49.76%) are considered insufficient. Satisfaction rates

are high for geography (88.63%) and disaster management (63.74%), but low for infrastructure (45.5%) and renewable energy (45.21%).

Table 2: Citizen Perceptions and Expectations in Düzce (Survey Findings)

Category	Findings
Key Issues	Air Pollution (78%), Public Transport (45.7%), Affordable Housing (41.2%)
Smart City Priorities	Smart Infrastructure (91.94%), Disaster Management (91.23%), Smart Healthcare (90.52%)
Satisfaction Rates	Geography (88.63%), Disaster Management (63.74%), Infrastructure (45.5%)
ICT Infrastructure	Insufficient Wireless Internet (70%), Insufficient ICT Infrastructure (54%)
Innovation Ecosystem	Openness to New Ideas (56.87%), Start-ups (49.76%)

3.3.2. Municipal Applications and Strategies (Interview Findings)

Interviews with municipal officials detailed Düzce's smart city strategies and applications.

3.3.2.1. Local Smart City Strategy and Roadmap Specific to Düzce City

Based on interviews with senior executives, Düzce Municipality's smart city strategy aims to provide transparent, accountable, and disability-friendly services focused on urbanism, belonging, and solutions.

Description and Strategy of Düzce: A citizen-focused vision for the city that respects its history and culture has been adopted. Applications such as the Solid Waste Energy Production Facility and Kentkart Mobile strengthen the smart environment and mobility components.

Disaster Preparedness and Urban Transformation: In Düzce, an earthquake-prone city, 75% of buildings have been renovated, in compliance with the ground + 4-floor limit and earthquake regulations. Artificial intelligence-based early warning systems can strengthen disaster management.

Climate Change and Energy Efficiency: The Solid Waste Facility produces energy and fertiliser from waste, while solar panels provide electricity. The Natural Gas Conversion Project reduces air pollution and can be optimised with big data analytics.

Stakeholder Participation: The City Council's women's, youth, and environmental assemblies support smart governance. Citizen participation in rural areas should be increased through infrastructure investments.

Data Strategy and ICT Infrastructure: The City Information System is a model for Turkey, with 95% of property data up to date. Cloud City Information System

integration strengthens transparent governance. Protecting data privacy is critical for citizen trust.

Innovation Ecosystem: Düzce Technopark (55 companies, 327 employees) and the Science Centre support digital literacy and innovative education. The Technopark's entrepreneurship services strengthen the smart economy component.

Access to applications for people with disabilities and older adults is a priority in an inclusive smart city.

Table 3: Düzce Municipality's Smart City Applications and Strategies

Application/Strategy	Description
Solid Waste Facility	Energy and fertiliser production from waste, solar panels
Urban Renewal	75% building renovation, ground floor + 4-storey limit, compliance with earthquake regulations
Natural Gas Conversion Project	Reduction of solid fuel use, combating air pollution
City Information System	95% up-to-date property data, Cloud City Information System integration
City Council	Citizen participation through councils such as women, youth, and the environment
Düzce Technology Park	55 companies, 327 employees, entrepreneurship ecosystem
Düzce Science Centre	3D cinema, planetarium, interactive exhibitions

3.3.2.2. Smart City Applications Specific to Düzce City

Düzce Municipality's smart city applications have been determined through discussions and cover the components of smart governance, environment, mobility, economy, life and people.

Smart Governance:

Corporate Website and City Portal: Provides information about Düzce's history, culture and tourism; provides access to news, council meetings and tenders (I1).

White Desk and 153 Call Centre: Enables citizens to submit requests and complaints instantly, supporting transparent governance (I1).

City Council: Increases citizen participation with women's, youth and environmental councils (I16).

Digital Archive and E-government Services: Documents are digitised, and registration and record-keeping procedures are carried out via e-government (I1). Data privacy is critical for citizen trust.

Smart Environment:

Solid Waste Facility: Processes 800 tonnes of waste per day, produces 6 MWh of electricity and fertiliser; can be optimised with big data analytics (I9).

Renewable Energy: Solar panels are used on facility and marketplace roofs (I9, I12).

Air Pollution Control: Air quality is improved through controls on emissions from natural gas and coal (I17).

Smart Mobility:

Smart Stop: Includes LED screens, air conditioning, charging stations, and Wi-Fi; made from scrap containers (I10).

City Card and Accessible Pedestrian Signal: Facilitates public transport payments and accessibility for people with disabilities (I11).

Cycle Lanes: Encourages cycling through a zero-carbon project (I7).

Smart Economy:

Düzce Technopark: Fosters entrepreneurship and innovation with 55 companies and 327 employees (I14).

Science Centre: Promotes science education through workshops and exhibitions (I14).

Smart Living:

Millet Garden and Korugöl Life Village: Enhances quality of life with recreational areas and augmented reality applications (I13).

Culinary Arts Centre: Promotes Düzce cuisine and offers gastronomy education (I13).

Cemetery Information System: Provides citizen convenience through digital access (I12).

Smart People:

Children's University: Cultivates skilled human resources through software, coding, and art education (I4).

Disadvantaged Groups: Increase inclusivity through accessible facilities and clothing donation bins (I6).

Free Wi-Fi: Should be expanded to 56 neighbourhoods, with improved access in rural areas (I1).

Access to applications for disabled, elderly, and rural citizens is a priority for an inclusive smart city.

Table 4: Smart City Applications Specific to Düzce City

Category	Application	Description
Smart Governance	White Desk, City Council	Citizen participation, request/complaint management, and digital platforms
Smart Environment	Solid Waste Facility, Solar Panels	800 tonnes/day of waste, 6 MWh of electricity, fertiliser production
Smart Mobility	City Card, Accessible Pedestrian Signal	Public transport payments, disabled-friendly pedestrian access
Smart Economy	Düzce Technopark, Science Centre	55 companies, 327 jobs, entrepreneurship and science education
Smart Living	People's Garden, Korugöl Life Village	Urban transformation, recreational areas, and quality of life
Smart People	Children's University, Culinary Arts Centre	Software, coding, gastronomy education, and qualified human resources

3.3.3. Comparison of Düzce City's Smart City Applications with Other Cities

Although there is no comprehensive study on smart city applications in Düzce, a comparison with other cities reveals similarities and differences.

Konya: Düzce's Kentkart and Solid Waste Facility are similar to Konya's ATUS and its smart waste management system. However, Konya's mobile mesnevi application does not exist in Düzce.

Kahramanmaraş: Düzce's Accessible Pedestrian Signal is similar to Kahramanmaraş's adaptive signalling, but Düzce lacks smart solar poles and IoT infrastructure.

Edirne: Düzce's Solid Waste Facility and City Information System overlap with Edirne's waste union and city information system. However, Edirne's smart tourism and drone-based agriculture are not present in Düzce.

Sivas: Düzce's smart bus stop and cemetery information system is similar to Sivas', but Sivas' city cameras are not found in Düzce.

Antalya: Düzce's Solid Waste Facility competes with Antalya's waste-to-energy production, but smart irrigation and panic buttons are lacking in Düzce.

Gaziantep: Düzce's e-municipality services and solar panels are similar to those in Gaziantep, but Düzce lacks a traffic control centre and a biogas plant.

Düzce stands out in environmental and inclusive mobility with its Solid Waste Facility and Accessible Pedestrian Signal, but lags in areas such as traffic control centres and IoT. Accessibility for individuals with disabilities and older adults can

be enhanced by applications such as Düzce's Accessible Pedestrian Signal. Wi-Fi access in rural areas is limited relative to Gaziantep's smart grid; infrastructure investments could enhance inclusivity. Strengthening data privacy in the City Information System supports competition with Antalya's e-municipality standards.

Table 5: Comparison of Smart City Applications in Düzce and Other Cities

City	Smart Governance	Smart Environment	Smart Mobility	Smart Economy	Smart Living	Smart People
Düzce	City Information System, White Desk	Solid Waste Facility, Solar Panels	City Card, Accessible Pedestrian Signal	Technopark, Science Centre	People's Garden, Korugöl	Children's University, Culinary Arts
Konya	ATUS, City Information System	Smart Waste Management	Smart Intersection, Bicycle System	-	Mobile Mesnevi	-
Kahraman-maraş	-	-	Adaptive Signalling	STEM Centre	Smart Elderly Care	STEM Centre
Edirne	City Information System	Solid Waste Association	Smart Transportation	Technology Park	Smart Tourism	STEM, Smart Agriculture
Sivas	Mobile Application	-	Smart Bus Stop, Cemetery System	-	City Cameras	-
Antalya	E-Municipality, City Information System	Electricity from Waste, Smart Irrigation	Smart Intersection	-	Eco-Friendly Car Park, Panic Button	Chronic Patient Monitoring
Gaziantep	E-Municipality, Mobile Application	Solar and Biogas Energy	Smart Bus Stop, Traffic Centre	Innovation Club	Secure Parking	Mobile Mammo-graphy

3.4. ISSUES AND SOLUTION PROPOSALS

This section presents the current status of smart city applications in Düzce, the identified fundamental problems, and the proposed solutions.

3.4.1. Current Situation and Key Issues (Findings)

The research has identified strengths and weaknesses by evaluating perceptions and expectations of smart cities in Düzce.

Issues in Public Perception:

• Air pollution (78%), public transport (45.7%), affordable housing and social mobility stand out as key issues.

• Climate change (70%), energy efficiency (66%), renewable energy (65%), and urban transformation (54%) efforts are considered insufficient.

• ICT infrastructure (70% inadequate wireless internet) and the innovation ecosystem (55% lack of prototype demonstrations) are weak areas.

• Economic satisfaction (51.1%), renewable energy (45.21%), and infrastructure (45.5%) are at low levels.

• Low usage of smart bicycles/electric scooters (3.6%) and the White Desk application indicates a lack of awareness.

Findings in Municipal Applications:

• A lack of a clear smart city strategy is perceived.

• Improvements are needed in the areas of smart governance (open data platform), environment (smart lighting, irrigation), mobility (electric vehicle charging stations), living (smart health, buildings) and people (living laboratory).

3.4.2. Proposed Solutions

The following recommendations are proposed to develop smart city applications in Düzce to address existing problems. These recommendations aim to address the shortcomings identified in citizen perceptions and municipal practices, targeting improvements in inclusiveness, technological infrastructure, data security, and strategic planning:

Awareness Raising: Promotional campaigns should be organised in 2025 to increase the use of the White Desk and Kentkart. In addition, digital literacy and smart city application awareness workshops should be organised in rural neighbourhoods in collaboration with Düzce University. These workshops should adopt an inclusive approach, targeting older adults and individuals with disabilities in particular.

Smart Infrastructure: Wi-Fi hotspots should be established in 56 neighbourhoods by 2026, and smart water meters should be rolled out by 2027. Furthermore, to strengthen the IoT infrastructure, a smart grid pilot project monitoring energy and water consumption in real time should be launched in 2026.

Disaster Management: An AI-based early warning system pilot should be launched by 2026, and all buildings should be scanned for earthquake safety by

2028. Furthermore, by 2026, augmented reality (AR)-supported disaster simulations should be developed to increase citizen participation in disaster preparedness training.

Smart Health: Telemedicine and health monitoring applications should be launched as pilots in 2026. AI-supported health assistant applications (e.g., voice-activated medication reminders) should be developed to increase access for individuals with disabilities and older adults.

Smart Transport: 50 smart bus stops should be added by 2025, and a pilot scheme for an electric bus fleet should be implemented by 2027. Accessible Pedestrian Signals should enhance accessibility for people with disabilities. Furthermore, a pilot scheme for AI-based smart junction systems should be launched in 2026 to reduce traffic congestion.

Smart People: Digital literacy training at the Children's University should be expanded in 2025, and a smart guide application should be developed for tourists. Mobile education units, such as mobile technology buses, should be introduced in 2025 to increase access to technology for citizens in rural areas.

Smart Environment: The Solid Waste Facility should be optimised with big data, and air pollution should be reduced by 20% by 2027. A smart lighting pilot programme should be launched in 2026. Augmented-reality-based smart tourism applications should be developed for Lake Efteni and the Güzeldere Waterfall to raise environmental awareness.

Smart Energy: Solar panels should be widely installed in marketplaces and public buildings by 2026. A microgrid system pilot programme should be launched in 2027 to increase access to renewable energy in rural neighbourhoods.

Information Technology: Cybersecurity protocols should be implemented within the City Information System by 2025, and Wi-Fi access should be expanded in rural areas. Furthermore, to strengthen data privacy, protocols compliant with international standards (e.g. GDPR) should be integrated into the City Information System by 2025.

Smart Governance: The City Council's digital platforms should be strengthened by 2025, and an open data platform should be created. To increase transparency, a pilot application of a blockchain-based citizen participation platform should be launched by 2025.

Innovation Ecosystem: Two hackathons should be organised at Düzce Technopark in 2025, and five start-ups should be supported in 2026. Furthermore,

a Smart City Innovation Laboratory should be established in 2026 to provide prototype development support for local start-ups.

Economic Development: Tourism-focused gastronomic events should be launched in 2026 in collaboration with the Culinary Arts Centre. A digital marketplace platform should be developed to integrate agriculture and tourism.

Access to all applications for disabled, elderly and rural citizens is a priority for an inclusive smart city. Data privacy, particularly in the City Information System and health applications, should be strengthened in line with international standards. Future research should evaluate the impact of these applications and the extent of access for disadvantaged groups.

Table 6: Smart City Issues and Solution Recommendations in Düzce

Issue Area	Identification (% Rate)	Solution Proposal	Timeframe
Air Pollution	78% inadequate (Cluster)	Solid waste facility optimisation, augmented reality-based smart tourism applications (Lake Efteni, Güzeldere Waterfall)	20% reduction by 2027
Public Transport	45.7% inadequate	Widespread use of Kentkart and smart bus stops, pilot application of artificial intelligence-based smart intersection systems	50 stops in 2025, pilot in 2026
ICT Infrastructure	70% inadequate (Wi-Fi)	Wi-Fi hotspots in rural areas, IoT-based smart network pilot application, GDPR-compliant data privacy protocols for the City Information System	56 neighbourhoods by 2026, protocols in 2025
Innovation Ecosystem	55% lack of prototype demonstrations	Hackathon and start-up support, establishment of a Smart City Innovation Laboratory	2 hackathons in 2025, laboratory in 2026
Disaster Management	Adequate - 57%	Early warning system pilot application, augmented reality-supported disaster simulations	Pilot in 2026
Smart Health	90.52% high demand	Telemedicine and health monitoring pilot application, artificial intelligence-supported health assistant applications	Pilot in 2026
Smart Human	Limited access in rural areas	Expansion of digital literacy at Children's University, mobile education units	Education in 2025, mobile units in 2025
Smart Energy	45.21% low satisfaction	Expansion of solar panels, a microgrid pilot project in rural areas	Panels in 2026, pilot in 2027
Smart Governance	Lack of an open data platform	City Council digital platforms, a blockchain-based citizen participation platform	Platforms in 2025, pilot in 2025
Economic Development	Agricultural and tourism potential	Gastronomy events with the Culinary Arts Centre, the digital Marketplace platform	Events in 2026, platform in 2026

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CHAPTER FOUR

EVALUATION OF DÜZCE IN THE CONTEXT OF PROMOTION AND ADVERTISING

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INTRODUCTION

In contemporary tourism, promotion and advertising have evolved beyond their traditional roles as tools of information dissemination and demand stimulation, becoming strategic mechanisms through which destinations construct meaning, identity, and emotional connection. As tourism markets grow increasingly competitive and experience-oriented, destinations are required not only to present their tangible attractions but also to communicate intangible values such as authenticity, sustainability, and cultural identity through integrated and multidimensional communication strategies. In this context, promotion and advertising function as key determinants of destination visibility, perception, and long-term competitiveness.

The transformation of tourism communication has been strongly influenced by digitalization, participatory media, and shifting visitor expectations. Promotion is no longer a one-way process in which destinations merely "tell" potential visitors what to see or do; rather, it has become an interactive and co-creative process in which visitors, residents, and stakeholders actively contribute to destination narratives. Advertising, once dominated by mass-media persuasion, is now increasingly shaped by emotional storytelling, data-driven targeting, and ethical considerations. These developments have blurred the boundaries between promotion, public relations, branding, and experience design, giving rise to integrated destination communication ecosystems.

Within this evolving landscape, regional destinations face both significant opportunities and structural challenges. Provinces such as Düzce, which possess a diverse combination of natural landscapes, coastal resources, highland tourism,

cultural heritage, and alternative tourism potential, must manage the complexity of communicating heterogeneous tourism assets under a coherent and recognizable destination identity. The effectiveness of promotion and advertising in such contexts depends not only on the variety of tools employed, but also on strategic integration, stakeholder collaboration, narrative consistency, and sustainability-oriented communication.

Düzce represents a particularly relevant case for examining the contemporary dynamics of promotion and advertising in tourism. Located in the Western Black Sea region of Türkiye, the province has increasingly sought to position itself as a nature-based, experience-oriented, and sustainable destination. Over the past decade, promotional efforts in Düzce have expanded from traditional visibility tools-such as fairs, printed materials, and institutional campaigns-to include digital platforms, social media storytelling, experiential events, and collaborative branding initiatives. The emergence of the shared branding discourse "Come to Duzce" illustrates an attempt to unify promotional narratives and strengthen destination memorability through participatory and emotionally resonant communication.

However, the transition from fragmented promotional practices to an integrated destination communication system remains an ongoing process. Issues related to narrative coherence, stakeholder coordination, continuity of promotional strategies, data-driven evaluation, and the transformation of tourism assets into visitor-centered experiences continue to shape the effectiveness of Düzce's promotion and advertising efforts. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive analytical framework that integrates theoretical insights from tourism marketing, destination branding, public relations, and sustainability studies with empirical observations drawn from local practices.

Accordingly, this chapter aims to evaluate Düzce within the context of promotion and advertising by combining conceptual discussion with destination-based analysis. The chapter first examines the definitions, interrelationships, and core elements of promotion and advertising in tourism, emphasizing contemporary trends such as digital communication, experience-oriented promotion, and sustainability-driven narratives. It then explores the role of public relations and collaborative communication models in destination management. Building on this theoretical foundation, the chapter analyzes promotional and advertising practices in Düzce, highlighting their evolution, strengths, and limitations. Finally, the chapter identifies key problems and proposes solution-oriented recommendations to support the development of a coherent, data-informed, and sustainable destination communication strategy for Düzce.

By situating Düzce within broader debates on destination promotion and advertising, this chapter contributes to both academic literature and practical destination management, offering insights relevant to policymakers, tourism professionals, and scholars concerned with regional tourism development and strategic communication.

4.1. DEFINITION OF PROMOTION AND ADVERTISING

Promotion encompasses all planned communication activities aimed at ensuring that a product, service, or destination is recognized, accurately perceived, and preferred by target audiences. The promotional process extends beyond mere information provision and includes the formation of perceptions, the strengthening of image, and the establishment of long-term relationships with potential consumers. In this respect, promotion is regarded as a strategic instrument, particularly within service sectors characterized by intangible products, such as tourism (Middleton et al., 2009; Pike, 2016). Advertising represents one of the most visible and controllable components of promotional activities and is defined as a persuasive form of communication delivered through mass media in exchange for a specified payment, with predetermined message content and timing. While advertising primarily serves to raise awareness and stimulate demand, the concept of promotion encompasses a broader framework that also includes public relations, digital communication, events, and experience-based practices. Accordingly, advertising should be viewed as an integral element within a wider promotional strategy rather than as an isolated activity (Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 2017).

Promotion and advertising activities constitute key determinants of destination competitiveness from a tourism perspective. Since tourism products cannot be fully evaluated prior to consumption, potential visitors rely heavily on perceptions, image, and trust when making travel decisions. Therefore, the effective presentation of a destination's natural, cultural, and social assets through appropriate promotional strategies is of critical importance for building brand value, increasing visitor numbers, and supporting sustainable tourism development. Well-designed promotion and advertising practices not only enhance destination awareness but also shape preference formation and contribute to the development of a positive and enduring destination image (Buhalis, 2000; UNWTO, 2018). Recent studies in Turkey underline that emphasizing local identity and cultural distinctiveness in destination promotion strengthens visitor perception and brand attachment (Bişkin & Pektaş, 2021; Top, 2023).

Traditional definitions of promotion emphasize communication activities designed to inform and persuade target audiences. However, in the context of contemporary

tourism, promotion must be reinterpreted as a multidimensional process of experience communication. It is not limited to the transfer of information about attractions, but extends to the creation of emotional value and symbolic meaning associated with the destination brand (Buhalis, 2000; Kotler et al., 2017). From this perspective, destination promotion becomes a strategic act of storytelling that aligns local identity with global visibility. Each narrative-whether a short video, social media post, or digital campaign-functions as a fragment of the destination's collective story. Thus, promotion is not merely "telling the audience what to expect" but rather "inviting them to take part in the experience." In the digital era, successful promotional strategies integrate data analytics, sensory design, and participatory communication. The concept of co-created promotion has emerged, whereby visitors, residents, and stakeholders collaboratively shape destination image through shared media content and authentic storytelling. This participatory model increases credibility and facilitates emotional bonding between destinations and audiences (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014; Richards, 2018). Ethical and sustainable promotion also play a growing role in shaping destination reputation. As global travelers become increasingly aware of environmental and socio-cultural issues, destinations are expected to communicate transparency, inclusivity, and responsibility through their promotional messages. The shift from "selling the place" to "representing its values" marks a paradigm change in destination communication (Font & McCabe, 2017; Weaver, 2006).

Advertising in tourism has evolved from mass-media persuasion to an interactive, data-informed, and emotionally driven process. Early tourism advertisements primarily focused on showcasing scenic beauty or cultural landmarks. In contrast, contemporary advertising campaigns emphasize immersive storytelling, personalized content, and brand authenticity. Destinations today seek not only to attract but also to engage, inspire, and retain visitors as brand ambassadors (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Pike, 2016). The increasing dominance of digital ecosystems has led to the emergence of new advertising forms such as influencer marketing, immersive video content, and augmented reality (AR) experiences. These tools allow destinations to offer prospective visitors "preview experiences" that blur the boundaries between imagination and reality (Baran & Baran, 2021). As a result, advertising in tourism has become a participatory act in which audiences contribute to brand identity through likes, shares, and reviews. Furthermore, micro-targeting and AI-assisted personalization have revolutionized how advertising messages are delivered. Data-driven advertising platforms enable destinations to identify micro-segments-such as adventure seekers, eco-conscious travelers, or gastronomic tourists-and deliver customized narratives that resonate with their motivations (Top, 2023; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Nevertheless, the effectiveness of destination

advertising increasingly depends on transparency and authenticity. Over-commercialized or exaggerated imagery can damage credibility and trust, while emotionally truthful storytelling reinforces perceived authenticity. The most successful campaigns, therefore, are those that blend aesthetic creativity with ethical responsibility, producing experiences that are both inspiring and believable (Font & McCabe, 2017; Richards, 2018).

4.2. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PROMOTION AND ADVERTISING

Promotion and advertising are regarded as two fundamental yet distinct components that complement each other while differing in scope and function In the marketing communication literature. Promotion refers to a comprehensive communication process aimed at creating a positive perception of a destination or tourism product, building trust, and establishing long-term relationships with target audiences. Advertising, by contrast, represents the more controlled, planned, and persuasive dimension of this process. Within this framework, advertising is considered a subcomponent of promotional activities and constitutes the most visible expression of the overall promotion strategy (Middleton et al., 2009; Pike, 2016).

The relationship between promotion and advertising becomes particularly evident within the context of marketing in the tourism sector. Promotional activities communicate a destination's identity, cultural values, and experiential promise in a holistic manner, whereas advertising ensures that these messages reach specific target markets through appropriate communication channels. Awareness generated through advertising supports the broader promotional process, while promotional activities enhance the credibility and continuity of advertising messages, thereby strengthening their overall impact (Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 2017). The coordinated and integrated implementation of promotion and advertising activities is of critical importance from a tourism marketing perspective. Communication strategies that rely solely on short-term advertising efforts are often insufficient to establish a lasting destination image. In contrast, integrated promotional approaches that combine advertising with public relations, digital communication, and experience-based activities enable destinations to achieve a competitive advantage and develop a sustainable brand perception. Such an integrated framework contributes not only to increased visibility but also to long-term image formation and destination loyalty (Buhalis, 2000).

The effectiveness of destination promotion depends largely on its ability to create and sustain a coherent identity. In this respect, communication is not merely instrumental - it is constitutive. It shapes how the destination is imagined,

experienced, and emotionally connected by visitors and residents alike (Avraham & Ketter, 2017). For Düzce, whose tourism appeal rests on the diversity of its natural, coastal, and cultural resources, the challenge lies in transforming these heterogeneous assets into a unified symbolic identity. Fragmented communication practices - separate campaigns for gastronomy, adventure, or eco-tourism - risk producing a diluted brand perception. The key is strategic integration: developing a shared visual language, tone, and narrative logic that consistently reinforces Düzce's values of authenticity, hospitality, and sustainability (Font & McCabe, 2017; Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019). Strategic communication in regional tourism also demands adaptive governance. In Düzce, promotional decisions are distributed across various institutional actors - from the Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism to municipalities and the Eastern Marmara Development Agency (DOKA). While this pluralism enriches creative diversity, it also risks inconsistency unless coordinated under a shared communication framework. Establishing a Destination Communication Council could help synchronize strategies, ensuring continuity, efficiency, and shared accountability among stakeholders (Mesci & Bakır, 2020). At a deeper level, Düzce's communication strategy should embrace relational transparency - sharing authentic stories, addressing community concerns, and incorporating local voices into promotional narratives. This approach not only strengthens external trust but also reinforces internal cohesion, cultivating a sense of ownership among residents. As scholars note, destinations with participatory communication systems are better equipped to foster emotional loyalty and sustainable engagement (Mossberg, 2008; Yıldız & Demirtaş, 2025). Therefore, Düzce's strategic communication must evolve as a living system - one that integrates digital innovation, ethical storytelling, and community participation into a single, sustainable narrative.

4.3. ELEMENTS OF PROMOTION AND ADVERTISING IN TOURISM

The effectiveness of promotional activities in tourism primarily depends on the accurate identification of target audiences and the development of strategies aligned with the characteristics of these groups. The concept of a target audience is closely related to market segmentation, which involves dividing the market into meaningful segments based on variables such as age, income level, educational background, travel motivations, and expectations. In order to use limited resources efficiently and enhance the impact of promotional messages, tourism destinations must clearly define their target markets and tailor their communication strategies accordingly (Kotler et al., 2017; Middleton et al., 2009). Another fundamental element of the promotional process is destination image and perception management. Destination image reflects the overall set of knowledge, impressions,

and emotions that potential visitors associate with a particular destination (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013; Font & McCabe, 2017). As a key factor influencing travel decision-making, destination image is largely shaped through promotional activities. Effective perception management aims to highlight a destination's distinctive attributes, reduce negative perceptions, and reinforce positive expectations related to the visitor experience (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003; Pike, 2016). In regional destinations like Düzce, promotion serves not only as a marketing tool but as a mechanism of place communication, integrating identity, emotion, and sustainability within a single narrative system. Traditional elements such as fairs and publications have evolved into interactive storytelling spaces supported by digital media convergence.

Promotion represents one of the most dynamic and integrative elements of the tourism marketing mix. It does not only communicate the features of a destination but also constructs meanings, emotions, and symbolic associations that shape visitor perceptions. In regional destinations such as Düzce, promotion serves not merely as a marketing activity but as a mechanism of place communication. This involves linking tangible tourism products with intangible elements such as identity, authenticity, and emotional resonance. Through this process, promotional efforts contribute to the social construction of the destination's image, transforming marketing from a functional tool into a cultural and communicative act (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). Traditional forms of tourism promotion - including fairs, brochures, and print media - continue to play a role in visibility, but they are now complemented by interactive and participatory tools. With the rise of digital convergence, Düzce's promotional strategies increasingly integrate storytelling, co-created digital content, and sustainability messaging into a unified narrative framework (Font & McCabe, 2017; Richards, 2018). For this reason, promotional activities should be planned in alignment with brand identity and guided by a long-term strategic perspective (Buhalis, 2000). Thus, promotion in contemporary tourism is best understood as a multi-layered communication ecosystem that connects stakeholders, technologies, and audiences through shared emotional narratives rather than one-way persuasion (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005).

4.3.1. Promotion Strategies

Promotion strategies in tourism are no longer limited to informing and persuading potential visitors; they now aim to design experiences and emotional connections that align with a destination's identity. Modern tourism promotion emphasizes experience-centered strategies, where storytelling, interactivity, and co-creation define the core of communication (Pine & Gilmore, 2011; Mossberg, 2008). These strategies are shaped by the destination's available resources, competitive

environment, and tourism policies, and they aim not only to achieve short-term promotional objectives but also to build a long-term brand perception. Effective promotion strategies enable destinations to highlight their distinctive attributes and achieve differentiation in increasingly competitive tourism markets (Middleton et al., 2009; Pike, 2016). For destinations such as Düzce, strategy means integrating natural, cultural, and digital narratives under a single storytelling framework. The success of such strategies relies on their capacity to co-create value with visitors through shared experiences, social media engagement, and local authenticity. In Düzce, these strategic principles are visible in the coordination of campaigns such as "Come to Duzce," which blends local storytelling with data-informed targeting. Integrating AI-assisted analytics could further enhance adaptive communication, enabling real-time adjustment of narratives based on visitor sentiment and engagement metrics (Top, 2023).

National and international promotion strategies vary according to the geographical, cultural, and structural characteristics of the target markets. Promotional activities conducted at the national level primarily focus on stimulating domestic tourism and enhancing destination awareness within the country. In contrast, international promotion strategies operate under more intense competitive conditions and require a communication language that is consistent with the country's overall image and the destination's brand identity. In this context, coordination among governmental institutions, local authorities, and tourism stakeholders plays a decisive role in the effectiveness of promotion strategies (UNWTO, 2018; Buhalis, 2000).

Target market–oriented promotion strategies represent a critical approach in terms of efficiency and effectiveness in tourism marketing. Strategies developed by taking into account the travel motivations, expectations, and media consumption habits of identified target markets allow promotional messages to be perceived more clearly and persuasively. This approach enables destinations to allocate limited promotional budgets more rationally while simultaneously contributing to higher levels of visitor satisfaction and destination loyalty (Kotler et al., 2017; Dolnicar, 2008).

Traditional promotion strategies in tourism were primarily focused on visibility-how to make the destination known. Today, however, strategy means *curating perception*. Successful destinations operate through strategic storytelling frameworks that define not only "what" is promoted, but "how" and "why" it resonates with target audiences.

A contemporary promotion strategy integrates **data analytics**, **emotional branding**, and **multi-sensory communication** to influence visitors' decision-

making processes (Kotler et al., 2017; Pike, 2016). These strategies emphasize three core principles:

1. **Authenticity:** Messages must reflect the genuine culture and lived reality of the destination rather than staged imagery.

2. **Consistency:** All communication-from social media visuals to official branding-should follow a coherent narrative and tone.

3. **Co-creation:** Stakeholders, residents, and visitors collaboratively shape the destination story through shared experiences and digital content (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014).

Additionally, adaptive strategies based on real-time data allow destinations to monitor emotional responses and modify campaigns dynamically. This transition from static planning to *responsive storytelling* marks a major evolution in promotion strategy, aligning with modern visitors' expectations for transparency, participation, and personalization (Baran & Baran, 2021; Top, 2023). In regional destinations like Düzce, this transformation is particularly visible. Rather than focusing solely on visual appeal or product awareness, Düzce's recent promotional efforts aim to strengthen its emotional resonance with visitors. The "Düzce'ye Gelsene" ("Come to Düzce") campaign, for instance, integrates local narratives, community participation, and digital engagement, representing a shift from one-way advertising to participatory destination storytelling. Furthermore, strategic communication in Düzce has begun to adopt data-informed planning. The use of analytics, visitor feedback, and digital metrics allows tourism authorities to adapt their messages in real time. Integrating AI-assisted tools and sentiment tracking could enhance these efforts, enabling more personalized, responsive, and adaptive promotion models (Top, 2023; Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019). Overall, effective promotion strategies for destinations like Düzce require an alignment between authenticity, technology, and sustainability - creating not just visibility but meaningful, long-term emotional engagement.

4.3.2. Advertising Types

In the tourism sector, advertising types vary according to the communication tools employed and the characteristics of the targeted audiences, and they constitute a significant component of destinations' promotional strategies. Traditional advertising includes practices conducted through mass media channels such as television, radio, newspapers, and magazines, with the aim of reaching broad audiences. These forms of advertising are particularly effective in increasing destination awareness and building a general image; however, they also involve

certain disadvantages, including high costs and limited levels of interaction with potential visitors (Middleton et al., 2009; Kotler et al., 2017).

Digital advertising, by contrast, refers to promotional activities implemented through internet-based platforms that offer high levels of measurability and targeting capability. Social media advertising, search engine marketing, and online video content represent some of the most widely used tools of digital advertising in tourism. The opportunities for personalization and real-time feedback provided by digital advertising enable destinations to reach their target markets more effectively and allow for continuous monitoring and evaluation of advertising performance (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Outdoor and experience-based advertising is regarded as a category that emphasizes emotional engagement and the transfer of experiential value in tourism promotion. Advertising applications implemented through billboards, digital screens, thematic spatial designs, and experiential zones aim to establish direct contact between visitors and the destination. The typology of tourism advertising has expanded beyond traditional media to include immersive, algorithmic, and narrative forms. Destinations increasingly use AI-assisted targeting, influencer collaborations, and short-form storytelling videos to personalize engagement and emotional connection (Freberg et al., 2011; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Experience-based advertising practices contribute to strengthening destination perception by creating memorable impressions in the minds of potential tourists and offer a communication approach that extends beyond traditional advertising models (Pine & Gilmore, 2011; Pike, 2016).

Advertising in tourism has evolved from one-way persuasion to a hybrid model that integrates emotional resonance, interactivity, and ethical communication. Three key forms now dominate the sector:

1. **Narrative Advertising:** Instead of selling a service, destinations narrate an identity. Through short films, micro-documentaries, or emotional storytelling, advertising creates symbolic associations with visitors' aspirations (Fog et al., 2005; Mossberg, 2008).

2. **Experiential and Immersive Advertising:** Using augmented reality (AR), virtual tours, and interactive installations, destinations invite audiences to *preview* their experiences before traveling. These immersive campaigns enhance emotional connection and memorability (Baran & Baran, 2021).

3. **Sustainable Advertising:** Environmentally responsible advertising emphasizes local culture, green mobility, and ethical tourism choices. It appeals to

visitors' moral engagement as much as their aesthetic appreciation (Font & McCabe, 2017; Weaver, 2006).

Furthermore, the integration of AI-driven targeting allows campaigns to match content with micro-segments of travelers, optimizing relevance and reducing message fatigue. The emphasis has shifted from "reach" to "resonance": meaningful engagement replaces volume-based exposure as the true indicator of success (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Across these types, the unifying element is responsible storytelling: advertising that conveys emotional authenticity while avoiding over-commercialization. For destinations like Düzce, balancing creative persuasion with cultural integrity remains a defining ethical challenge (Font & McCabe, 2017; Richards, 2018).

4.3.3. Digital Promotion and Social Media

Digital promotion refers to contemporary promotional approaches that enable tourism destinations to establish direct, interactive, and measurable communication with their target audiences. Digital promotional activities conducted through websites, search engines, and social media platforms not only enhance destination visibility but also directly influence potential visitors' information search and decision-making processes. By allowing tourism products to be presented through visual and audiovisual elements, digital environments contribute to strengthening expectations related to the tourism experience (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

Social media platforms constitute one of the most effective tools of digital promotion in tourism and provide a dynamic communication space in which users actively participate in content creation. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, X, and YouTube offer significant opportunities for destinations in terms of storytelling, visual communication, and the visibility of user-generated experiences. Content shared through social media plays a crucial role in shaping potential tourists' perceptions of destinations and in fostering trust during the decision-making process (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). Within the digital promotion process, content marketing and user engagement emerge as key components of a sustainable communication strategy. Original and consistent content that delivers value to target audiences increases levels of interaction and contributes to the development of emotional connections between visitors and destinations. Recent developments in data-driven communication have transformed social media from a promotional platform into an identity-building ecosystem. Destinations can now measure audience sentiment, optimize message timing, and personalize experiences through AI-powered analytics (Top, 2023; Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019). Moreover, influencers and digital opinion leaders play an

increasingly important role in destination promotion through experience-based content. By generating perceptions of credibility and authenticity, these actors exert a strong influence particularly on younger, digitally oriented target groups (Freberg et al., 2011; Pike, 2016). Recent research focusing on hotel businesses in Düzce indicates that local tourism enterprises actively use social media and websites but still lack professional digital marketing strategies, which limits campaign effectiveness (Top, 2023).

Digital promotion represents the most dynamic and democratized dimension of tourism communication. It enables destinations to directly engage with audiences, generate dialogue, and monitor perceptions in real time.

In the post-pandemic period, **social media ecosystems**-particularly Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube-have replaced traditional advertising spaces. Destinations now rely on *micro-influencers*, *AI-curated campaigns*, and *user-generated storytelling* to reach niche markets effectively (Freberg et al., 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Contemporary digital promotion strategies include:

- **Algorithmic visibility management** - optimizing search and platform algorithms to enhance destination exposure.
- **Interactive campaigns** - gamified challenges, virtual tours, and hashtag storytelling (#VisitDuzce) create digital participation loops.
- **Data ethics and transparency** - collecting user data responsibly to ensure trust and privacy.

Social media's strength lies in its ability to convert visitors into "digital ambassadors." User-generated content functions as both testimonial and advertisement, fostering community-based credibility that paid media cannot achieve. Consequently, *digital promotion is no longer about broadcasting messages but orchestrating conversations* (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014; Top, 2023). In Düzce's case, the official tourism accounts and the "Come to Düzce" hashtag (#VisitDuzce) exemplify this transformation. Local influencers and content creators have begun to produce short-form videos portraying authentic experiences in Akçakoca, Kardüz, and Efteni Lake. Such micro-narratives demonstrate how digital ecosystems can amplify local identity and collective participation (Öncü TV, 2025).

4.3.4. Experience-Oriented Promotion

Experience-oriented promotion in tourism refers to a promotional approach that aims not merely to enable visitors to see a destination, but to engage with it at

emotional and cognitive levels. Within this approach, the primary focus shifts from the physical product or service to the holistic experience offered to visitors. The natural, cultural, and social attributes of tourism destinations are thus designed and communicated as memorable experiences that leave lasting impressions on visitors, and promotional activities are built around this experiential promise. Experience-oriented promotion is therefore regarded as a key instrument enabling destinations to differentiate themselves within increasingly competitive tourism markets (Pine & Gilmore, 2011; Richards, 2018). Experience-oriented promotion reframes destinations as stages of emotional performance, where visitors become co-creators of meaning rather than passive consumers (Mossberg, 2008). Storytelling constitutes one of the core components of experience-oriented promotion. It aims to present a destination's history, culture, local life, and unique values within a meaningful narrative framework. This method facilitates the establishment of emotional connections between visitors and destinations, while also contributing to the concretization and memorability of otherwise intangible tourism experiences. In particular, stories developed around local narratives, traditions, and everyday practices play a significant role in strengthening destination image and enhancing perceived authenticity (Fog, Budtz & Yakaboylu, 2005; Mossberg, 2008). In the case of Düzce, festivals, gastronomy events, and eco-tourism activities serve as living examples of this logic, transforming promotion into embodied storytelling that bridges nature, culture, and emotion (Karaca & Baran, 2021; Mesci & Bakır, 2020).

Experience- and story-based promotional practices in tourism also promote a communication approach that encourages active visitor participation. Rather than remaining passive observers, tourists become part of the experience itself, and the sharing of these experiences contributes to increased digital visibility of destinations. Promotion strategies grounded in experience and storytelling generate positive outcomes in terms of visitor satisfaction, revisit intention, and destination loyalty, thereby supporting sustainable tourism development (Pine & Gilmore, 2011; Richards, 2018).

Experience-oriented promotion places human emotion at the center of marketing communication. It acknowledges that travelers make decisions not only based on rational information but also on affective anticipation-the desire to "feel something" before arriving.

This approach integrates **multi-sensory communication**, **storytelling**, and **cultural immersion** to shape pre-travel emotional experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 2011; Richards, 2018). Instead of static brochures or visuals, destinations design interactive experiences such as:

- **Virtual cultural encounters** (e.g., live local workshops streamed globally)
- **Emotional storytelling campaigns** (where real visitors narrate their own experiences)
- **Participatory art or music events** that merge residents and visitors into shared narratives.

These strategies blur the line between promotion and performance, turning the destination itself into a stage of collective expression. By co-creating meaning, destinations evolve from places to be visited into stories to be lived. Integrating emotional analytics - measuring visitors' affective responses through surveys or digital sentiment analysis - would allow destinations like Düzce to evaluate how storytelling and festival experiences translate into lasting emotional memory (Top, 2023).

4.3.5. Sustainability-Oriented Promotion

Sustainability-oriented promotion in tourism now encompasses ethical, social, and cultural dimensions of communication - not just environmental awareness (Font & McCabe, 2017). Sustainability-oriented promotional approaches refer to holistic communication strategies that aim to promote tourism destinations while preserving their environmental, socio-cultural, and economic values. These approaches are grounded in a long-term perspective that prioritizes destinations' life cycles and carrying capacities rather than short-term increases in visitor numbers. Emphasizing sustainability within promotional activities contributes to positioning destinations in line with the principles of responsible tourism and fosters a positive public image among increasingly conscious audiences (UNWTO, 2018; Weaver, 2006). Transparent storytelling and measurable accountability have become essential components of sustainable branding. For destinations like Düzce, adopting green communication principles and reporting tangible outcomes (e.g., local sourcing, eco-friendly events) can strengthen trust and reputation (Yıldız & Demirtaş, 2025).

A sustainable destination image is shaped through promotional processes that highlight environmental sensitivity, the protection of cultural heritage, and the well-being of local communities. The responsible use of natural resources, the support of local products, and the promotion of authentic cultural values enable destinations to gain a competitive advantage in tourism markets. In this context, sustainability should be regarded not merely as a conservation-oriented approach, but also as a fundamental component of destination branding and long-term brand value creation (Buhalis, 2000; Pike, 2016).

Green promotion and responsible tourism discourse constitute the communication dimension of sustainability-oriented promotional strategies. Integrating environmentally friendly practices, carbon footprint reduction efforts, and collaboration with local communities into promotional messages encourages environmentally conscious visitors to develop favorable attitudes toward destinations. However, when sustainability claims are not supported by actual practices, there is a risk of credibility loss. For this reason, transparency and consistency between promotional messages and on-the-ground implementation are of critical importance in sustainability-oriented tourism promotion (Font & McCabe, 2017; UNWTO, 2019). Empirical research in the Uğursuyu and Aksu basins of Düzce demonstrates that integrating regional identity and cultural landscapes into ecotourism promotion enhances both sustainability and visitor engagement (Yıldız & Demirtaş, 2025).

Sustainability-oriented promotion represents the ethical evolution of destination communication. It is not limited to environmental awareness; it embodies a *holistic value narrative* where ecological, cultural, and social sustainability converge.

Effective sustainable promotion relies on **green storytelling**-narratives that connect environmental responsibility with emotional inspiration. Yet, sustainability communication must also address ethical transparency. Visitors increasingly expect destinations to demonstrate evidence of their claims - for example, through sustainability reporting dashboards, carbon audits, or partnerships with local cooperatives. Communicating these metrics openly strengthens both credibility and emotional trust (Font & McCabe, 2017). Destinations use transparent messaging about waste reduction, local sourcing, and community involvement to build trust and long-term reputation.

Key characteristics of sustainability-oriented communication include:

- **Authenticity:** Using real local voices, communities, and artisans in promotional content.
- **Transparency:** Reporting measurable sustainability actions rather than vague commitments.
- **Empowerment:** Encouraging travelers to become active contributors to conservation and cultural preservation.

Recent studies in Düzce's Uğursuyu and Aksu basins demonstrate that integrating regional identity with sustainable storytelling significantly enhances both visitor engagement and destination credibility (Yıldız & Demirtaş, 2025).

The ultimate goal is not merely to attract visitors but to nurture *responsible relationships* between destinations and travelers-relationships built on mutual respect, shared values, and long-term sustainability (Weaver, 2006; UNWTO, 2019).

4.4. PROMOTION AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

Public relations refers to planned communication activities aimed at establishing mutual understanding, trust, and positive relationships between an organization or destination and its target audiences. In the tourism sector, public relations encompasses not only the promotion of destinations but also the development of sustainable relationships with stakeholders, the management of crisis situations, and the protection of institutional reputation. In this respect, public relations is regarded as a strategic communication tool that focuses on long-term perception and image management rather than short-term promotional objectives (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2006).

Promotion and public relations activities are considered complementary components within tourism marketing. While promotional activities primarily aim to increase destination awareness and stimulate demand, public relations practices strengthen the credibility and continuity of this process. Public relations tools such as media relations, press trips, event organization, and corporate social responsibility initiatives contribute to making promotional messages more convincing and enduring. This integrated structure enables the consistent management of destination image and supports the development of a coherent communication strategy (Kotler et al., 2017; Buhalis, 2000). Evaluating the effectiveness of promotion and public relations activities is essential for assessing the success of communication strategies. Promotional performance indicators include not only quantitative measures such as visitor numbers, media exposure, digital reach, and engagement levels, but also qualitative indicators related to perception and image assessment. Particularly in digital environments, data analytics provides valuable opportunities to monitor campaign effectiveness and update communication strategies accordingly. This systematic measurement and evaluation process enables destinations to manage their communication activities in a more planned, evidence-based, and results-oriented manner (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; UNWTO, 2018).

Public relations (PR) in tourism is no longer a one-way effort to inform or persuade audiences; it has become a multidimensional dialogue that builds trust, credibility, and community. In the modern tourism context, PR operates as a relationship architecture-a system that connects institutions, local stakeholders, and travelers

through authentic narratives and shared values. While promotion focuses on visibility and persuasion, public relations aims to nurture long-term emotional engagement and reputation management. The two disciplines, when integrated, enable destinations to sustain a coherent and trustworthy identity across all communication channels (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Cutlip et al., 2006).

4.4.1. Strategic Integration of PR and Promotion

In tourism communication, the most effective strategies merge promotional storytelling with relational communication. Instead of presenting tourism products as commodities, PR repositions them as cultural experiences embedded within local identity. Through consistent and transparent messaging, it ensures that what destinations promise through promotion aligns with what they deliver on-site. A contemporary example of this integration is destination-based narrative management, where every campaign-whether social media, print, or event-based-follows a unified storyline grounded in the destination's authentic values. Such integration transforms promotion from persuasion to relationship cultivation, emphasizing dialogue, co-creation, and ethical representation (Font & McCabe, 2017; Mossberg, 2008).

4.4.2. The Role of Digital PR

Digital transformation has redefined how PR functions in tourism. Traditional press releases and media relations have evolved into **digital engagement ecosystems**, where influencers, bloggers, and online communities act as intermediaries between destinations and audiences.

Contemporary digital PR involves:

- **Social listening** - monitoring visitor sentiment and feedback across digital platforms;
- **Crisis communication** - managing sudden reputation risks such as environmental incidents or service failures;
- **Online reputation management (ORM)** - using analytics and feedback loops to continuously enhance the destination's perceived credibility (Freberg et al., 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Through social media platforms, destinations can directly communicate with travelers, address their concerns, and amplify positive experiences. This two-way interaction not only increases trust but also transforms visitors into *advocates* who voluntarily share authentic content.

4.4.3. Ethical and Sustainable PR Practices

Modern PR in tourism is inseparable from the concept of sustainability. Ethical communication is essential for maintaining transparency, respecting local culture, and preventing over-commercialization. Destinations must communicate not only their attractions but also their responsibilities-to the environment, local communities, and visitors.

Sustainability-oriented PR emphasizes three core dimensions (UNWTO, 2019; Weaver, 2006):

- **Environmental communication:** Promoting eco-friendly practices such as waste reduction, green mobility, and local sourcing.
- **Socio-cultural communication:** Highlighting inclusivity, cultural heritage protection, and local participation.
- **Economic transparency:** Communicating how tourism revenue contributes to community development.

In this framework, PR professionals act as *mediators of trust* between stakeholders, ensuring that promotional narratives remain authentic and accountable. Green storytelling and community-based campaigns strengthen both the ethical image and emotional appeal of destinations (Font & McCabe, 2017; Yıldız & Demirtaş, 2025).

4.4.4. Collaborative PR Models for Destinations

Public relations in tourism increasingly relies on collaborative networks involving public institutions, private enterprises, NGOs, and local communities. This networked model-known as collaborative destination communication-enables joint storytelling across sectors. Such collaboration is particularly vital for regional destinations like Düzce, where resource limitations can be balanced through partnership-based campaigns. Cross-sector collaborations enhance message consistency, expand audience reach, and distribute communication responsibilities among multiple actors (EMDA, 2014; Mesci & Bakır, 2020). By adopting this approach, destinations create a "shared communication culture" that integrates promotional messages, public engagement, and sustainable action into a single coherent system. The result is a communication ecosystem where reputation is co-owned, not individually controlled.

4.5. PROMOTION AND ADVERTISING IN DÜZCE

Promotion and advertising activities in Düzce are carried out through various tools aimed at enhancing the visibility of the province's natural environment, coastal areas, highlands, and alternative tourism potential. The primary objective of these

activities is to position Düzce as a destination particularly associated with nature-based and alternative tourism. Promotional practices implemented across the province are structured around trade fair participation, digital platforms, printed materials, promotional films, media relations, and event-based activities (EMDA, 2014). This hybrid communication model illustrates a significant transformation from institutional, top-down promotion to participatory and interactive branding. Public agencies, local stakeholders, and small tourism enterprises in Düzce. The branding discourse developed to consolidate promotion and advertising practices in Düzce under a common framework is articulated through the slogan "Come to Duzce." This slogan does not merely advertise the region-it narrates a collective invitation, symbolizing hospitality, curiosity, and local authenticity. The slogan has become the symbolic articulation of this transformation, integrating local pride with an open invitation to discovery (Öncü TV, 2025). This evolution marks a paradigm shift: Düzce's promotion is no longer about displaying attractions but co-creating experiences and meaning with its visitors. While the adoption of a common brand identity represents an important step toward simplifying promotional messages and increasing memorability, its effectiveness is closely linked to stakeholder collaboration, strategic planning, and the continuity of implementation. In this respect, the sustainability of the shared branding approach depends on coordinated action among public institutions, local authorities, and tourism stakeholders (Mesci & Bakır, 2020).

The promotion and advertising activities conducted in Düzce reflect the region's ambition to position itself as a sustainable, experience-oriented, and digitally visible destination. Over the past decade, Düzce has adopted a multi-channel communication approach that combines traditional visibility tools-such as fairs, festivals, and publications-with contemporary digital platforms, social media, and short-form video storytelling.

4.5.1. From Traditional Visibility to Digital Identity

Historically, Düzce's promotion strategies focused on fairs such as EMITT and YÖREX, tourism brochures, and regional exhibitions. These platforms successfully introduced Düzce's natural and cultural assets to domestic audiences (EMDA, 2014). However, the global digital transformation has redefined destination visibility - presence alone no longer ensures perception.

The transition from traditional to digital promotion in Düzce demonstrates an attempt to construct digital identity rather than mere representation. Websites, virtual guides, and official tourism portals have become storytelling interfaces that mediate between visitors and local experience (Top, 2023).

Nevertheless, challenges persist regarding the consistency, search engine visibility, and multilingual accessibility of these digital tools. A unified content management strategy supported by AI-assisted personalization and interactive storytelling could transform these platforms into immersive, participatory ecosystems. In this sense, digital promotion should not only inform but also immerse - engaging users through authenticity, narrative coherence, and emotional design (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Baran & Baran, 2021).

4.5.2. Collaborative and Community-Based Branding

The development of Düzce's promotional identity has increasingly relied on collaboration among local actors. The Eastern Marmara Development Agency (DOKA) and Düzce Governorship have coordinated branding initiatives that connect public institutions, tourism entrepreneurs, NGOs, and residents under shared communication goals (Duzce Governorship, 2021). The campaign "Come to Duzce" serves as a strong example of collaborative branding. Its success stems from participatory storytelling, where local communities and visitors jointly contribute to the destination narrative through photographs, social media posts, and events.

This model aligns with the global shift toward co-created destination branding, emphasizing authenticity, inclusion, and emotional engagement (Font & McCabe, 2017; Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). To sustain this participatory momentum, Düzce could establish a Destination Communication Council - a network integrating public, private, and community actors in strategic planning, content co-production, and evaluation. Such a governance model would institutionalize collaboration while preserving creative flexibility (Yıldız & Demirtaş, 2025).

4.5.3. Experience and Emotion in Destination Promotion

In Düzce's recent promotional efforts, experience orientation has emerged as the central communicative paradigm. Rather than simply advertising attractions, campaigns increasingly focus on the feelings and stories associated with them - a shift consistent with the global experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). Festivals, short films, and digital storytelling initiatives now play a pivotal role in translating local culture into emotional experience. The Akçakoca Culture and Sea Festival, the Off-Road Rally, and gastronomy events function as embodied advertisements - spaces where visitors participate in the brand narrative rather than merely consume it (Mesci & Bakır, 2020; Karaca & Baran, 2021). Düzce's visual media productions and social media reels increasingly adopt cinematic aesthetics, presenting the region's nature and culture through immersive storytelling. The integration of user-generated content amplifies credibility, while influencer collaborations expand audience reach (Freberg et al., 2011; Richards, 2018). By

positioning emotion and authenticity as the core of its communication, Düzce can redefine its promotional logic: not as "promotion of place" but as "experience of belonging.".

4.5.4. Data, Transparency, and Sustainability

The next frontier in Düzce's promotional strategy lies in establishing data-driven sustainability communication. Current practices rely heavily on quantitative indicators such as visitor numbers and online reach (Öncü TV, 2025). Yet, long-term brand resilience requires qualitative insights - understanding how visitors perceive, emotionally connect, and recommend Düzce. Integrating impact measurement systems and real-time analytics dashboards could enable decision-makers to track engagement, satisfaction, and brand perception continuously (Bişkin & Pektaş, 2021; Top, 2023). These tools would transform monitoring from a bureaucratic obligation into a learning mechanism, enhancing adaptability and innovation. Equally important is the ethical dimension. Sustainable promotion must communicate not only tourism products but also ecological responsibility, cultural sensitivity, and community inclusion. "Green storytelling" practices - emphasizing environmental stewardship, local participation, and transparency - can reinforce Düzce's authenticity and align it with global sustainable tourism principles (Font & McCabe, 2017; UNWTO, 2019). Ultimately, Düzce's communication success depends on balancing technological sophistication with human empathy - using data to understand people, not replace them.

4.6. PROBLEMS AND SOLUTION PROPOSALS FOR PROMOTION AND ADVERTISING IN DÜZCE

Recent studies underline that the absence of a unified narrative not only weakens destination recognition but also reduces the perceived authenticity and emotional resonance of the brand. Contemporary branding literature suggests that place storytelling and identity-based marketing are crucial for connecting diverse tourism assets under a coherent emotional framework (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005; Richards, 2018). One of the primary challenges in the field of promotion and advertising in Düzce is the insufficient integration of the destination's diverse tourism assets under a coherent narrative and a consistent brand identity. Although nature-based, coastal, highland, and culture-oriented tourism values are featured in promotional activities, the lack of a unified destination story may lead to fragmented perceptions among potential visitors. Academic studies focusing on the case of Akçakoca similarly indicate that the absence of an integrated branding framework represents one of the major obstacles to effective destination branding in the region (Mesci & Bakır, 2020).

Another significant challenge relates to the limited level of stakeholder collaboration and continuity in promotional activities. Although the Düzce Tourism Strategy and Action Plan explicitly emphasizes the need to strengthen coordination among public institutions, local authorities, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector, promotional practices in the province are often implemented on a short-term and project-based basis. Strengthening multi-stakeholder collaboration through co-created communication platforms can enhance both message consistency and social legitimacy. The establishment of "Destination Communication Councils," involving representatives from public, private, and civil sectors, is recommended to ensure participatory governance and long-term brand ownership (Font & McCabe, 2017; Yıldız & Demirtaş, 2025). This lack of continuity hinders the development of a long-term destination image and sustainable brand value (EMDA, 2014). As a policy recommendation, the establishment of a clearly defined coordination structure based on annual promotional plans, with explicitly assigned roles and responsibilities, is considered essential.

Another critical issue concerns the limited use of systematic measurement and evaluation mechanisms in assessing the effectiveness of promotional activities. According to recent bibliometric analyses of Turkish tourism marketing research, integrated promotion strategies that combine digital storytelling and data-driven evaluation methods are becoming increasingly emphasized in the academic literature (Bişkin & Pektaş, 2021). While local media sources indicate that promotional efforts are often evaluated through indicators such as digital reach and visitor numbers, their actual impact on visitor behavior and destination choice is rarely analyzed in a comprehensive and systematic manner (Öncü TV, 2025). To enhance the effectiveness of promotional strategies, it is therefore necessary to regularly monitor indicators such as digital engagement levels, conversion rates, and visitor profiles within a data-driven evaluation framework. Recent advancements in AI-assisted analytics and sentiment tracking allow destinations to evaluate not only quantitative reach but also qualitative engagement. Integrating real-time data dashboards and visitor experience mapping would transform evaluation from passive reporting into strategic decision-making (Top, 2023; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

Finally, structural limitations exist in transforming Düzce's strong natural and cultural potential into concrete visitor experiences. Although the promotional content produced by the Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism presents the destination's touristic attractions in considerable detail, the translation of these attractions into visitor-oriented routes, packages, and experiential products remains

limited (DPDCT, 2024). To address this gap, Düzce can adopt an experience design approach, integrating local storytelling, gastronomy, and nature-based activities into thematic visitor routes. Such experiential frameworks not only extend visitor stay but also strengthen emotional attachment and word-of-mouth promotion (Pine & Gilmore, 2011; Karaca & Baran, 2021). In this context, it is recommended that promotional activities be supported by experience-based tourism products, that clear and visitor-centered content based on the visitor journey be developed, and that a consistent communication language aligned with the shared destination brand be adopted.

Overall, the sustainable success of Düzce's promotion and advertising activities depends on their capacity to evolve from fragmented visibility efforts into a coherent, data-informed, and community-driven communication system. Future strategies should integrate ethical storytelling, digital transparency, and green communication principles to align the destination's narrative with contemporary global tourism values (UNWTO, 2019; Font & McCabe, 2017). By doing so, Düzce can transform its rich natural and cultural resources into a resilient and emotionally compelling brand identity that appeals to both domestic and international audiences.

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CHAPTER FIVE

EVALUATION OF DÜZCE IN THE CONTEXT OF DESTINATION MARKETING

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INTRODUCTION

Destination marketing refers to promotional activities carried out with the aim of revitalizing tourism in a particular region and enhancing its attractiveness as a tourist destination. The tourism appeal of a destination largely depends on the diversity and uniqueness of its natural, cultural, historical, and gastronomic assets. The effective marketing of these assets significantly influences the level of preference for the destination. In tourists' decision-making processes, not only the existing resources but also the way in which these resources are presented and promoted have become decisive factors. Today, increasing competition, the variability of tourist preferences, the necessity of image building, seasonality, and sustainability are among the key factors that make effective destination marketing indispensable. In this context, as with any destination, the need for Düzce to engage in destination marketing in order to fully develop its tourism potential is evident. With its unique natural beauty, abundant natural resources, cultural heritage, gastronomic diversity, and rich historical texture, Düzce offers significant tourism potential, enabling the development of various forms of tourism. Accordingly, this book chapter aims to evaluate Düzce's destination marketing within a holistic framework in light of these characteristics.

First, the definition and importance of destination marketing will be discussed, followed by an examination of its key elements, namely destination image, destination branding, and destination positioning. Subsequently, the relationship between destination marketing and management will be explored, emphasizing the

managerial components that are essential for the sustainable development of destinations. The concept of integrated marketing communication will then be explained, with particular attention given to its significance for destinations. Finally, destination marketing activities undertaken in Düzce will be analyzed, and the existing challenges in destination marketing, along with proposed solutions, will be addressed.

5.1. DEFINITION AND IMPORTANCE OF DESTINATION MARKETING

The concept of a destination has been defined in the literature in various ways by different researchers. Leiper (1995, p. 87) defines destinations as "places perceived as attractive, where individuals travel to experience certain features and choose to stay for a period of time." Destination marketing, on the other hand, is defined as "a sequential process in which programs are planned, researched, implemented, controlled, and evaluated with the aim of meeting tourists' needs and expectations, as well as the vision and goals of the destination and related managers" (Morrison, 2022, p. 9). According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2004), destination marketing is a continuous and coordinated process that aims to respond to consumer demands, position destinations competitively, and distribute products effectively to potential markets, thereby bringing buyers and sellers together.

The marketing of destinations differs significantly from the marketing of traditional goods and services due to its dynamic structure, which requires multidimensional relationships among all stakeholders, the absence of single ownership over the product, and the integration of sometimes conflicting interests into a shared vision (Line & Wang, 2017). Moreover, unlike conventional marketing, destination marketing is based on place-specific visitor experiences. In this regard, it seeks to enhance the appeal of an experience rather than a tangible product. Within this process, emphasis is placed on building a positive perception of the destination among target audiences and maintaining this perception consistently over time. In other words, the construction of a memorable, trustworthy, distinctive, and emotionally engaging image-aligned with service quality, visitor satisfaction, local lifestyle, and the overall appearance of the destination-is the primary goal (Kumar et al., 2020). Thus, destination marketing requires a more comprehensive, holistic, and systematic management process.

Today's tourists exhibit significant diversity in terms of age, income level, nationality, cultural background, interests, and travel motivations. With their disposable income, they have access to a broader range of options and, in line with their rising expectations, make destination choices accordingly (Fyall & Fletcher,

2009). For this reason, it has become more important than ever for destinations to differentiate themselves from competitors. Destination marketing provides a strategic platform to achieve such differentiation.

Destination marketing goes beyond merely promoting the natural, cultural, and historical assets of a region; it also aims to preserve and sustainably manage these assets, enhance the long-term competitiveness of the destination, and contribute to regional economic development. Therefore, the significance of destination marketing emerges in a multidimensional manner, encompassing both economic contributions and socio-cultural impacts. The literature summarizes these contributions as follows (Kotler et al., 2017; Bastiaansen et al., 2018; Hahm & Severt, 2018; Kozak & Buhalis, 2019; Matiza & Slabbert, 2024):

- It stimulates the development of supporting sectors, creates new employment opportunities and contributes to improving the living standards of local communities.
- It enhances cultural interaction, strengthens international understanding and cooperation, and thereby contributes positively to global peace efforts.
- It shapes tourists' perceptions, fostering positive emotions toward the destination.
- It revitalizes the local economy by increasing return on investment and generating mutual benefits among stakeholders through equity capital.
- It strengthens socio-cultural interaction and solidarity by bringing communities together through events, festivals, conferences, and similar activities.
- It contributes directly to the enhancement of the destination's brand value by strengthening components such as brand identity, image, familiarity, reputation, and awareness.

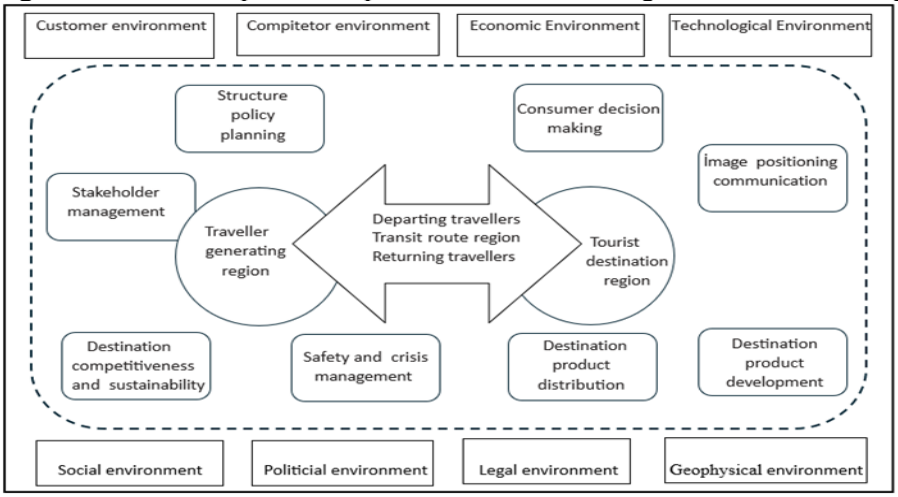
Tourists tend to spend on accommodation, food and beverages, and souvenirs while visiting destinations. This tendency makes it imperative for destinations to respond to needs arising in competitive markets with a more proactive and strategic approach. Accordingly, destination marketing strategies should not be limited to presenting the physical attributes of a place. Instead, they must focus on designing and managing the emotional, cultural, and social interactions and experiences that tourists develop with the destination in a holistic manner (Uysal et al., 2011).

5.2. DESTINATION MARKETING AND MANAGEMENT

Destination management is a professional approach that directs tourism activities in a sustainable manner within a region and aims to manage all elements of the destination in an integrated and coordinated way (Morrison, 2022). Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs), which manage the marketing processes of

destinations, are responsible for planning and implementing adaptive policies, management tools, and strategies necessary for the success and continuity of sustainable destinations (Reinhold et al., 2023). In Türkiye, destination marketing and promotion activities are carried out by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. In addition, various public institutions and organizations, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, airlines, tour operators, travel agencies, universities, and local governments are also institutions that take part in the tourism structure (Yüncü, 2015).

Figure 1. The Concept and Scope of Destination Management and Marketing



Source: (Wang & Pizam, 2011).

Figure 1 visually presents the scope of destination marketing and management processes and the main structural components involved in these processes. Destination-oriented marketing and management encompass a wide range, extending from the destination itself, consumer decision-making processes, image management, product development strategies, and supplier management to competitiveness and sustainability principles, as well as security, stakeholder management, and disaster and crisis management (Wang & Pizam, 2011). Tourist flows include the movements among tourist-generating regions, transit routes, and tourist destinations; moreover, this process is influenced by various factors such as customers, competition, economy, technology, social, political, and legal environments (Wang & Pizam, 2011).

The term Destination Management Organization (DMO) is also referred to in the literature as a Destination Marketing Organization (Pike & Page, 2014). Indeed, one of the core functions of DMOs is to adapt the fundamental principles of marketing (such as product, price, place, and promotion) to a destination (Pike &

Page, 2014). The main components of the marketing and promotional role of DMOs are as follows (Morrison et al., 2020, p. 26):

- Marketing Planning: Following a systematic and step-by-step approach in developing marketing strategies and plans.
- Market Research: Conducting the necessary research to collect, interpret, and share information in order to make effective marketing decisions.
- Market Segmentation: The process of dividing tourist markets into subgroups with similar needs, expectations, and behaviors to develop more effective strategies for the target audience.
- Marketing Strategy: Positioning the destination in the competitive market, evaluating its image, and developing an appropriate branding approach.
- Marketing Plan: Preparing short-term action or implementation plans to guide marketing activities.
- Promotion and Communication: Strategic use of traditional and digital tools and techniques to communicate effectively with target audiences.
- Marketing Control and Evaluation: Monitoring marketing implementation and measuring the effectiveness of marketing and promotional activities.

5.3. ELEMENTS OF DESTINATION MARKETING

In this section, the topics of destination image, branding, and positioning, which are among the fundamental elements of destination marketing, will be addressed.

5.3.1. Destination Image

Destination image is defined as "the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a particular destination" (Crompton, 1979, p. 18). It is one of the most important components of a tourism destination and constitutes a critical factor in determining the success or failure of tourism management (Lopes, 2011). Therefore, destinations must develop unique and distinctive images that differentiate them from their competitors (Kotler et al., 2017).

In today's dynamic and competitive global environment, destination image is widely recognized as an effective management tool for enhancing competitiveness in the tourism industry. Over the past decade, the impact of destination image on tourists' behavioral intentions has been extensively examined (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020). Research has demonstrated a significant relationship between destination image and tourist satisfaction. Accordingly, a positive image perception of a destination increases visitor satisfaction and positively influences intentions to revisit as well as the likelihood of recommending the destination to others (Marques et al., 2021; Manyangara et al., 2023; Çavuşoğlu et al., 2023). Moreover,

destination image has been identified as a fundamental determinant of tourists' destination choice and loyalty formation (Trang et al., 2023).

The formation of destination image is a dynamic process consisting of pre-travel, during-travel, and post-travel stages that shape visitor behavior (Akyurt & Atay, 2009). Determinant factors in these processes include individuals' perceptions, educational background, tourism marketing activities, psychological tendencies, previous travel experiences, perceived service quality, media influences, travel motivations, as well as social and economic characteristics (Lopes, 2011; Manyangara et al., 2023). Beerli and Martin (2004) emphasize that destination image is a multidimensional concept influenced by various dimensions such as natural resources, general infrastructure, tourist infrastructure, tourist attractions and recreational opportunities, cultural and historical elements, political and economic factors, natural environment, social environment, and the atmosphere of the place. For these elements to be managed effectively and appropriately, it is necessary to establish a comprehensive framework or system that thoroughly examines and analyzes the destination's image. Such an analytical framework enables the identification of strengths and weaknesses of the destination and provides a basis for strategic planning to enhance its image (Wang et al., 2024).

5.3.2. Destination Branding

Destination branding is defined as "the strategic process of creating and managing a unique, consistent, and distinctive image that embodies the promise of delivering a memorable experience associated with the destination and shapes tourists' decision to visit" (Kotler et al., 2017). Destination branding is an interactive process that not only involves the development of brand identity and brand positioning themes by Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) but also encompasses the formation of destination image shaped by consumers' personal perceptions and experiences (Kotsi & Pike, 2021). The objective of destination branding is to ensure the creation of a positive image and strong positioning of the destination, to support its differentiation from competitors, and to develop a consistent brand strategy aimed at promoting a strong brand that emphasizes its unique identity (Ruiz-Real et al., 2020). Image is a crucial component of the brand, directly contributing to the creation of the destination brand and its success in the market (Tasci & Kozak, 2006).

According to Blain et al. (2005), destination branding is a marketing process that involves the following elements:

- Identity and Differentiation: The creation of a name, symbol, logo or other graphic elements that define a destination and distinguish it from others.

- Consistency and Expectation Management: The consistent communication of the expectation of a memorable travel experience uniquely associated with the destination.
- Emotional Bonding: Strengthening and reinforcing the emotional connection between visitors and the destination.
- Reducing Consumer Risk: Conducting marketing activities that lower consumers' information acquisition costs and perceived risks.

The integration and development of sustainable destination branding in tourism involve multidimensional challenges such as economic and geopolitical uncertainties, competitive market dynamics, principles of inclusivity, health and safety concerns, monitoring technological advancements, and increasing environmental concerns (Aman et al., 2024). The existence of such challenges, combined with the dynamic nature of destinations and their potential to change over time, necessitates their continuous and holistic management (Wang & Pizam, 2011). For this purpose, it is essential that all stakeholders-particularly public and private sector managers-collaborate to develop an effective regional branding strategy that reflects the identity of the region and fosters development based on destination image (Almeida & Almeida, 2023). The support of all relevant stakeholders in this process is crucial to strengthen such collaboration. In order for the process to function effectively, the preparation of a comprehensive plan is required.

5.3.3. Destination Positioning

Positioning is defined as "establishing a clear, distinctive, and desirable place for a product in the minds of target consumers relative to competing products" (Kotler et al., 2017). The aim of destination positioning is to communicate the values of a destination to its visitors through promotional activities, thereby gaining recognition in the market (Lv et al., 2024). For instance, the ancient city of Prusias ad Hypium located in the Konuralp region of Düzce can be positioned as a touristic product. One of the main challenges faced by destination marketing managers is to develop an effective brand positioning strategy that encompasses attributes and benefits, is grounded in personal values, provides a competitive advantage, and simultaneously reflects the multidimensional nature of the destination (Kotsi & Pike, 2021). In the positioning process, destinations first identify potential customer value differences that will provide a competitive advantage and then build their positioning on these differences (Kotler et al., 2017). To enhance the effectiveness of a positioning strategy, it is necessary to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the benefits offered in line with target audience expectations and the relative performance of competing destinations (Pike & Ryan, 2004). The benefits

presented must be communicated effectively, monitored regularly, and evaluated through appropriate performance indicators in order to measure the success of the strategy (Pike & Ryan, 2004).

Positioning strategies are generally developed on the basis of elements such as a destination's cultural heritage, natural attractions, recreational opportunities, and gastronomy. This process is not limited to a physical or service-oriented intervention but rather represents a perceptual strategy that establishes and shapes the place of a product in the minds of potential customers (Anderson & Vincze, 2004). Lv et al. (2024) emphasize that sensory experiences can play a strategic role in destination positioning and that highlighting sensory elements appropriate to the target audience is important for shaping tourists' perceptions. In destination positioning, the unique characteristics of a destination should be emphasized to foster positive feelings among tourists about the place (García-Carrión, 2025). Moreover, a strategically planned communication approach influences individuals' perceptions and behaviors toward a product or service. In this context, integrated marketing communication provides destination managers with a strategic tool for differentiating their brands and advancing positioning processes (Wang & Pizam, 2011).

5.4. INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION IN DESTINATIONS

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) is an approach that, since the late 1980s, has been increasingly addressed as a means of managing all communication and marketing activities of an enterprise within a strategic integrity, ensuring consistent messages and common objectives (Gordon-Isasi et al., 2021). Porcu et al. (2019) define IMC as "an interactive, stakeholder-centered process that enables the delivery of transparent and consistent messages across all media channels, through cross-functional planning and alignment of organizational, analytical, and communication processes, with the aim of developing long-term, value-creating, and profitable relationships."

In parallel with the transformation of consumer behavior, the growing importance of digital, mobile, and particularly social media platforms has encouraged a shift from mass marketing to targeted communication. The emergence of new communication tools has made the concept of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) inevitable (Kotler et al., 2017). Unlike mass communication approaches, IMC is a comprehensive, integrated, targeted, and coordinated process which, through these characteristics, enhances marketing effectiveness and provides a more efficient framework (Anantachart, 2006). IMC creates synergy by aiming to bring together marketing activities not only

individually but also in an interactive and harmonized manner (Anantachart, 2006). This approach integrates various communication elements-such as advertising, public relations, direct marketing, and digital media-into a single strategic framework, with the aim of maximizing marketing impact (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

The IMC approach requires the creation and maintenance of a consistent image, clear positioning, explicit messaging, and a holistic theme across all marketing communication tools employed (Anantachart, 2006). Therefore, it is important for marketing communication practitioners to deliver the intended message consistently across all media and channels and to maintain coherence both visually and textually (Šerić et al., 2015). Consistency achieved through the IMC process has a significant and decisive impact on the key dimensions of destination brand equity-namely, awareness, image, perceived quality, and loyalty (Šerić & Mikulić, 2023).

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) is based on the systematic and strategic planning of all promotion-oriented messages. This strategic planning involves a systematic process consisting of specific stages (Percy, 2023):

- Analyzing the product and brand preferences of the target audience as well as their decision-making processes
- Determining the brand's positioning in marketing communication and selecting a benefit to support this position
- Defining communication objectives
- Identifying media channels that align with the communication objectives and ensure effective reach to the target audience.

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) is an approach that facilitates the establishment of long-term relationships of trust and loyalty by developing databases that segment tourist preferences (Palazzo et al., 2021). In this process, it enables balanced budget allocation by shaping management and marketing activities through consideration of customer feedback (Palazzo et al., 2021). The effective allocation of resources, in turn, enhances the sales performance of destinations in terms of visitor numbers and expenditures (Porcu et al., 2019).

In today's highly competitive tourism industry, cost optimization has become a critical factor. In this context, the incorporation of digital and social media tools into integrated marketing communication strategies contributes both to cost efficiency and to the enhancement of brand equity (Kushwaha et al., 2020). Strengthening brand equity, in turn, increases tourist satisfaction, destination loyalty, and intentions to revisit and recommend (Porcu et al., 2019). Therefore, the

strategic use of digital platforms holds critical importance for ensuring the sustainability of success in destination marketing.

5.5. DESTINATION MARKETING ACTIVITIES IN DÜZCE

The effective utilization of Düzce's tourism potential necessitates the development and implementation of strategic destination marketing practices. In this section, destination marketing activities carried out in Düzce are examined, existing practices are evaluated, and the factors contributing to the region's branding process are addressed.

5.5.1. Participation in Tourism Fairs

Düzce participates in various national and international tourism fairs with the aim of enhancing its tourism potential. One of the fairs in which it takes part is the East Mediterranean International Tourism and Travel Exhibition (EMITT). EMITT is one of the world's five largest tourism fairs influencing the sector, hosting approximately 30,000 industry professionals and tourists annually (Emittistanbul, 2025). As the leading travel fair of the region, EMITT has contributed to the growth of the industry for the past 28 years by offering new business and cooperation opportunities to the travel sector (Emittistanbul, 2025). Düzce's participation in EMITT is carried out in a regular and coordinated manner under the coordination of the Düzce Governorship and the Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, in collaboration with Düzce University, municipalities, the Provincial Special Administration, chambers of commerce and industry, and other relevant institutions. Through this participation, the province aims to effectively promote its historical, cultural, and natural assets, along with its intangible cultural heritage elements and geographically indicated products. In 2023, the Düzce stand was awarded "*Best Team*" in the destinations category and "*Best Stand*" in the overall category (Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2023).

Another fair in which Düzce participates is the Regional Products Fair (YÖREX). The Regional Products Fair is an event organized with the aim of promoting the branding of regional products, strengthening their visibility, enabling them to reach wider audiences in national and international markets, and enhancing their economic value (Yörex, 2025). Düzce's participation in the Regional Products Fair was carried out under the auspices of the Governorship of Düzce and coordinated by the Düzce Chamber of Commerce and Industry, in collaboration with Düzce Municipality and Düzce University. At the fair, the province's historical and natural assets, tourism values, geographically indicated products, unique culinary culture, and intangible cultural heritage elements were presented at the Düzce

stand, thereby seeking to enhance the visibility of the region's identity and tourism potential (Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2024).

5.5.2. Websites

The websites of institutions such as the Governorship of Düzce, Düzce Municipality, and the Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism provide detailed information about the province's tourism potential, as well as its historical and cultural values. These websites also serve as important promotional tools by offering content that supports the province's promotional activities. In addition, travel agencies and accommodation enterprises operating in Düzce promote the region's tourist attractions, their services, and booking opportunities through their own websites. Furthermore, thematic websites established in collaboration with non-governmental organizations, along with travel blogs and tourism-oriented forums created by individual users, stand out as alternative sources of information where personal experiences, recommendations, and visual content related to Düzce are shared. For instance, recent promotional activities carried out under the auspices of the Düzce Chamber of Commerce and Industry on the "*düzceyegelsene*" platform have made highly significant contributions to the promotion of Düzce's touristic assets. Through this platform, all of the province's natural, cultural, and social tourism values are continuously shared. It has also been observed that the number of followers of this platform has been steadily increasing (Duzceyegelsene.com, 2025)

5.5.3. Social Media Platforms of the Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism

Düzce possesses significant tourism potential with the diversity of its rich historical, cultural, and natural heritage. Social media platforms are actively utilized in the effective promotion of this potential. In this context, the official website of the Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism includes links directing users to social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter). General information on the official social media accounts managed by the Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. General Information on the Social Media Accounts Managed by the Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism (as of October 07, 2025)

Social Media Platforms	Name of Account	Date Joined	Number of Posts	Number of Followers
Facebook	Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism	June 2020	Not Determined	1900

X	@duzceiktm	September 2016	2500	1343
Instagram	@duzceiktm	October 2016	1529	2791
	@go_duzce	November 2022	316	2123
	@gezsen_duzce	September 2021	478	13600

On the official website of the Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, there are three Instagram accounts, one Facebook account, and one X (formerly Twitter) account. The promotional activities carried out through different social media accounts for the promotion of Düzce are observed to reach broader audiences particularly on the Instagram platform.

5.5.4. Printed Publications

The printed publications prepared by the Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism for the promotion of Düzce comprehensively reflect the province's cultural richness, natural beauty, and tourism potential. Works such as *Cultural Diversity and Düzce Flavors*, *Values of Folk Culture of Düzce Province from Past to Present*, and *Akçakoca Ethnographic Culture Inventory* focus on folk culture and intangible cultural heritage; whereas materials such as the *Düzce Prestige Book* (published in Turkish, English, and Arabic editions) and the *Düzce Tourism Map* aim at the general promotion of the province. In addition, publications such as *From Yığılca to Yedigöller*, *Trans Plateau Tourism*, and *Faith Tourism* support the production of content on thematic types of tourism, while works such as the *Düzce Hiking Trail Booklet* serve as guides for nature-based tourism activities.

One of the comprehensive evaluations of Düzce's tourism potential is the book *Tourism in Düzce: Problems and Solution Proposals*, which addresses the current state of tourism in the province, the challenges encountered, and proposed solutions. The work serves as a guiding reference for both academic circles and decision-makers. This publication is an important reference in terms of the promotion of Düzce. Another significant printed source aimed at presenting the historical and cultural heritage of Düzce is the book *History, Culture, and Art in Düzce*, which provides comprehensive information on the province's history, cultural heritage, and artistic values. In addition, the book *Local Cuisine of Akçakoca* includes recipes specific to Akçakoca. These recipes are of importance in presenting and promoting the culinary traditions of various ethnic cuisines.

Among the materials prepared for the promotion of Düzce's cultural and archaeological assets, the catalog *Prusias ad Hypium (Konuralp)*, prepared by the Eastern Marmara Development Agency, stands out. This catalog contributes to destination promotion by offering detailed information on the ancient city's historical background, structural elements, and cultural significance. Furthermore, promotional materials covering the Western Black Sea Region also include information on Düzce's cultural and natural heritage, thereby emphasizing the touristic significance of the destination within the region.

5.5.5. Promotional Films

The promotional films featured on the official websites of the Governorship of Düzce and the Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism aim to reach national and international target audiences through multilingual versions prepared in Turkish, English, and Arabic. In addition, thematic videos specific to prominent destinations such as Kardüz Plateau, Akçakoca, and Gölyaka are also included in these contents. These promotional films serve as an important communication tool in visually presenting the touristic assets of the province (Governorship of Düzce, n.d.). Furthermore, the promotional film titled *Follow the Water*, prepared by the Eastern Marmara Development Agency with contributions from the Governorship of Düzce and the Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, was produced in three languages (Turkish, English, and Arabic) (Eastern Marmara Development Agency, n.d.). This promotional film reflects Düzce's natural water resources and cultural assets through a holistic approach, supported by impressive visuals.

5.5.6. Press and Media-Based Promotion

Under the guidance of the Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, promotional shootings were carried out in the Akçakoca district for the travel program *"Yakın Rotalar"* broadcast on the TRT News channel. Within this scope, prominent tourist sites reflecting the district's historical, natural, and cultural heritage were presented to viewers through visual content (Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2023).

Within the coordination of the Turkey Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (TGA), press- and media-based promotional activities are organized to promote the country's tourism potential at both national and international levels. In this context, as part of the *"Bithynia Route Press Trip"* attended by tourism writers from Moldova and North Macedonia, visits were made to the ancient city of *Prusias ad Hypium*, the Aydınpınar Waterfalls, and the Berceste Facilities in the Kaynaşlı district, where the local culinary culture was showcased (Turkey Tourism Promotion and Development Agency, 2024a). Again, through the coordination of

the TGA, in collaboration with the Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism and the stakeholders of the Provincial Promotion and Development Board, local social media influencers with large followings were hosted in Düzce. As part of these promotional activities, visual content was produced at sites such as Akçakoca Genoese Castle and Beach as well as the ancient city of *Prusias ad Hypium* (Turkey Tourism Promotion and Development Agency, 2024b). For the purpose of promoting Düzce's cultural values and tourism sites, the program *"Rebwar/Step by Step Turkey"* was filmed under the authority of the TRT Internal Productions Department and broadcast on TRT Kurdi (Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2024). Likewise, under the coordination of the Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, the travel program *"Belma Belen'le Geziyoruz"* was filmed, featuring destinations such as the Güzeldere and Aydınpınar Waterfalls, Lake Efteni, *Prusias ad Hypium* Ancient City and Akçakoca Genoese Castle. The program was broadcast on television, reaching a broad audience (Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2022).

5.5.7. Events and Festivals

Tourism-oriented events and festivals organized in Düzce aim to promote the province's natural, historical, cultural, local, and gastronomic assets while invigorating regional tourism. Table 2 below presents the prominent tourism events and festivals held in Düzce.

Table 2. Main Tourism Events and Festivals Organized in Düzce

Name of Event/Festival	Location	Purpose of the Event/Festival
Akçakoca Gastronomy Festival	Akçakoca	To promote local cuisine, develop gastronomic tourism, and facilitate sectoral knowledge exchange.
Akçakoca Culture, Tourism and Hazelnut Festival	Akçakoca	To promote Akçakoca's culture, tourism potential, and high-quality hazelnuts at the national and international level.
Yığılca Balkız Honey Festival	Yığılca	To promote local honey production, revitalize regional tourism, and strengthen social solidarity.
Traditional Düzce Herbs Abundance Festival	Central District ve Konuralp	To increase the visibility of local gastronomic culture by promoting the natural herb species grown in Düzce and the traditional dishes prepared with them.

Name of Event/Festival	Location	Purpose of the Event/Festival
Highland Festivals (Espitdüzü, Kardüz, Odayeri, Düverdüzü)	Gölyaka, Central District, Gümüşova	To preserve Düzce's highland culture, promote its natural and cultural values, and strengthen social solidarity by bringing together local people and visitors.
Hasanlar Dam Lake Water Sports Festival	Yığılca	To promote the natural beauty and water sports potential of the dam lake, and to integrate the region into tourism while sustaining local culture.
Off-Road and Nature Sports Events	Gümüşova, Kaynaşlı	To support regional tourism, economic development, and sports culture through events held in Düzce's highlands and natural trails.
Düzce Konuralp Film Festival	Central District (Konuralp)	To promote Düzce's cultural and touristic assets through cinema and to encourage the production of high-quality films.
Turkish Cuisine Week Events	The Central District and Its Districts	To promote Düzce's local flavors and geographically indicated products and ensure their transfer to future generations.
CaveFest Youth Festival	Yığılca	To engage young people in social, cultural, and sports activities and promote the region's natural and touristic values.
Düzce Pumpkin and Chestnut Festival	Central District	To promote Düzce's distinctive pumpkin and chestnut, increase the recognition of local agricultural products, and contribute to gastronomic tourism.
Düzce International Folk Dance and Tourism Festival	Central District	To promote the region for tourism and showcase local and international folk dances.
Çilimli Education Festival	Çilimli	To raise awareness in education and bring participants together through artistic, social, and cultural activities.
Hazelnut Harvest Festival	Central District	To emphasize the regional importance of hazelnuts, celebrate the harvest process through a cultural event, and in doing so, promote Düzce's agricultural products, intangible cultural heritage, and touristic assets.
Gölyaka Traditional Culture and Tourism Festival	Gölyaka	To promote cultural and touristic values and ensure the transmission of traditions and customs to future generations in unity and solidarity.
Gırgın Meadow Hıdırellez and Spring Festival	Kaynaşlı	To revive disappearing local dishes, handicrafts, and traditional values such as wrestling, and to promote the region and integrate it into tourism.

Name of Event/Festival	Location	Purpose of the Event/Festival
Tourism Week Celebrations	The Central District and Its Districts	To increase social awareness of tourism, revitalize tourism by promoting Düzce's natural, cultural, and historical values.
Akçakoca Traditional Anchovy Festival	Akçakoca	To promote Akçakoca's fishing tradition, highlight local gastronomy, preserve cultural heritage, and contribute to tourism.
Düzce Cycling Festival	The Central District and Its Districts	To encourage the use of bicycles and, in doing so, promote Düzce's historical, cultural, and natural attractions.
Historic Silk Road Trail Run	Çilimli-Konuralp	To promote Düzce's natural beauty, geographically indicated products, handicrafts, and traditional folk dances within the framework of sports tourism and history.
International Museum Day Celebrations	The Central District and Its Districts	To emphasize the importance of museums in the development of society and to draw public attention to museums.
Kite Festivals	Cumayeri, Kaynaşlı	To strengthen the sense of unity and solidarity.
Muhlama Festival	Gölyaka	To promote the touristic and cultural values of Gölyaka through local flavors and cultural events.

Source: This table has been prepared by compiling data obtained from the official website of the Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism.

An examination of the main tourism-oriented events and festivals held in Düzce reveals that, in particular, *Turkish Cuisine Week* and *Tourism Week* are celebrated with a wide range of rich activities (Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2025). These celebrations are organized under the auspices of the Governorship of Düzce, coordinated by the Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, and carried out in collaboration with district governorships, municipalities, Düzce University, relevant public institutions, non-governmental organizations, and tourism sector stakeholders. Within the scope of *Tourism Week*, cultural and tourism site visits, panels, nature walks, rafting, photo safaris, and cultural activities are organized throughout the province. As part of the *Turkish Cuisine Week* celebrations, different themes are developed to promote the rich culinary culture of Düzce.

5.5.8. Düzce's Shared Tourism Brand: "Düzce'ye Gelsene"

The phrase *"Düzce'ye Gelsene"* ("Come to Düzce") was launched in 2024 under the leadership of the Düzce Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DTSO), in

cooperation with the Governorship of Düzce and Düzce Municipality. It has been registered with the Turkish Patent and Trademark Office, thereby receiving legal protection (Düzce Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2024). Considering the social media interaction data together with the visitor traffic of the web portal and mobile application, it is evaluated that within one year of its launch, the application has reached more than 100,000 users for the promotion of Düzce's touristic assets, thus making a significant contribution to the province's destination image (Çavuş & Mesci, 2024). The *"Düzce'ye Gelsene"* mobile application, which provides access to a variety of information regarding Düzce's natural resources, visitable destinations, accommodation opportunities, cultural and social events, and local cuisine, is actively used with the aim of promoting Düzce in the digital sphere (Düzce'ye Gelsene, n.d.). Within this scope, the information regarding the brand's social media accounts is presented in Table 3.

An examination of the brand's social media accounts reveals that it is actively present on Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube platforms. The posts shared under the slogan "Düzce'ye Gelsene" (Come to Düzce), aimed at promoting Düzce through different social media accounts, are observed to reach broader audiences particularly on the Instagram platform.

Table 3. Social Media Accounts of the "Düzce'ye Gelsene" Brand (as of October 07, 2025).

Social Media Platforms	Managing Institution	Name of Account	Date Joined	Number of Posts	Number of Followers
Instagram	Düzce Chamber of Commerce and Industry	@duzceyegelsene	July 2023	574	6737
Facebook		Düzce'ye Gelsene	April 2024	Not Determined	621
Youtube		@duzceyegelsene	July 2023	58	19

5.6. PROBLEMS AND SOLUTION PROPOSALS IN DESTINATION MARKETING OF DÜZCE

In order to analyze Düzce within the scope of destination marketing, current strategy documents, promotional materials, district-level promotional activity reports, and social media content published by local and regional stakeholders such as the Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, Düzce Municipality, Düzce Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DTSO), and the Eastern Marmara Development Agency (MARKA), as well as up-to-date news and announcements, tourism strategies, and action plans, were systematically examined. In this section,

the existing problems regarding Düzce's destination marketing are addressed in a multidimensional manner in light of the aforementioned documents, followed by proposed solutions within the framework of the literature.

Today, many tourist destination countries have become branded through their distinctive features, which have turned into central elements of destination marketing. Düzce possesses significant assets in terms of gastronomy, history, culture, natural beauty, and cultural heritage. With its coasts, highlands, ancient city, waterfalls, and other unique natural and cultural values, it carries substantial tourism potential that is worth exploring for visitors. In this context, evaluating these assets of Düzce as focal points of branding mechanisms and marketing campaigns around specific themes such as culture, history, sea, nature, and gastronomy will contribute more distinctly to shaping the province's tourism identity.

The more effective and planned use of social media channels in the promotion of Düzce is of great importance for enhancing the province's digital visibility and reaching broader audiences. Compared to traditional marketing methods, social media platforms stand out with their cost- and time-efficient structure. Accordingly, they can be employed as an effective marketing tool to reach wider audiences through paid advertisements and sponsored content. Increasing digital engagement encourages visitors to share their opinions, suggestions, and evaluations of the destinations they experience on platforms such as TripAdvisor, YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram through the active use of popular social media channels. Many potential visitors consider not only official destination marketing information but also user-generated comments and content on social media when planning their trips. In this regard, it is recommended that destination managers produce strategic, target audience-oriented, and engagement-based digital content to achieve more effective results in the destination marketing of Düzce. A focused strategy is required when producing such content. For instance, when developing a promotional product or content, acting collectively with all stakeholders around a focused motto can play a key role in achieving success. For example, the slogan "Düzce'ye Gelsene" (Come to Düzce), supported by all stakeholders in Düzce, contributes significantly to the tourism promotion of the province. This also highlights the unifying power of tourism. It is therefore recommended that such mottos, or similar ones, be emphasized and adopted by stakeholder institutions to ensure greater effectiveness.

Events represent an important marketing tool for any destination, as they attract attention, draw new visitors, and enhance destination awareness and image. For a province like Düzce, which has lived in close interaction with diverse cultural

elements throughout its historical process, festivals and events allow its cultural richness to be experienced on site. Various improvements can be proposed to enhance the contribution of festivals and events organized in Düzce to destination promotion. First, some festivals are held once and not repeated, which may negatively affect sustainability and visitor loyalty. Ensuring the sustainability of festivals, in particular, is of critical importance. Moreover, in order to secure sufficient participation from outside Düzce, event-based destination promotion activities supported by integrated marketing communication tools are required. Enriching festivals with innovative and engaging activities, integrating them with existing tourism routes, and planning them in a more inclusive manner are also essential. Making such events accessible to all segments of society will enhance cultural participation. In addition, establishing post-event monitoring and evaluation mechanisms would provide benefits in terms of sustainability and further development. Finally, building strong communication and cooperation among stakeholders will contribute to the realization of well-planned, institutional, and sponsorship-supported organizations.

Influencers play an important role in shaping target audience behavior by influencing the perceptions and preferences of their followers through social media channels. Blogger and influencer invitations related to Düzce have occasionally been organized, and it is recommended that the continuity of these initiatives be ensured. By inviting influencers who produce high-quality content, have established trust in the field of travel, and provide accurate information, Düzce's promotion can be enhanced through content that delivers the right message to the right audience. The impact of such activities should also be evaluated in terms of achieving the intended objectives.

Completing infrastructure and superstructure investments that support the effectiveness of destination marketing in Düzce, integrating archaeological sites into tourism, increasing accommodation capacity, and improving physical facilities for tourism services are of critical importance. In this process, supporting local entrepreneurs capable of developing projects and increasing budgets allocated to tourism investments will contribute to sustainable tourism planning.

The integration of Düzce's tourism-potential districts (Akçakoca, Konuralp, Yığılca, Cumayeri, Gölyaka) into national and regional tour routes will enhance the province's destination identity and recognition. Within this framework, it is essential that the tour routes to be developed are consistent, accessible, well-structured, and tailored to the target audience. The success of such planning, however, will depend on the establishment of a strong coordination and collaboration mechanism among Provincial Directorates of Culture and Tourism,

municipalities, non-governmental organizations, universities, and local entrepreneurs.

It is of great importance that travel enterprises assume a more active role in Düzce's destination marketing. In this context, personnel working in the sector should be encouraged to participate in comprehensive training programs to enhance their professional competencies. In addition, diversifying tour packages and planning marketing campaigns tailored to target audiences can be recommended. Travel agencies are key actors in promoting the spatial and thematic expansion of tourism. Establishing sustainable collaborations between these actors and local stakeholders will contribute to enhancing the destination's brand value. Therefore, structural measures that support the sectoral effectiveness of travel agencies should be developed and implemented by public authorities and local administrations.

An integrated marketing approach in Düzce's destination marketing serves as an important tool for effectively promoting the province's natural, cultural, historical, and gastronomic assets to wider audiences. The synchronized planning of traditional media, digital platforms, social media campaigns, influencer collaborations, fair participations, and festivals ensures a holistic and sustainable communication with the target audience. Adopting this approach within Düzce's promotional strategy will enhance marketing effectiveness, and through regular analysis of outcomes and continuous improvement of the process, it will contribute to the achievement of long-term tourism objectives.

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CHAPTER SIX

OVERTOURISM WITH TÜRKİYE AND EXAMPLE DESTINATIONS; DÜZCE AS AN EXAMPLE OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM[2]

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INTRODUCTION

Overtourism occurs when a region's carrying capacity is exceeded, negatively impacting both the tourist experience and the quality of life of local residents. It also negatively impacts the development of tourism destinations and creates a negative image. Overtourism is associated with exceeding carrying capacity, concentration in time and space, uncontrolled tourism development, increased cruise tourism, regional inflation, and the loss of socio-cultural connections. Many destinations around the world are experiencing overtourism, leading to protests, boycotts, and even violence. While many destinations in Turkey experience overtourism, no concrete response has yet been seen. The solution to overtourism is responsible and sustainable tourism, and Düzce Province was included in the study as an example of a city in Turkey where sustainable tourism is implemented.

This chapter will first examine overtourism conceptually, explaining its environmental, economic, and sociocultural impacts. The causes of overtourism will then be itemized, and its negative impacts will be listed. Afterward, the issue will be examined in Santorini, Barcelona, and Venice, examples of global destinations experiencing overtourism. Following examples of destinations experiencing overtourism in Turkey, the concepts of responsible and sustainable tourism, considered as potential solutions, will be explained. Information will then be provided on the tourism potential of Düzce, a city in Turkey where sustainable tourism is implemented. Finally, the conclusions and recommendations section will offer recommendations relevant to all tourism stakeholders.

[2] The summary of this study was presented at the 5th International Sustainable Tourism Congress.

6.1. THE CONCEPT OF OVERTOURISM

Overtourism is a situation that occurs when the number of tourists in the tourism industry exceeds the social, physical, ecological and economic carrying capacity in some times and regions, and often creates dissatisfaction among tourists and locals (Peeters et al., 2018,p.22; Yüncü, 2019,p. 1027; Çam & Çelik,2022,p.67; Karahan & Öztürk, 2020,p. 452). Overtourism is a multidimensional factor used to describe a situation in which environmental, economic, physical and socio-cultural carrying capacity is exceeded (Walmsley, 2017,p. 2; Gonzalez et al., 2018, p. 277). This term refers to the problems created by increasing growth in some destinations and has been a topic of discussion in the literature since the early 1970s. (Capocchi et al., 2020; Milano et al., 2019; Hristov,2021,p.62). The word 'over tourism', which was among the words of the year in 2018 in the Oxford Dictionary, has been a term that has been emphasized a lot lately (Independent,2025). This is a situation that disrupts the living conditions of the local people and prevents them from fully enjoying their settlements, thus creating feelings of resentment and hatred towards visitors. (Çetinoğlu&Uygur,2020,p.3010;Çam &Çelik,2022,p.67). The concept of overtourism is used in the literature together with concepts such as carrying capacity, fear of tourism, tourism and tourist phobia, sustainable tourism, mass tourism (Çam& Çelik,2022,p.67).

Instead of overtourism, concepts such as excessive tourism (Çolak, 2019) and tourism phobia have been developed in Turkish literature (Yüncü,2019). The term "excessive tourism" is also used in this context and is frequently mentioned in the media. The term "excessive tourism" is used to describe situations where tourism exceeds acceptable limits, such as crowds, traffic, air and noise pollution, and tourists' behavior contrary to local rules and regulations (Hospers, 2019; Lino & Marie, 2019; Çolak et al.,2020,p.611; Özkan & Çakmak,2023,p.38). In addition to the concept of excessive tourism, the people of Barcelona in Spain use the concept of tourism phobia to describe their reaction to the excessive growth of tourism (Milano,2017; Martin et al.,2018).

The term "overtourism" was first used in the early 21st century to describe the danger of overexploitation of natural resources (Kruczek, 2019, p.3). Academic research on overtourism has increased in the last two years. Poor tourism planning and overcrowding in destinations, the adoption of cyclical solutions to this problem, and difficulties in mitigating the social and environmental impacts of tourism are evident (Amore, 2019, p.1). Overtourism has several indicators (Peeters et al., 2018). These include:

- Tourism density (overnights per square kilometre and overnights per resident)
- Airbnb and booking.com site bed total

- Share of tourism in regional GDP
- Air travel density (number of arrivals by air divided by the number of locals)
- Proximity to airports, cruise ports and UNESCO world heritage sites (Vagena, 2021, p.3).

While overtourism may appear to be an obstacle to the growth of this industry, it actually poses an existential risk to many destinations around the world. There are numerous examples of regions where cultural and natural heritage are at high risk, coupled with rising costs, declining quality of life, and rising real estate prices. Uncontrolled tourism can lead to the loss of landscapes, deterioration of air and water quality, economic inequalities, and even social exclusion, jeopardizing a destination's future appeal (Vagena,2021; Giang,2020). The problem here isn't tourism's excessive growth, but rather its inability to manage its growth. Therefore, sustainable growth in tourism is crucial due to its income-generating and employment-creating impact (Vagena,2021;Giang,2020) because excessive tourism not only creates population growth but also negatively affects the environment and socio-cultural life (Yumuk & Altıntaş, 2019, p. 92). Table 1 shows these effects.

Table 1. Environmental, Economic and Socio-Cultural Impacts Caused by Overtourism

Effect(Code)	Processes	Effects
Environmental		
Pollution	Increased use of natural resources (land,water,energy)	Contribution to water, air and soil pollution, waste disposal problems
Infrastructure	The sudden increase in demand has led to increased use of infrastructure, facilities and commercial activities	Tourism-specific infrastructure works disrupt the infrastructure systems used by local people
Visual	Structures such as airports and cruise ports disrupt natural and cultural landscapes	Visual pollution on natural and cultural landscapes
Blockage	Concentration of tourists on certain routes,activities and facilities	Overcrowding of facilities and commercial activities
Damage	Increased visits to natural, historical and architectural sites	Damage to natural, historical and cultural values
Overcrowded	Having many visitors in natural, historical and architectural areas	Overcrowding of natural, historical and architectural areas
Economic		
Inflation	The increase in demand for tourist goods and services, as well as production factors such as labor and capital, will increase their prices and make it impossible for local people to purchase these products	Price inflation and failure to produce agriculture, industry, housing, etc. for local people

Economic dependence on tourism	Seasonal changes in tourist visits or changes in the types of jobs demanded	Economic dependence on tourism, excessive seasonality
Infrastructure costs	In tourism, sometimes there is a sudden increase in demand for infrastructure and activities	Increased cost of infrastructure maintenance and decreased quality, especially for local residents
Accessibility	Overcrowding reduces access to infrastructure, businesses and activities	Reduced access to infrastructure,shops, puplic transportation and activities for both tourists and locals
Destination image	The spread of negative experiences of visitors	Deterioration of the image perceived by visitors
Socio Cultural Influences		
Degradation of Infrastructure	Increasing demand for tourism infrastructure, facilities and activities, cultural degradation	Deterioration of infrastructure,facilities and activities specific to local residents
Detourization of residential areas	Tourism accommodation and services are expanding into residential areas through Airbnb etc.	The character of residential areas is changing to become less suitable for residents
Marginalization of local residents	Visitors outnumber local residents	Excessive increase in the number of tourists per resident
Hostility	The increase in the number of people who are different from the population in terms of ethnicity, age, gender, wealth, social and religious background	Increased misunderstandings, hostilities, conflicts and resulting protests between hosts and visitors
Crime	Due to some types of tourism, crime rates among tourists and therefore crime in the region are increasing	Deterioration in perceived security due to increased alcohol, prostitution, gambling and drug trafficking
Modification of recreational areas	Increased participation in events and activities from abroad	Changing events, architectural and historical sites to welcome visitors and earn more
Loss of cultural identity	Changes in structures, cultural values, behavior of the inhabitants, family structure and consumption habits	A loss of cultural identity, which will lead to the loss of community spirit, the degradation of traditions, values and moral standards

Source: (Peeters et al.,2018).

According to Eurostat and Statista, the tourist movement resulting from the economic crisis in previous years has reversed among EU countries, and a steady increase in accommodation statistics has been seen until before the pandemic. The severity of the situation becomes clearer when comparing the number of tourists per resident. For example, in 2017, there were 20,000 tourist nights per 1,000 residents in Malta and Croatia, while in Greece, there were 8,291 tourist nights per 1,000 residents (Vagena,2021,p.4). Since the late 19th century, the famous archaeological sites of Egypt, the coasts of France, Italy, and Greece, and the historic cities of these places have been subjected to excessive pressure from

wealthy individuals due to mass tourism. The excessive pressure tourism has placed on these locations has led to the emergence of a concept called turismophobia, a feeling locals harbor towards tourists (Pham et al.,2019; Hristov, 2021, p. 62).

Despite rising visitor numbers, destinations have begun taking precautions. For example, in Barcelona, authorities have begun halting new hotel construction. The Louvre Museum in Paris was forced to close in May due to rising visitor numbers and deteriorating working conditions. In Amsterdam, the "Enjoy and Respect" campaign was discontinued due to people getting drunk and using public spaces inappropriately. Greece's Ionian Islands and the Peloponnese also face this problem, but Santorini is the most affected (Vagena,2021). Venice is overrun by tourists during the day, and in the evening tourists stay in hotels outside the city, probably near Mestre or Lido di Jessolo, and at night Venice turns into a ghost town. The narrow streets of Florence, Toledo, and Santorini are filled with tourists during the day. Locals can only enjoy the silence in the early morning or at night (Barrera et al., 2019).

A tourism destination must have restrictions on tourist traffic. Defining this allowable number of tourists presents a significant challenge. Cities that are major tourist centers must determine the optimal level of socio-psychological carrying capacity (Russo, 2002; Kruczek, 2019, p.2). Research has concluded that people living in tourist areas develop more positive feelings toward tourism as their education level increases. A study conducted in the city of Livingston found that employment among educated people in tourism also increases positive perceptions of the sector (Vagena, 2021, p. 3).

6.2. FACTORS CAUSING OVERTOURISM

The primary factor contributing to overtourism is the industry's rapid growth. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, the tourism industry grew by 4% in 2018, and this rate has increased steadily in subsequent periods. The decreasing cost of international transportation, the popularity of cruise travel, government policies, the ambition of tourism facilities to increase their market share and the influence of social media have created the problem of overtourism. Destination managers make promotions to direct tourists from high-density regions to regions with similar characteristics and direct tourists to these regions with low density. However, even in this case, the new region is overcrowded. Various websites publish lists of destinations to visit as a solution, turning those cities into overtourism destinations, and thus these methods are counterproductive (Fitzgerald, 2018; Appelbaum, 2025).

6.2.1. The Growth of the World Middle Class: Globally, the middle-income segment is growing steadily, with an average of 140 million people participating annually. This is primarily due to economic development in China and India. Furthermore, as individuals in higher-income brackets have more disposable income for leisure, their overseas travel has increased (https://sustainabletravel.org). Furthermore, advancements in accommodation and transportation technology, coupled with the increased affordability of these services, have increased the participation of middle-income individuals (Kharas, 2017,p 2). According to the World Tourism Organization, approximately 790 million tourists traveled internationally in the first seven months of 2024. This number is 11% more than in 2023 and 4% less than in 2019 (UNWTO,2025).

6.2.2. Making Travel Accessible to Everyone: While international travel was once considered a luxury item for the wealthy, today it has become more affordable and something people can demand en masse. Technological advancements, coupled with competition, have reduced airfare. For example, in the US, the average round-trip domestic ticket cost $525 in 1995, falling to $388 in 2024 (Sustainabletravel,2025).

6.2.3. Growth of Cruise Tourism: While it was thought that cruise tourism would end after the Covid-19 pandemic, it has now surpassed pre-pandemic levels, reaching 31.7 million passengers in 2024. Because only certain ports worldwide can accommodate these large ships, some cities with cruise ports face significant short-term pressure. Furthermore, the limited impact of these passengers on local development raises doubts about whether the impact of this tourism is positive or negative (Sustainabletravel,2025).

6.2.4. The Rise in Short-Term Home and Room Rentals: In cities like Barcelona and Venice, home-sharing platforms like Airbnb have led homeowners to prefer short-term rentals to long-term rentals because they are more profitable. This has increased the number of visitors to these tourist destinations. For example, while the average nightly rate for a long-term rental is €11, the average nightly rate for a short-term tourist rental is €71. This increases the cost of living for residents and creates a housing shortage.

6.2.5. Changing Consumer Preferences: Generations are now more inclined to spend their money on meaningful experiences rather than material possessions. For example, in the US, international travel grew fourfold between 2014 and 2016, making travel a necessity for consumers.

6.2.6. The Impact of Social Media: As technology advances, taking and sharing photos has become easier, and people have begun sharing on these platforms. This has triggered the feeling of missing out, also known as FOMO. New destinations are constantly being added to the must-see list on social media. This trend increases pressure on popular destinations (https://sustainabletravel.org). The film and television industry, as well as travel blogs like TripAdvisor, have also contributed to the emergence of overtourism. Millions of people sharing their travels on these platforms will also mobilize potential tourists (Yarkıcı &Yıldız, 2024, p. 625).

6.2.7. The Popularization of Remote Working Methods: In this working method, which has increased especially after the pandemic, people prefer destinations with low living costs, easy internet access and visa access, and abundant recreational areas (Sustainabletravel,2025).

6.2.8. Lack of Planning in Tourism: Lack of planning and oversight prevents sustainable tourism growth. This leads to inadequate utilization of tourism and negative reactions from local residents toward tourists.

6.3. NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF OVERTOURISM

6.3.1. Crowding and Congestion

Tourism-developing destinations worldwide are generally historical cities with rich environmental and sociocultural richness. The tourist attractions in these cities are often fragile. Their narrow streets cannot accommodate overcrowding. This situation can be observed, for example, in cities like Venice and Dubrovnik. Rural destinations and transportation in developing countries lag behind tourism development. Islands, due to their limited land area, are also vulnerable to crowding. In places with steep cliffs like Santorini, visitors often have to contend with overcrowding to get the best views (Sustainabletravel,2025).

6.3.2. Wear and Tear

Crowds of tourists exceeding their carrying capacity accelerate the erosion of natural and cultural sites. The constant use and lack of maintenance of these sites lead to their rapid deterioration. For example, at the 900-year-old Anakor Wat temple in Cambodia, heavy visitor traffic has eroded the stone floors and steps, and touching and climbing have damaged the carvings (Sustainabletravel,2025).

6.3.3. Public Reaction

If tourism is not managed well, it can cause more harm than good to society. The increasing influx of tourists can create inflation and lower living standards. Many people work in the sector for low wages, and the main income flows abroad

through foreign investors. Furthermore, tourists face even greater criticism when they disrespect public norms and values and damage sacred sites.

6.3.4. Competition for Resources

Resources like energy and water, which are scarce in nature, are increasingly consumed by tourists. Pools, landscaping in accommodation facilities, golf courses, and other areas are rapidly depleting clean water resources. Freshwater shortages, particularly in small island destinations, are causing a crisis during peak tourist demand. Furthermore, threats such as drought and climate change are increasing the pressure on already limited resources.

6.3.5. Environmental Destruction

As tourism demand increases in destinations, a wide variety of accommodations are being built to meet this demand. Unless all this is planned, coral reefs, turtle nesting beaches, and other areas are being destroyed. For example, Maya Bay in Thailand was closed for two years due to excessive coral loss. Mount Everest was also polluted by mountain climbers' waste and garbage. This pollution, along with melting snow, reached groundwater, causing infections in locals and tourists.

6.4. EXAMPLES OF OVERTOURISM DESTINATIONS

6.4.1. Santorini

Santorini is a famous Greek volcanic island belonging to the Cyclades archipelago in southern Greece. It is renowned for its cliff-top houses with blue domes, archaeological sites, churches, stunning sunsets, and white waters (Greek National Tourism Organization, 2018; Peeters, 2018, p. 215). In 2024, 3.4 million tourists visited Santorini, far outnumbering the 20,000 residents. During peak season, up to 17,000 cruise ships arrive, dispersing the visitors to popular destinations in the towns of Fira and Oia (Edition.cnn,2025).

The negative impacts of tourism on Santorini are experienced during the summer season, from May to October. Overtourism, which leads to traffic, noise, waste disposal, and environmental degradation on the island, will also impact the destination's future appeal (Vassilopoulou, 2018; Peeters, 2018, p. 215). Through Airbnb, property owners rent their homes to tourists, which has economic consequences for local residents and seasonal workers. Experts agree that Santorini is the busiest destination in Greece (Smith, 2018).

Santorini Mayor Nikos Zorzos aims to impose a daily limit of 8,000 cruise ship passengers in a plan approved by Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis (Edition.cnn,2025). He also plans to impose a €20 peak season tax on cruise ships

visiting the Greek islands and ban construction in Santorini's caldera (Independent,2025).

The effects of overtourism in Santorini can be summarized as follows (Peeters, 2018, p.215):

- Spread of visitors to residential areas
- Too many cruise ships
- The number of tourists per local population is high
- Tourists complaining about tourists
- Traffic
- Environmental problems

Picture 1: The Problem of Overtourism in Santorini



Source: (Tourismjournal,2025)

6.4.2. Barcelona

Barcelona is the third-largest city in Europe and the 10th largest in the world in terms of visitor numbers and spending. In 2023, 12.4 million people visited the city, generating €9.6 billion in revenue. This figure is 15% higher than in 2019, the pre-pandemic period (Roadgenius,2025). Barcelona's population in 2024 is estimated to be 5,172,000.

The city, favored by tourists for its rich culture, gastronomic treasures, climate, and beaches, faces problems brought on by overtourism. Residents were disturbed by the large number of tourists visiting the city. The first critical comments on this issue were made during the Forum of Cultures held in Barcelona in 2004 (Boz &Özkan,2019,p.842). Drug use, prostitution, increased fraud, and the inappropriate behavior of drunk tourists are among the main complaints. These problems make

Barcelona's famous Las Ramblas a dangerous and unsafe area (Goodwin, 2018). On July 6, 2024, 3,000 people held a demonstration in Barcelona to protest the excessive number of tourists in the city (Roadgenius,2025).

Picture 2: The people of Barcelona organized a march against tourists.



Source: (turizmguncel.com,2025).

In a 2012 study on the perception of tourism among Barcelona's locals, 71.8% of participants thought the city should attract more tourists, but this rate dropped to 47.5% in 2016. Similarly, the rate of those who believed that tourism had exceeded its carrying capacity increased from 24.9% in 2012 to 48.9% in 2016 (Ajuntament Barcelona, 2025). Signs such as "tourist go home" and "if it's tourist season, why can't we shoot them?" were written on some streets of Barcelona (Çolak et al.,2019, p. 988).

Another difficulty in Barcelona is the distribution of rental housing, as in some neighbourhoods there is an imbalance in the ratio of residential housing to tourist flats (tourist rental flats) (Yarkıcı & Yıldız, 2024, p.626). As a result, local residents face rising rents and complaints about the disturbances visitors cause to the surrounding area (Hospers, 2019). This situation negatively impacts the local population both financially and socioculturally, leading some people to move out of the city because they can no longer afford to live there.

Mass tourism in Barcelona is a relatively new phenomenon, beginning with the 1992 Olympics. It took 30 years to understand the need for tourism promotion strategies to prioritize quality over quantity. The goal is to increase cultural tourists and reduce backpackers. According to Mateu Hernández, who heads the city's tourism sector, medium-term goals include not building more hotels and not allowing the opening of more cruise lines and travel agencies (The guardian,2025).

The city has set its sights on becoming a leading destination in urban tourism by developing a plan for the modernization, sustainability, energy efficiency, and digital transformation of its tourism sector. The nearly 20 project plans aim to achieve the following sub-goals: (Ajuntament Barcelona,2025):

- To ensure the harmony of tourism with the lives of local people through a sustainable city model and to raise awareness of the contributions of tourism to the economy.
- Changing the tourism paradigm.
- Revealing the distinctive features and culture of the city as a new destination.
- To promote sustainable tourist mobility in harmony with the city.
- To ensure energy efficiency by reducing the effects of climate change on tourism.

6.4.3. Venice

Known as Europe's floating city, the city, with its water canals, is currently experiencing a large influx of tourists (Yarkıcı & Yıldız, 2024, p. 628). Over the last decade, the city has become a hub for overtourism, attracting approximately 30 million visitors annually (The guardian,2025). Most of these tourists are concentrated in famous landmarks like the Rialto Bridge and St. Mark's Square. This creates a dense concentration of tourists in a very small area, straining the city's infrastructure and damaging buildings. Low-cost air travel, cruise ships, and home-sharing platforms are the most obvious reasons for this. Furthermore, only half of tourists stay in the city, and tourism's contribution to the local population is limited (Responsibletravel,2025).

The negative effects of overtourism on Venice include parking problems, traffic, environmental and noise pollution, increased rents and house prices, inflation, and a decrease in the local population's sense of belonging to their region (Seraphin at al., 2018, p.375). Venice, with a population of 50,000 in the city center, welcomed around 75,000 tourists per day in 2024, a significant number for a city comprised of 118 small islands. As a solution to this situation, locals wear "100% Venetian T-shirts and shop in shops displaying the same inscription" (Öztürk, 2020, p.117). The UNWTO Secretary-General stated that the hostility felt by local people towards tourists is a very serious problem (Tapper,2017). Therefore, stronger government and intergovernmental plans and policies, as well as environmentally friendly practices, are needed.

To address this issue in Venice, several measures have been implemented since 2024. These include restricting tourist groups to no more than 25 people, banning loudspeakers, and charging tourists a €5 entrance fee for crowded areas

(aa.com.tr,2025). UNESCO has proposed adding Venice to its List of World Heritage Sites in Danger in 2024 (aa.com.tr,2025).

Picture 3: Protesters demonstrated against overtourism in Venice



Source: (Turkiyeturizm.com,2025).

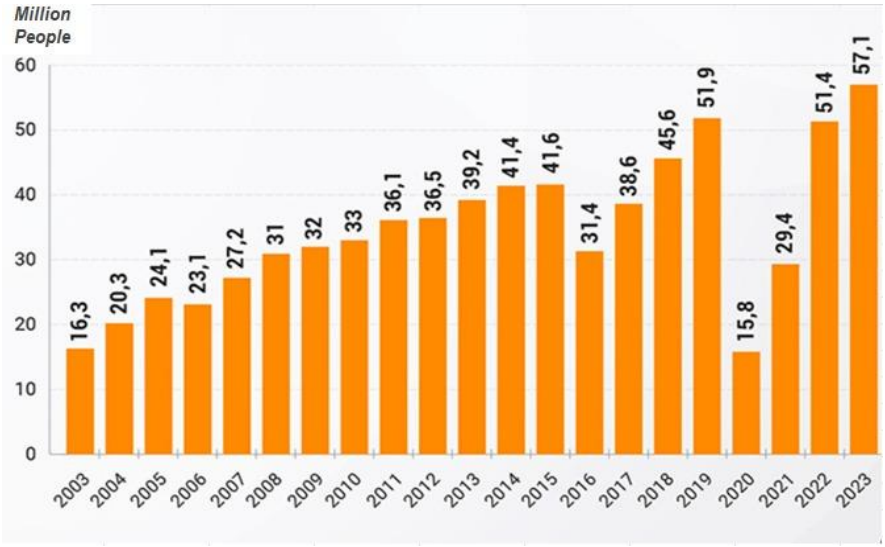
6.5. OVERTOURISM IN TÜRKİYE

International tourism reached 90% of pre-pandemic levels by the end of 2023, with approximately 975 million tourists traveling internationally between January and September 2023. Although the number of tourists visiting Turkey declined during the pandemic, a recovery period began in 2022, and in 2023, more international tourists were hosted than in the pre-pandemic period (2019). In the first nine months of 2024, 1.1 million tourists traveled internationally. This number exceeded 61 million in 2024 (aa.com.tr,2025). The UNWTO report also highlighted Turkey's success, stating that it demonstrated a strong performance in 2024, with a 41% increase compared to the previous year (www.unwto.org). According to the data of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 62 million 269 thousand visitors came to Turkey in 2024, 9 million 640 thousand of whom were citizens residing abroad and 52 million 629 thousand were foreign visitors (Yigm.ktb.gov,2025).

The World Tourism and Travel Council (WTTC) conducted a study based on infrastructure, workforce, environment, and increasing tourist numbers, identifying 50 cities that will experience overtourism by 2030. Istanbul was listed as the second-highest risk city after Kuala Lumpur (Independent,2025). Many destinations in Türkiye face overtourism. Istanbul (Sultanahmet Square and its surrounding areas), Muğla, Antalya, Aydın, and the coastal districts of İzmir are among the first that come to mind. Overtourism is particularly prevalent in the

districts and small towns of these cities (Çam & Çelik, 2022, p. 3; Özgürel &Yılmaz, 2021; Eren & Bozkurt, 2020).

Figure 1: Number of Tourists from Abroad in Turkey Between 2003 and 2023



Source: (aa.com.tr,2025).

Genç (2020) concluded in his study, "Overtourism in Istanbul," that Istanbul's tourism sector has failed to meet both quantitative and qualitative expectations. The location of the Galataport Cruise Port, which has been a contributing factor to overtourism in Istanbul, was criticized by those interviewed. Despite this tourist activity in the city, no anti-tourism activities have been observed. This is attributed to the fact that the overtourism problem has not yet reached a serious level and that a sense of belonging to the city has not yet developed (Genç, 2020, p. 167).

Eren and Bozkurt (2020) conducted a study on the problem of overtourism in the Cappadocia region. The study concluded that the region experiences congestion during certain periods and that this congestion should be spread throughout the year. It was also determined that no measures have been taken to spread the tourist density in the Cappadocia region. As a solution, they recommend limiting the number of visitors to museums and historical sites, implementing a reservation system, and spreading regional tours over three to four days (Eren & Bozkurt, 2020, p. 3101).

One of the natural attractions that has suffered from the negative effects of tourism is the travertines of Pamukkale. Çetinoğlu and Uygur (2020) study on this topic noted that a Pamukkale conservation plan was enacted in 1991. This plan includes strategies to protect the region's ecology, such as removing accommodation

facilities, demarketing, and rerouting highways. Despite this strategy, the travertines, which reached a record number of tourists in 2014, have faced overtourism. However, the Pamukkale Special Environmental Protection Area Management Plan (2020-2024) has been created for today, and the travertines are protected as a sensitive area (Çetinoğlu & Uygur, 2020, p. 3022).

A study investigating the opinions of residents of the Odunpazarı Evleri district of Eskişehir regarding increased tourism activity (Demirci et al., 2020) found that excessive demand for the area resulted in traffic and noise pollution, environmental pollution, the sale of handicrafts not associated with the area, and the distortion of its identity. While rising real estate prices and inflation are among the problems, local residents are quite satisfied with the economic benefits they receive from tourists. This is attributed to the fact that most locals live in their own homes and engage in trade in the area.

A study to determine the perceptions of overtourism among Bodrum residents found that while inadequate infrastructure and high rents were seen as problems in the region, tourism improved employment (Yumuk & Altuntaş, 2019, p. 99). Local governments must work effectively to address these issues. They must be sensitive to the needs of locals and tourists, and tourism awareness must be raised among the local population. It was also concluded that employment diversity should be provided in the region (Yumuk & Altuntaş, 2019, p. 99). Foça is one of the destinations experiencing excessive tourism in Turkey, and a study was conducted to investigate the attitudes of the local population towards tourism. Tourism is seen as a high-yielding sector in Foça, and agricultural lands are thought to be shrinking (Gümüş & Özüpekçe, 2009).

6.6. THE SOLUTION TO OVERTOURISM: RESPONSIBLE AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

The concept of responsible tourism has been introduced into the literature as tourism activities are being conducted consciously. While some researchers consider sustainable and responsible tourism synonymous, the concept of responsibility provides an outward manifestation of sustainability as a behavior (Mihalic, 2014,pp. 6–7). Responsible tourism expects all stakeholders to fulfill their responsibilities within the sector with ethical awareness. These stakeholders include businesses, public institutions, non-governmental organizations, and tourists (İlban, 2023, p. 203). While the concept of responsible tourism was first used in the field of marketing of the natural environment, its content has later expanded as a management philosophy that advocates that education is at the

forefront for displaying ethical behavior and that all stakeholders should receive this education (State & Bulin, 2016, p.701).

Responsible tourism was first defined at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Cape Town in 2002. Because responsible tourism is about creating better places for people to live and visit, it can be said that its goal is to protect local people first and then tourists. The difference in sustainable tourism is that it focuses on what all stakeholders (people, businesses, and government) do to maximize the positive impact of tourism. For a better understanding of responsible tourism, the Cape Town Declaration provides information on its content below (Goodwin,2025):

- To minimize the negative impacts of tourism.
- Ensuring that the host community earns more and improving working conditions for this purpose.
- Involving local people in decisions regarding their own areas.
- Providing support to local people on socio-cultural and environmental issues and thus improving the quality of the tourist experience.
- To ensure access to tourism services for disabled and disadvantaged people.
- Respects cultural sensitivities and ensures local pride and trust.

Five tactics are suggested to prevent the formation of overcrowded tourist groups. These are as follows (Alfonso,2019, p.27):

- Spreading reservations and ticketing over time.
- Spreading peak seasons and promotions over time.
- Developing new tourism destinations by dispersing less visited tourist attractions.
- Pricing should be balanced to meet demand, some taxes and fees should be implemented, and variable and tiered pricing should be implemented.
- Limitation of accommodation, access to this service and activities.

Sustainability and responsible tourism are not synonymous. While sustainability has an abstract meaning, responsible tourism is more abstract in its content. Overtourism, on the other hand, is the opposite of responsible tourism. Overtourism refers to destinations where there are too many visitors, either locals or tourists, and where the quality of life and visitor satisfaction in the region are perceived to be unacceptably declining (responsibletravel, 2025).Although the purpose of these two concepts is the same, in responsible tourism, all stakeholders are expected to be responsible for the effects of their own actions (İşçi & Güzel, 2018, p.13).

While sustainable tourism and responsible tourism have different meanings, they share the same purpose. The environmental integrity, social justice, and local economic benefits of responsible tourism are the same principles of sustainability (İşçi &Güzel, 2018, p. 14). The World Tourism Organization's brochure titled "Tourist and Traveler" describes the characteristics of a responsible tourist. Accordingly, a responsible tourist is one who respects local culture, preserves natural and cultural heritage elements, contributes to the economic and social development of the region, tries local cuisine, and avoids waste by using energy and water resources prudently (İşçi & Güzel, 2018, p. 14).

The Mckinsey Company and the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) have suggested five strategies to prevent overcrowding in tourist areas (Peeters et al., 2018, pp. 254-255):

- Spreading visitors out over time: Many tourist areas experience high traffic during certain seasons, days, festivals, or specific times. If this traffic can be spread out over time and space, both tourist satisfaction and the negative impacts of overtourism can be mitigated.
- Visitors can be spread geographically across less visited areas, thus alleviating bottlenecks in overcrowded areas.
- Balancing supply and demand using pricing policies: Increasing the price of tourist products will reduce demand and lead to increased demand from the elite. However, this will also cause domestic tourists to struggle to access the increased price of tourist products, leading them to lose sight of their country and its cultural heritage. To prevent this, this strategy requires careful planning.
- The number of tourist supply sources is increasing, but some restrictions need to be imposed on the rental of secondary residences, which have increased in recent years.
- In some destinations, festivals, fairs, etc. may need to be restricted or even eliminated completely if necessary.

6.7. DÜZCE AS AN EXAMPLE OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Located in the western Black Sea region, Düzce is a lush green city that gained provincial status in 1999. Located west and north of Bolu, east of Sakarya, and southwest of Zonguldak, Düzce rises 160 meters above sea level (Düzce Municipality, 2025). Having hosted various civilizations, from the Roman and Byzantine periods to the Ottoman Empire, Düzce possesses a rich cultural and historical heritage. Traces of this culture can also be seen in traditional handicrafts, unique cuisine, and historical buildings (Düzce Tourism Strategy Report, 2024). Thanks to all these natural and cultural resources, the city offers many alternative

tourism options. These include birdwatching, cave tourism, ecotourism, air and water sports, plateau tourism, sea tourism, and religious tourism (Kardaş & Turgut, 2023). For example, Lake Efteni and its surroundings, with their water resources and vegetation, are an important birdwatching destination. This region, where hunting has been banned since 1992, is a haven for waterfowl, particularly. It is home to a total of 150 bird species (Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2025). Furthermore, the Büyük Melen River is renowned for its Kaynaşlı motor sports center, as well as for rafting and canoeing (Düzce Tourism Strategy Report, 2024). Düzce's rich water resources attract nature and water sports enthusiasts.

Düzce, with its climate and geographical advantage, is a city suitable for tourism throughout all seasons and will continue to be a regional center of attraction. Düzce is not sufficiently benefiting from its advantages such as its traditions and customs, local lifestyle, unspoiled nature, and history (Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2025). Tourists visiting Düzce come from metropolitan areas like Istanbul, Ankara, and Kocaeli, and they prefer the city for weekends or short breaks. Consequently, their stays are short. Foreign tourists are attracted to nature sports such as rafting, paragliding, and trekking (Düzce Tourism Strategy Report, 2024). The table two shows the number of domestic and international tourists visiting Düzce between 2018 and 2024.

Table 2: Number of Tourists in Düzce by Year (2018-2023)

Tourist Type/Year	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**
Local	184.504	121.898	107.783	106.684	211.773	152.238	165.429
Foreign	30.672	12.049	2.092	3.161	11.652	11.316	11.810
TOTAL	**215.176**	**133.947**	**109.875**	**109.845**	**223.425**	**163.554**	**177.239**

Source: Düzce Province Tourism Strategy Report, 2024

Approximately half of all tourists visiting Düzce come to Akçakoca, a former tourist resort known as Anatolia's gateway to the sea. After Düzce's sea, waterfalls, lakes, and streams were developed for tourism, the number of tourists increased (Düzce Tourism Strategy Report, 2024). Efteni Lake, Topuk Yaylası Lake, Basanlar Dam Reservoir, Torkul Lake, Çamlıpınar Lake, and Kurugöl are among the water resources suitable for water sports. Furthermore, the Büyük Melen River, Turkey's second-longest rafting route, is located in this city (Kardaş & Turgut, 2023). Natural wonders such as Güzeldere and Samandere waterfalls, as well as

Saklıkent, Sarıyayla, Harmankaya, Bakacak, Aktaş, and Aydınpınar waterfalls, are also located nearby (Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2025).

Gastronomy tourism, with its registration of geographically indicated products and local foods, presents a significant opportunity for Düzce (Akkil et al., 2024). Furthermore, this form of tourism will enhance the region's identity and protect local producers by contributing to the production of local products (Baran & Karaca, 2021; Akkil et al., 2024). Düzce has significant potential for faith tourism. Historical structures such as the historic Orhan Gazi Mosque, Hemşin Village Mosque, Uğurlu Village Yeni Meze Mosque, Akçakoca Central Mosque, as well as the Konuralp Tomb, Hasan Dede Tomb, and Ahmet Dede Tomb are among the important structures for faith tourism. Mosques located in the villages where the greengrocer Turks settled in Düzce after 1323 are important centers of faith tourism (Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2025).

Düzce also has significant potential for retail tourism. The major caves that have been developed for tourism are: Akçakoca Fakıllı Cave, Sarıkaya, Aksu, Çamlı, Gökçeağaç, and Yağcılar Cave (Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2025). Dadalı Village, a district of Akçakoca, has been transformed into an eco-tourism village with support from the Eastern Marmara Development Agency. Tourists visiting the village are offered organic and local food prepared from locally grown produce, and various cultural activities are offered (Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2025). The town of Akçakoca in Düzce also offers sea, sand, and sun tourism. Akçakoca boasts a 35 km coastline and numerous sandy beaches. Its mild summer climate welcomes local tourists seeking refuge from the summer heat (Kardaş & Turgut,2023). Düzce, with its geography stretching from Abant to the Kardüz Plateau, also has rich potential for plateau tourism. The Topuk, Koca, Pürenli, Sakarya-Kütük-Sinekli Plateaus, and Hira Plateau are also suitable for various ecotourism activities. These plateaus are suitable for mountain biking, tent camping, photo safaris, off-roading, and nature walks (Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2025).

In addition, the presence of suitable areas for outdoor sports preferred by young people, the presence of a green nature, the presence of thermo-mineral water resources suitable for thermal tourism, and the presence of fully equipped public and private hospitals for health tourism are the advantages of the city in terms of tourism. However, the city's disadvantages include inadequate transportation infrastructure, the lack of an airport, the inadequacy of all accommodation facilities, especially thermal spas, both in quantity and quality, and the lack of promotional and marketing efforts. Furthermore, the region's heavy reliance on the domestic market, industrialization, and unplanned and illegal construction are

among the region's most significant tourism challenges (Düzce Tourism Strategy Report, 2024).

6.8. CONCLUSION AND SOLUTION SUGGESTIONS

Today, due to factors such as the advancement of transportation and communication technologies, the internet, increased leisure time, and disposable income, international tourism has become a massive movement. This mass movement is not evenly distributed across the globe; it congests certain destinations in certain countries. These congestion events occur during specific seasons and for specific activities. In this situation, overcrowding, far exceeding the carrying capacity, contributes to the negative perception of tourism rather than its positive impacts. In such circumstances, the question of whether tourism is beneficial or harmful remains.

Overtourism causes numerous environmental, economic, and sociocultural damages in destinations. This can lead to irreversible damage to tourist attractions. Locals may become resentful of tourism and tourists when they encounter numerous problems caused by large crowds, such as inflation, housing shortages, traffic, noise, and parking problems. While initially happy with the arrival of tourists, locals begin to see the costs of tourism, which they had previously overlooked, as the tourist population increases. The increasing crowds can lead to initial discontent, followed by resentment and hatred, and even violence.

According to the International Ecotourism Society (TIES), the solution to overtourism lies in ecotourism. The indigenous people, culture, environment, and natural resources of a region are all elements of ecotourism. There is much debate about what ecotourism entails. Ecotourism, often portrayed as a solution to overtourism, offers the following benefits, the opposite of overtourism :

- Minimizing the physical, social and psychological impacts of tourism.
- To create environmental and cultural awareness and respect.
- To ensure the satisfaction of both the visitor and host community.
- To provide economic benefits to the local community and the private sector.
- Providing visitors with memorable experiences.
- Respect for the political, social and environmental sensitivities of the host country.
- Designing low-impact activities.
- Respecting the rights and beliefs of local people.
- All stakeholders come together to form a community.

Combating overtourism requires developing strategies that not only ensure a sustainable visitor experience but also foster the well-being of the local community. To avoid such problems, destinations are implementing similar measures to limit tourism. For example, Amsterdam has restricted river cruises to reduce congestion, and Barcelona has banned short-term rentals. In Greece, visitor restrictions have been imposed on places like the Acropolis. Venice has introduced a daily tour fee to prevent visitor density. In his study, Alexis (2017) recommended that tourism professionals "manage your destinations and educate tourists" (Alexis, 2017, p. 292). In Coimbra, Portugal, tourists are being directed to smaller towns nearby to combat overtourism. Many cities, including Barcelona, Venice, Amsterdam, and Bali, already impose tourism taxes, but whether these taxes will solve the problem of overtourism is debatable because they are too low to be considered a deterrent. However, these taxes do provide local governments with funding to cover certain expenses, such as garbage collection.

Macao is one city in Asia that uses technology to manage overtourism. One area where technology is being used in Macao is transportation management. Residents can easily find out when buses will arrive, where parking is available, and how to get around, improving their quality of life. Tourists also use a government-created app to visualize crowded areas and plan their travels. Data mining is also being used to organize activities in Macao and identify tourist behavior patterns. Augmented reality technology is being used to enhance travel experiences. All of this is also being used for tourism development.

Another problem in addressing this problem is that those who want to reduce tourist numbers are comprised of others who have authority over the solution. While cities like Amsterdam and Barcelona have taken admirable measures, overtourism cannot be addressed through such piecemeal measures (Butler & Dodds, 2022, p. 48). Below are some suggestions for overtourism (Butler & Dodds, 2022, p. 48).

- Capacity limitations
- Non-marketing
- Limited access to destinations
- Timed and limited entries
- Increased services (such as restrooms and parking)
- Additional payments for visits
- Training of multiple stakeholders and visitors
- Changes in marketing and promotion
- Reducing control over transportation to local areas

- Ensuring the compatibility of tourism policies with other sectors
- Changes to seasonal restrictions
- Removal of visa restrictions
- Payments to compliant visitors
- Working in harmony with other government institutions
- Aligning tourism policies with sustainable development goals

Travel agencies also play a crucial role in ensuring the sustainability of tourism. Limiting the number of people in tour groups can reduce excessive pressure on destinations. Furthermore, educating tourist groups can reduce negative impacts on sociocultural values and the environment. While many countries once struggled to generate more revenue from tourism, today this struggle has shifted to a preference for preventing excessive tourist arrivals. It's not possible to say that every region is equally affected by tourism overcapacity, as residents of each region have different perspectives on tourism, commitment to tourism, income generated from tourism, culture, education, habits, and perceptions. While many destinations have developed similar solutions to this problem, these solutions appear unsustainable in the long term. To address this issue, it is recommended that all stakeholders, from tourists to business owners, develop coordinated, consistent, and applicable strategies across all levels of government. Furthermore, in addition to policy efforts and the use of technology, smart city applications can be implemented in cities experiencing overtourism.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

AGRICULTURAL TOURISM

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most significant effects of globalization in today's world is the simultaneous transformation of cities' fabric, their inhabitants, and their lifestyles. This process is gradually leading to the loss of local identities and unique characteristics. Modern urban life, dominated by intense tempos and stress, has strengthened individuals' desire to reconnect with nature, even if only briefly. In this context, people need environments where they can both relax and rejuvenate themselves mentally and physically through various recreational activities. Such activities are generally considered within the scope of tourism. Initially, the phenomenon of tourism emerged primarily in the form of mass tourism, shaped by individuals visiting regions with diverse physical and social characteristics. However, over time, the negative effects of this type of tourism on nature and local culture were recognized, and as a result, an alternative tourism approach centered on protecting local people, the environment, and cultural heritage began to gain importance. The concept of rural tourism, which developed within this context, represents a form of tourism more integrated with nature and culture, along with subtypes such as village tourism, farm tourism, and agricultural tourism (Çanga et al., 2018).

Turkey, thanks to its climate, rich natural resources, diverse vegetation, seas, lakes, land structure, fertile soils, and irrigation facilities, offers a wide range of agricultural production opportunities and favorable conditions for the development

of mass, cultural, and alternative tourism types. While many sectors within the country's economy interact with each other, the agricultural and tourism sectors are among the areas where this interaction is most strongly felt. This is primarily because tourism is a service sector that heavily consumes staple foods and beverages such as fruits, vegetables, and wine. A significant portion of the food supply required for the sustainability of tourism activities is provided by the agricultural sector, regardless of whether it is domestic or international tourists (Çıkın et al., 2009).

Agritourism is increasingly considered an important alternative for increasing the income of rural households, revitalizing the local economy, and contributing to national development. Education-based initiatives are among the factors that can accelerate the development of agritourism by supporting the transition to this new agricultural approach. The growing importance of agritourism reflects the significant integration of the agricultural and tourism sectors. It offers unique and authentic experiences to travelers while also creating an opportunity to support economic development for rural communities (Santosh et al., 2024).

This section examines the concept of agritourism from a holistic perspective, encompassing its historical development and economic and social significance. Agritourism stands out as a type of tourism that integrates agricultural production processes with the tourist experience in rural areas, utilizing local culture, gastronomy, and nature in a sustainable manner. With the increasing importance of experience-based tourism, agritourism has become a field that supports rural development and contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage. This section examines the planning, management, marketing, and sustainability dimensions of practices such as farm tourism, rural tourism, and agrotourism. Furthermore, the relationship between agritourism and local culture is evaluated through elements such as gastronomy, local flavors, festivals, and community participation. The example of Düzce province examines the region's agricultural potential and local values, presenting a holistic framework for the economic, cultural, and social contributions of agritourism.

7.1. DEFINITION AND IMPORTANCE OF AGRICULTURAL TOURISM

Agricultural tourism, also known as ecotourism, village tourism, farm tourism, and agrotourism, has become a prominent alternative form of tourism in recent years as a sub-branch of rural tourism (Yılmaz et al., 2014). Agricultural tourism allows farmers to diversify their income sources, while also contributing significantly to the preservation of arable lands and the economic empowerment of women living in rural areas (Ferreira et al., 2022). Rural tourism is defined as a tourism approach

that intertwines the natural environment, rural culture, and agricultural activities, and can easily be integrated with other types of tourism. Therefore, rural tourism, supported by various initiatives at the local, national, and international levels, is attracting people to rural areas in many countries to experience a holiday immersed in nature. It is also noted that rural tourism can be undertaken year-round (Pezikoğlu, 2012). Agricultural tourism not only contributes to the socio-economic development of local communities but also allows a portion of the revenue generated to be used for the preservation of the natural environment and the maintenance of traditional cultural values. Moreover, it is attracting attention as a type of tourism that supports the preservation of biodiversity and ecosystem balance in developing countries. Vineyard tourism, a subcomponent of agricultural tourism, is of particular importance because it is environmentally and ecologically sustainable, economically viable, and socially accepted (Türkben et al., 2012).

7.1.1. The Concept of Agricultural Tourism

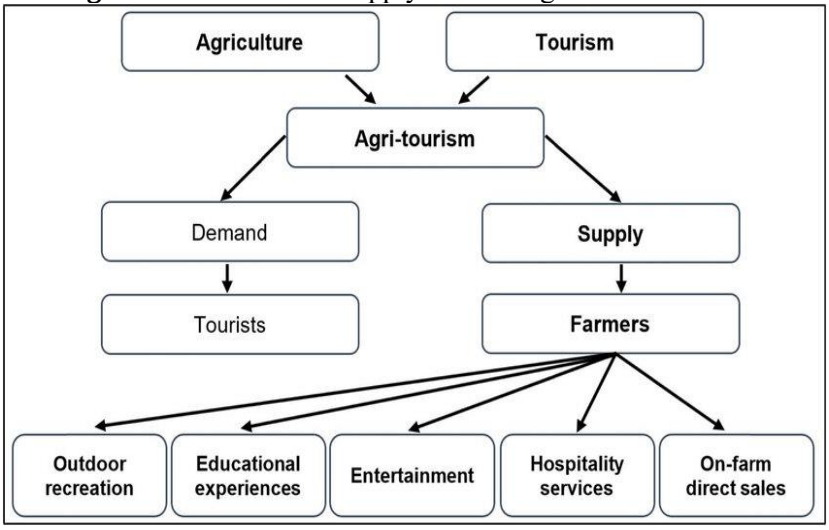
Agritourism emerged as a form of tourism activity conducted in rural areas distinguished by their natural beauty and attractiveness. In this type of tourism, visitors spend their holidays on farms where agricultural activities are carried out and participate in agriculture-based activities. Considered an extension of ecotourism, agritourism offers participants the opportunity to directly experience rural life while also encouraging city dwellers to visit rural areas during their vacations and creating economic activity in these areas. This process provides locals with the opportunity to earn additional income and provides tourists with the opportunity to relax, observe, and learn in natural surroundings. The cultural and social interaction inherent in tourism occurs within the context of agritourism, fostering a shared knowledge and experience between locals and visitors. This facilitates the sharing of knowledge and experience between the two. From the tourist's perspective, such activities offer the opportunity to actively participate in agricultural production processes in the destination, while providing a significant advantage for hosts in terms of both sustaining production activities and securing a share of tourism revenue. While agritourism is defined differently, it encompasses similar activities that fundamentally serve the same purpose. Carrying out agriculture and tourism together is also of great importance in terms of ensuring environmental sustainability (Taşkıran et al., 2023).

The concept of agritourism represents a new dimension of rural tourism and rural management. This type of tourism, which is fundamentally focused on public, farm-centered rural activities, offers visitors the opportunity to directly engage with agricultural production areas, observe production processes, and experience rural life. Agritourism destinations typically offer a variety of activities that visitors can

view, participate in, and purchase, and these activities are organized for the general public. This form of tourism can be defined as "a travel experience in which agricultural or rural environments are integrated with agricultural production activities and products." According to Pandurang Tavare's definition, agritourism is a rural management activity in which farmers or local people in a region offer visitors the opportunity to observe the planting, harvesting, and processing of agricultural products not grown in their own region, such as coconut, pineapple, sugarcane, or corn. In these activities, farmers provide accommodation for visitors and simultaneously create an educational and experience-oriented environment. Agricultural tourism practices, sometimes organized by private tour companies, offer urban residents both entertaining and educational experiences (Mahaliyanaarachchi, 2015). The primary goal of agritourism is to introduce visitors to agricultural production processes in vineyards, gardens, and farm settings, encourage knowledge sharing, and raise awareness of rural life. While the primary goal of these activities for agricultural businesses is to generate income, agritourism is carried out with a multifaceted set of objectives. These objectives are listed as follows (Şekerli, 2018):

- Encouraging agricultural producers to pursue agritourism activities based on their personal interests or to engage in hobby activities in this field,
- Ensuring the long-term sustainability of agricultural production and businesses,
- Developing employment opportunities in the agricultural sector and creating new business areas,
- Ensuring that tourism revenues are distributed equally throughout the year,
- Supporting social services that benefit society.

Figure 1. Demand and Supply Side of Agricultural Tourism



Source: van Zyl et al., 2021.

7.1.2. History and Development

The interaction between agriculture and tourism has played a decisive role in the economic development and transformation of rural areas for centuries. Historically, agricultural lifestyles and farming practices were among the fundamental elements shaping the socio-economic structure and production approach of rural societies. The historical roots of tourism, however, lie in agricultural societies, where the aesthetic elements of natural landscapes combined with the seasonal cycle of agricultural activities formed the basis for commercial activities aimed at visitors (Kulyniak et al., 2024).

The Industrial Revolution of the 19th century was a turning point in the development of the tourism sector, a significant source of income for countries. Following the Industrial Revolution, advances in production technologies led to increased leisure time for individuals, and the convenience provided by steam-powered transportation in maritime and rail transport were among the key factors in the expansion of tourist activities. Innovations in transportation technologies in the 20th century allowed mass tourism to spread to wider geographies, while the development of mass media increased individuals' desire to travel and their motivation to participate in tourism. Parallel to these shifts in tourism demand, significant innovations have also occurred in tourism supply, giving the sector a constantly evolving and dynamic structure. However, in recent years, tourist interest has shifted from traditional mass tourism to alternative forms of tourism that are more sensitive to the environment, culture, and local values. One of these alternative forms is rural tourism (Çeken et al., 2012).

While not a modern phenomenon, rural tourism began in England in the 19th century with nature-oriented trends and later spread to the industrialized countries of Europe. The rapid adoption of this form of tourism was driven by the rising socioeconomic status of city dwellers, negative conditions such as air pollution, noise, and intense stress in large cities, and the emergence of a need for recreation in rural areas. In European countries where rural tourism is widespread, at least one-third of the population spends their holidays in rural areas. This type of tourism primarily appeals to families and adults, targeting the middle-income group. However, the share of sophisticated and high-income individuals devoting to rural tourism is also increasing (Başer, 2020).

Agritourism has emerged as a form of tourism that involves tourists actively participating in agricultural activities by visiting farms. This concept has rapidly gained popularity, particularly in European countries like Italy and France, which offer visitors accommodation and rural experiences on farms. With the growing global interest in sustainable tourism and rural experiences, the concept of

agritourism has expanded beyond traditional agricultural practices to encompass a broader range of activities. Today, agritourism represents a multifaceted tourism approach that includes visits to vineyards, orchards, cheese production facilities, tea gardens, and organic farms, as well as cultural interactions and experiences such as purchasing local products (Basumatary et al., 2923).

7.1.3. Economic and Social Importance

Tourism is considered a development tool and an employment-generating model in countries with high unemployment rates. Tourism is gaining importance as a sustainable economic resource, raising income and improving living conditions, particularly for communities living in rural areas. Regions where agriculture and livestock farming are intensively practiced hold strategic importance for rural tourism. Rural tourism stands out as an alternative economic activity by opening up these potential regions to tourism and creating non-agricultural employment opportunities. The most significant economic contribution of agritourism to rural areas is its direct income generation. Due to the consumption-based nature of tourism, the expenditures made by domestic and international tourists during their trips to rural areas to meet their needs, such as accommodation, food and beverages, rural activities, transportation, shopping, local handicrafts, and authentic foods, increase the incomes of rural residents. This income increase not only raises the living standards and welfare of local residents but also increases the purchasing power of rural areas that attract tourists, creating opportunities for new tourism investments (Kadanalı & Yazgan, 2012).

The sociocultural impacts of tourism manifest themselves through changes in value systems, individual behaviors, family relationships, shared lifestyles, perceptions of security, moral norms, traditional ceremonies, and the organizational structure of society. Rural tourism also creates various sociocultural impacts on both individuals and communities. While tourists are influenced by the lifestyles of the regions they visit, local people are also affected by the tourists' behaviors and lifestyles, which can lead to changes in the lifestyles of local people. Furthermore, the interaction between tourists and local people with different ideas, values, and lifestyles gives rise to a new form of social interaction called the "tourist-local relationship." This relationship can take various forms and can have positive or negative consequences for the participants (Ahişapoğlu, 2006). The interaction between local people and tourists has a particularly significant impact on family structure. With the development of rural tourism, internal migration, which stems from the imbalance between the rate of development and population growth in regions, is decreasing or tending to cease. This situation contributes, albeit indirectly, to the solution of urban slums and unplanned urban development (Uçar,

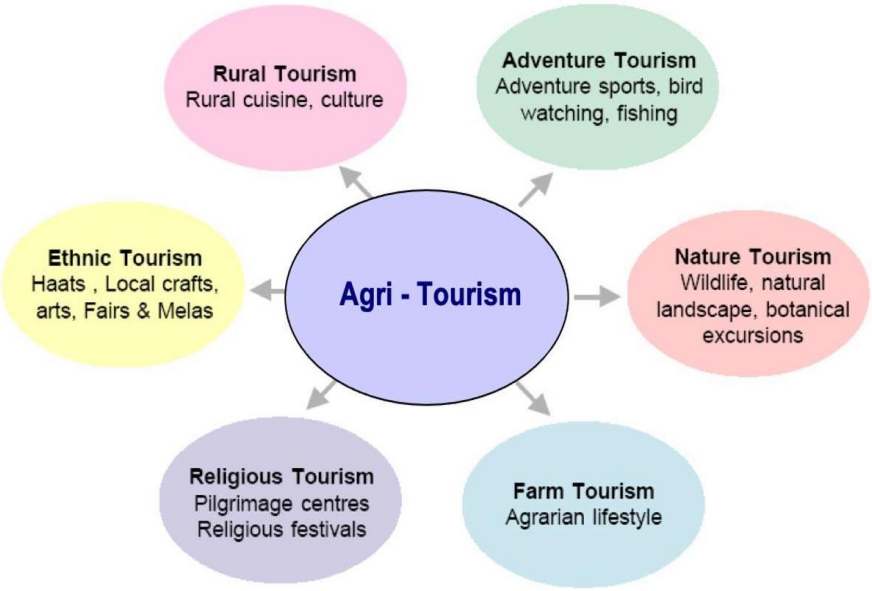
2010). Rural tourism also benefits international relations. It fosters regional and intercultural understanding and tolerance, supports local development by attracting additional visitors, and contributes to the socio-economic development of the region (Sertkaya, 2001).

7.2. AGRICULTURAL TOURISM TYPES AND APPLICATIONS

Agricultural tourism can be implemented in a variety of ways in different countries, and the geopolitical location of countries often plays a decisive role in shaping these practices. Yavuzaslanoğlu and Yavuz (2012) stated that birdwatching can be included within agritourism and also suggested that activities such as picnics, selling agricultural products, camping activities, and rural excursions can be implemented within this type of tourism (Gündoğdu, 2023). For example, practices such as agritourism in Italy, hayloft accommodation in Switzerland, farm accommodation in New Zealand, and farm holidays in the UK demonstrate that agritourism is considered an alternative form of tourism that is given strategic priority by countries. Application methods may vary depending on the geographical location of countries and the importance they place on agricultural tourism (Oruç et al., 2015). In their study, Ertan and Özlem (2008) categorized agritourism activities under six main headings as follows:

- **Outdoor Activities:** This category includes outdoor activities such as horseback riding, wildlife observations, photography, camping and picnicking, skiing, fishing, and other hunting activities.
- **Sales of Agricultural Products:** Farm producers can offer their products to consumers at farm festivals, roadside stands, or special sales areas.
- **Educational Activities:** In this context, participants can participate in educational activities such as school tours, vineyard and nursery tours, horticulture tours, agricultural courses, agricultural fairs, and product promotion programs.
- **Production Participation:** Participants can actively participate in agricultural production processes and experience basic agricultural activities carried out on the farm.
- **Accommodation Facilities:** Unlike other types of tourism, accommodation within the scope of agritourism is provided in farmhouses, youth hostels, and similar rural accommodations.
- **Organization and Events:** Festivals, fairs, concerts, and other entertainment events organized within the framework of agritourism are included in this category. Other Activities: Activities such as cultural visits, guided and equipment-supported operations and producer markets are also included among agricultural tourism activities.

Figure 2. Activity-Based Linkages of Agricultural Tourism



Source: Url 1.

7.2.1. Farm Tourism

Farm tourism is defined as a sub-branch of rural tourism. This type of tourism offers visitors hands-on training opportunities in hunting, fishing, and farming, as well as the supply of local products. In other words, farm tourism is also considered a form of tourism that allows individuals to volunteer or stay as guests and gain experience in a farm environment. Participants assume the role of a farmer for a period of time and have the opportunity to experience farm life. The primary goal of this type of tourism is to provide environments where tourists can firsthand experience rural and agricultural life. It is known that the popularity of farm tourism increased, particularly in the 20th century. It is noted that farm tourism, widely practiced in European countries, is not limited to farms engaged in agricultural production but also provides tourists with fresh food, accommodation, and food and beverage services (Cicik & Akdağ, 2021). Farm tourism supports environmental protection through the concepts of sustainability and nature- and community-oriented tourism. While agricultural activities protect the environment, farm tourism allows farmers to diversify their landscapes and agricultural areas and contributes to the protection of natural resources in a way that benefits tourism and other sectors (Yamagishi et al., 2024).

7.2.2. Village Tourism

Village tourism is defined as a type of tourism that takes place in rural areas and benefits local communities by utilizing the natural, cultural, and human-derived values of these areas (Ocampo, 2022). Considered a subtype of rural tourism, village tourism has recently evolved to meet visitors' expectations not only for recreation but also for learning and experience. Today's tourists are increasingly drawn to village-based activities that offer opportunities to explore traditional farm life and interact with nature. The primary goal of educational trips within village tourism is to foster a positive perception of agriculture, particularly among urban residents and children, by introducing them to farmers' lifestyles, production processes, and agricultural activities, and to contribute to cultural sustainability. In this context, educational village tourism activities include short-term workshops held on school farms, basic or comprehensive training courses, and other activities. Activities for children include flower arranging, farm cooking classes, the production of natural herbal medicines, the introduction of traditional beer and wine production techniques, and the historical revitalization of traditional village life. Recreational village tourism, on the other hand, encompasses activities focused on entertainment and relaxation, intertwined with nature. Activities such as botanical art, agricultural labyrinth tours, wine tasting tours, vegetable picking experiences, and observation of naturally occurring plants and wildlife species are included (Petroman et al., 2016).

7.2.3. Agro Tourism

An examination of the etymology of the concept of agrotourism reveals that it is a combination of the terms agriculture and tourism. The prefix "agri" is derived from the Latin word "ager," and the term "agro" in Greek refers to the science of soil and agriculture. Tourism, on the other hand, is defined as a form of active recreation that allows individuals to travel outside their homes and meet their mental, recreational, and sporting needs (Civelek et al., 2014). The roots of agrotourism date back to the late 19th century. The first agrotourism activities undertaken during this period included short-term trips that allowed city dwellers to escape daily city life and visit relatives. With the invention of the automobile in the 1920s, access to rural areas became easier, and such visits became more common. Following the Great Depression and World War II in the 1930s and 1940s, interest in recreational activities in rural areas increased significantly. While activities such as horse riding and taking care of farm animals became popular in the 1960s and 1970s, farm holidays, bed and breakfast accommodations and commercial farm tours came to the fore in the 1980s and 1990s (Civelek et al., 2013).

7.3. AGRICULTURAL TOURISM PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

Agricultural tourism is a form of tourism that allows urban residents to gain a deeper understanding of rural life, integrate this experience into their daily lives, establish direct contact with local cultural elements, and strengthen their connection to the land. This type of tourism aims to contribute to reducing rural-urban migration and related economic, social, and cultural problems by generating additional income for rural communities (Türkben et al., 2012). Agricultural tourism, also known as agrotourism, is a type of tourism that has emerged in rural areas with natural attractions, where agricultural activities are carried out in parallel with the development of international tourism. This form of tourism encompasses a variety of tourism activities primarily carried out in rural areas and, in this respect, shares some similarities with rural tourism (Çıkın et al., 2009). In this context, determining the criteria for successful implementation is crucial for agricultural tourism enterprises to achieve a sustainable structure.

Research conducted in California reveals that agritourism businesses must prioritize several key elements for success. These include defining processes clearly and concisely, ensuring effective information flow, developing a comprehensive business plan, establishing strong relationships with local communities and other businesses, fostering awareness, and preparing pre-implementation assessment reports. Furthermore, resolving permitting issues, addressing regulatory hurdles, raising awareness, conducting promotional activities for agritourism, and fostering supportive local communities are also important factors influencing business success (Keith et al., 2003).

7.3.1. Marketing and Promotion Strategies

Agricultural marketing is a process that combines the concepts of agriculture and marketing and encompasses all activities related to agricultural products from farm to consumer. This process includes production planning, growing and harvesting processes, product classification and packaging, storage and transportation, processing, distribution, advertising, and sales of agricultural food products. Agricultural marketing aims to increase producers' incomes and ensure consumers have access to high-quality, safe products by regulating the economic and logistical relationships between producers and consumers. In this respect, it is considered a comprehensive field requiring a holistic approach focused on service, logistics, and strategic planning (Gedik, 2023). The planning and management strategies applied in agricultural marketing also serve as a guide for the marketing of agritourism activities, requiring the efficient use of resources and sustainability in both areas.

Given the characteristics of agritourism, the marketing process should take into consideration social and ecological carrying capacity. In this context, information about the number of people accommodated in each establishment should be provided to tourist consumers when making their business selection. Thus, exceeding carrying capacity is prevented and agritourism activities are carried out effectively and efficiently within the framework of sustainability principles (Oruç et al., 2015). Therefore, agritourism marketing and promotion strategies should not be limited to promoting the product or service but should also consider factors such as visitor capacity, ecological balance, and social sustainability. This holistic approach enhances the quality of tourist experiences while ensuring the long-term sustainability and economic efficiency of agricultural enterprises.

7.3.2. Sustainability and Environmental Management

In recent years, increasing populations, rising food demand, and the pressures of climate change have made sustainability in agricultural production essential. Sustainable agriculture refers to a production structure that ensures the long-term protection of natural resources while utilizing environmentally friendly agricultural technologies. This approach aims to balance agronomic, environmental, social, and economic dimensions; the goal is to maintain agricultural productivity, minimize environmental damage, maintain economic vitality, and improve the quality of life of those engaged in agriculture (Ateş & Akbaş, 2018). In this context, the effectiveness of sustainable agricultural practices is directly related to businesses developing strategies aimed at environmental sustainability and prioritizing the protection of natural resources. In the literature, concepts such as green innovation, circular economy, firm performance, and corporate social responsibility stand out as key themes that serve to balance both environmental and economic dimensions in agricultural production. From this perspective, the planning and implementation of sustainability practices in the agricultural sector plays a critical role in increasing production efficiency, protecting natural resources, and ensuring long-term economic sustainability. (Yorulmaz, 2024).

7.4. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AGRICULTURAL TOURISM AND LOCAL CULTURE

Agritourism contributes to the preservation of the identity of local communities by preserving local agricultural culture and traditional agricultural practices in rural areas (Kalaycı & Özçatalbaş, 2021). Agritourism businesses' branding and marketing of local products aligns with the "environmentally sensitive and conscious" profile of tourists, thus creating a cultural and economic synergy (Dalgın & Civelek, 2020). Furthermore, research emphasizing the preservation of

cultural heritage in rural tourism planning indicates that traditional lifestyles and local values can be both preserved and contributed to the development of society through tourism (Erşahin et al., 2025). Local gastronomy and food and beverage traditions, in particular, are indispensable components of agritourism; Zengin and Kapucuoğlu (2019) demonstrate in their study that "local food and beverages" play a critical role in promoting a region and in the development of the local population. Furthermore, sustainability-focused assessments addressing the agriculture-tourism-rural nexus emphasize the need to balance the economic benefits of tourism with ecological and cultural sustainability goals (Pezikoğlu, 2012).

7.4.1. Gastronomy and Local Flavors

The development of gastronomy tourism in a given region depends largely on the existence of unique and inimitable gastronomic products specific to that region. Such unique products are among the key elements that distinguish a region from others. In this context, food has moved beyond a basic need to become an activity where people spend their time focused on experience and pleasure. Gastronomy tourism has significant potential to support both social and economic development, driven by the role of food in tourism (Gazelci & Şahingöz, 2023). Local products and local culinary culture play a central role in gastronomy tourism, both strengthening regional identity and generating economic advantage.

Local products hold symbolic value for a region, attracting tourists and enhancing the competitive advantage among destinations. Local food and beverages offer new tourism markets for countries and regions and provide a unique competitive advantage for entrepreneurs in destinations. Having a large number of producers capable of producing significant quantities of high-quality food products within a culinary region is crucial for developing a cuisine based on traditional dishes using local processing methods and techniques and regional ingredients. Effectively utilizing these methods and local culinary culture enhances interregional competition and enables businesses in the region to differentiate themselves and generate economic profits (Gazelci & Aksoy, 2024).

7.4.2. Cultural Events and Festivals

In the context of agritourism, gastronomic and cultural festivals held in rural areas play a significant role in promoting local agricultural products and strengthening rural cultural identity (Taşkıran et al., 2023). For example, "herb festivals" held in the Aegean Region, as a component of rural gastronomy tourism, both emphasize the economic value of local plants and offer tourists the opportunity to introduce traditional plant uses (Tilki & Yalçın, 2021). Furthermore, gastronomy festivals organized within the scope of vineyard and wine tourism bring agricultural producers' products directly to tourists while also contributing to the preservation

of the vineyard tradition of the regional cultural heritage (Erdoğan, 2021). Rural festivals can function as arenas that provide participants with cultural capital; through socio-cultural interaction, participants experience local culture and acquire cultural knowledge (Smith et al., 2021). In Turkey, olive harvest festivals held in the Milas district, in addition to their economic and socio-cultural benefits, also serve to preserve the local agricultural lifestyle and traditional practices (Çukur & Kızılaslan, 2018).

7.4.3. Community Participation and Activities

Agritourism offers a framework that encourages the active participation of rural communities in economic and social processes; in particular, local people contribute to their own well-being and support rural development by participating in the planning and implementation of tourism projects (Bollukcu & Cesur, 2020). Furthermore, agritourism initiatives carried out in collaboration with civil society organizations strengthen the sustainable use of local resources and social solidarity (Azadalıyev & Kızılırmak, 2023). An examination of local people's perceptions of tourism reveals a strong expectation of economic and sociocultural benefits, while environmental concerns also exist (Azadalıyev & Ayazlar, 2025). This participation dynamic enables agritourism to go beyond being an economic activity and function as a development model that preserves social capital and local identity.

7.5. DÜZCE PROVINCE AND AGRICULTURAL TOURISM

Düzce province, with its local handicrafts, culinary culture, rural lifestyle, and traditional practices, has significant rural tourism potential. Its geopolitical location, combined with its natural, historical, sociocultural, and environmental assets, makes Düzce a prominent region for rural tourism. Dadalı village, located in the Akçakoca district, stands out as one of the few settlements in the region that practices ecological agriculture and holds strategic importance for rural tourism activities. The village aims to offer its visitors a unique rural life experience. In this context, tourists visiting the village can participate in daily agricultural activities such as cow milking, egg collection, and fruit and vegetable production with the village women in the early morning hours. They can also sample local cuisine and participate in cultural events such as weddings, engagements, and henna nights, providing a holistic rural tourism experience (Aydın & Selvi, 2012). This holistic experience further highlights the economic and cultural opportunities offered by rural tourism in Düzce, demonstrating the complementarity of the province's agricultural tourism potential with its natural and cultural riches.

Düzce possesses significant potential for agricultural tourism thanks to its natural resources, agricultural production capacity, and regional beekeeping ecotypes. Studies conducted by the Düzce University Beekeeping Research, Development, and Application Center (DAGEM) are promoting the province's registered Yığılca honeybee ecotype, as well as monofloral chestnut and rhododendron honeys. In this context, domestic and international tourists are invited to visit apiaries, participate in hive opening and beekeeping experiences, and become familiar with apitherapy, thus creating additional income sources for rural development and sustainable tourism (Düzce University, 2023). Furthermore, Düzce's forests, plateaus, water resources, and rural life opportunities; By combining agriculture and livestock farming with organic products and nature tourism, it enables the province to become a versatile rural/agricultural tourism destination (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2023).

7.5.1. Agricultural Potential and Products

Due to its geographical location, the Düzce region is rich in natural resources and exhibits diverse climate and soil characteristics. The most critical of these natural resources are water and soil resources, which provide essential requirements for life and productivity. Furthermore, the status of efforts regarding the effective use and management of these resources in the region is of great importance. Initiatives and investments aimed at protecting and ensuring the sustainability of water and soil resources play a significant role in the socioeconomic development of the region (Özmen et al., 2015). In this context, when assessing Düzce province's agricultural production potential and land use, the region's natural resources and their management also stand out as important determinants.

In Düzce province, fruit production accounts for the largest share of plant production, covering 61.5% of agricultural land. Hazelnuts are a key crop in this regard. When the distribution of cultivated land across the province is examined, orchards lead the way, followed by grain production areas and 2% by vegetable gardens. Although the province is suitable for vegetable production in terms of climate and soil structure, the agricultural land allocated for this purpose is quite limited. An examination of the distribution of agricultural land and production values by crop by district reveals significant differences in cultivated areas and preferred crops. These differences stem primarily from the districts' geographical locations. The central district is generally located in plains, while Gölyaka is located at a higher elevation, resulting in climatic differences between the districts. These climatic differences are considered to be a direct factor influencing agricultural production (Yılmazgil, 2016).

7.5.2. The Connection Between Local Culture, Festivals, and Gastronomy

Düzce boasts a rich cultural and gastronomic heritage due to the convergence of diverse ethnic groups and migration throughout history. This diversity provides an important foundation for preserving local cuisine and passing it on to future generations. Ünüvar & Cesur (2023) note that Düzce cuisine is shaped by traditional flavors such as "Düzce köftesi," "Konuralp pilaf," "kaldirik kavurması," and "zucchini dessert." However, the culinary culture is poorly documented, and some traditions are at risk of disappearing. In this context, the culinary practices and cultural memory of the local population play a critical role in the sustainability of this gastronomic heritage.

Gastronomic festivals and events in the region are important tools for both increasing the visibility of local food culture and developing gastronomic tourism. Akkil, Mesci, Güler, & Durcan (2024), while assessing Düzce's gastronomy tourism potential, emphasize that festivals promote local products and contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage. Furthermore, studies conducted throughout Turkey demonstrate the effectiveness of gastronomy festivals in highlighting local cuisines, supporting cultural transmission, and increasing tourism diversity (Solunoğlu & Örgün, 2024). This suggests that festivals planned specifically for Düzce can constitute a sustainable strategy, both culturally and economically.

7.5.3. Current Status of Düzce: Problems and Proposed Solutions

According to a study conducted by Özmen, Yıldırım, & Şahin (2015), soil and water resources in the Düzce region were examined from an agricultural perspective and, due to the geographical structure, significant climate differences were determined between Düzce city center and its districts. This difference was particularly pronounced between Düzce city center and the Akçakoca district. The authors state that this situation demonstrates that the microclimate conditions of the districts have significant effects on agricultural production. Additionally, the study emphasizes that hazelnut and corn are the dominant cropping patterns in the region, but yields are not at the desired level. It suggests that comprehensive research should be conducted to increase the yield and quality of hazelnuts and corn, and that alternative crops suitable for the region should be tested in open areas. The study states that while approximately one-third of the region's land is suitable for agricultural activities, only one-quarter is cultivated. These cultivated lands consist of fertile soil, and uncultivated areas should be opened to agriculture and used effectively (Özmen et al., 2015).

In this context, agricultural production in Düzce province is directly dependent on natural environmental conditions. Factors such as topographic limitations, flood risk, and the opening of forests to agriculture affect the use and sustainability of

agricultural lands. Hazelnut production, in particular, is carried out through the clearing of extensive forest areas, which threatens ecosystem integrity and can lead to soil erosion and yield losses in the long term. In addition, flood risk and sudden water level changes in the Melen Stream and Efteni Lake basins reduce the security of agricultural production and cause economic losses for producers. These conditions demonstrate the need to maintain a balance between the natural environment and production in the planning of agricultural activities in Düzce. The vague boundaries between agricultural and forest areas necessitate the development of planned land use and sustainable agricultural strategies (Koçak, 2023).

7.6. CONCLUSION

Agritourism stands out as a multifaceted form of tourism, offering an alternative to the stress and disconnection from nature created by modern urban life, with economic, cultural, and social implications. By providing the opportunity to experience agricultural production processes in rural areas, this type of tourism not only offers tourists unique and authentic experiences, but also increases the income of rural communities and supports local development. As seen in the example of Düzce, the province's rich natural resources, agricultural potential, local handicrafts, and culinary culture offer significant opportunities for the sustainable development of agritourism. When planned in various formats, such as farm tourism, village tourism, and agrotourism, agritourism contributes to the preservation of local culture, the promotion of gastronomic values, and increased social participation. Furthermore, sustainability, environmental protection, and the implementation of effective marketing strategies are critical to the long-term success of agritourism. Consequently, beyond generating economic gain, agritourism is considered a strategic tool for preserving cultural heritage, strengthening local communities, and the sustainable development of rural areas.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

ADVENTURE TOURISM IN DÜZCE

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the tourism sector has evolved beyond a single-type vacation approach into a multifaceted niche ecosystem that caters to specific interests. Adventure tourism, one of these niches, has become a notable tourism type worldwide, particularly in North America and Europe (Lou, 2014; UNWTO, 2014). Those seeking a different vacation experience are drawn to exciting and engaging activities. The need for experiences that challenge people's physical limits has influenced the emergence of adventure tourism (Sung, 2004; Geldenhuys, 2018).

Adventure tourism encompasses travel and leisure activities that involve adventurous activities that participants engage in to reward themselves. These activities are preferred by those seeking a change and enjoying high-risk elements. One of the reasons for the rise of adventure tourism is that these activities help people escape the stresses of daily life and offer the opportunity for new experiences. When people get away from their routine lives and engage in exciting and risky activities, it can be considered within the framework of adventure (Rantala, Rokenes & Valkonen, 2016; Gyimothy & Mykletun, 2004).

Today, increasing urbanization and digitalization; tourists seek active, participatory, and unique experiences that highlight natural and cultural values. Adventure tourism stands out as a tourism type focused on risk and excitement,

involving physical and mental challenges and to be willing to choose destinations that offer authentic experiences to participants. Adventure tourism activities can be perceived differently depending on individuals' skill and experience levels and covers various activities such as mountaineering, rafting, diving, paragliding, and camping. In this respect, adventure tourism is considered an important area that increases both the diversity of individual experiences and the touristic potential of destinations (Muller & Cleaver, 2000; Geldenhuys, 2018; Yıldız, 2019 & Dar, 2014).

In this chapter; the concept of adventure tourism, the characteristics of adventure tourists, and the adventure tourism potential of the province of Düzce are examined. Within the scope of the study, firstly the concept of adventure tourism, its characteristics, and types are discussed within a theoretical framework. Subsequently, the current status of adventure tourism in the world and in Turkey is scrutinized. In the final section, the adventure tourist profile is analyzed, and information regarding adventure tourism activities specific to Düzce is provided.

8.1. ADVENTURE TOURISM DEFINITIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The adventure tourism sector has become an area attracting increasing attention in the tourism market in recent years. Adventure tourism, which previously appealed to a limited segment as a niche area, has become a large-scale market reaching the masses with increasing demand and diversified participant profile (Giddy & Webb, 2018).

Haddock and Wisheard (1993) define adventure tourism as recreational activities that individuals choose according to their own preferences and experience in environments where they can reveal their physical or emotional potentials. According to Buckley (2006), adventure tourism is defined as guided commercial tours that derive their main attraction from outdoor activities carried out in the natural environment; which generally require special sports or similar equipment and offer exciting experiences for participants.

In adventure tourism definitions, it is generally defined as activities involving risk, carried out in unusual environments, where tourists participate for physical activities (Gross & Sand, 2020). Kane and Tucker (2004) express adventure tourism as travels undertaken by individuals to experience activities containing adrenaline, excitement, and a certain level of risk. According to Addison (1999), there are two basic elements determining the degree of the adventure tourism experience. The first element is danger factors and necessary technical skills, revealing the difficulty level of the struggle individuals face, while the second element is the level of independence in the individual's experience. These elements

cause each participant to encounter different levels of difficulty and independence, resulting in unique and distinct adventure tourism experiences (Swarbrooke et al. 2003).

Participants feeling the perception of danger and the potential negative consequences of actions ensure the formation of the adventure experience. Adventure tourism can occur in any condition when it carries features such as obscurity, challenge, and risk. Although the risk feature of adventure is mostly emphasized, in the approach focusing on the nature of adventure rather than adventure tourism, the characteristics of the concept of "adventure" are listed as follows (Swarbrooke et al., 2003):

Uncertain Outcome: One of the most fundamental characteristics of adventure is the uncertainty of its result. The inability to predict how the experience will result triggers a sense of risk and anxiety in participants, increasing excitement and strengthening commitment to the activity. This uncertainty is also evaluated as an important factor revealing the challenge element in adventure activities; while the presence of risk and danger reinforces the unpredictability of the process and shapes the unique nature of the adventure experience.

Danger and Risk: Danger and risk are directly related to uncertainty; while uncertainty creates risk perception in individuals, risk simultaneously reinforces uncertainty. In this context, risk refers to individuals participating in adventure activities exposing themselves to danger physically or mentally of their own free will. Therefore, this mutual interaction between uncertainty and risk constitutes one of the fundamental characteristics of the adventure experience.

Challenge (Struggle): When uncertainty, danger, and the expectation of overcoming difficult conditions come together, struggle or challenge emerges. This process can occur in intellectual, moral, spiritual, emotional, sensory, or physical dimensions. Challenge elements that stand out especially in physical adventure activities are related to physical strength, sensory experiences, and the pursuit of success. The difficulty degree of the struggle determines the intensity of the adventure experience, creating a continuum extending from extreme adventurousness to more moderate adventurousness. Challenge depends on perceived level of risk and also skills of participant. These skills can cover personal characteristics such as self-confidence and belief in addition to physical and technical qualities.

Expected Reward: Adventurers experience an expectation that they will benefit from their experiences and obtain intrinsic rewards. This process occurs with individuals participating in the adventure of their own free will without any

coercion and provides individual benefits like leisure activities. Participation relies on intrinsic motivation such as a tangible reward (cup or an ethnic artifact etc.), an abstract gain (story, photograph, or diary etc.) of the experience. Even if the goal is not reached, "having experienced it" becomes a sufficient source of satisfaction for most participants.

Novelty: Novelty, being one of the most important features of adventure, is related to individuals trying an adventure they have not experienced before or improving their past experiences. Participants take action to do new things in their lives, and in this context, it offers individuals the opportunity to constantly experience new experiences. Travel shows that adventure tourism is an indispensable tool for individuals in search of novelty by enabling both the development of previous experiences and the living of completely new experiences.

Arousal and Excitement: Adventure is an intense experience stimulating individuals' senses, emotions, intellects, and physiologies. While this process gains awareness and a sense of living for many adventurers, it is further strengthened by the adrenaline accompanying moments of fear. High levels of arousal create excitement, but this level varies from person to person. Muller and Cleaver (2000) emphasize that adventure tourism is defined by its ability to offer high sensory arousal to tourists, highlighting it as one of its distinguishing features.

Escape and Distancing: The adventure experience expresses individuals' desire to move away from the monotony of daily life and meet the search for novelty. Exotic and authentic environments, new activities, and unusual social norms offer the person an experience area different from their routine, strengthening the sense of escape. Therefore, adventure activities constitute an important alternative for individuals wanting to go beyond the ordinary and meet the search for intense arousal.

Research and Discovery: This feature is one of the basic components of the adventure experience and supports increased personal awareness and knowledge accumulation through the discovery of new cultures, places, and individual skills. This discovery-oriented process emerges as a physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual journey in adventure tourism experiences and carries the quality of an important reward element for the participant.

Commitment and Focus: Various mental and emotional states are triggered in individuals during adventure experiences, and these states generally require commitment and intense concentration. A challenge or difficult activity necessitates the participant to use their skills and effort intensely, while simultaneously increasing emotional intensity and focus. Therefore, adventure

tourism experiences contain intense focus periods where individuals direct their attention and energies to the activity.

Emotional Contrast: Adventure largely emerges as an emotional experience. Individuals often go through processes such as dreaming, hoping, worrying, or building confidence mentally and emotionally before starting the activity, that is, before experiencing the adventure. The adventure experience can be likened to riding a roller coaster with difficult maneuvers; because uncertainty, danger, risk, and the difficulty level of the experience lead participants to experience contrasting emotions such as "fear and joy, happiness and unhappiness, pleasure and anxiety".

Adventure tourism is a comprehensive type of tourism involving participation in activities harboring risk, being in obscurity, and benefiting from tourism products and services. Uslu (2024) bases the aspects of adventure tourism that distinguish it from other tourism types as follows: This area, which generally appeals to middle and high-income masses, is based on special interest activities designed for individuals or specific groups. Besides this, adventure tourism, rather than a standard structure, is carried out in different ways according to the economic, social, and political values of every country where it is applied, exhibiting a dynamic structure varying depending on the destination's history, geographical features, and traditions.

When the adventure tourism literature is examined, it is seen that the sector exhibits rapid growth on a global scale and the geographical features and natural riches possessed by countries are determining factors in this growth. Tokat and Ekinci (2017) draw attention to the economic and cultural contributions of this potential while emphasizing the necessity of an effective management approach for the sustainability of said growth. In this context, Morgan, Moore, and Mansell (2005) discussed the factors shaping the scope of the sector and revealed that a safe risk management process is essential to offer satisfying experiences to adventure tourists. Interaction between the guide and participant plays a critical role in the safety and risk management process. Buckley (2010), in his study on water activities in different countries, determined that effective health and safety communication reduces potential dangers and increases customer satisfaction. The author also noted that language and cultural differences affect communication, pointing out that not only the technical but also the "emotional performances" of guides are an important element in safety perception.

In his study on the Kaş destination, Cankül (2021) stated that the region has a high potential to host activities such as diving, canoeing, and trekking with its geographical and historical beauties, but this potential can be turned into value with

effective management. Studies conducted in recent years focus on the psychological dimension of adventure tourism, not just the physical. Bentley (2024) revealed the contributions of adventure tourism to psychological well-being such as stress reduction, strengthening self-esteem, and increasing resilience. Furthermore, he argues that safety, ethical approaches, and environmental protection must be handled holistically for these gains to be permanent.

8.2. ADVENTURE TOURISM IN THE WORLD AND TURKEY

The historical development of adventure tourism is based on risky journeys made by various groups to unknown regions in different periods. Adventure tourism activities first started in history in the mid-1800s with river rafting and mountain climbing. In the following period, the National Geographic Society was established in 1888 to increase and disseminate geographical knowledge regarding adventure activities, and the Explorers Club was established in 1904 to encourage land, sea, air, and space explorations. The first climbing and rafting attempts carried out in the mid-1950s aroused interest on a global scale and encouraged many individuals to attempt their own exploration journeys. Maurice Herzog reaching the summit of Annapurna in 1950 and the climbing achievements of Tenzing Norgay and Sir Edmund Hillary to Everest garnered wide repercussions; these developments paved the way over time from the purpose of adventure being "exploring foreign and unknown environments" to the establishment of adventure-oriented tourism businesses where these experiences are commercialized (Tourism Notes, 2021).

Pilgrims, explorers, missionaries, natural historians, mercenaries, and seasonal migrants traveled to distant and dangerous places for different purposes. From the 1990s onwards, travelers and travel writers seeking new experiences emerged with the influence of the media. While hunting, performed for basic needs or entertainment purposes in the past, decreases today, international education and student exchange programs can also be evaluated as a modern adventure experience due to cultural adaptation and uncertainty (UNWTO, 2014; Yıldız, 2019; Swarbrooke et al., 2003).

8.2.1. Adventure Tourism in the World

Today, adventure tourism has become a sector increasingly integrated into tourists' routine experiences with its lively, dynamic, and rapidly changing structure. According to Adventure Tourism Development Index researches, adventure tourism grew by 65% between 2009–2012, creating a share of 263 billion dollars in the world tourism market. Parallel to this growth, the Galapagos Islands, one of the popular adventure destinations, hosted 93.364 visitors solely in 2012. According to Adventure Travel Trade Association and UNWTO data, the number of tourists

traveling worldwide exceeded 1.1 billion in 2012. While the tourism sector grew by 4–7% in general, it is seen that nature and adventure tourism reached growth rates between 20–30% with the effect of increasing demand. According to the 2016 data of the Adventure Tourism Development Index, the number of internationally traveling tourists reached 1.18 billion, showing a 4.4% increase compared to the previous year (UNWTO, 2013; ADTI, 2016; TÜRSAB, 2015). In the same period, the share of adventure tourism in the global tourism market rose to 406.1 billion dollars (Grand View Research, 2025). Due to the high share of adventure tourism, many countries in the tourism market are trying to attract adventure tourists to their own countries in order to get a larger share from this growing market (Türk & Güneren, 2021).

The Adventure Tourism Development Index (ATDI), in its 2020 study examining the changing structure of adventure tourism, addressed these three factors: "Safety and Welcoming", "Adventure," and "Preparedness." Table 1 presents the Adventure Tourism Development Index factors (ATDI, 2024).

Table 1: Adventure Tourism Development Index (ATDI) Factors

2020		
Safe and Welcoming	**Adventure**	**Preparedness**
Sustainable Development Safe Natural Resources Health	Entrepreneurship Adventure Resources	Humanitarian Infrastructure Cultural Resources Image
2024		
Enabling Environment	**Resources**	**Preparedness**
Sustainable Development Safety Health Climate Resilience	• Natural Resources • Cultural Resources	• Entrepreneurship • Infrastructure • Image

In its 2024 study, it updated these factors to conduct a more comprehensive analysis and used the factors "Enabling Environment," "Resources," and "Preparedness." The top 10 destinations possessing high capacity and competitive power in the field of adventure tourism according to ATDI (2024) are shown in Table 2. Although it is seen that some countries on the list effectively use this potential to attract adventure-oriented tourists and strengthen their international positions, it should be stated that visitor numbers are not taken into account as a direct evaluation criterion within the scope of the index. Besides this, the fact that

the weighting system and criteria set applied in the 2024 index have been significantly renewed compared to 2020 makes comparisons with rankings for previous years methodologically problematic.

Table 2: Leading Countries in Adventure Tourism

	Developed Countries	**Developing Countries**
1	Germany	Costa Rica
2	France	Chile
3	Switzerland	Thailand
4	Norway	Brazil
5	Austria	China
6	Spain	Peru
7	United Kingdom	Turkey
8	New Zealand	Montenegro
9	Canada	United Arab Emirates
10	Japan	Romania

Source: (ATDI, 2024.)

8.2.2. Adventure Tourism in Turkey

Türkiye, with its geographical diversity and natural beauty, is a destination with high potential for adventure tourism. Its structure consisting of seven different geographical regions allows for various adventures tourism activities to be carried out throughout the country (Bingöl & Kozak, 2020). When adventure tourism activities carried out in Turkey are examined; it is seen that activities spreading over a wide range such as canyoning, trekking, canoe-rafting, mountain biking, diving, kitesurfing, and paragliding are widely applied (Türk & Güneren, 2021).

While the development of alternative tourism types worldwide dates back to the 1950s, it is seen that the wide spreading of these tourism types in Turkey began in the 1980s. Due to this delayed start, despite having significant potential, Turkey lagged behind in the development of other tourism varieties for a long time due to the "sea-sand-sun" focused tourism understanding. As a result of this situation, academic studies and sectoral applications in Turkey have started to address alternative tourism types only in recent years (Karpuz, 2017). Özşahin (2015) evaluate the province of Hatay in the context of adventure tourism, it was revealed that although the region is geographically suitable, it could not attract adventure

tourists due to lack of promotion and therefore adventure tourism activities could not develop sufficiently.

Among the factors that can contribute to Turkey getting a higher share from the adventure tourism market are important advantages such as its relatively unspoiled natural areas, its geographical location suitable for nature-based tours and outdoor sports, climate diversity, young population, and employment potential. Furthermore, Turkey's ability to access approximately 40% of the world population with a four-hour flight distance makes the country an attractive adventure destination on a global scale. However, despite these strong aspects, problems such as the lack of a holistic adventure tourism strategy on a national scale in Turkey, insufficient coordination between stakeholders and public institutions, promotion and infrastructure problems, inconsistency of legislations with each other, and inability to adopt sustainability principles constitute significant disadvantages. Therefore, it is necessary to eliminate said obstacles and implement policies, planning, and regulations that will support the development of adventure tourism (TURSAB, 2015; Yıldız, 2019).

8.3. ADVENTURE TOURISM ACTIVITIES

Adventure tourism refers to leisure-oriented outdoor travels where physical risk and danger take place as a natural component. In this context, adventurers encounter activities containing different levels of difficulty and experience excitement-enhancing experiences in this process. Wild, exotic, and unusual destinations are among the main attractions of adventure tourism activities due to their structures allowing for the discovery of new areas and having unpredictable results (Khulge & Naik, 2018). Adventure tourism activities are divided into four groups according to the environment in which they are performed: air, land, water, and mixed-based (air-land-water). Adventure tourism activities are shown in Table 3 (Kozak & Bahçe, 2009; Pomfret, 2006).

Table 3: Adventure Tourism Activities According to the Environment

Land-Based	Water-Based	Air-Based	Mixed
- 4x4/ATV Tour	- Canoeing	- Hot Air Ballooning	- Adventure Races
- Horse Riding	- Jet Ski	- Microlight Flight	- Nature Conservation Tours
- Cycling	- Surfing	- Sky Diving	- Cultural Experiences
- Hunting	- Snorkeling	- Helicopter Flight	- Spiritual
- Hiking	- Scuba Diving	- Glider Flight	- Enlightenment
- Backpacking	- Sailing	- Hang Gliding	
- Caving	- Kitesurfing		
- Climbing	-Windsurfing		
- Sledding	- White Water		

Land-Based	Water-Based	Air-Based	Mixed
- Hiking Mountaineering - Bungee jumping - Camping - Wildlife - Observation, etc.	Rafting - Boat Trip etc.	- Zero-Gravity Flight, etc.	- Wildlife Observation Tours - Charity Challenges

These classifications, meeting the expectations of all kinds of adventure enthusiasts with different environments and activities, are of great importance in terms of touristic satisfaction as well as the protection of natural areas and the settlement of sustainable tourism understanding (Hall &Page, 2012).

Land-based adventure tourism covers activities such as trekking, mountaineering, bicycle tours, zipline, and trips made with off-road vehicles. While this type offers participants the opportunity to be intertwined with nature, it also highlights environmental sensitivity by emphasizing the necessity of protecting the natural areas where activities take place. Water-based adventure tourism, where resources such as sea, lakes, and rivers are used; offers experiences to participants with activities such as rafting, canoeing, surfing, and diving. Air-based adventure tourism gives individuals a sense of freedom at high altitude through activities such as skydiving, paragliding, and balloon tours. Mixed-based adventure tourism offers participants a multifaceted and enriched experience by combining land, water, and air elements. Apart from the classification of adventure activities according to the environment in which they are performed, they are also classified as soft and hard activities in terms of the uncertainty, risk, excitement, and fear emotion they contain. Soft and hard adventure activities are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Soft and Hard Adventure Activities

Soft Activities		Hard Activities
Backpacking Birdwatching Camping Canoeing Ecotourism Fishing Hiking Caving Horse riding Snowboarding Surfing	Hunting Kayaking/sea/ whitewater Orienteering Safaris Scuba Diving Snorkeling Skiing	Caving Mountain Climbing Rock climbing Ice climbing Hiking Skydiving

Source: (Tourism Notes, 2021).

Considering the risk degrees of activities and touristic experiences, adventure activities are divided into soft adventure activities (canoeing, horse riding, balloon

flying, camping, etc.) and hard adventure activities (rafting, bungee jumping, snorkeling, etc.) depending on the uncertainty, risk, excitement, and fear levels they contain, in addition to their classification according to the environments in which they are performed (Patterson and Pan 2007; UNWTO, 2014; Geldenhuys, 2018; Türk & Güneren, 2021).

Among soft adventure activities are walking in natural areas, safari, horse riding, cycling, canoeing, diving, and animal observation. Participants preferring these types of activities tend to choose safer experiences due to feelings of fear and hesitation; therefore, the desire to be in a safe and sheltered environment constitutes the basis of these preferences (Pomfret, 2016). Hard adventure activities are defined as activities requiring high risk and skill (Hill, 1995). The main determining factors in these activities are risk and experience. Participants generally act with motivations of challenge, adrenaline experience, and risk seeking; while the desire to experience new emotions is supported by skill and challenge elements (Ewert & Hollenhorst, 1985). Yılmaz (2023) emphasizes that individuals participating in hard adventure activities must be courageous, talented, and physically sufficiently equipped. These activities, directing the person to difficult environments by taking them out of their comfort zone, require a high sense of trust necessitating safety measures and expertise.

8.4. ADVENTURE TOURIST

Adventure tourism is distinguished from other tourism types by its unique products and the specific tourist profile demanding these products. Yıldız (2019) defines this mass, which are willing to discover local culture and nature, experience previously untried activities, and be in exotic environments, as the "New Tourist". Changes in individuals' motives, expectations, and risk perceptions cause adventure tourism activities to diversify and develop over time (Lötter et al., 2014). In this context, tourists' activity preferences are shaped according to personality traits, demographic qualities, and recreational behavior patterns (Bingöl & Kozak, 2020).

The identity of adventure tourists is generally explained by Edgework Theory. This theory associated with risky behaviors and voluntary risk-taking actions in psychology, is an important tool in making sense of why individuals participate in extreme activities such as bungee jumping. According to the theory, adventure tourists consciously participate in activities perceived as dangerous; and integrate the pleasure and excitement they get from this process with the desire to push their own skills and capacities (Beckman et al., 2017).

Travel motivations, forming the basis of tourism research, also play a determining role in adventure tourism. While reasons such as cultural discovery, rest, or escape

from routine life stand out in general tourism (McGehee et al., 1996); motivations exhibit a more specific structure in adventure tourism. Buckley (2012) classifies the basic elements mobilizing adventure tourists as risk, excitement, physical activity, and interaction with nature. While situations containing risk are generally avoided in society, adventure tourists are motivated specifically by this risk factor. However, besides risk seeking, elements such as nature experience, physical challenge, and excitement are among the motivation sources as effective as risk (Gyimothy & Mykletun, 2004; Beckman et al., 2017).

8.5. ADVENTURE TOURISM TRENDS IN DÜZCE

Düzce, possessing a rich natural structure with its rivers, lakes, cold water resources, plateaus, and sandy beaches, is a very suitable province in terms of rest and tourism. It has a 22 km coastline on the Black Sea coast. There are 7 districts connected to Düzce province: Akçakoca, Cumayeri, Çilimli, Gölyaka, Gümüşova, Kaynaşlı, and Yığılca. In terms of geographical structure, apart from the coastal part, its lands consist of areas with a depression in the middle surrounded by mountains. While Akçakoca is located in the north, Bolu in the east, and Elmacık Mountains in the south, the Düzce Plain, which is important for agricultural production, is located in the central part. Its main rivers are Küçük Melen, Asar, Uğur, Aksu, and Big Melen, and the rivers outside the Akçakoca coast merge in Lake Efteni and reach the Black Sea via the Big Melen River.

Düzce offers activity opportunities in a wide range from air sports to water sports, from mountaineering to hunting tourism within the scope of adventure tourism. Prominent adventure activities by region in Düzce are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Adventure Activities in Düzce

Sport Type	**Region / District**
Rafting	Cumayeri, Dokuzdeğirmen Village
Sailing	Akçakoca
Canoeing	Akçakoca and Cumayeri
Fishing	Akçakoca, Gölyaka, Kaynaşlı
Paddleboarding	Gölyaka, Kaynaşlı
Diving	Akçakoca
Trekking and Hiking	Düzce Centre and Districts
Camping	Düzce Centre and Districts

Caravan Camping	Düzce and Akçakoca
Birdwatching	Gölyaka
Plant Watching	Gölyaka
Photo Safari	Düzce Centre and Districts
Motocross	Kaynaşlı
Off-Road	Düzce
Cycling	Düzce Centre and Districts
Air Sports	Gölyaka – Culture Park
Hunting Tourism	Altınçay, Deredibi, Gölyaka, Melen, Cumayeri, Kaynaşlı, Fındıklı, Aksu, Yığılca Hunting Grounds

Source: (Kardaş & Turgut**,** 2023).

Information on some of the popular adventure tourism activities in Düzce is provided below (Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2025; Turkey Culture Portal, 2025; Düzce Nature Hiking Trails, 2018).

Motor Sports (Off-Road and Motocross): Off-road races are among alternative sports branches containing obstacles difficult to overcome with vehicles, consisting of deep water crossings, mud and swamp tracks, and steep ramps and descents. Organizations held in Darıyeri Yörükler Plateau and Kocayayla in Düzce offer participants both struggle and visual aesthetics. These plateaus are suitable for off-road races with their tracks for speed and show purposes, as well as for activities such as camping, trekking, and photo safari. Yörükler Plateau activities attract intense interest every year. Kocayayla, 35 km away from Düzce center, forms integrity with Şehirli, Çiçekli, and Sinekli plateaus with its 1,449 m altitude and wide area and is located on the shortest transportation route to Abant. Yörükler Plateau, located in Darıyeri Yörükler village of Kaynaşlı district, stands out with camping and off-road games.

Motocross is a motorcycle sport carried out using natural obstacles on closed tracks. The length of the tracks should not be shorter than 1.5 km or longer than 3 km; the narrowest part should not be less than 9 meters. Spectators must be at least 1 meter away from the track. Also, deep water crossings and excessively stony grounds should not be included in the tracks, and the average speed should not exceed 50 km/h. Düzce's geographical structure offers many alternative areas for motor sports. Especially the Kaynaşlı district is rapidly developing towards

becoming a nature and motor sports center through its plateaus, lakes, forests and location. In this direction, the Motor Sports Center established on a 150-decare land in the district; hosts Motocross, Enduro, ATV, Off-Road, and Mountain Bike races, and also serves both national and international athletes with the organized Extreme Enduro Championship.

Sailing and Canoeing: Sailing sport is one of the leading alternative water sports for those who love the sea, nature, and excitement. Akçakoca and Yığılca districts of Düzce offer a significant potential for this sport with the sea and lake advantages they possess. Located at the western tip of the Black Sea, in the position of Central Anatolia's closest window opening to the sea, Akçakoca is privileged holiday resorts where green and blue meet between two large metropolises like Istanbul and Ankara. Besides the sea-sand-sun axis, it also draws attention with many alternative tourism opportunities, especially nature tourism.

Rafting: Rafting is a nature sport located among adventure activities on water and carried out in fast-flowing rivers with inflatable boats. This sport, organized under the roof of the Turkish Rafting Federation by gaining autonomy in 2018 in Turkey, offers a significant tourism potential in terms of both competition and nature experience. Big Melen River passing by Dokuzdeğirmen village connected to Cumayeri district offers a suitable area for rafting with its 13 km course. The village, located only 3 km away from the district center, took this name due to nine water mills built on Melen Stream. The region is in the position of one of the prominent centers of Düzce in terms of outdoor sports by hosting professional rafting and canoe activities in every period of the year.

Camping and Caravan: Mountains, plateaus, river banks, and in-forest areas shaping the geographical structure of Düzce province offer a suitable infrastructure for camping and caravan tourism. Akçakoca district is one of the points where caravan tourism mobility was first seen in Turkey. Derebalık, Hera, and Balıklı plateaus on Elmacık Mountains offer an isolated and comfortable camping experience with dense forest texture consisting of scotch pine, hornbeam, fir, and beech trees. Dipsizgöl Çamlıpınar Pond is also suitable for both daily use and tent camping.

Sport Fishing: Rivers and lakes located in the province are suitable for recreational fishing activities. In this context; Hasanlar Dam Lake, Topuk Plateau Pond, Lake Efteni, Yayakbaşı and Muncurlu ponds, along with Melen River and Akçakoca coastline, stand out as the main fishing fields in the province. Besides general water resources, nature parks having protection status and high-altitude plateau lakes constitute specific destinations where this activity is carried out with the

biodiversity and landscape value they offer. Kurugöl Nature Park located within the borders of Kaynaşlı district is one of the important centers standing out in this context. Torkul Plateau and Pond, located within the borders of Uğur Village of the central district, 34 km away from the city center, is another important attraction center. Torkul Pond located at 1,250 meters altitude and being a volcanic lake in terms of geomorphological origin, is surrounded by a forest consisting of beech, fir, hornbeam, chestnut, maple, and black pine species. Torkul Pond allows for fishing accompanied by a panoramic view. Also the recreational diversity offered by the area, visitors can do picnics, tent camping, and photo-safari.

Trekking: Trekking is one of the soft adventure tourism activities based on overcoming obstacles by walking in high-altitude and rugged terrains. It is similar to hiking in terms of walking distance and duration; however, it is evaluated as a more difficult activity compared to hiking, but easier compared to mountaineering. Trekking activities can generally last two or more days and may require additional sports skills like swimming, climbing, and camping along with suitable equipment depending on location and conditions (Türkiye Dağcılık Federasyonu, 2017). Düzce province is among Turkey's important destinations in terms of trekking with its in-forest paths, rich water resources, stream beds, and plateaus with high biodiversity. Walking routes across the province are gathered in eight main regions as Akçakoca, Cumayeri, Çilimli, Gümüşova, Gölyaka, Kaynaşlı, Yığılca, and Provincial Center, and offer 23 different courses reaching 330 kilometers in total. These courses allow visitors to experience natural formations such as waterfalls, caves, lakes, and plateaus, historical ruins, and local life culture in the same atmosphere besides a physical activity. Visitors find the opportunity to perform recreational activities such as photo-safari, tent and caravan camping, sport angling, bird and plant (flora-fauna) watching besides trekking on these routes.

The most strategic component of Düzce's trekking potential is formed by the "Plateau Corridor" on Elmacık Mountains extending from the east to the west of the province. On this line starting from Kardüz Plateau and extending to Abant National Park; Kardüz, Kızık, Pürenli, Balıklı, Hira, Sinekli, Derebalık, Torkul, Odayeri, Sırık, Keklik, Çiçekli, Şehirli, Kocayayla, Topuk, İkizler, Eğrelti, Yeniyurt, and Sakarca plateaus are listed. These plateaus, located at walking distances of 5 to 20 minutes from each other and provided with easy transportation via trans road connections; offer a suitable infrastructure for alternative tourism types such as mountain biking, off-road, caravan camping, and angling in plateau ponds. Kardüz Plateau, which is one of the important points of the corridor and declared as a Culture and Tourism Conservation and Development Zone, creates an ideal environment for advanced level trekking, winter sports, and endemic plant

watching, especially on the 24-kilometer route between it and Aksu Stream. For those looking for a calmer experience, Pürenli, Odayeri, and Torkul plateaus; appeal to camping and nature photography enthusiasts with their natural ponds and rich forest texture. The hydrological richness of the region increases activity diversity by ensuring the integration of trekking routes with waterfalls and canyons. Güzeldere, Samandere, and Aydınpınar waterfalls; offer visitors picnic, geological observation (eg. Witch's Cauldron in Samandere), and walking opportunities accompanied by the sound of water with their courses passing through beech, hornbeam, and chestnut forests.

The route between Güzeldere Waterfall and Balıklı Plateau is important in terms of wildlife observation. While Aktaş Waterfall and Kurugöl Canyon in Akçakoca possess suitable courses for rock climbing and canyon walks. Hasanlar Dam Lake and Saklıkent Waterfall surroundings in Yığılca district offer alternative routes for those who want to canoe, cycle tours, and walk in honey forests. While Saz Village route in Kaynaşlı offers visitors gastronomic tastings and cultural interaction opportunities with 100 year old Tekir Village House and Abkhazian cuisine.

Konuralp Ancient City route allows for history-focused walks accompanied by Roman Bridge and Aqueducts. Also, in Cumayeri Dokuzdeğirmen region, trekking is combined with rafting excitement on Melen Stream, offering a dynamic experience for adventure tourism lovers. Düzce can appeal to nature lovers of all levels from challenging peaks to cultural routes, from canyon crossings to calm plateau camps.

Plant (Flora) Watching: Düzce province possesses a habitat diversity harboring dune, maquis, forest, stream, and alpine vegetation types due to its phytogeographical location. Approximately 700 different plant taxa have been determined in the region. 71 of these taxa are endemic, and 11 of these are evaluated in the "Endangered" category in the Red Book of Turkish Plants.

8.6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this study, the potential of Düzce province within the scope of adventure tourism has been evaluated in the context of current activities and development areas. Düzce possesses a rich natural structure with its 22 km coastline, plateaus, rivers, and forested areas. It is suitable for both hard adventure activities involving high risk (off-road, rafting) and soft adventure activities like trekking and camping. Akçakoca offers a suitable infrastructure for rock climbing and canyon walks with natural formations like Aktaş Waterfall and Kurugöl Canyon. Furthermore, the district has an important place in Düzce's adventure tourism diversity with it being one of the caravan tourism points in Turkey and its sailing sports potential.

Melen River rafting course in Cumayeri Dokuzdeğirmen region and the motor sports center in Kaynaşlı stand out as important attraction centers of the province. In addition to this, the line starting from Kardüz Plateau and extending to Abant and defined as the "Plateau Corridor" carries an integrated route potential for trekking and camping tourism. The province's floristic structure possessing rich plant taxa, 71 of which are endemic, also provides opportunity for plant watching.

For Düzce's existing adventure tourism potential, instead of independently carried out activities like rafting, trekking, or off-road, package programs offering visitors multi-day and diverse experiences can be developed by integrating them. By combining the sea and canyon activities offered by Akçakoca with the plateau and forest activities in the inner parts, a "Blue and Green Adventure" concept can be developed

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CHAPTER NINE

BIRD WATCHING TOURISM AND DÜZCE

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INTRODUCTION

The spread of alternative tourism types worldwide has been effective in countries' marketing activities, regional sustainability, and the formation of new trends. Bird watching, one of the alternative types of tourism, is quite important because it encompasses types of ecotourism (Düzgün and Kurt, 2021). In this context, nature-based types of tourism can be preferred because they can be done in different seasons and geographies (Ağbay, 2024). The change in people's preferences towards tourism over time has resulted in an increase in demand for tourism types related to natural areas. Birdwatching, one of the nature-based tourism types, has also become a highly sought-after tourism type among the tourism types (Sak, 2023).

This section provides conceptual definitions of birdwatching and a general assessment of birdwatching tourism. It covers the status of birdwatching worldwide and in Türkiye, as well as activities and information related to birdwatching in Düzce province. Potential locations for birdwatching tourism are also indicated. The status and prospects of birdwatching tourism in Düzce Province are evaluated, along with its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

9.1. BIRD WATCHING TOURISM

9.1.1. Definition and Scope of Birdwatching

Birdwatching has become increasingly popular in recent years as an activity that plays an important role in tourism activities integrated with nature. It is defined as

an in-situ activity aimed at observing, identifying, and protecting birds in their natural habitats (Sarı, Oban & Erdoğan, 2011). Another definition similarly describes it as recreational activities based on bird watching, which can be carried out individually or in groups (Özkan, 2023).

Birdwatching is described as an observational sport that allows nature to be understood through the eyes of birds. Also seen as an ecotourism activity, birdwatching is an outdoor recreational activity that finds its place among hobby-based special interest tourism types. It is also defined as the observation of birds in their natural habitats with the naked eye, with the aid of tools such as telescopes or binoculars, or by listening to bird sounds (Sop, 2015). It is a type of tourism that focuses on observing specific bird species in their natural habitats (grasslands, lakes, wetlands, drylands, etc.) or along their migration routes (Sak, 2023).

Birds, one of the most stunning elements of the natural environment, attract the attention of many people with their flying abilities and diverse appearances. This interest has led to birdwatching becoming an activity where people can recognize birds and learn about their characteristics. Birdwatching, an activity involving the identification and recording of bird species observed in the field, stands out as a special area of interest that is gaining popularity among people today (Kocaman and Arslan, 2023). Indeed, unlike in previous years, it is now seen as a catalyst for ecotourism (Cordell & Herbert, 2002). Birdwatching, which is being embraced by an increasing number of people, has become one of the most preferred activities during visits to natural areas, which have become sought-after places for recreation after the COVID-19 pandemic (Afanisiev, 2022).

Even while birding is regarded as an ecotourism activity, it is done in a way that calls for more specialized abilities, knowledge, and manners rather than posing a risk. Compared to other adventure tourism activities like climbing, mountaineering, and safaris, it carries a lower level of danger (Kaya, 2020).

Birdwatching is thought to be more advantageous than other forms of ecotourism in terms of boosting the local economy. It has a great deal of potential for educating the local population about the value of biodiversity and motivating them to appropriately conserve and safeguard natural places (Şekercioğlu, 2002). The fact that birdwatching is an activity carried out from morning hours throughout the day and that birdwatchers prefer to spend the night in locations close to their observation areas is an indication that it provides greater economic benefits to the local community. Raising ecological awareness and the high expectations of birdwatchers can pave the way for the protection of many areas that do not officially have protected status (Sözüer & Erkol, 2023). Birdwatching tourism is a

type of ecotourism with economic potential that is growing steadily (Callaghan et. al., 2025).

Birdwatching is considered a widespread activity in many countries (Sert and Aslan, 2019). It is considered one of the most prominent activities of ecotourism and one of the oldest types of nature-based tourism. It is practiced all over the world, and there has been a marked increase in its popularity as a preferred activity over the last half-century. It has evolved from a hobby that is often the subject of humor to an important activity in international tourism and local recreation and leisure activities. Birdwatching can take the form of intensive, specialized tours to the Amazon, Antarctica, and areas where interesting or rare bird populations are found, accompanied by experienced guides, or it can take the form of daily trips to municipal wastewater treatment plants to see rare migratory birds (Weaver, 2001).

9.1.2. Impacts of Birdwatching Tourism

Birdwatching plays an important role in the tourism industry. In many countries, it provides direct and indirect economic benefits to the community. Considering that it also represents a fundamental asset for nature and a tourism resource, it is also considered important for the tourism industry in developing countries. For this reason, many countries that are currently developing types of ecological tourism attach special importance to birdwatching (Afanisiev, 2022). One of the most important features that distinguishes birdwatching from other types of tourism is its effectiveness in increasing the demand for a protective approach to nature and bird species. When birdwatching began as a type of tourism and countries started to profit from these activities, bird species began to be protected more rigorously by both local governments and local communities (Kocaman, 2023).

There are many reasons why people start and continue birdwatching. These include enjoying nature and the outdoors, seizing the opportunity to try something new to learn new things, admiration for the colors, diversity, and behavior of birds, reducing stress, and meeting people with similar interests (Cordell & Herbert, 2002). In addition to these motivations for participation in birdwatching tourism, there are also some disadvantages. In some cases, during the activity, participants may get too close to nests, broods, or areas where birds rest or forage for food. Birds may be frightened to obtain photographs or more detailed images, which can damage the natural cycle. In this context, birdwatching areas require preventive measures to be taken in terms of physical impacts such as carrying capacity, pollution, noise, and excessive proximity, as well as ensuring sustainability (Yılmazdoğan, 2024).

The positive aspects of birdwatching activities are listed as follows:

- Acting as a mediator between local income generation and avian diversity,
- Providing economic incentives that support wildlife conservation efforts,
- Producing higher revenue while exerting less ecological pressure compared to conventional forms of tourism,
- Enhancing local monitoring and management capacities due to the presence of unique bird species,
- Encouraging visitation to sites beyond traditional tourist routes,
- Supporting the protection of undesignated or unprotected areas alongside targeted species,
- Increasing recognition of the value of local knowledge related to natural history,
- Facilitating the training and employment of local guides,
- Establishing financial mechanisms dedicated to bird conservation,
- Contributing to the expansion of ornithological research and data.

When examining the negative aspects:

- Disturbance of birds using playback recordings and close approaches,
- Higher rates of nest disturbance, predation, and abandonment,
- Increased pressure on rare and/or endangered species,
- Habitat degradation and pollution caused by visitors,
- Leakage of financial benefits away from local communities,
- Resentment among community members who are excluded from tourism benefits,
- Erosion of cultural values associated with tourism activities (Şekercioğlu, 2002).

9.1.3. Birdwatching in a Global Context

Birdwatching tourism is one of the rapidly growing types of ecotourism globally. It promises mutual benefits, particularly in tropical countries, in terms of conservation and economic development. eBirding activities, cited as an indicator in birdwatching tourism, are growing worldwide, but the situation varies from country to country. Despite their various bird species, birdwatching is said to be stationary in countries like Bolivia, Venezuela, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, while it is growing significantly in some nations like Colombia (Ocampo-Peñuela et al., 2024).

Colombia is becoming among the top countries for birdwatching tourism. Almost 20% of the world's bird species are found in Colombia. Only Colombia is home to some bird species (Travel & Tour World, 2025). The market for birdwatching tourism is projected to grow to a size of about $66.2 billion in 2024. It is projected to expand at an average annual rate of 6.3% from 2025 to 2030, reaching over $95.2 billion. Birdwatching tourism, once a specialty of ecotourism, has grown significantly in popularity in recent years due to rising environmental consciousness and demand for eco-friendly travel experiences (Grandview Research, 2025). The United States spent $107.6 billion on birdwatching in 2022. Travel-related costs like lodging, food, and transportation account for $14 billion of total expenditure. Equipment including birdhouses, binoculars, cameras, and land economic balances. Equipment including birdhouses, binoculars, cameras, and land purchases accounted for the remaining $93 billion. This helped create $90.2 billion in labor income by sustaining the jobs of 1.4 million individuals. The overall economic production in 2022 was $279 billion, supporting both local and national economic balances (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 2025).

In the United States, over 80 million individuals are said to observe or feed birds, and in the United Kingdom, over one in three people participate in birdwatching. Birdwatching has grown to be a significant industry and a significant source of income in many areas (BirdLife International (2018). Because of its diverse bird species and habitat, North America is known for providing birdwatchers with an appealing and distinctive setting for birdwatching tourism. Furthermore, it is reported that environmental awareness and protection have significantly increased among the local populace. Between 2024 and 2030, the US market for birdwatching tourism is expected to expand by 7.2%. In the US, birdwatching has transformed from a specialized pastime to a major source of income. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration estimates that over 45 million Americans engage in birdwatching. In 2023, the Asia-Pacific area generated 22.42% of the world's birdwatching tourism earnings. Numerous endemic bird species can be found in the area, which is well known for its high biodiversity. When it comes to having the greatest number of bird species, nations like Indonesia, Malaysia, and India rank among the best in the world. Indonesia is a popular location for birdwatchers because it is home to about 17% of all bird species worldwide. Between 2024 and 2030, an average yearly growth rate of 5.8% is projected for Europe. In particular, it is estimated that about 3 million foreign journeys are undertaken annually for birdwatching. Additionally, 20% of European wildlife tourists are interested in birding (Grandview Research, 2025). The popularity of birdwatching among European tourists is still rising. The Netherlands and Germany are the next most popular destinations for birdwatching tourists in

Europe, behind the United Kingdom. Birdwatching tourism offers a variety of venues and draws seasoned tourists to nations (CBI, 2025). Africa's wetlands, rare species, and migration pathways make it a significant birding tourism destination. Birdwatchers around the world regard nations like Madagascar, Tanzania, Kenya, and South Africa to be key destinations (Deep Market Insights, 2025). It is thought to be the nature-based tourist sector with the quickest rate of growth worldwide. In fact, when it comes to nature-based tourism, birdwatching tourism in Alaska is thought to be one that is expanding in rural and isolated places and provides substantial economic potential. In 2016, Alaska attracted about 300,000 birdwatchers. According to Schwoerer and Dawson (2022), an average of 4,000 workers were employed by their estimated $378 million in expenditures. Globally, tropical nations with many distinctive bird species and high levels of avian biodiversity are said to offer substantial advantages in terms of supporting sustainable development when it comes to birdwatching tourism. The potential for tourism income to have a significant influence in rural areas is being assessed because many of these nations are categorized as developing nations. One of the top nations that has witnessed the benefits of birdwatching tourism is Colombia. In comparison to 2010, 40 times as many birds were seen nationally in 2022, according to EBird data. Furthermore, from 2010 to 2022, it was the most popular travel location. South Africa is an additional destination. The number of visits is said to be exceptionally high in comparison to the number of bird species that inhabit the area in other Western European and Canadian nations. High visitor numbers and bird biodiversity are characteristics of Mexico, Costa Rica, Peru, Brazil, Ecuador, and Australia. However, in other tropical nations like Bolivia, Madagascar, Papua New Guinea, Venezuela, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, the situation is said to be the opposite. There aren't many birding visitors in these nations (Euronews, 2025).

9.1.4. Birdwatching in Türkiye

Birdwatching, which is widely practiced in many places around the world, has also become widespread in Turkey in recent years (Küçükaslan, 2007). Turkey has great potential for birdwatching activities due to its rich wetlands and location on bird migration routes (Sarıipek & Çevik, 2023). A wide variety of bird species can be observed in Turkey throughout the year. While resident species remain present in all seasons, summer migrants are predominantly recorded during the summer months, wintering species appear in the winter, and migratory birds are most seen during the spring migration period (Özkan, 2023). Turkey is considered an important destination for birdwatchers worldwide. The fact that 41% of the highest-rated observers who enter data into eBird visit Turkey shows that Turkey is attractive in terms of its bird species diversity (Kocaman & Arslan, 2023).

Turkey's location on an important bird migration route and its hosting of approximately 91% of the 530 bird species in Europe, or 483 species, is highly significant in terms of serving as feeding and breeding grounds for birds. (Türkoğlu & Şekercioğlu, 2018). Due to its geographical location, it encompasses north-south and east-west migratory movements between continents every year (Çelik, Durmuş & Türkoğlu, 2021). Land and water habitats in Turkey are used at least twice a year as resting and breeding areas for migratory bird species (Çorba, 2019). Turkey's rich bird diversity is related to its geographical location. The Anatolian peninsula, located at the meeting point of Turkey's land areas with different climatic characteristics and hydrological structures, experiences migratory movements during seasonal transition periods (Tunç, 2018). In addition, terrestrial and aquatic habitats provide opportunities for migratory and native bird species to stay, breed, and feed in different parts of the country almost every month of the year. From a birdwatching perspective, this situation contributes to Turkey being an important birdwatching destination (Çelik, Durmuş & Türkoğlu, 2021). Considering the high bird diversity from a geographical perspective, it can be said that the country has strong potential for birdwatching tourism in the future (Özer, 2021).

Many researchers have conducted studies on destinations in Turkey that have potential for birdwatching and are currently used as birdwatching areas. Kayseri Hürmetçi Reeds (Özer, 2021), Iğdır Province (Çelik, Durmuş & Türkoğlu, 2021), Kızılırmak Delta (Özel, 2021), Seyfe Lake (Dönmez, Kendir & Güllü, 2016), Tortum Lake (Sevindi & Kaya, 2019), Kars Kuyucuk Lake (Sevindi, 2013), Muğla Province (Çorba, 2019), Bursa Eskikarağaç Region (Dinç & Ok, 2022), Manyas Bird Sanctuary National Park (Sarıipek & Çevik, 2023), Bitlis (Ağbay, 2024), Sivas Province (Asan, Yalçın & Şimşek, 2018), Adana (Sözüer & Erkol, 2013), Manavgat (Tunç, 2018).

9.1.5. Bird Watchers

Birdwatchers are people who enjoy observing birds, either as amateurs or professionals. These individuals often go on birdwatching trips to observe birds and share their observations with other birdwatchers (Pekçetinöz, 2006). People interested in birdwatching come from different age and occupational groups (Özkan, 2023). Birdwatchers, who want to observe birds in their natural habitats and carry out this activity with low environmental impact, are generally educated people with high income levels, and their numbers are increasing (Şekercioğlu, 2002). Minimal equipment and a low level of skill are required to start birdwatching. To observe birds, equipment such as a camera, telescope, binoculars,

etc., and a notebook to record information about bird species is required (Çelik, Durmuş & Türkoğlu, 2021).

Birdwatchers seek to travel to areas where rare bird species are found. Although it is stated that healthy eyes are sufficient for birdwatching, in areas where it is not possible to get very close to bird species, the use of tools such as binoculars or telescopes is necessary (Demir, 2017). Observers record their findings after identifying bird species. The identification of previously unseen bird species is considered a prominent feature of this activity (Kocaman, 2023). Because many birdwatchers have clear target species and high expectations regarding their sightings, they generally exhibit a greater willingness to spend money to observe birds in their natural environments compared to ecotourists who do not have a specific interest in avifauna. (Şekercioğlu, 2002).

Anyone can participate in activities as a birdwatcher. This only requires a little time and effort. A park, garden, or grove in one's neighborhood can be an area where birds can be seen. In such areas, it is possible to see different bird species and closely observe their behavior. The bird species observed in parks, gardens, and groves also change as a result of seasonal changes (Küçükaslan, 2007).

Scott and his colleagues examined birdwatchers at three different levels of expertise in their studies. These three levels of expertise are ranked as dedicated, active, and casual birdwatchers. A committed birder is someone who is prepared to travel short distances specifically to observe rare species, experts in identifying bird species and the areas where they can be seen, subscribed to birdwatching magazines, organize field excursions or educational seminars for local birding groups and maintain comprehensive life lists and observational journals, purchased equipment for photographing, recording, and observing birds, and viewed birdwatching as their primary outdoor activity. Active birder is described as individuals who rarely wish to travel far from where they live for the purpose of birdwatching, may or may not hold membership in a local birdwatching organization, and they subscribe to bird-related publications based on personal interest, They take part in local excursions or seminars without assuming leadership roles, maintain a basic record of the species they encounter, and regard birdwatching as meaningful yet not their primary activity. Casual birder, on the other hand, are generally defined as individuals who engage in birdwatching as a secondary activity to other travel and outdoor interests, not hold formal membership in birding clubs and generally do not subscribe to birdwatching periodicals, do not keep a life list, and engage in birdwatching in an enjoyable but irregular manner (Scott et al., 2015).

9.2. DÜZCE PROVINCE AND BIRDWATCHING TOURISM POTENTIAL

Düzce Province is a province where ecotourism activities can be carried out, including nature walks, river, botanical and cave tourism, mountain climbing, and bird watching (Kurtay, 2021). Öztürk & Özkan (2020) examined the potential of the Avni Akyol Park, Muncurlu Gölet Park, İsmet İnönü Park, Melensu Park, Ali Hamza Park, and Kent Park in the central district of Düzce to meet the needs of birds in their study aimed at identifying bird species. They found that the populations of some bird species, such as rock pigeons, sparrows, and carrion crows, which adapt to urbanization, have increased. In contrast, some bird species are rarely seen in the area or do not prefer it, and the dominant bird species in the area cause negative effects such as polluting the environment (Öztürk & Özkan, 2020).

Keten, Arslangündoğdu & Selmi (2012) in their study conducted to identify bird species living in Lake Efteni, identified a total of 129 bird species and noted that the highest number of bird species was observed in August. The numbers of bird species they identified were 47 in winter, 71 in spring, 73 in summer, and 71 in autumn (Keten, Arslangündoğdu, & Selmi, 2012).

9.2.1. Birdwatching Spots in Düzce

There is only one area in Düzce where birdwatching can be actively practiced. Efteni Lake is a very popular destination for birdwatching. Korugöl Nature Park, Karagöl, and Torkul Lake are also suitable places for birdwatching. However, infrastructure and superstructure facilities are not yet available. It can be said that the areas have potential for birdwatching.

9.2.1.1. Efteni Lake

Located 5 km from the center of Gölyaka district in Düzce province, Lake Efteni is 25 km from the provincial center. Thanks to its water resources and rich plant diversity, Efteni Lake and its surroundings are one of the important centers located on the migration routes of migratory birds (Düzce İKTM, 2025a). Various ecological habitats such as reed beds, marshes, and open water surfaces are found in and around Efteni Lake. In this context, Efteni Lake and its surroundings are considered an area suitable for nature photography and bird watching (Düzceye Gelsene, 2025a).

Lake Efteni is a suitable area for bird watching and plant observation. In 1992, the Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs, Directorate General of Nature

Conservation and National Parks, granted it protected status, considering the protection of game and wild animals, the protection of migratory bird species' migration routes, the protection, development, and improvement of habitats, and the provision of shelter, food, and suitable living conditions. Within this scope, hunting has been prohibited in Lake Efteni (Düzce IKTM, 2025a).

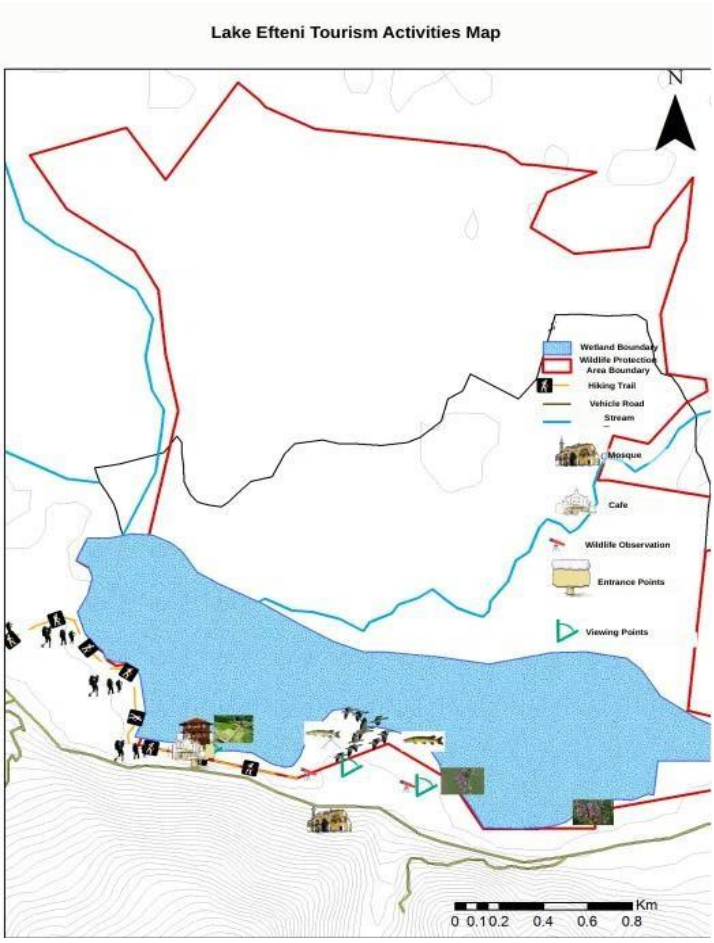
Photo 1. Lake Efteni



Source: (Düzce IKTM, 2025b)

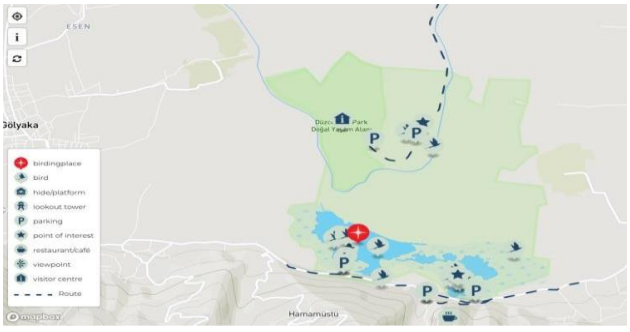
Located on the northwest-south migration route, Lake Efteni hosts bird species that are rare or endangered in Turkey. Lake Efteni, which is a very important feeding and resting area for bird species on their migration routes, is a wintering and breeding area for some migratory bird species that live in Europe during the winter months but cannot migrate further south. For this reason, many bird species of various types can be observed in this area during migration times. Species at risk of extinction, such as Mute Swan, Common Crane, Little bustard, Great bustard, branta ruficollis, Pygmy cormorant, gadwall, garganey, spoobills, as well as species under potential threat, such as mallard, fiyu, red-crested pochard, northern pintails, mazar, ferruginous duck and common pochard, can be seen (Düzce İKTM, 2025b). Furthermore, Lake Efteni provides shelter, feeding, and breeding opportunities for 28% of the bird species recorded in Turkey (Keten, Arslangündoğdu & Selmi, 2012). Lake Efteni hosts a wide variety of bird species-such as the Grey Heron, Eurasian Coot, Crane, Little Bustard, and Great Cormorant. Importantly, several of these species are not solely seasonal or passing visitors but represent stable, year-round inhabitants of the lake’s ecosystem (Go Türkiye, 2025).

Photo 2. Düzce Lake Efteni Tourism Activities Map



Source: (Düzceye Gelsene, 2025a).

Photo 3. Lake Efteni Birding Map

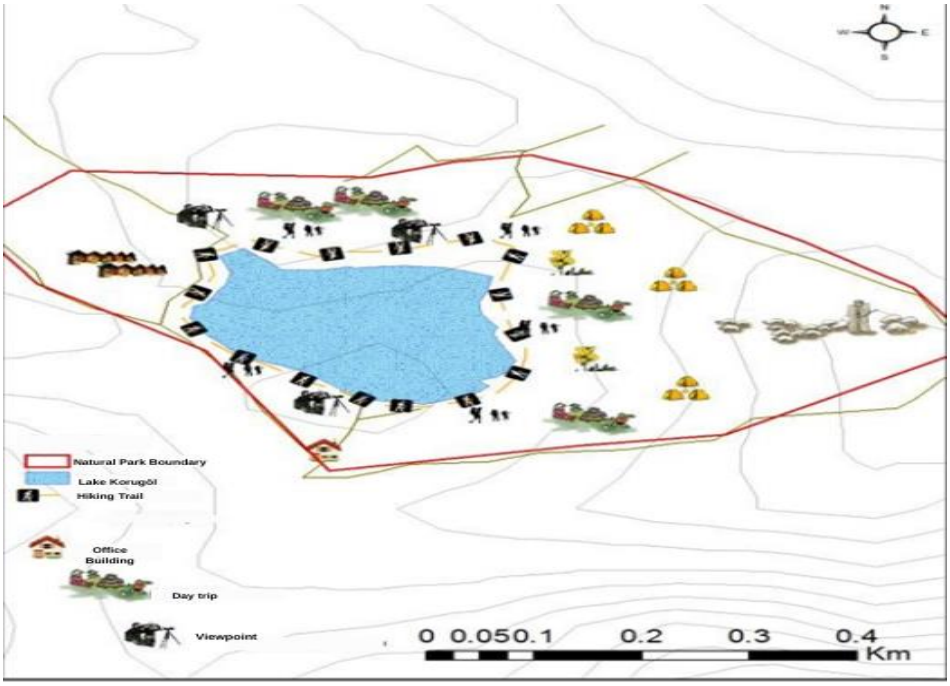


Source: (Birding Places, 2025).

Lake Efteni has an observation deck where bird species can be observed. The lake, which is a resting place for birds on their migration routes, provides shelter for birds with its water lilies and reed beds above the water level, while also offering a complete experience for photography and bird watching (Culture Portal, 2025).

9.2.1.2. Korugöl Nature Park

Photo 4. Korugöl Nature Park Tourism Activities Map



Source: (Düzceye Gelsene, 2025b).

Located in the Kaynaşlı district of Düzce province, Korugöl was initially established as a recreational area in 2004 and later designated as a Nature Park in 2011. Korugöl Nature Park, featuring beech, oak, and hornbeam trees, offers an environment ideal for activities like photo safaris, sport fishing, and camping. It sits at the heart of ecological connections where the river system of the Düzce Plain converges and flows into the Black Sea through the Büyük Melen Canal. Thanks to its water resources and diverse plant life, it is situated along the migratory route of various bird species (Düzceye Gelsene, 2025b).

Photo 5. Korugöl Nature Park

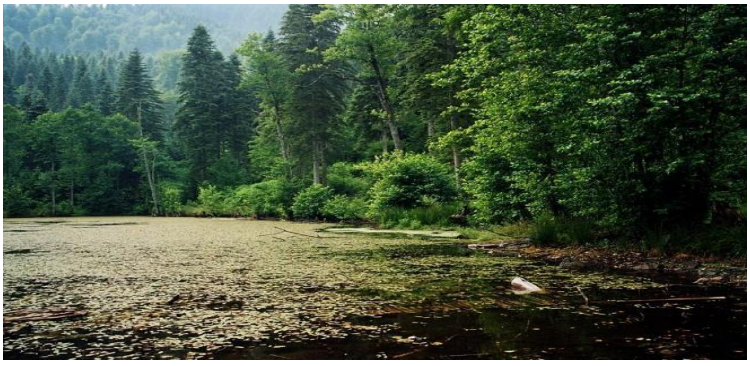


Source: (Düzceye Gelsene, 2025b).

Based on the findings of the field surveys, 20 species representing 16 families and classified into six groups were evaluated according to various conservation criteria. All 20 bird species recorded in the area are listed in the Red List of the International Union for Conservation of Nature. However, all of them are classified as "Least Concern." In this context, the population distribution and population sizes of these species throughout the European continent are seen to be progressing positively. Furthermore, there is currently no perceived threat to the continued existence of these species' populations (Ekotaban, 2025a).

9.2.1.3. Karagöl Nature Park

Photo 6. Karagöl



Source: (Düzce IKTM, 2025c)

Karagöl is a lake used by the local community for fishing activities. It is also used for recreational purposes. Animal production activities are carried out in the region. Karagöl has potential for bird watching, photography, and wetland education activities (Ekotaban, 2025b).

9.2.1.4. Lake Torkul

Photo 7. Lake Torkul



Source: (Düzce IKTM, 2025d)

Lake Torkul has potential for bird watching, photography, and wetland education activities. Today, day trips, picnics, and camping activities are carried out on and around the lake (Ekotaban, 2025c).

9.3. CONCLUSION AND EVALUATION

The demand for birdwatching is rapidly increasing worldwide and in Turkey. When international developments are examined, it is noted that birdwatching has become an important sport in Turkey. Turkey has considerable potential in terms of bird population. While bird species diversity in Europe is reported to be 500, there are 487 bird species in Turkey. This is explained by Turkey's location on bird migration routes and its abundance of wetlands. In terms of its geographical location and physical characteristics, it lies on the intercontinental north south and east-west migratory routes that birds follow cyclically each year. Two of the bird migration routes pass through Turkey (Dündar, 2023). With its increasing popularity over the last 10 years, bird watching has become one of the driving forces of global ecotourism. Bird watching tourism is described as a form of sustainable development that leads the way in protecting habitats. It can be particularly beneficial for tropical countries, which have a high diversity of bird species and many endemic bird species, and which generally have lower levels of economic development. This situation allows tourism revenues to have a

disproportionately large impact, especially in rural communities (News, 2025). Due to the low environmental impact of birdwatching, it is seen to be intensively preferred as an alternative tourism activity, especially in Western societies. When focusing specifically on Turkey, it is observed that despite the country's strategic position along major bird migration routes and its diverse flora and fauna, birdwatching activities remain limited (Düzgün & Kurt, 2021). Engaging the local community and incorporating environmental education into birdwatching can promote sustainable tourism and aid in preserving biodiversity. Moreover, birdwatching can reinforce the perception that it is both an appealing tourism activity and a tool for advancing environmental sustainability. In fact, it not only attracts environmentally conscious tourists but also supports long-term sustainability objectives (Padilla-Delgado, Castillo-Palacio, M., & Zuñiga-Collazos, 2025).

9.3.1. Current Status, Problems, and Solutions

Düzce has significant potential for birdwatching tourism due to its diversity of bird species and its location on bird migration routes. The Efteni Lake Wetland holds significant potential to attract many local and foreign ecotourists because it offers a suitable environment for many activities such as bird watching, fishing, and hiking. The necessary studies, regulations, and promotions should be carried out to attract ecotourists to the region (Kızılçaoğlu, 2012).

In addition to Lake Efteni, there are other areas in Düzce province that hold potential for birdwatching tourism. Korugöl Nature Park, Karagöl, and Torkul Lake are among the natural areas where birdwatching activities can be carried out. As with Efteni Lake and its surroundings, planning and necessary work for birdwatching tourism in these areas could result in the creation of a new tourism destination. Considering that birdwatching tourism is a sustainable and nature-friendly type of tourism, it can be said that incorporating these areas into birdwatching tourism will increase the diversity of tourism in Düzce province and enable the protection of natural areas.

Düzce Province attracts attention with its rich bird diversity and location on bird migration routes. The region features reed beds, wetlands, and various ecological habitats. This makes it a suitable habitat for many bird species. This ecological richness demonstrates great potential for alternative tourism types such as nature-based tourism and ecotourism, as well as recreational activities.

Düzce Province has many opportunities in terms of birdwatching tourism given its status. The increase in demand for nature tourism and ecotourism in recent years has been effective in the development of birdwatching tourism in the region. The

variety of bird species in Düzce Province offers great opportunities for birdwatching tourism both within the country and globally.

The unregulated use of areas for camping, picnicking, and similar recreational activities poses a significant threat to natural habitats. To address this issue, it is essential to protect recreational sites that have potential for birdwatching tourism. This situation places pressure on natural habitats. Another important aspect is the local community's views on birdwatching tourism and their awareness of nature conservation. It is also necessary to involve the local community in any birdwatching-related projects. Changes in migration patterns caused by climate change may threaten birdwatching tourism in the area. Furthermore, the disruptive behavior of uninformed tourists-such as speaking loudly, approaching nests too closely, and trying to feed birds-can disturb bird species' natural habitats and cause them to abandon these areas.

To maximize the potential of birdwatching tourism, effective management and a sustainable approach are crucial. Düzce should leverage its birdwatching strengths, assess opportunities, address the negative impacts of current threats, and work on improving its weaknesses. Therefore, it is necessary to develop infrastructure in birdwatching areas, establish visitor management plans, and as highlighted in the literature, increase awareness among the local community and engage them in the process. Additionally, implementing educational programs on birdwatching and promoting the tourism potential with the support of local guides will be essential.

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CHAPTER TEN

WINTER TOURISM IN DÜZCE

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INTRODUCTION

Located in Türkiye's Western Black Sea Region, Düzce stands out with its ecological richness, strategic location, and ease of access (Düzce Governorship, 2023). Traditionally anchored in nature and rural tourism, the region has recently begun to position winter tourism as a new pillar of sustainable development. This emerging focus extends beyond snow sports, embracing the aesthetic allure of snowy landscapes, the appeal of serene isolation, and the peaceful rhythms of rural life.

In a global tourism landscape shaped by intense competition, destinations must now prioritize seasonal variety and product differentiation. Within this context, Düzce's high-altitude treasures (such as the Kardüz and Topuk Plateaus and surrounding uplands) serve not just as natural features but as strategic assets that support the province's potential for year-round tourism (Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism of Düzce, 2025). Its location, nestled between Istanbul and Ankara, provides a key logistical advantage, making it especially attractive for micro-tourism activities like weekend getaways, alpine sports, and nature-based camping.

The expansion of winter tourism in Düzce has implications that go well beyond immediate economic returns. It supports local employment, helps stabilize income throughout the year, and plays a role in maintaining rural land use. As Kara and Çeken (2023) argue, this sector functions as a holistic model integrating economic, environmental, and social dimensions of sustainability. A major policy milestone occurred in 2013, when the Kardüz Plateau was designated a Culture and Tourism Conservation and Development Region (KTKGB). According to the East Marmara Development Agency [MARKA] (2020), this marked a move toward more strategic, long-term planning. Later feasibility studies by MARKA confirmed that

Düzce's full tourism potential can be realized through well-calibrated collaborations between public and private sectors.

Climatically, Düzce displays a dual character: temperate lowlands coexist with highlands that exhibit a more continental climate. This variation enhances the reliability of snow coverage during key tourism periods. Data from the Turkish State Meteorological Service (2025) shows peak snow depth in the city center reaching up to 80 cm, implying that higher elevations like Kardüz are even more snow-resilient a crucial trait for sustaining winter sports. However, perhaps Düzce's most valuable strength lies in its preservation of natural integrity. Unlike many overdeveloped resorts, the region remains relatively untouched, preserving its unique landscape. If guided by sustainable planning and careful management, Düzce could become a model winter destination for Türkiye. A balanced approach that merges winter activities with broader nature tourism may pave the way toward a truly four-season strategy.

This study explores the winter tourism potential of Düzce, focusing on its natural resources, product development, and alignment with sustainability principles. The analysis begins by examining the province's geographic and climatic features, followed by an inventory of natural assets (including plateaus, glacial lakes, and waterfalls) suitable for winter use. It then moves on to discuss market trends, management structures, and policy needs. Through this layered approach, the chapter seeks to offer a solid academic basis for the strategic development and future planning of Düzce's tourism landscape.

10.1. GEOGRAPHIC AND CLIMATIC PROFILE OF DÜZCE

Düzce, which gained provincial status in 1999, is located in Türkiye's Western Black Sea Region a positioning that plays a defining role in its ecological identity. Spanning 2,593 km², the province is bordered by Bolu to the east and south, Sakarya to the west, and the Black Sea to the north (Düzce Governorship, 2023). While its average elevation is around 150 meters, the southern areas rise dramatically to altitudes of 1,800 meters in places such as the Elmacık Mountains and the Kardüz Plateau. This elevation variation supports a rich tapestry of microclimates across relatively short distances.

In climatic terms, Düzce occupies a transitional zone that blends the humid, mild traits of the Black Sea climate with the colder, more continental conditions of the interior. Coastal areas are generally temperate and moist, whereas the highlands experience harsh winters and significant snowfall (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2025). According to long-term data from the Turkish State Meteorological Service (2025), covering the period 1991–2020, the province averages 13.0°C annually and receives 828.6 mm of precipitation. The bulk of precipitation occurs between November and February, a span during which snow tends to accumulate and remain on plateaus above 800 meters.

Records indicate that the city center reached a maximum snow depth of 80 cm on January 2, 1983 (Turkish State Meteorological Service, 2025). In comparison,

high-altitude zones like the Elmacık Mountains and Kardüz Plateau frequently record snow depths over one meter, with retention lasting 90 to 100 days. The "Preliminary Feasibility Report for Kardüz Plateau Ski Center and Hotel Investment" by MARKA (2020) describes the snow quality as "powder snow," ideal for skiing and generally eliminating the need for artificial snowmaking.

Yet, shifting climate patterns pose emerging risks. Research conducted by the Faculty of Forestry at Düzce University, using Köppen–Geiger, De Martonne, and Erinç classification systems, reveals a trend of rising temperatures and declining precipitation (Baş & Palta, 2024). These changes could reduce the length of the winter tourism season over time.

Aside from snow data, Düzce's hydrological assets also enhance its winter appeal. Natural features such as Efteni Lake and the Samandere and Güzeldere Waterfalls often partially freeze during winter months, creating striking visual environments perfect for snow trekking, birdwatching, and nature photography (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2025).

In conclusion, Düzce's geography, topography, and climate characteristics collectively offer strong potential for sustainable winter tourism. Consistent snow cover, easy accessibility, and preserved natural beauty grant the province a distinct edge. These foundational elements set the stage for the targeted tourism resources discussed in the next section.

10.2. WINTER TOURISM RESOURCES

Recognized as one of Türkiye's most resource-rich destinations for nature-based tourism, Düzce boasts a diverse array of geographical assets including dense forests, intricate hydrological systems, and elevated plateaus. While these features support tourism year-round, the convergence of specific climatic conditions and snow accumulation during the winter months transforms the province into a highly attractive winter destination. Düzce's natural inventory (comprising alpine plateaus, snow-covered highlands, and seasonally frozen lakes and waterfalls) offers a wide range of possibilities for development within a sustainable tourism model (Düzce Governorship, 2023).

Winter tourism in Düzce transcends traditional activities like skiing and sledding. Instead, it supports a variety of experiences such as snow trekking, wildlife observation, landscape photography, and culinary tourism rooted in local culture (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2024). Düzce's geographic location (situated at the convergence of the Western Black Sea and Marmara transition zones) enables it to offer the snow reliability of a continental climate along with the logistical advantages of maritime accessibility (Turkish State Meteorological Service, 2024).

Key winter tourism sites include elevated plateaus such as Kardüz, Topuk, Odayeri, Sinekli, and Derebalık. These are complemented by hydrological landmarks like Efteni Lake and the Samandere and Güzeldere Waterfalls, which

develop unique visual appeal when frozen. These environments are well-suited for thematic excursions and short-term retreats that attract both domestic and international travelers (MARKA, 2020).

Arguably, one of Düzce's most strategic strengths is its near-equal distance from Istanbul and Ankara. This central location enhances its appeal as a weekend destination, allowing for efficient travel and increased visitor turnover. Furthermore, the preservation of the natural environment across many of these sites makes them ideal candidates for carefully managed, sustainable tourism projects (UNWTO, 2022).

The next section classifies Düzce's key winter tourism resources into four main categories: Kardüz Plateau, Topuk Plateau, Other Plateaus, and Natural Values. Each category will be analyzed in terms of its physical features, tourism infrastructure, sustainability prospects, and current usage patterns to offer a comprehensive understanding of the province's winter tourism capacity.

10.2.1. Kardüz Plateau

Situated at an elevation of approximately 1,830 meters within Düzce's Gölyaka district, the Kardüz Plateau represents the highest point in the province's topography (MARKA, 2020). In its 2020 Preliminary Feasibility Report for the Kardüz Plateau Ski Center and Hotel Investment, the East Marmara Development Agency (MARKA) identifies the plateau as "one of the most promising areas for snow tourism in the Western Black Sea." The snow in the region is classified as "powder snow," a condition conducive to winter sports without the need for artificial snowmaking. A significant milestone in Düzce's tourism strategy was reached in 2013, when the area was officially designated as a Culture and Tourism Conservation and Development Region (KTKGB) (Official Gazette, 2013), providing the policy foundation for future investment planning and site analysis.

Climatological data from the Turkish State Meteorological Service (2024) confirms average snow depths exceeding one meter, with retention lasting between 90 and 100 days comparable to Türkiye's established ski centers. The plateau's northwestern slope orientation further delays melting, effectively prolonging the usable winter season into April.

Beyond its winter sports appeal, Kardüz also offers a rich suite of nature-based tourism opportunities. Field observations support its use for snow trekking, snowmobiling, sledding, and nature photography. When these activities are paired with the culinary and artisanal offerings of nearby rural communities, the plateau becomes a strong candidate for sustainable rural tourism development (Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism of Düzce, 2024).

However, accessibility remains a challenge in the winter months. Heavy snowfall along the Gölyaka-Kardüz route can obstruct access, prompting MARKA (2020) to propose alternative transport solutions such as snow-track vehicles or a cable car system. Long-term development goals include branding Kardüz as the flagship "Western Black Sea Winter Tourism Center." Projections suggest that a fully

operational ski facility could host up to 150,000 visitors annually, potentially stimulating the growth of local accommodation, food services, and guiding sectors.

10.2.2. Topuk Plateau

Located within Düzce's Kaynaşlı district at approximately 1,280 meters elevation, the Topuk Plateau functions as a year-round tourism hub. The site has gained prominence due to the Fenerbahçe Topuk Yaylası Facilities, serving as a focal point for sports tourism, outdoor recreation, and camping (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2024). Seasonal snowfall reshapes the landscape and opens avenues for alternative winter tourism.

In particular, the area surrounding the plateau's pond has become popular for snow trekking, photography tours, and winter camping. The site is also integrated into Düzce University's ecotourism initiatives and has been featured in nature route planning efforts. During the winter, it attracts nature-focused groups from nearby provinces. With existing infrastructure (including lodging, transportation, and security) the plateau requires minimal additional investment to scale up its winter offerings.

According to the Turkish State Meteorological Service (2024), average snow depth in the area ranges between 40 and 60 cm, with retention lasting around 60 days. This window is sufficient for a range of nature-based winter experiences. Within Düzce's broader sustainable tourism framework, the Topuk Plateau stands as a model of successful synergy between sports and nature tourism. Repurposing summer hiking trails for winter snow routes offers a natural pathway for further diversification.

10.2.3. Other Plateaus

In addition to Kardüz and Topuk, Düzce is home to several lesser-known highland areas that hold significant winter tourism potential. Among these are the Odayeri, Sinekli, Derebalık, Hasanlar, and Yörükler Plateaus. What distinguishes these sites is their dual-season appeal; their natural infrastructure supports both summer and winter tourism (Düzce Governorship, 2023).

The Sinekli Plateau, located atop the Elmacık Mountains, regularly receives heavy snowfall, with snow depth often surpassing one meter. This makes it particularly suitable for snow trekking and wilderness camping. Meanwhile, Odayeri Plateau (close to Gölyaka) offers panoramic forest views under snow cover, ideal for scenic day trips and eco-tourism activities.

Notably, these plateaus have remained largely untouched by the kind of mass tourism that has overwhelmed other destinations. Their relative underdevelopment signals strong potential for sustainable growth. With careful planning, these areas could be seamlessly woven into a broader ecotourism and nature-based winter activity framework (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2025).

10.2.4. Natural Assets

Düzce's winter tourism value is not confined to its plateaus. The region also hosts an array of hydrological and ecological landmarks that acquire unique visual and recreational qualities during the colder months. Key among these are the Samandere Waterfall Natural Monument, Güzeldere Waterfall Nature Park, and the Efteni Lake Wetland. Registered in 1999 as one of Türkiye's first natural monuments, Samandere Waterfall often freezes in sub-zero temperatures, creating a striking seasonal landscape (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change, 2025).

Similarly, Güzeldere Waterfall (located along the Yığılca route) has become a hub for winter camping and landscape photography. Efteni Lake, on the other hand, is a significant wetland ecosystem with particular relevance for birdwatching during winter. Research by Düzce University's Department of Biology has documented over 80 bird species inhabiting the lake in colder months (Keten et al., 2012).

These natural environments offer pathways to diversify winter tourism beyond physical activities. Integrating ecological observation, wildlife monitoring, and conservation-centered programs into Düzce's tourism economy enhances its identity as a "green winter destination." When managed responsibly, these assets will contribute not only to economic growth but also to long-term environmental stewardship.

10.3. ACCESSIBILITY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Accessibility plays a decisive role in determining the competitive viability of any tourism destination. In weather-sensitive sectors like winter tourism, a trio of factors (transport logistics, infrastructure robustness, and duration of accessibility) profoundly influence visitor behavior. Düzce benefits from a prime geographic location, positioned between Türkiye's two largest cities, Istanbul and Ankara. This centrality significantly enhances its attractiveness for short-stay tourism, including weekend getaways and daily nature visits (General Directorate of Highways, 2024).

10.3.1. Geographic Connectivity

Düzce's transportation network is anchored by the Trans-European Motorway (TEM/E80) and the D-100 State Highway. These major routes are maintained to remain operational even during severe winter weather, ensuring year-round accessibility (General Directorate of Highways, 2024). Located about 210 km from Istanbul and 230 km from Ankara, Düzce is reachable within 2.5 to 3 hours by car, offering a proximity advantage over many other mountainous destinations in Türkiye.

This strategic location supports Düzce's classification as a "short-haul destination." Well-developed highway infrastructure correlates strongly with the high usage of private vehicles for domestic travel. According to the Türkiye Tourism Strategy Report (2023), 72% of local tourists use their own vehicles for short vacations

(Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure, 2023). This statistic underscores the province's logistical advantage in attracting winter tourists.

However, access to high-altitude zones such as Kardüz, Topuk, and Odayeri Plateaus during the snow season requires systematic snow management. The Düzce Special Provincial Administration's 2024 winter response strategy includes deploying more than 30 heavy-duty snow-clearing machines to ensure continuous access to these areas (Düzce Special Provincial Administration, 2024). These efforts are essential not only from a logistical perspective but also to maintain the viability of the local winter tourism economy.

10.3.2. Transport Infrastructure and Modal Splits

Düzce's transport system is heavily road-oriented. Although the province does not have its own airport, it benefits from the proximity of nearby air travel hubs: Zonguldak Çaycuma Airport (100 km), Kocaeli Cengiz Topel Airport (130 km), and Istanbul Sabiha Gökçen International Airport, which is accessible within approximately 2.5 hours by car (DHMİ, 2024). These gateways serve both domestic and international visitors.

Recent initiatives under the "Smart City Düzce" program have introduced traffic sensors and route optimization tools to improve mobility, particularly between the city center and highland tourism areas during peak periods (Düzce Municipality, 2023).

Reducing the environmental impact of winter tourism transportation is a growing priority. Individual car use contributes to congestion and environmental degradation. As such, enhancing collective transport options aligns with broader sustainability goals (Duval, 2007). For Düzce, developing public transit links to key tourism nodes will be critical for achieving long-term environmental and operational efficiency.

10.3.3. Accommodation and Technical Framework

Reliable transportation must be complemented by sufficient lodging and technical infrastructure. As of 2024, Düzce offers 18 licensed accommodation facilities with a combined capacity of around 1,250 beds (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2024). These establishments are mainly concentrated near the city center, the Akçakoca coastline, and the Topuk Plateau.

In contrast, high-potential areas like the Kardüz Plateau currently lack permanent hospitality structures. Temporary options such as camping, mountain shelters, and boutique accommodations are used instead. A MARKA (2020) feasibility report estimates that a 60-room mountain hotel in the region could reach an annual occupancy rate of 55%, contingent on improved accessibility and infrastructure.

The integration of renewable energy stands out as a key strategy for sustainable winter tourism development. The TR42 East Marmara Region Renewable Energy Report highlights significant solar potential in Düzce's highlands (MARKA, 2011). The report supports the use of rooftop photovoltaic systems for small-scale tourism

enterprises. Research indicates that such systems reduce energy costs and carbon emissions, making them ideal for off-grid plateau areas.

Local authorities are beginning to reflect these priorities. In 2024, Düzce Municipality announced the expansion of solar-powered municipal services, reinforcing its commitment to sustainable energy (Düzce Municipality, 2024). Given the seasonality of winter tourism, energy solutions that are low-maintenance and durable offer practical infrastructure options for remote tourism zones.

10.3.4. The Nexus of Sustainable Transport and Tourism

Transport planning for winter tourism destinations must go beyond basic access and prioritize ecological responsibility. As noted by Gössling and Peeters (2015), transport remains the largest contributor to tourism's overall carbon footprint. For developing destinations like Düzce, this reality underscores the need to embed eco-friendly mobility solutions into infrastructure strategies from the outset.

The shift toward sustainable transport offers dual benefits environmental protection and economic efficiency. A recent study by Curtele et al. (2024) shows that electric shuttle systems in mountainous regions are more cost-effective than reliance on private vehicle use. In Düzce, pilot applications of such systems could be introduced on routes serving Kardüz and Topuk Plateaus. This introduces the critical idea of "environmental accessibility": the notion that destinations must be physically reachable in ways that respect ecological limits. Safe access under winter conditions, including snow and ice, must be coupled with climate-resilient and disaster-conscious infrastructure planning.

10.3.5. Transport as a Catalyst for Regional Development

Accessibility impacts more than just tourist mobility it also plays a vital role in socio-economic development. The expansion of winter tourism areas in Düzce stimulates employment opportunities in nearby rural communities, helping to revitalize the local economy. As emphasized by Kervankıran and Sert Eteman (2020), well-developed tourism infrastructure tends to raise local income levels and reduce migration pressures. These social ripple effects should be considered when assessing the full value of sustainable tourism investments in Düzce's hinterlands.

Moreover, the integration of transport infrastructure into broader regional development aligns with Türkiye's national spatial planning goals. The Türkiye Spatial Strategy Plan (2023–2040) identifies Düzce as a "strategic node in the Western Black Sea transport corridor," and recommends strengthening the links between nature tourism and transport systems (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change, 2023). Together, these insights highlight that transport is not only a functional necessity for winter tourism but also a critical lever for sustainable regional transformation.

10.4. MARKET AND COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

In recent years, the global tourism industry has undergone a significant transformation driven by evolving consumer expectations, technological advances,

and mounting environmental concerns. Today, destinations are expected to do more than simply showcase their natural assets. They must reposition these features within strategic frameworks that emphasize value creation, branding, and sustainability (UNWTO, 2023). Within this context, Düzce emerges as a promising tourism destination in Türkiye, with a strong foundation in nature-based and ecotourism offerings. However, securing a lasting competitive advantage in winter tourism requires more than natural beauty; it demands strategic positioning and the capacity to compete with established winter tourism hubs.

Conducting a detailed market and competitive analysis helps to clarify Düzce's role in the broader winter tourism landscape. This type of assessment maps target audiences, identifies comparative strengths and weaknesses, and reveals untapped opportunities. As such, it provides a critical foundation for informed tourism policymaking (Özkurt & Öcel, 2021).

10.4.1. Overview of the Winter Tourism Market

Türkiye's winter tourism market has grown substantially, with around 1.5 million participants recorded in 2023 (TÜRSAB, 2023). Domestic travelers represent 70% of this total, while international visitors (especially from Russia, Germany, the Netherlands, and Gulf countries) make up the remaining share. Importantly, winter tourism in Türkiye has evolved beyond traditional skiing to include a broader range of experiences, such as hiking, thermal tourism, wellness retreats, and culinary exploration.

Leading destinations like Bolu-Kartalkaya, Bursa-Uludağ, Kayseri-Erciyes, Erzurum-Palandöken, and Sakarya-Kartepe dominate the national market. Their success is largely attributable to advanced infrastructure, long-term government support, and intensive promotional campaigns (TÜRSAB, 2023). Compared to these well-established resorts, Düzce is still developing but it stands out with specific advantages: proximity to major cities, untouched natural beauty, peaceful surroundings, and ease of access.

The province's main winter tourism resources include the Kardüz, Topuk, Odayeri, and Pürenli Plateaus, along with the areas surrounding Efteni Lake. Although these locations currently lack large-scale winter sports facilities, they are well-suited for niche tourism approaches that emphasize alternative activities like snow trekking, snowmobiling, camping, paragliding, and scenic photography (MARKA, 2020).

Düzce's competitive edge lies in its ability to blend natural and cultural experiences. Rather than offering only snow-based recreation, the region delivers an integrated tourism product that includes local cuisine, village life, thermal springs, and cultural heritage sites such as Prusias ad Hypium and the Fakıllı Cave (Akkil et al., 2024). This multidimensional approach positions Düzce to attract a growing segment of travelers seeking authentic, diverse, and sustainable winter experiences.

10.4.2. Demand Profile and Target Market Analysis

Düzce's current tourism profile is primarily shaped by domestic visitors. In 2023, out of approximately 410,000 total tourists, 92% were domestic travelers, while international visitors (mainly from Germany, the Netherlands, and Saudi Arabia) accounted for just 8% (MARKA, 2024). A closer segmentation of the visitor base identifies four primary target groups:

- **Metropolitan Weekenders** – Residents from Istanbul, Ankara, and Kocaeli seeking short-term escapes from urban stress.
- **Nature and Adventure Enthusiasts** – Younger travelers interested in activities such as camping, nature photography, and trekking.
- **Wellness Seekers** – Middle-aged and senior tourists looking for peaceful environments and nature-based wellness experiences.
- **Cultural Explorers** – Visitors drawn to local cuisine, heritage, and authentic rural life.

What unites these segments is a shared desire for a "nearby nature experience." Post-pandemic behavioral shifts have intensified interest in escapism, short-haul nature retreats, and personalized travel (UNWTO, 2023). Düzce's natural and climatic attributes make it well-suited to meet these emerging demands. Moreover, there is growing interest in alternative forms of experiential tourism, including snow hiking, winter yoga camps, and thermal spring visits (Akay & Zengin, 2012). This positions Düzce favorably within the expanding "soft adventure" market a category that differs from traditional ski resort tourism.

Düzce's accessibility reinforces its market appeal. It can be reached within approximately 2.5 hours from Istanbul, 3 hours from Ankara, and 1.5 hours from Zonguldak (General Directorate of Highways, 2024). This proximity supports the growing trend of weekend tourism, particularly from the Marmara and Western Black Sea regions, often via private vehicles or day tours.

Nevertheless, some challenges persist. As noted by Aydın and Selvi (2012), around 68% of visitors stay for two nights or less. This limited duration restricts the overall economic impact of tourism. To address this, bundling winter tourism offerings with complementary experiences (such as regional gastronomy, thermal spa visits, and cultural attractions) could encourage longer stays and enhance revenue generation.

10.4.3. Comparative Analysis with Competitor Destinations

Düzce operates within a competitive landscape that includes Bolu (Kartalkaya), Sakarya (Kartepe), Kastamonu (Ilgaz), Ankara (Elmadağ), and Kayseri (Erciyes). These destinations exert direct competitive pressure due to their geographic proximity and similar climatic profiles.

- **Kartalkaya (Bolu):** A market leader in Turkish winter tourism, featuring 12 ski slopes, an elevation of 2,000 meters, and an annual visitor capacity of 350,000. However, its high cost (averaging 7,000 TL per day) and weekend

overcrowding make Düzce an appealing alternative for middle-income domestic tourists (TÜRSAB, 2023).

- **Kartepe (Sakarya):** Popular among Istanbul-based travelers due to its short distance (130 km). Its limited accommodation capacity (~700 beds) and concentrated infrastructure present constraints. In contrast, Düzce offers wider spatial dispersion across multiple plateaus and alternative access points (MARKA, 2020).
- **Ilgaz (Kastamonu):** While Ilgaz has a long-standing reputation in winter sports, its remoteness reduces its attractiveness for short trips. Düzce's accessibility gives it a competitive edge in the short-stay market (General Directorate of Highways, 2024).
- **Erciyes (Kayseri) & Palandöken (Erzurum):** These are internationally positioned, high-investment resorts. Rather than direct competition, they function as benchmarks and models for development.

Given this competitive context, Düzce should focus on differentiation. The region can cultivate a unique identity based on quiet, eco-friendly, and multifaceted experiences offering an alternative to more commercial, high-density winter resorts.

10.4.4. Price, Service Quality, and Competitive Dynamics

Price is currently Düzce's most immediate advantage. As of 2024, the average nightly rate for local accommodations ranges between 2,500 and 3,500 TL. In comparison, Kartepe averages 5,000 TL, Kartalkaya 7,000 TL, and Erciyes 8,500 TL (Booking.com, 2024). This affordability makes Düzce an attractive winter holiday destination for middle-income travelers.

Nonetheless, service quality remains a challenge. Aydın and Selvi (2012) identified significant gaps in service standards and workforce qualifications within Düzce's tourism sector. Addressing this issue could involve launching targeted training programs through Düzce University's Faculty of Tourism. One proposed solution is the development of a "Winter Tourism Service Quality Certificate Program" in partnership with industry stakeholders to cultivate a skilled labor force.

Digital visibility is another area that requires urgent improvement. Akkil et al. (2024) found a strong correlation between digital marketing efforts and destination appeal. Currently, Düzce's online presence is limited evident in the low number of reviews and weak representation on platforms like TripAdvisor and Booking.com. Closing this gap will require a comprehensive digital strategy that incorporates professional content creation, social media engagement, and influencer partnerships (UNWTO, 2023).

Additionally, adopting sustainability certification could enhance service quality and brand value. As Gössling and Peeters (2015) highlight, eco-certifications increasingly influence traveler decisions. Implementing "green hotel" and "eco-accommodation" models in Düzce could both reduce environmental impact and elevate the destination's reputation.

10.4.5. SWOT Analysis: Düzce Winter Tourism Market

A strategic SWOT assessment suggests that Düzce holds strong potential to position itself as a destination defined by its "green identity," high accessibility, and diverse tourism offerings. This combination provides a sustainable competitive advantage that can elevate the province's status at both the regional and national levels.

Table 1. SWOT Analysis of Winter Tourism in Düzce

Strengths	**Weaknesses**
• Strategic Proximity: Immediate access to major metropolises (Istanbul and Ankara). • Ecological Heterogeneity: Rich diversity in natural landscapes and climatic zones. • Logistical Connectivity: High accessibility via primary arterial highways (TEM and D-100). • Product Integration: Synergistic alignment with ecotourism, local gastronomy, and cultural heritage assets.	• Infrastructural Deficits: Insufficiency of permanent facilities and accommodation infrastructure. • Visitor Retention: Truncated duration of stay (low overnight ratios). • Marketing Gaps: Suboptimal promotional strategies and limited digital visibility. • Governance Issues: Fragility in inter-institutional coordination.
Opportunities	**Threats**
• Market Trends: Burgeoning global demand for nature-based and experiential tourism. • Sustainability Alignment: Compatibility with rising "green tourism" paradigms. • Socio-Economic Potential: Latent capacity for youth and female entrepreneurship. • Digital Frontiers: Untapped avenues for digital marketing and destination branding.	• Climate Risks: Climate change-induced volatility in snow regimes and precipitation. • Competitive Pressure: Entrenched brand equity of established competitor destinations. • Urbanization Risks: Environmental degradation driven by unplanned urbanization. • Economic Instability: Financial fluctuations stemming from acute seasonality.

Note. Source: Developed by the author.

Düzce's core strengths stem from its accessibility and the variety of its natural resources. Located between Istanbul and Ankara, the province is naturally positioned as a convenient choice for weekend trips and short holidays. However, transforming this geographic advantage into a true competitive asset requires more than proximity it calls for coordinated regional partnerships and well-executed marketing strategies.

In terms of weaknesses, Düzce currently faces several structural limitations. These include limited accommodation capacity, low levels of promotional activity, and underdeveloped institutional coordination. Addressing these gaps will be critical to

improving the region's competitiveness. The creation of a Destination Management Organization (DMO), or a similar collaborative governance structure, could support integrated planning and strengthen the tourism ecosystem.

On the opportunity front, the rising demand for nature-based experiences and the global shift toward sustainability present significant long-term growth avenues. By aligning its ecotourism and culinary assets with winter activities, Düzce can reinforce a "four-season tourism" model. This approach could also serve as a platform for promoting inclusive growth particularly through the support of female and youth entrepreneurship in the tourism sector.

However, certain threats could challenge Düzce's growth trajectory. Climate change and the well-established reputations of competing destinations are key external risks. Fluctuating snow levels and the potential decline in seasonal snow cover pose direct threats to winter tourism operations. For this reason, long-term planning must include climate adaptation strategies and environmental monitoring systems.

In summary, the SWOT analysis highlights that Düzce, with strategic development and proper coordination, can evolve into a strong regional winter tourism hub in the short term and, over time, grow its presence on the national stage.

10.5. THE FUTURE OF WINTER TOURISM IN DÜZCE: A SUSTAINABILITY PERSPECTIVE

Sustainability has become a central pillar of modern tourism development. In the case of Düzce, advancing winter tourism requires a carefully balanced approach one that limits environmental strain, maximizes local benefits, diversifies the economy, and commits to long-term destination management. Reviewing Düzce's strategic policy documents alongside academic research on ecotourism and stakeholder dynamics reveals that a truly sustainable future for winter tourism depends on a multi-dimensional strategy.

Geographically, Düzce is bordered by the Black Sea to the north, upland forests to the south, interior highlands, and river basins to the west. This composition forms a biophysically sensitive ecosystem. The East Marmara Development Agency (MARKA, 2013) emphasizes the need to preserve these natural assets. Its reports identify key threats: unchecked development on plateaus, surpassing ecological carrying capacities, inappropriate land use, and uncoordinated tourism activities. Importantly, the same report underscores the value of stakeholder engagement as a foundational component of sustainable tourism planning particularly for high-seasonality sectors like winter tourism.

Academic studies on environmental management in winter destinations consistently affirm that stakeholder awareness and perceptions of sustainability shape destination governance. In a qualitative study focused on Düzce, local stakeholders cited gaps in conservation enforcement, inadequate waste management, and mounting pressure from visitors on natural areas. They also

highlighted a crucial point: the environment is the core asset of tourism, and its protection is not just the duty of institutions, but a collective societal responsibility (Akyel & Mesci, 2022). These insights highlight the urgent need for stronger governance systems and coordinated oversight in managing Düzce's winter tourism sector.

The Düzce Tourism Strategy and Action Plan calls for embedding sustainability principles across all areas of tourism development, with a focus on ecotourism and plateau tourism aligned with environmental sensitivities (Düzce Special Provincial Administration, 2014). Although the plan acknowledges the winter tourism potential of Kardüz Plateau, it stresses the need for controlled and well-planned growth. Construction in highland areas brings inherent environmental risks, and any expansion must be closely monitored. Similarly, the 2010–2014 Strategic Plan emphasizes that rural tourism development must proceed hand-in-hand with responsible natural resource management (Düzce Special Provincial Administration, 2009). Together, these documents signal a strong policy commitment to environmental sustainability as a guiding principle for winter tourism.

Sustainable tourism extends beyond environmental considerations to include economic and social dimensions. Research in the Western Black Sea Region shows that stakeholders expect meaningful social returns from ecotourism. Local participation is viewed as essential to destination sustainability. Communities in Düzce are not only tourism beneficiaries they are part of the tourism product itself, offering traditional crafts, cultural hospitality, local cuisine, and ecological knowledge (Akyel & Mesci, 2022).

Düzce University (2014) has taken steps to contribute to this vision by focusing on human capital development for the tourism sector. It highlights the importance of equipping students with knowledge in environmental stewardship, sustainable practices, and local development. Furthermore, the university's research on plateau ecology, flora and fauna inventories, and landscape design adds scientific value to the sustainable planning of winter tourism activities.

According to a draft scoping report by Düzce Municipality (2022), long-term environmental goals include protecting natural heritage, expanding green infrastructure, and enhancing waste management efforts that extend beyond city centers into nature tourism zones. From the perspective of winter tourism, managing visitor flows, limiting temporary construction, preserving landscape aesthetics, and making strategic infrastructure investments in areas like Kardüz and Topuk Plateaus are essential.

Lastly, the Düzce Special Provincial Administration's rural development agenda (2009) plays a critical role in supporting sustainable tourism. The institution is responsible for maintaining access roads, enforcing conservation regulations, and overseeing rural tourism investments. Infrastructure initiatives in winter tourism zones must be aligned with environmental impact assessments to ensure long-term

ecosystem health. In this way, Düzce can safeguard its natural resources while cultivating a vibrant, sustainable winter tourism economy.

10.6. PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

For winter tourism in Düzce to advance sustainably, strategic product diversification is essential. Highland areas such as the Kardüz Plateau possess significant untapped potential due to their scenic landscapes, dependable snow coverage, and proximity to major cities. However, turning this potential into concrete tourism offerings requires carefully designed products that appeal to different market segments, reduce seasonality risks, and align with local cultural values.

The first step in this process involves systematically cataloging and assessing the region's natural and cultural resources. Research in ecotourism planning emphasizes that highland ecosystems are inherently adaptable: they can support trekking, camping, and cycling in summer and transition seamlessly into snow trekking, sledding, photography, and snowmobile tourism in winter. Designing these plateaus for four-season use is key to maintaining consistent tourism revenue throughout the year.

Stakeholder input points to a clear consensus on the need for environmentally compatible diversification. In a study on destination branding in Akçakoca, participants emphasized the importance of creating themed tourism products that preserve local identity and natural assets. The same principle applies to Düzce's winter context. For example, branding the Kardüz Plateau as a destination for a "quiet nature experience" could provide a distinct alternative to crowded winter resorts.

Düzce's rich biodiversity also presents an opportunity to develop niche tourism products, including winter photography, nature education, and birdwatching. Research in Gümüşova on botanical tourism illustrates how plant diversity can be monetized through guided tours, garden exhibitions, and workshops. These ideas could be adapted for winter tourism through specialized flora treks or botanical photography trails in snow-covered landscapes.

Integrating Akçakoca's health tourism strengths with winter offerings presents a smart strategy to address seasonality. Studies on thalassotherapy suggest that year-round wellness facilities stimulate regional economic activity. In Düzce, this could translate into winter wellness centers, thermal pools, snow bathing rituals, and sauna-nature experience packages.

Gastronomy is another cornerstone of Düzce's cultural appeal. Studies highlight that local cuisine significantly impacts visitor satisfaction. By weaving regional gastronomy into the winter tourism experience, the province can deepen emotional connections with visitors. Possible products include "winter gastronomy routes," "highland culinary workshops," and "traditional hearthside gatherings."

Environmentally sensitive design should underpin all new product development. This includes minimizing carbon footprints, using mobile and low-impact infrastructure, avoiding ecological degradation, and maintaining strict waste management. These principles should be embedded in a unified environmental management framework co-led by tourism operators and local authorities.

Social sustainability is equally important. Studies emphasize the need for equitable distribution of tourism income and meaningful community involvement. Health tourism research in Akçakoca notes that successful destinations foster collaboration between government, business, and civil society an approach that is just as relevant to winter tourism.

Economically, reducing the effects of seasonality is a top priority. Merging winter tourism with ecotourism, cultural experiences, gastronomy, and wellness offerings supports a comprehensive four-season strategy. Regional gastronomy research suggests that diversified products expand revenue opportunities for local businesses, reinforcing the role of culinary experiences as an integrating element.

Lastly, the Düzce Municipality's 2022 scoping report notes potential long-term changes in snowfall patterns, making climate adaptation a pressing issue. Diversifying winter tourism to include both snow-dependent and snow-independent activities is essential. This approach will minimize vulnerability and ensure year-round appeal.

In summary, Düzce's path to sustainable winter tourism hinges on protecting natural resources, empowering local stakeholders, diversifying the economy, strengthening environmental governance, and planning for climate resilience. Both strategic documents and academic research agree: long-term success requires a model built on sustainability and inclusive, collaborative management.

10.7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Assessing Düzce's current standing and future prospects in winter tourism highlights a fundamental imperative: the region's natural, cultural, and socio-economic assets must be integrated into a cohesive, sustainable tourism model. Synthesizing insights drawn from strategic plans, stakeholder evaluations, ecotourism research, botanical and health tourism studies, and participatory development reports reveals that the advancement of winter tourism in Düzce requires a multidimensional transformation. The region's foremost strength lies in its accessibility to a large potential visitor base, supported by its ecological richness, mountainous terrain, favorable climatic conditions, and proximity to major cities.

Despite this potential, the analysis reveals significant challenges ranging from limited infrastructure and underdeveloped brand identity to weak institutional coordination and seasonal economic fluctuations. These findings indicate that the development of winter tourism in Düzce cannot rely solely on infrastructure investments. Instead, progress depends on robust governance structures, education

initiatives, sustainability-focused planning, and inclusive community engagement. Stakeholder interviews consistently express concern about the environmental impacts of tourism, emphasizing that managing visitor numbers and preserving ecosystems are non-negotiable priorities. Academic literature reinforces this view, advocating for governance models that balance environmental, social, and managerial sustainability. Consequently, Düzce's winter tourism strategy must focus not only on attracting visitors but also on institutionalizing inclusive, stakeholder-driven decision-making that harmonizes conservation and use.

Strategic documents also highlight the need for greater product diversity and suggest that tourism growth should not revolve around a single focal point but rather emerge from a decentralized, multi-nodal development approach. Integrating thematic tourism experiences gastronomy, botany, cultural heritage, wellness, and nature-based activities into the winter portfolio will strengthen the destination's year-round appeal and economic resilience. Simultaneously, academic institutions must support these efforts by cultivating a well-trained workforce equipped to enhance service quality. As climate change alters snow patterns and seasonality, the development of snow-independent tourism products becomes vital. Stakeholder consensus points toward a future in which Düzce offers a rich, layered winter experience (beyond skiing) built on natural, cultural, and community assets (Akyel & Mesci, 2022).

Based on this comprehensive evaluation, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Specialized Management Plans for Highland Ecosystems:** Develop and implement plateau-specific management plans that include carrying capacity assessments, seasonal visitor monitoring, and the application of low-density tourism models to mitigate ecological stress.
2. **Establishment of an Institutional Governance Structure:** Create a dedicated tourism governance body representing municipalities, universities, tourism businesses, NGOs, and community stakeholders to facilitate coordinated, participatory decision-making.
3. **Phased Investment Strategies for Kardüz and Topuk Plateaus:** Prioritize modular, small-scale, and environmentally friendly infrastructure with renewable energy integration over large-scale construction. Investments should follow a phased, needs-based timeline.
4. **Diversification of Snow-Independent Tourism Products:** Expand offerings resilient to snow variability nature education, botanical tours, culinary workshops, cultural experiences, and wellness packages. Leverage unique assets like Çilimli's black rice in winter-themed gastronomy.
5. **Destination Branding and Digital Marketing:** Build a unique brand identity for Düzce's winter tourism (distinct from mass-market resorts) supported by professional digital marketing and content strategies.

6. **Inclusive Local Economic Participation Models:** Promote local entrepreneurship through cooperatives, farm-to-table markets, homestay initiatives, and certified guide training to ensure tourism benefits reach rural communities.
7. **Promotion of Environmental Management Standards:** Educate and incentivize businesses to adopt eco-friendly practices in energy, water, and waste management. Introduce voluntary sustainability certifications.
8. **Sustainable Transport Infrastructure:** Enhance road safety and restrict motorized access in sensitive areas. Develop pedestrian and cycling routes to support low-impact mobility.
9. **Expansion of Tourism Education Programs:** Strengthen collaboration between academia and industry by offering training in sustainable tourism, planning, environmental protection, and service delivery.
10. **Climate Adaptation Planning:** Incorporate climate adaptation into winter tourism strategies by investing in snow-making technologies (where feasible), microclimate monitoring, and alternative activity planning.
11. **Integration of Health and Wellness Tourism:** Combine wellness offerings such as thalassotherapy, spa, and nature-based rehabilitation into the winter tourism product to counter seasonality and attract new visitor segments.
12. **Regional Collaboration Frameworks:** Foster regional alliances with neighboring provinces like Bolu, Sakarya, and Zonguldak to develop joint marketing, tourism corridors, and shared investments.
13. **Systematic Tourism Data Monitoring:** Implement a data monitoring framework to track visitor volumes, revenue patterns, environmental impacts, and seasonal variations, enabling evidence-based decision-making.
14. **Scientific Evaluation of Investment Impacts:** Require comprehensive environmental, social, and economic impact assessments for all major tourism investments in highland areas to ensure sustainable growth.

In conclusion, Düzce's potential as a winter tourism destination is undeniable rooted in its rich ecological resources and growing stakeholder support. However, realizing this potential requires a strategic, interdisciplinary approach, anchored in long-term vision and collective action. If implemented effectively, these recommendations will enhance Düzce's competitiveness, drive inclusive local development, and preserve the natural values that make it unique.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

CRUISE TOURISM AND DÜZCE

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INTRODUCTION

Cruise tourism evolved into a niche market focused on tourism and leisure travel in the mid-20th century. Cruise tourism has become a form of tourism that fosters economic and social interaction in some destinations (Parisi & Kalafati, 2018). Today, cruise tourism is characterized by extensive itineraries, luxurious amenities, and diverse experiences that appeal to consumer preferences (Qu, 2023). The origins of modern cruise tourism date back to the 1960s, when companies operating in this sector began marketing their services as floating resorts offering all-inclusive travel experiences (Qu, 2023). Cruise tourism is a new type of tourism that emerged after shipping companies transitioned to travel focused on entertainment and food and beverage activities (Papathanassis, 2017). Destinations such as the countries in the Mediterranean basin and the Caribbean have managed to become primary destinations in this field by taking advantage of their natural beauty and cultural heritage as well as the marketing potential of cruise brands (Parisi & Kalafati, 2018; Brida et al, 2014).

Cruise tourism is a type of tourism that provides a direct economic impact to destinations through visitor spending and other payments such as port fees. It also creates employment opportunities in various sectors within the destinations (Gouveia & Eusébio, 2018). Research confirms this. For example, destinations like Funchal in Madeira generate significant economic revenue from cruise visits. However, cruise tourism, in addition to generating revenue, can also lead to leaks. For example, payments made to multinational suppliers and cruise operators operating in this sector constitute leaks and are considered economic losses (Gouveia & Eusébio, 2018). Furthermore, the economic benefits provided to a destination vary significantly across destinations. Specific investment strategies

and governance skills are needed to balance local economic impact in this area (Gouveia & Eusébio, 2018; Skrede & Tveteraas, 2019).

11.1. CRUISE TOURISM

Cruise tourism is defined as touristic voyages that involve the accommodation of passengers on board, rather than transporting them to any destination, and that include various pre-determined routes. These voyages include entertainment options catering to all tastes and preferences, and are a blend of transportation, accommodation, and port-based tourist activities (McWay, 2021; Liu et al., 2020; Parisi & Kalafati, 2018; Akpınar & Bitiktaş, 2016; Lyu et al., 2017; Gutberlet, 2019). While cruise tourism has become increasingly concentrated in the Mediterranean basin and the Caribbean, the Arctic region has also begun to be included among its routes, creating a distinct demand and product structure (Parisi & Kalafati, 2018; Kanrak et al., 2023). Cruise ship travel has several characteristics that distinguish it from other forms of maritime transportation or travel. The most distinctive characteristics of cruise ship trips are as follows (Sezer, 2014):

• The travel time is predetermined for the passenger.

• The passenger is returned to their destination. This means that the embarkation and disembarkation ports are the same.

• The destinations to be visited during the trip are determined by the tour itinerary.

• The destinations are predominantly chosen from among tourism centers (beach, sun, history, nature, shopping, etc.).

• Service activities are more of an excursion than a transportation activity.

In recent years, many countries have made significant investments in cruise tourism, but such investments carry opportunity costs and require coordinated planning (Zanne & Beškovnik, 2018; Ngamvichaikit et al., 2018; Jugović et al., 2020). For example, cruise passengers generate significant economic activity in port cities, contributing to local businesses such as restaurants, shops, and tour operators (Brida et al., 2012). However, some studies indicate significant economic leakage to cruise lines and multinational suppliers. This situation has been suggested to lead to limited or unequal economic distribution among hotels, restaurants, and local service providers (Skrede & Tveteraas, 2019; Bruno et al., 2019; Seidl et al., 2006; Papathanassis, 2017). Furthermore, the heterogeneity among individuals participating in cruise tourism shapes the amount of money spent in destinations. Individuals with high satisfaction and higher spending are more likely to generate local economic benefits, while those with a lower propensity to spend in the destination are less likely to generate local economic

benefits. This reduces the transformational effects of long-term tourism (Brida & Risso, 2010; Bruno et al., 2019; Brida et al., 2014).

Locals' attitudes toward cruise tourism can vary across destinations. In some destinations, locals value the economic benefits of cruise tourism and embrace it, while in others, they express concerns about environmental degradation and cultural commodification. In overcrowded destinations, locals may grapple with sociocultural impacts and environmental issues. This can lead to an increase in local opposition to cruise tourism (Del Chiappa et al., 2021; Naylor et al., 2021). For example, in high-traffic destinations like Venice, locals may criticize this tourism model for encouraging excessive density rather than seeing it as a quality or reputation-enhancing factor. However, in less densely populated destinations, locals may gladly support cruise tourism because of its economic benefits (Wilson et al., 2015). Understanding and analyzing these differing behaviors is important to encourage support from local people and reduce potential social tensions (Olsen et al., 2020; Jugović, 2020).

Cruise tourism can cause significant environmental problems, such as air pollution, water pollution, land misuse, and pressures on local ecosystems in sensitive coastal areas (Marquez & Eagles, 2007). Cruise tourism is beginning to be scrutinized in terms of its carbon footprint and natural resource use. This could lead to improved sustainability measures, such as better waste management practices and the adoption of cleaner technologies (Marquez & Eagles, 2007). All of this demonstrates that cruise tourism requires a balanced development approach that prioritizes environmental stewardship over economic gains (Wilson et al., 2015; Abesadze et al., 2021; Kulkov et al., 2023).

11.2. TÜRKİYE'S CRUISE TOURISM POTENTIAL

Cruise tourism has become a significant part of the global travel industry. Türkiye is a key player in this type of tourism in the Mediterranean market. Its rich cultural heritage and natural beauty, coupled with its strategic location at the intersection of Europe and Asia, make Türkiye an attractive destination for cruise ships (Demir et al., 2016). In recent years, Türkiye's cruise tourism has gained momentum in ports such as Istanbul, Antalya, and Kuşadası (Demir et al., 2016). These ports have become frequent destinations for cruise ships. The general increase in cruise ship berthing at Turkish ports in recent years has paralleled global trends. Türkiye continues to invest in developing its tourism infrastructure to meet the ever-growing demand (Aras, 2023).

Cruise tourism generates significant economic value by generating foreign currency inflows and creating jobs. It also stimulates infrastructure development

(Demir et al., 2016). Furthermore, investments in ports and related ancillary services stimulate retail sectors, fostering a sustainable tourism ecosystem (Al-Roubaie, 2019). However, to maximize these benefits, a strategic framework must be established that bridges the gaps between cruise lines and local businesses and increases direct economic contributions (Al-Roubaie, 2019).

Like other types of tourism, cruise tourism poses environmental problems due to air and water pollution, waste disposal, and negative impacts on the marine ecosystem (Polat, 2015). Therefore, Türkiye is adopting or promoting environmentally friendly practices to mitigate or eliminate these problems (Aras, 2023). Emphasizing sustainability in this type of tourism could increase Türkiye's appeal to environmentally conscious tourists and potentially position it as a leader in sustainable cruise tourism in the Mediterranean basin (Karakan, 2023).

Table 1: Number of Cruise Passengers Coming to Türkiye by Year

Year	Total Number of Cruise Passengers
2015	1.888.522
2016	626.840
2017	306.485
2018	213.771
2019	300.896
2020	1.824
2021	45.362
2022	1.010.767
2023	1.542.522
2024	1.889.426
2025 (Ocak-Ekim)	2.021.326

Source: (Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure of the Republic of Türkiye, 2025)

An examination of the number of passengers arriving in Türkiye for cruise tourism reveals significant fluctuations between 2015 and 2025. Passenger numbers declined significantly between 2016 and 2018, and in 2020 and 2021, due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, passenger arrivals dropped to their lowest levels in history. However, from 2022 onward, Türkiye demonstrated a significant recovery in cruise tourism, surpassing both pre-pandemic levels and the highs of

2015. By 2025, the number of cruise passengers exceeded 2 million. This suggests that Türkiye could once again become a strategic cruise hub in the Eastern Mediterranean. This upward trend, seen in Table 1, is a concrete indicator of both port infrastructure investments and the return of cruise companies to Turkish ports.

Table 2: Cruise ship and passenger statistics calling at Turkish ports based on port authorities (January-October 2025)

Harbour Master	Type of Ship	Number of Cruise Passengers			
	Cruise Ship	Arrival of Cruise Passengers	Departure of Cruise Passengers	Transit Cruise Passengers	Total Cruise Passengers
Alanya	20	17	27	22.552	22.596
Amasra	28	13	2	26.690	26.705
Antalya	15	5.276	5.876	6.915	18.067
Bodrum	113	205	204	135.268	135.677
Bozcaada	11	2	0	5.317	5.319
Çanakkale	35	16	2	21.780	21.798
Çeşme	69	20.393	23.383	10.195	53.971
Datça	1	0	1	105	106
Dikili	22	88	95	6.067	6.250
Fethiye	5	1	1	609	611
Göcek	7	0	0	911	911
İstanbul	242	96.955	107.235	380.140	584.330
İzmir	39	759	686	64.692	66.137
Kaş	8	12	0	15.393	15.405
Kuşadası	582	34.160	41.134	889.154	964.448
Marmaris	41	253	23	59.279	59.555
Samsun	20	0	0	19.702	19.702
Sinop	1	0	0	1.076	1.076
Trabzon	19	8	0	18.654	18.662
Total	**1.278**	**158.158**	**178.669**	**1.684.499**	**2.021.326**

Source: (Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure of the Republic of Türkiye, 2025)

An examination of the port-based data in Table 2 reveals that cruise tourism in Türkiye is spatially concentrated in specific centers. Kuşadası and Istanbul account for the vast majority of total passenger numbers. This demonstrates that these two destinations form the backbone of national cruise traffic. Kuşadası's superiority in transit passengers, in particular, reinforces the destination's strategic position on Mediterranean cruise routes. Istanbul, on the other hand, possesses strong homeport potential with its ability to accommodate larger-capacity cruise ships, its cultural appeal, and the modern infrastructure provided by Galataport.

Aegean ports such as Bodrum, Izmir, and Çeşme are seen to provide medium-sized passenger traffic. Furthermore, the provinces of Trabzon, Amasra, and Samsun, which have important ports in the Black Sea region, appear to be developing new routes. This distribution demonstrates that Türkiye's cruise tourism is predominantly Mediterranean-Aegean-focused. In terms of destination diversity, the Black Sea region appears to have a rising identity as a destination. Furthermore, the fact that approximately 80% of total passenger traffic consists of transit passengers indicates that Türkiye is still primarily positioned as a port of call. However, it is also evident that ports like Istanbul are evolving into a primary origin/destination function.

Türkiye's cruise tourism potential will likely be determined by its ability to adapt to emerging trends and meet market demands. As global cruise tourism has begun to revive post-pandemic, it has been strongly driven by diversified itineraries that include unique cultural experiences and sustainable practices (Demir et al., 2016). Therefore, politicians and tourism stakeholders in Türkiye should implement educational programs that inform everyone, starting with the local population, about the importance and benefits of cruise tourism. It is also crucial to ensure the integration of local communities into future planning efforts (Yılmaz, 2022).

11.3. DÜZCE'S CRUISE TOURISM POTENTIAL

Located in northwestern Türkiye, Düzce offers significant opportunities for cruise tourism investments, given its geographical location and cultural heritage. Cruise tourism continues to gain momentum globally. Düzce's development potential in this area is comparable to successful cruise tourism models in various regions. Düzce's natural beauty and cultural assets are attractive to cruise tourism businesses seeking new destinations. Cruise tourism is a type of tourism that can provide economic benefits by strengthening local economies through job creation and increased tourist spending. For example, cities like Tianjin have used their coastlines to revitalize local businesses and cruise tourism-related infrastructure

(Li, 2016). Düzce has the potential to implement similar economic models by focusing on sustainable practices that integrate its local economy into the tourism supply chain.

If Düzce wants to develop this type of tourism, it can learn about the process from destinations that have successfully implemented the cruise tourism experience. Collaboration strategies, including the inclusion of local residents in tourism planning and decision-making processes, are an effective model for building positive relationships between cruise tourism businesses and the local community (Hristić et al., 2024). This model provides an authentic experience for tourists while also increasing community participation, which is vital for the sector's sustainable success (Demir et al., 2016). To establish this type of tourism in Düzce, significant investments, primarily in the port, are necessary. The port will play a crucial role in ensuring cruise companies include Düzce as a destination in their tours. Furthermore, investing in marketing strategies that emphasize Düzce's unique natural beauty, historical sites, and gastronomic offerings is a secondary element of importance. Potential partnerships between local governments, port authorities, and industry stakeholders in this marketing effort can facilitate and ensure its success.

To assess Düzce's potential for cruise tourism, a systematic analysis of the region's strengths and weaknesses, as well as potential opportunities and threats, is necessary. In this context, a SWOT analysis serves as a strategic tool that provides a holistic view of a destination's current status. SWOT analysis provides fundamental data that can be used both in destination planning and in guiding cruise investment. Below is a SWOT analysis of Düzce's cruise tourism, prepared by considering its natural, cultural, infrastructure, and logistical characteristics. This analysis is important because it reveals which areas should be prioritized and which risks should be managed to ensure Düzce's potential for cruise tourism.

Table 3: Düzce's Cruise Tourism SWOT Analysis

Strengths	***Weaknesses***
Akçakoca's natural bays and clean coastline offer suitable potential for cruise ships.	Lack of a modern port infrastructure to accommodate large tonnage cruise ships.
It has easy logistics and transportation thanks to its location close to Iistanbul and Ankara.	Inadequacy of experienced personnel and operational infrastructure specific to cruise tourism.
It offers both culture (Genoese Castle), nature (waterfalls, plateaus) and sea tourism all together.	Düzce is not well known by international cruise companies.

The potential to be a safe alternative stop on the Black Sea coast.	The region has limited shops, restaurants and infrastructure suitable for the spending capacity of cruise tourists.
It has rich gastronomic elements (mancarli pide, melengücceği dessert, etc.) and local experiences.	The diversity of touristic products is not organised in accordance with package tours.
Opportunities	***Threats***
Increased government support for opening up the Black Sea region to cruise tourism.	The Black Sea poses operational risks due to periodic harsh sea conditions.
Potential to create routes for small and boutique cruise ships.	It will be in competition with other Black Sea ports in the region (Sinop, Trabzon, Samsun, etc.).
Akçakoca has a strong destination structure that blends history, nature and coastal tourism.	Cruise tourism is vulnerable to demand fluctuations on a global scale.
Creating tour packages by integrating ecotourism, coastal tourism, gastronomy and cultural heritage.	Local populations' unpreparedness for cruise tourism and social sustainability risks.
A modern cruise pier/terminal investment in the region would increase the destination value.	Environmental impacts and sensitivities to the coastal ecosystem.

An examination of the SWOT analysis in Table 3 reveals that Düzce has significant potential for cruise tourism. However, realizing this potential requires critical infrastructure investments and planned destination management. The natural beauty of the Akçakoca coast, in particular, suggests that the region could be both an alternative stop on Black Sea routes and a suitable destination for small-scale cruise ships. Furthermore, the lack of a modern cruise terminal, insufficient sector experience, and a lack of local service infrastructure are among the primary factors limiting the destination's current capacity.

When examining opportunities, government policies supporting cruise tourism in the Black Sea, the development of new routes, and the integration of ecotourism and cultural heritage offer significant advantages for Düzce. However, threats such as the presence of competing ports in the region, operational risks caused by harsh sea conditions, and the low level of preparedness of the local population are considered risks that should be considered in the strategic planning process.

A general analysis of the SWOT analysis indicates that Düzce's adaptation to cruise tourism requires not only investments in physical infrastructure but also raising awareness among the local population, developing a diverse range of tourist products, and enhancing brand value. These points highlighted by the SWOT analysis provide guidance for Düzce to become a sustainable and competitive cruise destination.

11.4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE REVIVAL AND DEVELOPMENT OF CRUISE TOURISM IN DÜZCE

We can say that Düzce province has significant potential for cruise tourism. The SWOT analysis results also demonstrate this. However, realizing this potential requires holistic, strategic, and sustainable planning. Düzce's natural beauty, cultural heritage, and location offer significant advantages in tourism, but infrastructure deficiencies, inadequate advertising, and a lack of industry experience pose significant obstacles to its development. For Düzce to develop cruise tourism, not only physical investments but also the development of a destination management organization with stakeholder participation and sustainable marketing strategies are necessary. In this context, the following recommendations are made for Düzce, which needs to invest in cruise tourism and manage this type of tourism sustainably:

• A modern pier or small-scale cruise terminal should be constructed along the Akçakoca coast to ensure the safe docking of cruise ships.

• Marine structures such as breakwaters, depth measurements, and breakwater reinforcement should be evaluated through scientific feasibility studies.

• Port-of-call services such as electricity, water, waste management, and emergency response capacity should be standardized.

• The terminal's surroundings should be redesigned, and basic services such as pedestrian access, a reception area, and directional signage should be improved.

• Short-term coastal excursions centered in Akçakoca should include historical (Genoese Castle), cultural (village texture), gastronomic (mancarlı pide, melengücceği dessert), and nature-based (waterfalls, plateaus) routes.

• Packaged tours of 2–4 hours, 4–6 hours, and full-day tours should be developed to meet the expectations of cruise companies.

• Thematic tour packages should be prepared combining elements of ecotourism, coastal tourism, plateau tourism, and gastronomy.

• Carrying capacity analyses should be conducted for plateaus and waterfalls, and the risk of overcrowding should be carefully monitored.

• Participation in international cruise fairs should be ensured with the Düzce brand.

• English promotional materials, video content, and port catalogs should be prepared digitally.

• Sustainable port and destination planning research should be conducted in collaboration with the tourism and urban planning departments of Düzce University.

• A cruise tourism working committee should be established among the municipality, the Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, investment offices, and private tourism enterprises.

• Public incentives and funding sources (Development Agency, EU funds, Tourism Incentive Law) should be evaluated to attract investment to the region.

• Stakeholders should be included in the process as a whole, and multi-stakeholder planning should be implemented (Cerveny et al., 2020; Johansen et al., 2021).

• Carrying capacity should be calculated accurately, and strategies should be developed to prevent destination destruction (Sanz-Blas et al., 2019; Johansen et al., 2021).

• Investments in port-city connections should be made, and ecological protection measures should be taken during these investments (Zanne & Beškovnik, 2018; Ngamvichaikit et al., 2018; Jugović et al., 2020).

• Environmental regulations should be prioritized, and operational sustainability should be prioritized (Huang et al., 2024; Johansen et al., 2021).

11.5. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This section of the book comprehensively examines Düzce's cruise tourism potential, assessing the destination's natural, cultural, and strategic values from the perspective of both international and national cruise tourism. The SWOT analysis demonstrates that Düzce, along with the Akçakoca coastline, has the potential to become a major cruise tourism destination in the Black Sea. The region's coastline, plateaus, natural areas, gastronomic treasures, and historical fabric offer a rich variety of products that cruise tourists can experience during short-term shore excursions.

The future of cruise tourism holds significant potential with the increasing interest in emerging markets in Asia and expeditions to destinations such as the Arctic (Kim and Noh, 2024; Stewart et al., 2009). Many countries are investing in cruise tourism. For example, China is expanding its existing potential by continuing its infrastructure investments for cruise tourism (Liu et al., 2020). Destinations such as the Caribbean, on the other hand, are considered niche markets and are investing in cruise tourism with sustainable strategies (Pioch et al., 2022). Countries located in the Mediterranean basin, with their favorable weather and climate conditions and

rich cultural values, continue to invest in cruise tourism because of their considerable potential (Tymoshchuk, 2024). The focus on ecotourism and advancements in ship designs and technologies following Covid-19 have played a significant role in the transformation of cruise tourism (Radić et al., 2020; Spencer and Spencer, 2022).

For Düzce province to achieve the development of cruise tourism, many shortcomings must be addressed. A modern cruise terminal and port are lacking. First and foremost, infrastructure investments are needed in this area. Experienced personnel in cruise tourism are lacking. Experienced personnel need to be trained in this field. Furthermore, the weaknesses identified in the SWOT analysis must be addressed in the short, medium, and long term.

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CHAPTER TWELVE

THE RECREATIONAL POTENTIAL OF DÜZCE AND RECREATION MANAGEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Recreation is defined as the totality of activities that individuals voluntarily engage in during their leisure time for the purposes of renewal, relaxation, enjoyment, and improving quality of life (Kraus, 1971; Lu & Hu, 2005; Hurd, Anderson & Mainieri, 2021). In contemporary society, the pace of life has accelerated, and urbanisation and work intensity have increased significantly; this situation heightens the need for recreation and renders leisure time practices increasingly important for individuals to maintain their physical and psychological well-being (Aslan, 1993). The literature widely emphasises the effects of recreation, including stress reduction, renewal, contributions to mental and physical health, enhanced motivation, and support for social life (Yılmaz, 2004; Toy & Yılmaz, 2010; Özer & Çavuşoğlu, 2014).

The diversity of recreational practices encompasses a wide spectrum, ranging from outdoor activities and rural recreation to cultural activities and sports-based pursuits. The literature emphasises that these activities strengthen destinations' attractiveness, contribute to the formation of a positive tourism image, and support local development (Tayfun & Arslan, 2013; Yemenoğlu, Dalgın, & Çeken, 2013). Within this framework, recreation is regarded as a strategic tool in contemporary destination planning that enhances the quality of life of the local population and enriches the visitor experience.

When evaluated within the framework of this theoretical approach, Düzce, which possesses a rich potential in terms of its natural, cultural, and socio-economic

characteristics, emerges as a destination well suited to recreation-oriented development through its plateaus, waterfalls, forest areas, coastal ecosystems, and alternative sports opportunities. This diversity observed across the province indicates that Düzce offers noteworthy opportunities for outdoor recreation as well as rural and nature-based recreation types. In particular, the presence and variety of activities such as trekking, camping, photo safaris, rafting, birdwatching, and rural life experiences constitute significant factors contributing to the formation of Düzce's recreation-oriented destination identity. These activities can be regarded as fundamental inputs in the processes of assessing the province's recreational potential and destination planning.

This section addresses the scope, importance, and basic classifications of the concept of recreation. The relationship between recreational tourism and destinations is examined within a theoretical framework; subsequently, Düzce's natural, cultural, and rural recreational potential is evaluated in detail. In addition, recreational activities, events, sports organisations, and promotional practices implemented in the region are analysed, and Düzce's current status and challenges in recreational tourism are discussed from a holistic perspective. This comprehensive assessment aims to establish a strong foundation for strategic planning, branding, and sustainability in Düzce's recreation management.

12.1. THE CONCEPT OF RECREATION, ITS IMPORTANCE AND BASIC CLASSIFICATIONS

The concept of recreation derives from the Latin verb recreare, meaning "to renew," "to refresh," and "to revive" (Merriam-Webster, 2025; Etymology Dictionary, 2025). This etymological origin points to a functional framework in which recreation is associated with the restoration of an individual's physical and mental well-being. Over the course of its historical development, the concept has moved beyond a narrow definition limited to leisure activities, evolving into a multidimensional structure that encompasses both individual and social dimensions.

Under this heading, the definition and scope of the concept of recreation, its importance at the individual and social levels, and the basic classifications of recreational activities are examined from a theoretical perspective. In this way, the conceptual foundations of recreation are established, providing a holistic framework for the issues discussed in detail in the subsequent subheadings.

12.1.1. Definition and Scope of Recreation

Recreation is defined as the totality of activities that individuals voluntarily engage in during their leisure time for the purposes of renewal, relaxation, enjoyment, and

improving quality of life (Kraus, 1971; Lu & Hu, 2005; Hurd, Anderson & Mainieri, 2021). This definition distinguishes recreation from activities based on compulsory responsibilities and economic production expectations, positioning it as a field of activity that individuals pursue by choice and that provides subjective satisfaction. Accordingly, recreation is not merely a passive pursuit aimed at filling free time; rather, it constitutes a multidimensional process that responds to individuals' physical, psychological, and social needs.

The scope of the concept of recreation has expanded throughout its historical development and has been enriched through contributions from different disciplines. Nash (1953) conceptualised recreation as a domain in which individuals participate voluntarily and creatively during their leisure time in order to develop themselves, generate meaning, and contribute to social life. This perspective demonstrates that recreation is not limited to functions of rest and relaxation; rather, it provides a structure that enables individuals to express themselves, utilise their creativity, and strengthen their social relationships. Kraus (1971), in turn, defined recreation as a holistic phenomenon that brings together voluntary participation, personal satisfaction, and social integration within the context of leisure time. Kraus's approach emphasises not only the benefits of recreation at the individual level but also its effects on social cohesion and processes of social interaction. Within this framework, recreation is regarded as a field of activity that enhances the quality of the relationship individuals establish with themselves and their environment, while contributing to the sustainability of social life.

In contemporary literature, recreation is approached as a dynamic process in which individuals engage in voluntary activities during their leisure time for the purposes of renewal, relaxation, enjoyment, and gaining motivation (Hurd, Anderson & Mainieri, 2021). This perspective considers tangible outcomes that may arise from recreational activities as secondary, while prioritising experience, the process of participation, and subjective satisfaction. Within this context, recreation encompasses activities that do not pursue economic production objectives, yet may involve processes such as creativity, learning, and self-actualisation.

The scope of recreation covers a broad spectrum, ranging from outdoor activities to cultural and artistic pursuits, from sports-based practices to experiences related to gastronomy, handicrafts, and rural life. This diversity demonstrates that recreation can be experienced in different ways depending on individual preferences, spatial conditions, and socio-cultural context. Accordingly, recreation should be regarded not as a uniform field of activity, but as a comprehensive leisure-time evaluation

process that supports individuals' quality of life, strengthens social interaction, and offers multifaceted experiential opportunities.

12.1.2. Individual and Social Benefits of Recreation

The benefits of recreation at the individual and social levels are addressed in contemporary literature within the dimensions of physical health, psychological well-being, social interaction, and quality of life. Particularly under modern living conditions, increasing work intensity and stress factors have rendered recreation an important form of leisure-time utilisation for maintaining individuals' physical and mental balance (Iwasaki, 2007).

At the individual level, recreation contributes not only to the support of physical health through its activity-based or experience-oriented structure, but also to stress reduction and the enhancement of psychological well-being. Empirical studies have demonstrated that participation in nature-based and outdoor recreational activities has positive effects on individuals' mood, reduces mental fatigue, and supports emotional balance (Pretty, Rogerson, & Barton, 2017; White et al., 2019). Within this context, recreation is regarded as a renewal-oriented process that enables individuals to temporarily disengage from the routines of everyday life.

The individual benefits of recreation are also decisive in terms of subjective life satisfaction and overall quality of life. It is stated that regular participation in recreational activities increases individuals' satisfaction with life and strengthens their perceptions of general well-being (Newman, Tay, & Diener, 2014). The national literature likewise emphasises that recreation enables individuals to utilise their leisure time in a more meaningful and satisfying manner (Karaküçük, 2014).

When considered at the societal level, recreation provides a structure that enhances social interaction and strengthens interpersonal communication. Recreational spaces and activities contribute to the development of social bonds by enabling individuals from different age groups and socio-cultural backgrounds to come together (Veal, 2019). In this respect, recreation is regarded as a process that supports not only individual well-being but also the quality of social life. The literature indicates that recreation- and leisure-based activities are associated with sustainable destination development and social well-being (Manning, 2011; Bramwell & Lane, 2011).

12.1.3. Types of Recreation

Recreational activities can be examined within the framework of open spaces and enclosed spaces by taking the spatial context into consideration. This distinction provides a spatial framework based on whether recreational activities are conducted in natural or built environments (Hall & Page, 2014). Within this

context, the types of recreation are discussed below according to participation level, settlement context, and activity content, and the varieties of recreational activities included within each category are explained.

12.1.3.1. Types of Recreation Based on Participation Level

When participation level is taken as a basis, recreation is evaluated in two main types: active recreation, in which individuals directly participate in activities through physical or mental involvement, and passive recreation, which requires more limited participation. Active recreation encompasses activities in which individuals are actively engaged in processes of movement, production, or learning. Nature walks, camping, cycling, water sports, and gastronomy workshops are among the principal types of recreation classified as active recreation (Russell, 2017). Passive recreation, by contrast, includes activities in which individuals assume a spectator or observer role, with limited physical participation. Activities such as attending cultural and artistic events, participating in exhibitions and festivals, sightseeing, and watching performances are considered forms of recreation within this category. This distinction is explained on the basis of differences in the intensity of the recreational experience and the individual's role in the activity process (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997).

12.1.3.2. Types of Recreation Based on Settlement Context

When the settlement context is taken into consideration, types of recreation are addressed as urban recreation and rural recreation. Urban recreation encompasses activities carried out through urban parks, recreation areas, sports facilities, and cultural venues. City walks, sports activities, cultural organisations, and workshop activities are among the forms of recreation included within this category. This type of recreation enables individuals, particularly those living in densely populated urban environments, to utilise their leisure time in accessible spaces (Hall & Page, 2014).

Rural recreation, on the other hand, includes activities conducted in natural and semi-natural areas, involving interaction with the rural landscape and local life. Nature-based walks, camping, agrotourism practices, gastronomic experiences, and activities based on local production practices are considered within the scope of rural recreation. The literature emphasises that rural recreation has become more visible, particularly with the increasing demand for nature-based experiences, and is associated with alternative tourism approaches (Lane & Kastenholz, 2015).

12.1.3.3. Types of Recreation Based on Activity Content

Types of recreation can be classified based on the content of the activity as sports-based, cultural-artistic, nature-based, and experience-oriented recreation. Sports-based recreation encompasses activities focused on physical activity and movement and is based on the use of individuals' physical capacity. Sports activities conducted individually or in groups, as well as physical activities carried out in open or enclosed spaces, are considered within this category.

Cultural-artistic recreation, on the other hand, includes activities that involve individuals' participation in processes of cultural production, aesthetic experience, and artistic interaction. Festival participation, exhibition visits, attending performing arts events, and creative workshops are among the principal forms of recreation within this category. This type of recreation enables individuals to engage with forms of cultural expression and to gain aesthetic experience (Russell, 2017).

Nature-based recreation encompasses activities that centre on individuals' direct interaction with the natural environment. Activities such as hiking, camping, photo safaris, and nature observation are considered within this category. These activities strengthen individuals' relationship with the natural environment and integrate the recreational experience with its environmental context (Bell, Phoenix, Lovell, & Wheeler, 2014).

Experience-oriented recreation consists of activities that prioritise participation, learning, and interaction. Gastronomy workshops, local production experiences, thematic events, and participant-focused practices are considered within this category. This approach demonstrates that recreation is not limited to functions of rest and enjoyment; rather, it offers a multidimensional structure that also encompasses learning, participation, and the acquisition of experience (Pine & Gilmore, 2011).

12.2. RECREATIONAL TOURISM AND THE DESTINATION RELATIONSHIP

The relationship between recreation and tourism emerges from the intersection of individuals' ways of spending their leisure time with spatial mobility. Recreational tourism is considered a form of tourism in which travel undertaken to meet recreational needs constitutes the primary motivation for the tourist experience. Within this context, recreational tourism offers a structure that places recreational activities at the centre of tourist travel and prioritises the participant experience (Hall & Page, 2014).

From the perspective of tourism destinations, recreation is not merely a means of leisure-time utilisation; rather, it is regarded as a strategic element that enhances destination attractiveness, diversifies visitor experiences, and contributes to the temporal dispersion of tourism demand. The quality and diversity of recreational activities strengthen the perceived image of the destination and create a competitive advantage. For this reason, recreational tourism has become an important component in contemporary destination planning and management processes (Tribe, 2016).

Under this heading, the definition and basic characteristics of recreational tourism are addressed; recreational attraction factors in destinations are discussed, and sustainable recreation planning and management are evaluated within a theoretical framework.

12.2.1. Definition and Characteristics of Recreational Tourism

Recreational tourism is defined as a form of tourism that emerges from the organisation of trips undertaken by individuals during their leisure time for the purposes of renewal, relaxation, enjoyment, and gaining experience around recreational activities. In this form of tourism, recreational activities constitute the primary motivation for travel rather than serving merely as complementary elements of the trip (Hall & Page, 2014). One of the distinguishing characteristics of recreational tourism is that visitors participate in activities actively or semi-actively rather than acting as passive consumers. Sports-based activities, nature-based recreation, cultural and artistic events, and experience-oriented practices are frequently included within the scope of recreational tourism. In this respect, recreational tourism goes beyond standard tourist experiences by placing individual participation and subjective experience at the centre (Russell, 2017).

Recreational tourism also exhibits a multidisciplinary structure. Different types of recreation-such as sports, nature, culture, gastronomy, and rural life experiences-can be transformed into recreational tourism products depending on the resources available at the destination. This diversity enables recreational tourism to appeal to different target groups and allows destinations to diversify their tourism products (Lane & Kastenholz, 2015).

12.2.2. Recreational Attraction Factors in Tourism Destinations

Destinations can stimulate tourism mobility by transforming recreational areas into elements of attraction in line with their strategic objectives (Kargiglioğlu, 2019: 95). Recreational attractiveness in tourism destinations is directly related to the suitability of the destination's natural, cultural, and socio-economic resources for recreational activities. Recreational areas play a decisive role in visitors'

destination choices and contribute to the formation and strengthening of the tourism image (Hall & Page, 2014). Environmental elements such as natural areas, coastal ecosystems, plateaus, forested areas, and water resources constitute strong attraction factors, particularly for nature-based recreational activities. Activities carried out in these areas-such as trekking, camping, rafting, birdwatching, and photo safaris-enhance the recreational value of the destination (Çavuşoğlu & Kolbakır, 2023).

In addition, cultural and experience-based recreational activities play a significant role in shaping destination attractiveness. Gastronomy tourism, through participatory and experience-oriented practices such as festivals, cultural events, and workshops, constitutes one of the important experiential domains evaluated within the scope of recreational activities. Gastronomy-themed festivals and events, in particular, stand out as recreational practices that integrate the food and beverage experience with social interaction, cultural learning, and entertainment, allowing individuals to make meaningful use of their leisure time. Such events contribute to destination promotion by positioning gastronomy tourism within the framework of recreational tourism, enhance the visibility of local culture, and support the diversification of visitor experiences (Cömert & Karamustafa, 2023; Akturfan & Şen, 2023; Karakan, 2021).

12.2.3. Sustainable Recreation Planning and Management

Sustainable recreation planning refers to an approach that aims to manage recreational activities by jointly considering environmental, social, and economic dimensions. In the context of recreational tourism, sustainability requires the conservation of natural and cultural resources, the inclusion of local communities in planning processes, and the long-term sustainability of the visitor experience (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Manning, 2011). Unplanned and intensive use of recreational areas may lead to problems such as environmental degradation, exceeding carrying capacity, and conflicts between local residents and visitors. Therefore, principles such as carrying capacity, land use, visitor management, and environmental sensitivity come to the forefront in recreation planning (Hall & Page, 2014).

Empirical studies demonstrate that visitor satisfaction increases and environmentally responsible behaviours are strengthened in recreational areas that are planned in a sustainable manner. Akkuş and Yordam (2021) revealed that there are significant relationships between recreational experience and environmentally responsible behaviour in nature-based recreational areas. These findings indicate that sustainability principles in recreation management generate important outcomes not only in environmental terms but also at the experiential level.

Sustainable recreation management is regarded as an approach that enables destinations to develop while preserving their recreational potential, balancing the relationship between recreational tourism, local development, and quality of life (Hall & Page, 2014; Manning, 2011). In this context, recreational tourism is considered a field of activity that is associated with and supportive of sustainable destination planning processes (Bramwell & Lane, 2011).

12.3. ASSESSMENT OF DÜZCE'S RECREATIONAL POTENTIAL

A destination's recreational potential is assessed within the framework of the suitability of its natural environmental elements for recreational activities, the diversity of these activities, and the capacity of the areas to be used sustainably. The fundamental approach to analysing recreational potential is based not only on identifying the physical characteristics of natural areas, but also on determining the extent to which these areas support different types of recreation. This perspective requires recreational areas to be considered not merely as existing assets, but in terms of their patterns of use and the experiential opportunities they offer (Clawson & Knetsch, 1966). The classic recreational area evaluation approach proposed by Clawson and Knetsch (1966) demonstrates that the recreational value of natural environments can be analysed through criteria such as accessibility, environmental attractiveness, activity diversity, and intensity of use. Within this framework, areas with varying topographical and ecological characteristics allow for different forms of recreational use and enhance the overall recreational capacity of the destination.

Düzce Province possesses a multi-layered natural environment that brings together coastal areas, mountainous zones with dense forest cover, plateaus, rivers, waterfalls, and wetlands within relatively short distances. This structure, reflecting the characteristic physiographic features of the Western Black Sea Region, reveals the province's topographical diversity and ecosystem richness. Such spatial diversity enables Düzce to appeal to different levels of participation and areas of interest in terms of nature-based recreation. Indeed, throughout the province there are natural areas suitable for the implementation of various types of recreation, including highland tourism, nature walks, camping, rafting, cycling, and water-based recreational activities. In this context, Düzce can be characterised as a destination possessing numerous potential sites that may be evaluated within the scope of outdoor recreation, nature-based recreation, and adventure recreation (Kurtay, 2021; Özkurt & Öcel, 2021).

Another important dimension in assessing the recreational potential of natural areas is related to the balance between conservation and use. In particular, the intensification of nature-based recreational activities may lead to increased

environmental pressures in cases of unplanned use. Eagles, McCool, and Haynes (2002) emphasise that recreational use in natural and semi-natural areas should be planned in accordance with principles of area management and carrying capacity. This approach aims to ensure the long-term sustainability of recreational potential. Buckley (2009), within the context of nature-based recreation and ecotourism, states that the recreational experience cannot be considered independently of its environmental context. Interaction with the natural environment constitutes one of the fundamental elements determining the quality of the recreational experience. Therefore, the assessment of recreational potential should be addressed not only in terms of activity diversity, but also together with the dimensions of experience quality and environmental sensitivity.

Within this framework, Düzce's recreational potential is evaluated on the basis of the diversity of the province's natural recreational resources, the suitability of these resources for different types of recreation, and the possibilities for sustainable use. In the following subheadings, Düzce's natural recreational resources are examined in detail under the categories of plateaus and mountainous areas, waterfalls and water resources, coastal and wetland areas, and nature-based recreational routes.

12.3.1. Düzce's Natural Recreational Resources

Natural recreational resources refer to the physical and ecological elements that support nature-based recreational activities in a destination. These resources are evaluated in terms of the suitability of environmental components-such as topography, hydrological characteristics, vegetation cover, and climatic conditions-for recreational use. In the literature on recreation geography and environmental planning, it is emphasised that the recreational value of natural areas is determined not only by their physical attributes, but also by the diversity of experiences they offer and their spatial integrity (Newsome, Moore, & Dowling, 2013).

n the assessment of natural recreational resources, the compatibility of recreational use with environmental sustainability is considered as important as the suitability of areas for recreational activities. The unplanned intensification of nature-based recreational activities may lead to problems such as habitat degradation, damage to landscape integrity, and negative impacts on user experience. Therefore, the recreational potential of natural areas should be evaluated by jointly considering land-use capacity and environmental sensitivities (Pickering & Hill, 2007). In addition, the experiences offered by natural recreational areas are not limited to recreation based solely on physical activity; they also provide multidimensional benefits such as interaction with nature, landscape perception, relaxation, and mental renewal. The nature-based recreation literature highlights the positive

effects of such areas on individual well-being and the overall recreational experience (Bell et al., 2014).

Düzce Province is located in the Western Black Sea sub-region of the Black Sea Region (Ünver, 2024). Across the province, mountainous areas with pronounced elevation differences, river valleys and basin systems, and extensive forest ecosystems are particularly notable (Aksoy et al., 2018; Aksoy et al., 2006). This natural structure indicates that the province possesses significant potential in terms of plant diversity and ecosystem richness. Spatial analyses conducted at the basin scale reveal clusters of natural and cultural resources with a high concentration of ecotourism potential in the Uğursuyu and Aksu basins of Düzce. GIS-based assessments further demonstrate the formation of linear ecotourism corridors in these areas, indicating a high potential for nature-based recreational activities (Gültekin & Uzun, 2012).

Within this framework, Düzce's natural recreational resources are evaluated under the headings of plateaus and mountainous areas, waterfalls and water resources, coastal and wetland areas, and nature-based recreational routes. In the following subheadings, the recreational use potential of each type of natural resource and the prominent activity types associated with them are examined in detail.

12.3.1.1. Plateaus and Mountainous Areas

Plateaus and mountainous areas are among the spatial contexts in which nature-based recreation is most intensively experienced, offering favourable conditions particularly for activities such as hiking, camping, sightseeing, nature observation, and adventure-based pursuits. The recreational value of mountainous areas is shaped by a combination of factors including topographical diversity, climatic coolness, visual landscape quality, and the continuity of natural vegetation (Price, 2013). In the international literature, the recreational use of plateaus and mountainous areas is associated not only with opportunities for physical activity, but also with the distinctive experiential environments they provide and their perceived level of naturalness. Beedie and Hudson (2003) demonstrate that recreational activities carried out in mountainous areas increase the intensity of users' experiences and that these areas offer powerful settings for "experience-based recreation." In this context, plateaus are regarded as spaces that support both the physical and mental dimensions of the recreational experience.

Along the Elmacık Mountains extending from east to west across Düzce Province, there are numerous plateaus with the capacity to form an integrated "plateau corridor" in terms of highland tourism. These plateaus offer environments suitable for nature-based tourism activities with respect to landform characteristics, climatic

conditions, water resources, and vegetation cover. Within this plateau belt stretching from Kardüz Plateau to Abant National Park, prominent plateaus include Kardüz, Kızık, Pürenli, Balıklı, Hira, Sinekli, Derebalık, Torkul, Odayeri, Sırık, Keklik, Çiçekli, Şehirli, Kocayayla, Topuk, İkizler, Eğrelti, Yeniyurt, and Sakarca. The ease of access between the plateaus and their interconnection over short distances enhance the region's potential for use in nature walking, camping, photo safaris, mountain biking, and other ecotourism activities (Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2025).

The recreational use of mountainous and plateau areas also carries the potential to exert pressure on sensitive ecosystems. Therefore, in planning recreational activities in these areas, principles such as area capacity, user density, and environmental sensitivity gain particular importance. Studies on the management of recreation and tourism activities in mountainous areas emphasise that the adoption of sustainable use principles is essential both for the conservation of the natural environment and for ensuring the continuity of the recreational experience (Nepal & Chipeniuk, 2005). Within this framework, when addressed through appropriate planning and management approaches, the plateaus and mountainous areas of Düzce are regarded as fundamental natural resources that strengthen and diversify the province's nature-based recreational potential.

12.3.1.2. Waterfalls and Water Resources

Among Düzce's natural recreational resources, waterfalls and water-based micro-landscapes stand out due to their visual attractiveness, their ability to enhance sensory experience through elements such as sound, coolness, and movement, and their suitability for short-term nature-based escapes. The waterfall systems located within the provincial boundaries have largely been opened to recreational use under protected area designations-such as natural monuments and nature parks-often in conjunction with forest ecosystems. Within this framework, they have become significant attraction components supporting activities such as walking, sightseeing, photography, picnicking, camping, and nature education (Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2025).

One of the most well-known examples of water-based recreational attractions in Düzce is the Samandere Waterfall Natural Monument. The site's advantageous proximity to the city centre of Düzce and to major transportation routes constitutes a factor that increases the tendency toward day-use visitation. The hydrological continuity of Samandere can be traced through the streams surrounding the waterfall, which merge with the Uğursuyu Stream, flow into Lake Efteni, and ultimately reach the Black Sea via the Büyük Melen system. This relationship

indicates that waterfall landscapes should not be regarded merely as "point-based" attractions, but rather as components of a broader basin-scale integrity (Budak, 2018). Furthermore, the natural monument status of Samandere and the updating of its boundary definitions demonstrate that area management is addressed within an administrative framework that prioritises the balance between conservation and use (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2025).

The second major focal point within the province's water-based recreational network is the Güzeldere Waterfall Nature Park. Located within the boundaries of Gölyaka district, Güzeldere is considered one of the institutionalised examples of water-based recreation in Düzce, based on its area size (22.76 ha), elevation (630 m), and its status transition from a picnic area (28 December 1993) to a nature park (11 July 2011) (Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2025; Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2025). Such areas create a "cool forest corridor" effect within the visitor experience, enhancing thermal comfort during the summer season, while also providing a suitable setting for short, landscape-oriented walks and photography routes.

Aydınpınar Waterfalls Nature Park draws particular attention due to its proximity to the city centre of Düzce (approximately 10 km) and its capacity to generate a "multi-focal" landscape experience through sequential waterfall clusters consisting of five cascades flowing consecutively (Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2025). Information provided by local authorities indicates that the area is associated with activities such as trekking, photo safaris, and camping, and that recreational use has diversified through route and trail variety (Düzce Municipality, 2025). Within this framework, Aydınpınar is positioned not merely as a site for waterfall viewing, but as a natural recreational product integrated with route-based experience, physical activity, and short-term nature education components.

Nevertheless, carrying capacity and environmental sensitivity constitute fundamental management variables in the recreational use of water-based natural areas. Unplanned or intensive visitor pressure around waterfall environments may result in outcomes such as solid waste accumulation, pressure on flora and fauna, trail erosion, and indirect negative impacts on water quality. The relevant literature emphasises, through case-based evidence, that admitting visitors without calculating carrying capacity around recreational water resources can increase anthropogenic pressures, particularly intensifying problems related to waste and visitor density (Özgeriş & Karahan, 2021). In the context of Düzce, this situation renders visitor guidance measures (route and trail organisation), waste management, access restrictions in sensitive zones, seasonal use regulations, and

monitoring and control practices indispensable components of recreation planning in protected attractions such as Samandere, Güzeldere, and Aydınpınar. Accordingly, while waterfalls and water resources are evaluated as natural recreational focal points that generate high attractiveness in Düzce, they should also be regarded as sensitive ecosystem components requiring specific managerial capacity to ensure sustainable use.

12.3.1.3. Coastal and Wetland Areas

Among Düzce's natural recreational resources, coastal and wetland areas occupy a significant position in terms of both biodiversity and recreational attractiveness. Although the Black Sea coastline does not lie directly within the provincial boundaries, the coastal belt extending to the Black Sea through the district of Akçakoca can be considered a transitional zone between marine–terrestrial ecosystems and inland wetlands. This zone contains recreational potential associated with both coastal tourism activities (such as beach use, wave observation, and fishing) and large-scale water cycle processes (Siyavuş, 2021).

The most prominent wetland focal point for Düzce in terms of birdwatching, nature walks, and landscape-oriented recreation is the Efteni Lake Wetland. Efteni Lake is located within the boundaries of Gölyaka district and forms part of an ecosystem network where streams descending from the foothills of the Elmacık Mountains converge. This characteristic enables the coexistence of diverse habitat types around the lake, including reed beds, marshlands, and extensive open water surfaces. Such heterogeneity is particularly important as a resting and feeding area for migratory waterbirds. The wetland character of Efteni Lake was further reinforced in 1992, when it was designated as a protected wetland/wildlife development area by the Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs (now the General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks under the Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry). This status allows for the protection of habitats for birds and other aquatic species, the safeguarding of migration routes, and the continuation of recreational observation activities within an official regulatory framework (Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2025; Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2025; Türkiye Culture Portal, 2025).

Due to its location along major migratory flyways, the surroundings of Efteni Lake host high bird diversity, particularly during spring and autumn migration periods. This situation provides a strong foundation for recreational activities such as birdwatching, nature photography, and environmental education. In addition, observation platforms constructed along reed beds and lake shores offer visitors

both low physical-effort accessibility and observation opportunities integrated with the landscape (Sinav, 2023).

The ecological connection between coastal areas and wetlands becomes evident through hydrological processes: water levels in Efteni Lake and the spatial extent of reed beds are associated with precipitation regimes and flow systems linked to the Küçük Melen–Büyük Melen basin network. Therefore, wetland management should be planned with regard to both the sustainable use of the lake ecosystem and the supervision of water cycle processes interacting with coastal dynamics (Şener & Kırlangıç, 2014). Within this scope, coastal and wetland areas in Düzce function as centres of attraction for biodiversity-oriented nature experiences, environmental education, and monitoring activities, as well as for low-intensity, nature-compatible recreational practices.

12.3.1.4. Nature-Based Recreational Routes

Nature-based recreational routes are defined in the literature on outdoor recreation and ecotourism as walking, trekking, and nature observation trails planned within natural landscape components in accordance with principles of environmental sensitivity and sustainable use. These routes are regarded as spatial tools that ensure a balance between recreational use and the conservation of the natural environment; accordingly, planning processes simultaneously consider criteria such as topography, vegetation cover, water resources, accessibility, and carrying capacity (Kiper & Arslan, 2007).

Düzce Province offers significant potential for the development of nature-based recreational routes due to its extensive forest cover, river basins, and mountainous topography. In particular, the Uğursuyu and Aksu basins possess landscape characteristics that are highly suitable for walking and nature-based recreational activities.

Nature-based recreational routes are regarded not only as spaces for physical activity but also as environments that encompass experiential dimensions such as nature education, the development of landscape perception, and the observation of flora and fauna. The ecotourism literature demonstrates that when such routes are developed through participatory planning approaches and in interaction with local communities, visitors' environmental awareness increases, while socio-economic contributions can also be generated in rural areas (Weaver, 2008; Honey, 2008; Fennell, 2022).

Nevertheless, academic studies emphasise that the unplanned or intensive use of nature-based recreational routes may lead to environmental problems such as

vegetation degradation, soil compaction, and pressure on wildlife. For this reason, it is stated that criteria including carrying capacity, seasonality, ecological sensitivity, and visitor profiles should be taken into account in the designation of such routes (Kiper & Arslan, 2007). Within this framework, nature-based recreational routes in Düzce can be evaluated as important recreational components that enable the experience of the province's natural resources. Academic findings indicate that, when addressed through scientific planning approaches, these routes can make a strong contribution to the goals of sustainable recreation and ecotourism.

An examination of the distribution of nature-based recreational areas in Düzce reveals that recreational activities are predominantly concentrated in forested areas, plateau connections, and around water resources. Field-based mapping studies conducted across the province indicate that nature walking trails are particularly prominent in the districts of Akçakoca, Gölyaka, Yığılca, and Kaynaşlı, with a significant proportion of these trails designed as short- and medium-distance routes centred on waterfalls, ponds, and plateaus. In addition, it has been identified that off-road and mountain biking routes in and around the city centre of Düzce are positioned to establish connections between rural settlements and forest roads, while areas surrounding Efteni Lake, Hasanlar Dam, and Torkul Pond exhibit a concentration of activities such as sport fishing, birdwatching, and water-based recreation. In terms of aerial sports, the vicinity of Bakacak Hill is among the suitable areas for paragliding and hang-gliding activities, whereas the Melen River corridor holds potential for river-based sports such as rafting and canoeing. These findings indicate that nature-based recreational routes in Düzce are largely oriented toward day-use activities; however, with appropriate spatial planning and route integration, they possess the capacity to be transformed into a comprehensive and interconnected recreational network (Tezcan Kardaş, 2015).

12.3.2. Düzce's Cultural and Historical Recreation Areas

Cultural and historical recreation areas are defined as spaces in which individuals spend their leisure time through interaction with cultural heritage, historical environments, and everyday life practices. In the recreation literature, these areas are regarded as multi-layered spatial resources that encompass not only functions of rest and enjoyment, but also dimensions of identity, sense of belonging, learning, and experience. Particularly at the urban scale, cultural recreation tends to concentrate in areas where historical environments intersect with contemporary life (Özgüç, 2017; Urry & Larsen, 2011).

In addition to its natural recreational resources, Düzce Province also attracts attention at the regional level in terms of cultural and historical recreation areas.

Within this context, coastal settlements-most notably the district of Akçakoca-stand out through recreational experiences shaped by traditional residential architecture, fishing culture, and everyday life practices.

12.3.2.1. Historic Houses of Akçakoca

In the cultural recreation literature, historic residential areas are regarded not merely as elements aimed at preserving architectural heritage, but also as recreational spaces in which individuals can engage with the historical environment through slow-paced movement, observation, and spatial experience. Through building forms and street patterns that bear traces of everyday life, such areas provide visitors with a holistic environmental perception of the past. The cultural landscape approach conceptualises traditional residential fabrics not only as physical structures, but as spatial components associated with collective memory and the spirit of place (genius loci) (Rifaioğlu & Güçhan, 2013). The historic residential areas of Akçakoca reflect local settlement patterns shaped within the historical development of Black Sea coastal settlements. These houses offer valuable examples for understanding the spatial organisation of everyday life in coastal towns, particularly in terms of street–building relationships, human-scale design, and settlement integrity. In this context, the historic residential fabric of Akçakoca is evaluated not through a detailed technical description of a specific architectural typology, but as a spatial manifestation of local ways of life. From the perspective of cultural recreation, such residential areas stand out as spaces where visitors do not assume the role of active consumers; instead, they interact with the environment through low-intensity recreational practices such as strolling, pausing, observing, and interpreting. Walks conducted along historic streets provide individuals with opportunities for physical movement while also enabling engagement with the visual and symbolic layers offered by the historical environment. In this respect, historic residential fabrics constitute important spatial resources that support the experiential dimension of cultural recreation.

The conservation literature emphasises that, in the process of subjecting traditional residential areas to recreational use, pressure arising from excessive intensity should be avoided, spatial authenticity must be preserved, and traces of everyday life should not be erased. Otherwise, such areas are at risk of transforming into representational and superficial spaces rather than producing cultural value (Rifaioğlu & Güçhan, 2013). For this reason, it is important that the historic residential areas of Akçakoca be addressed within the framework of a planned and low-intensity approach to cultural recreation. Within this context, the Historic Houses of Akçakoca may be evaluated as spaces that support cultural identity at the urban scale, while shaping the recreational experience through calmness,

observation, and spatial awareness. The recreational value of the area is associated not with quantitative visitor capacity, but with the quality of the historical environment experience it offers.

12.3.2.2. Urban Walking Routes

Urban walking routes are regarded in the cultural recreation literature as accessible and low-cost recreational spaces that connect historical and public areas. These routes enable individuals to establish direct contact with the urban environment, integrating physical activity with processes of cultural observation and learning (Gehl, 2010). In the context of Düzce city centre and the settlement of Akçakoca, pedestrian continuity established among the coastal strip, traditional residential areas, public squares, and coastal structures provides a suitable basis for urban cultural walking. Beyond being planned recreational routes, such walks can be considered practices that enable everyday interaction between residents and visitors and the cultural environment.

12.3.2.3. Fishing Culture and Gastronomic Recreation

Fishing is not merely an economic activity; it is also a cultural practice integrated with local cuisine, consumption habits, and forms of social interaction. The literature on gastronomy and recreation demonstrates that such local production-consumption relationships can be evaluated within the scope of gastronomic recreation (Bessière, 2013). Akçakoca district, located along Düzce's Black Sea coastline, has historically developed a coastal culture rooted in fishing. In Akçakoca, fishing harbours, coastal restaurants, and local fish-based culinary practices offer visitors recreational experiences centred on tasting, observing, learning, and socialising.

These experiences differ from conventional tourist food and beverage activities in that they involve direct contact with local culture and represent a form of cultural recreation integrated with everyday life. Within this framework, Düzce's cultural and historical recreation areas present a multidimensional recreational potential shaped by architectural heritage, urban walking practices, and fishing- and gastronomy-based experiences. Academic approaches indicate that, when such areas are conserved and managed through low-intensity use principles, they can contribute to both cultural sustainability and the diversification of local recreational offerings.

12.3.3. Rural and Ecotourism Based Recreational Opportunities in Düzce

Rural-and ecotourism-based recreation encompasses recreational activities carried out in harmony with the natural environment and grounded in direct interaction

with local production practices and everyday life culture. In the ecotourism literature, such recreational opportunities are addressed within the framework of environmental sustainability, local participation, and cultural continuity, emphasising that rural areas should be evaluated not only through their natural resources but also as living cultural landscapes (Lane, 2009; Weaver, 2008). Empirical studies conducted specifically in Düzce reveal that ecotourism activities can be regarded not merely as an alternative form of tourism for populations living in forest villages, but also as a tool for socio-economic transformation. The participation of forest villagers in activities such as guiding, food and beverage services, and local product production increases income diversification and may reduce tendencies toward rural outmigration (Gültekin & Gültekin, 2017).

Düzce Province possesses significant potential for ecotourism-based recreation due to its forest resources, diversity of agricultural production, and relatively well-preserved rural settlement structure. Across the province, rural recreation is shaped not only by nature-based activities but also by engagement with agricultural production processes, village life, and local culture.

12.3.3.1. Beekeeping Culture in Yığılca

The ecotourism literature demonstrates that local production activities provide visitors with learning-, observation-, and experience-based recreational opportunities (Bessière, 2013). Yığılca district is one of the prominent areas in which rural- and ecotourism-based recreational opportunities stand out due to its beekeeping culture, which has gained recognition across Türkiye. In Yığılca, beekeeping is not merely an economic activity; rather, it constitutes a rural life practice shaped by knowledge transmission, seasonal rhythms, and a continuous relationship with nature.

Observing beekeeping activities, introducing honey production processes, and experiencing local products create recreational experiences that allow visitors to establish direct contact with rural life. These experiences align with an ecotourism approach that prioritises participation and awareness-raising rather than passive consumption.

12.3.3.2. Hazelnut Orchards and Rural Walking Routes

Agricultural landscapes are addressed in the rural tourism and recreation literature not merely as areas of production, but as spaces where individuals can engage with the rhythms of everyday life and develop calm, low-intensity interactions with nature. Especially in rural areas where agricultural activities are ongoing, walking practices differ from planned tourist routes by enabling visitors to establish a

slower, awareness-based, and more subjective relationship with their surroundings (Sharpley & Jepson, 2011).

In Türkiye, hazelnut cultivation constitutes a widespread production practice across a broad rural geography, particularly within the Black Sea Region (Ünver, 2024). When considered together with seasonal cycles, maintenance processes, and harvest periods, hazelnut orchards form a distinctive rural landscape that makes the everyday flow of agricultural production visible. This landscape represents not only an economic production area, but also an environmental context that reflects the relationship between labour, time, and nature in rural life (İslam, 2018).

Field roads, intra-village connection routes, and footpaths located among hazelnut orchards are not formal or signposted recreational routes; rather, they are transitional spaces that emerge within the natural spatial organisation of rural life. Walks undertaken along these paths enable visitors to establish direct contact with agricultural production areas and to experience the rural environment through everyday patterns of use. Sharpley and Jepson (2011) emphasise that such rural walking experiences represent not only physical activity but also a subjective process that fosters slowing down, temporary detachment from daily routines, and heightened environmental awareness.

Given the widespread nature of hazelnut cultivation in rural Düzce, these walking paths embedded within hazelnut orchards provide a favourable environmental setting for low-intensity recreational practices that can be undertaken without the need for extensive infrastructure or specialised arrangements (Ünver, 2024). The recreational value of these walks is associated not with route length or technical difficulty, but with the direct and simple experience established within the agricultural landscape. In this context, hazelnut orchards and rural walking paths represent a form of rural- and ecotourism-based recreation in Düzce in which interaction with nature occurs through productive landscapes, reflecting a recreational approach centred on calmness, awareness, and engagement with everyday life.

Düzce Province hosts numerous nature walking routes across its forest trails, stream corridors, and plateau areas. Walking routes in Düzce are distributed across eight sections: Akçakoca, Cumayeri, Çilimli, Gümüşova, Gölyaka, Kaynaşlı, Yığılca, and the city centre. These routes allow for the combined experience of natural features such as waterfalls, caves, plateaus, and lakes, alongside protected areas and elements of local life, thereby supporting a variety of recreational activities. Across the province, a total of 23 walking routes have been identified, with an overall length of approximately 330 km (Düzce Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2025). Table 1 presents a list of nature walking routes, one of the recreational activities available in Düzce Province.

Table 1. Nature Walking Routes in Düzce Province

No	Name of the Route	Starting Point	Features Observed Along the Route
1	Akçakoca-Aktaş Waterfall	10 km-The route starts from the ring road of Akçakoca district, via the Göktepe and Aktaş village junction.	Village settlements, hazelnut orchards, forests, chestnut trees, monumental trees, Ahmet Dede Shrine and Mosque, Değirmen Stream, Cumayanı picnic area, ruins of an old bathhouse.
2	Altınçay-Çayağzı Village	11 km-Access is provided from the Düzce-Akçakoca road via the Tepe village junction, reaching Altınçay village where the walk begins.	Orhangazi Friday Mosque (Çantı Mosque), Kışla Stream, examples of vernacular architecture, coastal areas, food and beverage facilities, accommodation, camping areas, forests, recreational angling.
3	Dokuzdeğirmen-Melenağzı Village	24 km-The route begins after reaching Dokuzdeğirmen village via the Cumayeri junction on the Düzce-İstanbul road.	Rafting areas, restaurants, stone-decorated mosque and water well, orienteering areas, monumental trees, watermill, Harmankaya Waterfall, accommodation facilities, coastal areas, vernacular architecture.
4	Çilimli Kaplandede-Thermal Spring	35 km-Access is provided via the Çilimli junction on the Düzce–İstanbul road	Shrine, picnic area, beech forests, oak groves, chestnut trees.
5	Yeşilyayla Village-Kuyudüzü Pond	14 km-The route starts after reaching Yeşilyayla village via the Beylice village junction at the 10th km of the Gümüşova-Hendek road.	Beech, hornbeam, and oak forests, ponds observed along the route.
6	Efteni Lake-Güzeldere Waterfall	6 km-Access is possible via the Düzce-Aydınpınar-Gölormanı-Efteni route or via the Gölyaka exit from the TEM highway, reaching Efteni Lake.	Beech forests, restaurants, scenic viewpoints, birdwatching areas, fountains, camping areas, accommodation (bungalows), endemic plant species, recreational angling, wetlands, lakes, waterfalls, watermills.
7	Güzeldere Waterfall-Balıklı Plateau	23 km-The route starts after reaching Güzeldere via Efteni Lake, accessible from the Gölyaka exit of the TEM highway.	Waterfalls, stream landscapes, forest scenery, camping areas, wildlife observation opportunities.
8	Aksu Stream-Kardüz Plateau	24 km-The route begins after reaching the bridge over Aksu Stream via Düzce or the Gölyaka exit of the TEM highway.	Fountains, plateaus, camping areas, endemic plant species, wildlife.

9	Kaynaşlı-Topuk Plateau	18 km- Access is provided via the Bakacak area on the D-100 road from Düzce, passing Dipsizgöl and Bıçkıyanı villages.	Lakes, plateaus, camping areas, accommodation facilities, recreational angling, restaurants, wildlife, sports facilities.
10	Kaynaşlı-Sazköy – Tavak-Çakırsayvan-Samandere Waterfall	18 km-The route starts after reaching Kaynaşlı district from Düzce.	Waterfalls, camping areas, accommodation, restaurants, cultural house guesthouses, handicrafts and local products.
11	Muncurlu-Kurugöl-Yörükler-Sarıçökek Village	11 km-Access is provided via the Yeşilçam village junction at Muncurlu on the Düzce-Kaynaşlı D-100 road.	Lakes, recreational angling, fungus-covered beech trees, historic mosque, off-road routes, camping areas.
12	Konuralp (Ancient Theatre) - Kemerkasım Village (Aqueducts)	5,4 km-The route starts next to the ancient theatre after reaching Konuralp from Düzce.	Museum, ancient theatre, remains of aqueducts.
13	Aydınpınar Village-Waterfalls	4 km-The route begins after reaching Aydınpınar village from Düzce or Gölyaka.	Paintball facilities, accommodation (bungalows), waterfalls, camping areas, restaurants.
14	Odayeri - Derebalık Plateau	10 km-Access is provided via Odayeri Plateau.	Forests, plateaus, camping areas, endemic plant species, wildlife.
15	Odayeri-Torkul Pond and Plateau	9 km-Access is provided by reaching Odayeri Plateau via the Uğur village junction after arriving in Beyköy from Düzce.	Walking route passing through beech, hornbeam, chestnut, and fir forests; potential encounters with region-specific wildlife species.
16	Beyköy-Samandere Waterfall	14 km-The route starts after reaching Beyköy from Düzce.	Restaurants, camping areas, watermill, accommodation facilities, waterfalls.
17	Derdin Village-Çiçekli-Şehirli Plateaus	15 km-Access is provided by reaching Derdin village via Beyköy from Düzce.	Camping areas, accommodation facilities, plateaus, restaurants.
18	Samandere Waterfall - Sinekli Plateau-Abant	14 km-The route starts after reaching Samandere village via Beyköy from Düzce.	Plateaus, camping areas, accommodation facilities, waterfalls, watermills.
19	Hasanlar Village-Hasanlar Dam	4 km-The route begins in front of Orhangazi Mosque in Hasanlar village on the Düzce-Yığılca road.	Rock climbing areas, dam reservoir, water sports, flatwater canoeing, recreational angling.

20	Yığılca-Sarıkaya Cave	12 km-The route starts by heading toward Gökçeağaç village after reaching Yığılca from Düzce.	Cave formations, camping areas.
21	Yığılca-Karakaş-Mengen-Yaylatepe-Yedigöller	35 km-The route begins directly from Yığılca district via Düzce.	Waterfalls, camping areas, accommodation, restaurants, lakes, plateaus, forests, vernacular architecture.
22	Yığılca-Hebeler – Yağcılar-Saklıkent Waterfall	7 km-Access is provided via the Hebeler village junction on the Düzce-Yığılca-Yedigöller road.	Waterfalls, camping areas, accommodation, restaurants, thyme vegetation, stream corridors.

Source: Budak (2018)

According to an official 2018 source, Düzce Province has 22 walking routes. It is observed that local administrations provide detailed information on issues such as what participants may encounter along these routes, walking distances, and places of interest located near the walking areas.

12.3.3.3. Village Life and Cultural Interaction

Village life is addressed in the rural and ecotourism-based recreation literature not merely as a spatial settlement form, but as a lived cultural environment shaped by everyday practices, social relations, and production rhythms. Within this context, rural recreation acquires an experiential character through visitors' engagement with village life, encompassing processes of direct observation, slowing down, and meaning-making (Sharpley & Jepson, 2011). Sharpley and Jepson (2011) conceptualise the rural tourism experience as a temporary withdrawal from everyday urban life, during which visitors inhabit a calmer and more rhythmic environment; they emphasise that this process fosters awareness, inner tranquillity, and a subjective bond with place. Recreational experiences grounded in village life thus differ from forms of tourism oriented toward rapid consumption. Rather than positioning visitors as passive spectators, such experiences transform them into active subjects who establish relationships with their surroundings. The rural tourism literature demonstrates that cultural interaction with village life often occurs through practices that appear ordinary and everyday. Observing agricultural activities, experiencing the spatial organisation of village environments, and witnessing local social relations constitute core components of the recreational experience. These interactions tend to emerge organically within the natural flow of village life rather than through planned activities, thereby strengthening perceptions of authenticity (Lane, 2009). In rural Düzce, village life is shaped through everyday practices intertwined with the natural environment; agricultural production, seasonality, and local social relations form the fundamental character

of the rural landscape. Within this framework, village settlements may be evaluated as areas that, while not requiring intensive infrastructure investments, offer visitors opportunities for calmness, observation, and cultural engagement in the context of rural and ecotourism-based recreation. The recreational value here derives not from a specific activity, but from the everyday experiences inherent in village life itself. Lane (2009) emphasises that, for the sustainability of rural tourism, cultural interaction with local communities should remain limited, respectful, and structured in ways that do not transform local life. Otherwise, village life risks becoming a representational environment reshaped according to visitor expectations. For this reason, recreation-based interactions grounded in village life should be approached within a low-intensity and observation-oriented framework. In this respect, village life and cultural interaction represent a form of recreation within Düzce's rural and ecotourism-based opportunities that offers direct experiential engagement for visitors while prioritising the continuity of local life. The recreational experience is shaped not by quantitative visitor flows, but by the simplicity, slowness, and everyday cultural contact inherent in village life.

12.4. RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED IN DÜZCE

Recreational activities conducted within a destination are shaped by the use of natural and cultural resources, spatial accessibility, seasonality, and organisational capacity. The recreation literature emphasises that nature-based and event-oriented activities, in particular, integrate physical activity with social interaction and experiential dimensions (Manning, 2011; Getz, 2010). Within this framework, recreational activities carried out in Düzce can be classified under three main categories: sport-based outdoor activities, events and festivals, and promotion- and communication-oriented practices.

12.4.1. Sport-Based Recreational Activities

Sport-based recreation encompasses activities through which individuals engage with nature via physical activity and derive benefits related to health, well-being, and experiential gain. The outdoor recreation literature indicates that activities such as walking, cycling, and water sports enhance recreational satisfaction, particularly when conducted in natural environments (Manning, 2011).

In the context of Düzce, sport-based recreational activities are closely associated with the province's river systems, forested areas, and rural road networks. These activities are predominantly characterised by day-use and seasonal patterns and are implemented through both individual participation and organised recreational initiatives.

12.4.1.1. Off-Road and Nature Sports Activities

Adventure and nature sports are defined in the recreation literature through components such as perceived risk, intensity of experience, and direct interaction with nature (Buckley, 2011). Within this context, off-road activities are classified as motorised nature sports and are typically organised in rural and forested environments.

In Düzce, off-road and similar nature sports activities are conducted during specific periods and are predominantly organised through club- or community-based initiatives. The literature emphasises that, despite their recreational value, such activities require controlled planning due to environmental sensitivities (Buckley, 2011). Therefore, these activities should be evaluated within the framework of sustainability principles.

12.4.1.2. Düzce Bicycle Festival

Bicycle-based events are positioned at the intersection of sport recreation and event recreation, integrating physical activity with social participation and spatial experience (Ritchie, 1984). Bicycle events organised through festivals provide participants with opportunities to experience urban and natural environments through alternative modes of mobility.

Within this context, the Düzce Bicycle Festival can be evaluated as an event that promotes bicycle use and raises recreational awareness. The recreational significance of the festival derives from its positioning of cycling not merely as a sport, but as a means of leisure participation and interaction with the environment.

12.4.2. Recreation through Events and Festivals

Events and festivals are defined in the recreation literature as temporary yet intensive arenas of social interaction. Getz (2010) conceptualises the recreational function of festivals in terms of entertainment, socialisation, and engagement with local culture. In this context, the Akçakoca Gastronomy Festival serves as an example of recreational experiences shaped through local culinary culture. Gastronomy-based events create recreational settings centred on tasting, observation, and social sharing for participants (Bessière, 2013).

Similarly, Culture and Hazelnut Festivals can be evaluated as events in which agricultural production and local culture are jointly presented. Such festivals enhance recreational diversity by enabling agricultural products to be experienced within a cultural framework, thereby integrating production, heritage, and leisure practices (Getz, 2010).

12.4.3. Recreation-Oriented Promotional Materials

Promotional materials play a significant role in enhancing the visibility of recreational activities within destinations. The tourism and recreation literature indicates that brochures, posters, and visual materials shape potential visitors' perceptions of recreational opportunities (Pike & Page, 2014). In Düzce, recreation-oriented promotional materials primarily serve an informative function by presenting natural areas, events, and sport-based activities.

From an academic perspective, however, such materials are evaluated as descriptive and guiding tools rather than scientific sources; accordingly, they are considered supportive references rather than providers of empirical data.

12.4.4. Promotion of Recreational Activities through Digital Platforms

In Düzce, the promotion of recreational activities through digital platforms provides rapid and easily accessible information, particularly for individuals planning short-term visits. However, the literature emphasises that digital promotional content often presents a selective narrative and, therefore, should be approached with a critical perspective in academic analyses. Digital platforms have increasingly assumed a central role in the promotion of recreational activities. Social media channels and official websites, in particular, have emerged as key spaces in which recreational experiences are presented through visual and narrative-based formats (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

12.5. PROBLEMS AND SOLUTION PROPOSALS IN DÜZCE'S RECREATION TOURISM

The sustainable development of recreation tourism depends on the coordinated functioning of multiple components, including infrastructure adequacy, product and route design, and governance among stakeholders. The literature emphasises that the richness of natural and cultural resources alone is not sufficient; when these resources are not supported by effective planning, management, and positioning processes, their recreational value remains limited (Manning, 2011; Pike & Page, 2014). Within the context of Düzce, the main challenges encountered and the corresponding areas for improvement are discussed below.

12.5.1. Infrastructure and Facility Deficiencies

In open-air and nature-based recreational areas, the adequacy of infrastructure and facilities is of critical importance in terms of accessibility, safety, wayfinding, and the continuity of basic services. The outdoor recreation literature demonstrates that infrastructural deficiencies negatively affect visitor experience and may exert pressure on the carrying capacity of recreational areas. In Düzce, the

predominantly day-use and seasonal character of many recreational sites may lead to limited and fragmented infrastructure investments. This situation can manifest in the form of insufficient signage and wayfinding, discontinuities in essential services such as rest, hygiene, and safety, and accessibility problems in certain areas.

The literature suggests that adopting a "minimal yet functional" infrastructure approach in such areas both preserves environmental sensitivities and enhances the quality of the recreational experience (Manning, 2011).

Proposed Solutions:

- Establishing minimum infrastructure standards for recreational areas, including access, wayfinding, and safety provisions;
- Implementing flexible and modular facility solutions that take seasonality into account;
- Planning infrastructure investments in alignment with the carrying capacity of the area and its ecological sensitivities.

12.5.2. Branding and Positioning of Recreational Routes/Products

In recreation tourism, branding is not limited solely to promotional activities; rather, it requires a clear definition of which experiences the destination offers, to which target audiences, and through what value propositions. The destination marketing literature indicates that ambiguous or fragmented positioning reduces the perceptibility and preference of recreational products.

In the case of Düzce, while the diversity of recreational products-such as nature-based sports, cultural events, and rural experiences-constitutes a significant advantage, the inability to present this diversity within a coherent and integrated narrative may hinder the branding process. The approach recommended in the literature suggests that, instead of grouping all destination products under a single overarching claim, destinations should be positioned through complementary clusters of sub-experiences that reinforce one another (Pike & Page, 2014).

Proposed Solutions:

- Structuring Düzce's recreational products under thematic clusters (e.g. natüre-sports, culture-gastronomy, rural experiences);
- Defining a clear experience promise and target user profile for each cluster;
- Adopting a selective and consistent positioning strategy in promotional language, rather than an approach that attempts to appeal to "everyone with everything."

12.5.3. Inter-Stakeholder Coordination and Collaboration

The planning and management of recreation tourism require the interaction of multiple stakeholders, including public institutions, local governments, non-governmental organisations, the private sector, and local communities. The tourism governance literature emphasises that, in cases where inter-stakeholder coordination is weak, planning processes tend to remain fragmented and inconsistencies emerge during implementation.

In the context of Düzce, the fact that recreational activities are carried out by different institutions and initiatives may result in duplicated efforts, inefficient use of resources, and communication gaps when collaboration mechanisms are not sufficiently institutionalised. The sustainable tourism literature highlights the importance of participatory and network-based governance models in addressing such challenges (Bramwell & Lane, 2011).

Proposed Solutions:

- Establishing multi-stakeholder coordination platforms dedicated to recreation tourism;
- Involving local actors in planning processes not only at the level of consultation and feedback, but also in decision-making stages;
- Collaborating with universities and research institutions to monitor and evaluate recreational practices.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

REVALORIZING INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE THROUGH RURAL TOURISM: THE CASE OF ADA KALEH AND COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES FROM TÜRKİYE

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores current trends in sustainable tourism development across three counties in southwestern Romania: Caraș-Severin, Mehedinți and Dolj. The analysis is based on key tourism indicators, including tourist reception structures, accommodation capacities, tourist arrivals, overnight stays and the net utilization rate of tourist accommodation capacity, covering the period 2019–2024. The data were sourced from the Romanian National Institute of Statistics. Beyond the quantitative analysis, the study brings into focus the cultural dimension of sustainable tourism through the case of Ada Kaleh Island - a lost intangible heritage site submerged during the construction of the Iron Gates hydroelectric project in the 1970s. Once a vibrant multicultural community, Ada Kaleh has become a symbol of cultural memory and historical displacement. The chapter argues that revitalizing this memory could offer a unique narrative for developing rural tourism in the region. It is situated within the broader thematic framework of the present volume, coordinated in collaboration with Düzce University (Faculty of Tourism), which examines sustainable rural tourism and intangible cultural

heritage valorization across different national and regional contexts. In this collaborative framework, the Romanian case study is explicitly articulated in dialogue with Turkish research perspectives, particularly through the comparative analysis of Halfeti (Şanlıurfa Province, Türkiye) - a settlement whose heritage landscape was similarly transformed by dam construction. This parallel allows for the identification of shared methodological and strategic principles applicable to submerged or displaced cultural heritage, while acknowledging the specific socio-historical and institutional contexts of each case. Proposed strategies include the creation of thematic cultural routes, local tourism branding inspired by Ada Kaleh's heritage and community-based rural initiatives. By integrating statistical analysis with cultural heritage valorization and a bilateral comparative perspective, the study proposes a multidimensional approach to sustainable tourism in less developed rural areas of Romania.

This chapter investigates the extent to which the intangible cultural heritage of an irreversibly lost site - such as Ada Kaleh Island - can serve as a viable resource for sustainable rural tourism development, while analyzing its potential through methodological and strategic insights derived from the comparable case of Halfeti (Türkiye).

13.1. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

13.1.1. The context of sustainable rural tourism in Romania

Sustainable tourism is defined according to the UN Tourism (2025) as "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, responding to the needs of visitors, industry, the environment and host communities". This definition emphasizes the need for balance between economic development and the conservation of natural and cultural resources (Hall, 2019; Saarinen, 2021).

Sustainable tourism has become a strategic priority in European and national policies, by integrating economic, social, cultural and environmental dimensions (ETC, 2022). In Romania, this direction is supported by the National Strategy for Tourism Development 2025–2035, which aims to transform the country into a high-quality tourist destination, based on the uniqueness of natural and cultural heritage.

In this context, rural tourism has gained increasing importance in the last two decades, being perceived not only as a form of economic valorization of isolated areas, but also as an instrument for community revitalization, for the preservation of intangible heritage and for the promotion of responsible and authentic tourism.

The current development of rural tourism in Romania is based on three pillars:

- Economic sustainability - by diversifying local economic activities (agrotourism, traditional gastronomy, accommodation in rural households, local gastronomic points),
- Social sustainability - by involving local communities (empowerment), supporting artisans and preserving traditions,
- Environmental sustainability - by protecting cultural landscapes and promoting "slow" tourism (ecotourism, hiking, cycling).

Lately, Romania has started to receive international recognition for its initiatives in rural tourism:

- Best Tourism Villages: the villages of Rășinari, Ciocănești, Breb and Polovragi are globally recognized for the sustainable integration of heritage in tourism (MEDAT, 2025),
- Via Transilvanica: a route of over 1,400 km that has become a model of sustainable rural tourism, stimulating micro-economies and promoting local cultural identity (Via Transilvanica, 2025),
- Ecotourism in protected areas: destinations such as the Danube Delta or the National Parks of the Carpathians adopt ecotourism standards, limiting the negative impact of mass tourism.

A brief analysis of rural tourism highlights the following aspects:

- Strengths: active intangible cultural heritage (crafts, gastronomy, traditions); natural diversity and attractive landscapes; increased interest in authentic tourist experiences.
- Challenges: poor road infrastructure in remote areas, migration of young people from rural areas; lack of digitalization in promoting local tourism.
- Opportunities: creation and strengthening of Destination Management Organisations (DMOs); digitization of heritage (e.g. storytelling applications, virtual tours); access to European funds and the development of cross-border cooperation.

Sustainable rural tourism is no longer just an alternative to classic tourism, but a strategic tool for the balanced development of regions. The Strategic planning document for National Tourism 2023-2035 underlines the role of this sector in increasing the contribution of tourism to GDP and in repositioning Romania as an

authentic European destination (Ministerul Antreprenoriatului și Turismului, 2022).

Romania stands out for its great cultural and ethnographic diversity, and the less economically developed regions - such as the southwest of the country - can capitalize on these assets to create a competitive tourism profile. Here, sustainable rural tourism is seen in the period 2025–2026 as an engine of local regeneration, especially in areas affected by demographic and economic decline.

The south-western area, which includes the counties of Caraș-Severin, Mehedinți and Dolj, has a significant tourist potential, especially due to the natural resources (Danube, Danube Boilers, mountainous areas) and the local cultural heritage. However, this potential is still underutilized, especially in rural areas (Ministerul Antreprenoriatului și Turismului, 2022).

The present research is positioned at the intersection between the quantitative analysis of regional tourism indicators and the valorization of intangible cultural heritage, proposing an innovative approach to tourism development by revitalizing the memory of Ada Kaleh Island.

13.1.2. Objectives, relevance and methodological framework of the research

This section aims to analyze the trends of sustainable tourism development in the counties of Caraș-Severin, Mehedinți and Dolj - three administrative-territorial units in southwestern Romania which, although different in economic and tourist profile, are united by the geographical proximity to the Danube and by a common cultural memory, associated with the former island of Ada Kaleh.

The main objectives of the research are:

- analysis of trends (2019–2024) in the development of the tourism sector in south-western Romania, through a set of relevant statistical indicators: tourist reception structures, accommodation capacity, tourist arrivals and overnight stays, as well as the degree of net use of tourist accommodation capacity;
- identifying and assessing the potential to revitalise the memory of Ada Kaleh as an element of intangible cultural heritage, as well as exploring ways to integrate it into contemporary sustainable rural tourism development strategies;
- conducting a comparative analysis with case studies from Turkey, where the intangible cultural heritage has been successfully capitalized in the context of the development of rural and local tourism, in order to draw lessons applicable to the Romanian context.

- Formulating recommendations for sustainable rural tourism development, inspired by the memory of the island.

The relevance of this scientific approach derives from the need to build tourism strategies that are not based exclusively on infrastructure, but also on history, identity, community participation and respect for heritage. In a European context marked by the growing interest in sustainable cultural and rural tourism (Richards, 2018; Lane and Kastenholz, 2015), capitalizing on the memory of Ada Kaleh represents an opportunity for differentiation and authenticity for destinations in southwestern Romania. This approach is also aligned with the principles of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN, 2015) and the European Strategic Framework for Tourism (European Commission, 2022), which underline the importance of cultural heritage in the economic and social sustainability of local communities.

The research undertaken for the study has an interdisciplinary character and combines quantitative and qualitative methods, as follows:

- Quantitative analysis: the use of statistical data provided by the National Institute of Statistics of Romania (INS, 2025) regarding:
  - the typology of tourist reception structures;
  - tourist accommodation capacity;
  - number of arrivals and overnight stays;
  - the net occupancy utilization index;
- Qualitative analysis: documentary research on the history of Ada Kaleh Island, analysis of visual sources (archive photos, video documentaries), as well as reflections on how intangible heritage can be capitalized in current rural tourism,
- Tourism mapping: identification of relevant attractions in the studied counties,
- Comparative analysis was used to assess the relative tourism performance of the 3 counties in the study,
- The comparative case study was represented by the district of Halfeti (Şanlıurfa province, Türkiye), selected and analyzed through bibliographic documentation. Halfeti is a settlement whose historical layers and built heritage were partially flooded following the construction of the Birecik Dam on the Euphrates River (2000), generating a dynamic transformation of the cultural landscape comparable to that produced by the Iron Gates Dam in the case of Ada Kaleh. The selection criteria included: relevance of the cultural context and intangible

heritage; the degree of success of the integration of heritage into the local tourist offer; the level of involvement of local communities and the long-term sustainability of the initiatives. The critical analysis of this case allowed the extraction of good practices and lessons transferable in the Romanian context, developed in detail in section 13.6. The analyzed period is 2019–2024, in order to capture the recent dynamics of regional tourism and the possible effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on local tourist flows.

13.1.3. Ada Kaleh – cultural and symbolic case study

Ada Kaleh, the island located on the Danube in the area of the Iron Gates, represented until its disappearance in the 1970s a remarkable example of multicultural conviviality and ethnic diversity (Drace-Francis, 2013). The submergence of the island following the construction of the Iron Gates I hydropower complex generated not only a territorial loss, but also the dispersion of a unique community and an intangible cultural heritage of exceptional value. Its multicultural character, specific tax status (exempt from customs duties), traditional local crafts, reputation associated with rose essences and Ottoman culinary traditions have turned Ada Kaleh into a site of collective memory for communities in the region.

Currently, the memory of Ada Kaleh persists in the regional collective consciousness as a "place of memory" (lieu de mémoire) in the sense conceptualized by Pierre Nora (1989), providing opportunities for the development of authentic and sustainable tourism products (Ancuța and Jucu, 2023). Although physically extinct, the island continues to function as an identity and symbolic landmark, generating what Huyssen (2003) describes as "urban palimpses" - overlapping layers of memory and meaning that transcend the material presence of the place. This persistence of memory in the absence of physical support offers considerable potential for the development of forms of cultural tourism based on narrative and remembrance (Macdonald, 2013).

In the present research, Ada Kaleh is not approached exclusively as an object of retrospective historical investigation, but as a symbolic vector in the construction of new forms of identity and memorial tourism - based on critical recovery, creative reinterpretation and intergenerational transmission of collective memory. This perspective is part of the contemporary paradigm of capitalizing on intangible cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2003), which recognizes the dynamic and performative dimension of cultural memory in tourism contexts (Smith, 2006; Ashworth et al., 2007). From this perspective, Ada Kaleh becomes a relevant case study for exploring the ways in which absent or lost heritage can be reactivated

through participatory and narrative tourism practices that involve both the local community and visitors (Halewood and Hannam, 2001).

However, the relevance of this type of absent heritage as a tourist resource is not specific exclusively to the Romanian context. The case of the district of Halfeti (Türkiye), comparatively examined in section 13.6, demonstrates that similar dynamics - territorial loss through flooding, community dislocation and tourist reactivation of memory - can generate convergent strategies, with the potential for methodological transfer between different national contexts.

13.2. GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL FRAMEWORK OF SOUTH-WEST ROMANIA

13.2.1. Geographical and administrative characteristics of southwestern Romania

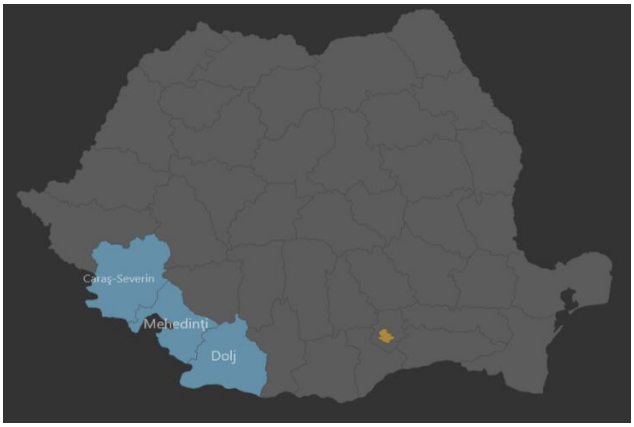
The three counties, subject to this analysis, Caraș-Severin, Mehedinți and Dolj, which form a territory of approximately 21,500 km² in the southwestern part of Romania, represent about 9% of the total area of the country (INS, 2025) - Figure 1. Although they form a relatively coherent geographical and cultural unit, structured around the Danube axis and the common historical heritage, they administratively belong to two distinct development regions, created according to the European planning and financing framework NUTS-II (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics, Law 315/2004): Caraș-Severin County is part of the West Development Region, while Mehedinți and Dolj counties are included in the South-West Oltenia Development Region.

This administrative division creates both challenges and opportunities for the integrated tourism planning and promotion of the studied area. Tourism development strategies, European funding programmes (through Regional Operational Programmes) and tourism marketing initiatives are developed and implemented at the level of the development region, which can lead to fragmentation of efforts and difficulties in creating a common tourism identity for the south-western Danube area. The lack of effective inter-regional coordination limits the possibility of developing coherent cross-border and trans-regional tourism products, which could make better use of the natural and cultural resources of the entire Danube corridor.

However, there are cooperation frameworks that can facilitate integrated approaches. The European Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR, 2011), in which Romania actively participates through all Danube counties, provides a framework for transnational and inter-regional cooperation that can facilitate the integrated capitalization of tourism resources along the Danube corridor. Local

Action Groups (LAGs) funded by the LEADER/CLLD programme also enable the development of projects on a micro-regional scale, which can transcend formal administrative boundaries and connect communities with common identities and interests (ELARD, 2025).

Figure 1. Positioning of Caraș-Severin, Mehedinți and Dolj counties in Romania



Source: Author's own elaboration using Visited Places, 2025

From an economic point of view, the region presents indicators below the national average, with GDP per capita significantly lower than the EU average. The economy is dominated by agriculture in lowland areas (Dolj), declining industry in mountainous areas (Caraș-Severin), services concentrated in major urban centers (Craiova, Drobeta-Turnu Severin, Reșița) and a combination of primary and tertiary activities in Mehedinți. The unemployment rate is relatively high, especially in rural areas and in the former industrial basins (Reșița, Valea Jiului), where the economic restructurings of the post-communist period had a severe impact.

Transport infrastructure remains a major challenge. The road network is insufficiently developed, with many county and communal roads in poor condition, limiting the accessibility of rural areas and potential tourist attractions (Ministerul Transporturilor și Infrastructurii, 2025). The railway, although present, has low traffic speeds and insufficient frequency. Connectivity with the rest of the country and European networks is partially provided by DN6 (E70) which follows the Danube valley, and by the A1 which crosses the northern edge of the region. Craiova International Airport offers limited connections, predominantly charter and low-cost.

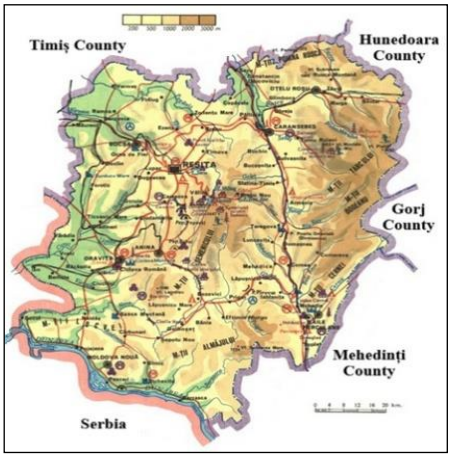
The studied territory presents a geographical diversity that integrates mountainous, subcarpathian, plateau and plain areas (Badea and Bugă, 1992; Posea, 2002). Thus,

the Banat Mountains and the Mehedinți Mountains offer a varied relief, conducive to hiking, speleotourism and biodiversity observation. The hilly and lowland areas of Dolj create favorable conditions for the development of traditional agriculture and gastronomic tourism. In addition, natural parks and protected areas - such as the Domogled-Valea Cernei National Park or the Iron Gates Natural Park - complete the landscape with a unique biodiversity and are integrated into the national ecotourism network. Added to all this is the Danube River, which marks the southern border of the three counties and forms spectacular gorges, ravines and islands. The Danube Boilers offer an exceptional natural setting for ecological and landscape tourism.

13.2.2. Overview of Caraș-Severin, Mehedinți and Dolj counties

The island of Ada Kaleh was located on the Danube, near the city of Orșova (Mehedinți County) and the Danube Boilers (Caraș-Severin County). Dolj County is also part of the south-western riparian area, with access to the Danube and has potential in the development of regional tourist routes.

Figure 2. Caraș-Severin County



Source: România pe hartă - Harta Rutieră a României, 2025

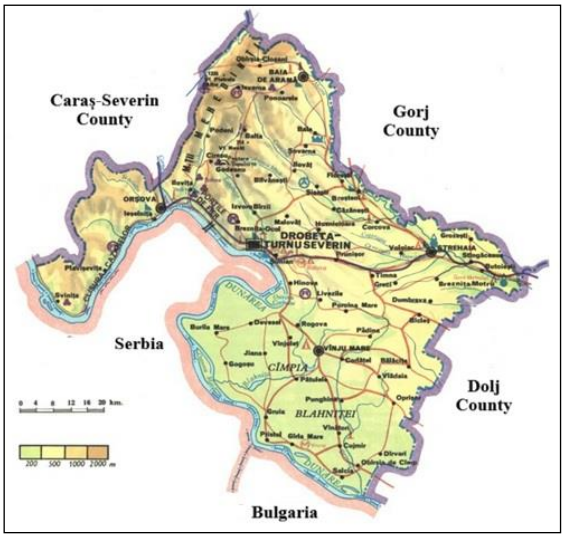
Caraș-Severin (Figure 2) is a predominantly mountainous county, which includes a significant part of the Banat Mountains. The contact area with the Danube includes the spectacular sector of the Danube Gorge . It represents a fluvial gorge of about 140 km in which the Danube pierces the Carpathian mountain ranges, creating a natural corridor with steep walls that reach 300-500 m in height, constituting one of the most remarkable riparian landscapes in Europe (Posea, 2002).

With a vast natural potential (rivers, forests, gorges, caves) and a diverse ethnographic heritage, the county represents a key point for the development of

ecotourism and cultural tourism. Caraș-Severin is home to Serbian, Czech, Croatian, German and Ukrainian communities. They have preserved their traditions, specific architecture and religious holidays, creating a special multicultural heritage.

Mehedinți (Figure 3), a county located in the area of the Iron Gates, includes important tourist attractions such as the city of Orșova, the Iron Gates Natural Park, the Orthodox monasteries and archaeological sites from the Roman era - the foot of Trajan's Bridge, from the second century, which is still preserved in Drobeta Turnu Severin. The county is crossed by the Danube for a length of about 100 km, including the final sector of the Danube Gorge and the exit area of the river in the Lower Danube Plain. Here, downstream of the municipality of Orșova, was the former island of Ada Kaleh, before its submersion following the construction of the Iron Gates I Dam. The county is recognized for its cultural and religious diversity. Mehedinți preserves traces of the Roman civilization, Ottoman influences, but also Orthodox traditions, related to the historical monasteries and the old villages on the Danube Valley.

Figure 3. Mehedinți County

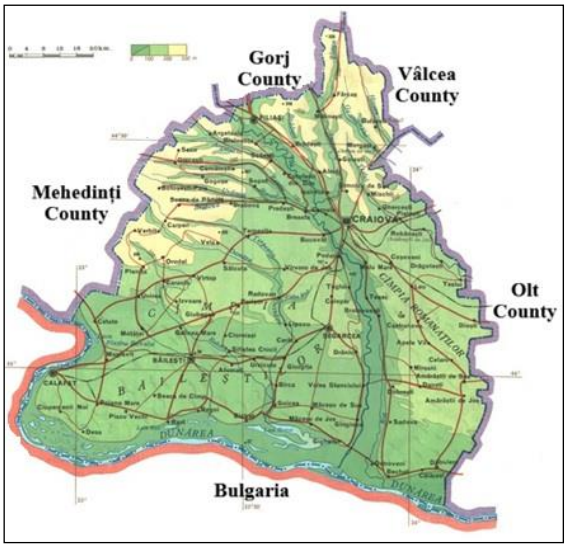


Source: România pe hartă - Harta Rutieră a României, 2025

Dolj (Figure 4) is a county with a strong Oltenian cultural identity, focused on agriculture and the resources of the Danube, dominated by the relief of plains and plateaus. The Danube delimits the county in the south for a length of about 80 km, offering a natural communication corridor and an important ecological and economic resource.

The county's capital, Craiova, is a major university and cultural center, and in the rural area specific traditions, handicrafts and traditional gastronomy are preserved. The development potential of rural tourism and agrotourism is high, especially in the plain and hill area. Dolj is known for preserving the Oltenian traditions - folk costume, traditional music, pottery from Oboga or Horezu (the border with Vâlcea County) - as well as for the specific folk dances (Oltenian Căluș).

Figure 4. Dolj County



Source: România pe hartă - Harta Rutieră a Romaniei, 2025

The memory of Ada Kaleh, an island with a majority Turkish population, but influenced by the coexistence with Romanians, Hungarians, Germans and Serbs, is symbolically integrated into this multicultural heritage. Although the island was "swallowed by the waters" following the construction of the Iron Gates hydroelectric power plant (1970), the culinary traditions, the scent of roses, Muslim spirituality and oriental architecture are today valuable memories, preserved in local narratives.

13.2.3. Relevant natural and anthropogenic tourist attractions in the studied counties

Southwestern Romania, through the counties of Caraș-Severin, Mehedinți and Dolj, has a remarkable tourist heritage, but still underexploited. Spectacular landscapes, ethnic diversity, historical vestiges and living traditions offer valuable opportunities for the development of forms of sustainable tourism - especially rural, cultural and ecological. In the following, some of the most significant tourist

attractions in each county are presented, relevant both from a natural and cultural point of view, with potential for integration into regional thematic circuits.

Caraș-Severin County:

Cheile Nerei – Beușnița National Park (Figure 5) includes six officially recognized nature reserves and a seventh in the process of declaration, all under strict protection. Among the most famous components of the park are: Nera-Beușnița Gorges, Ciclova-Ilidia Valley, Susara Gorges, Bigar Spring, Liciovacea and Ducin. The Nera Gorges area runs for a length of about 22 km, of which 20 km is a gorge itself, crossed by marked tourist trails. The complete crossing of the route implies, in certain segments, moving through the riverbed of the Nera River (LocuriDinRomania, 2025).

Figure 5. Cheile Nerei – Beușnița National Park



Source: LocuriDinRomania: Atracții și obiective turistice jud. Caraș-Severin, 2025

With a history of almost two millennia, *Herculane Baths (Figure 6)* is one of the oldest spa resorts in the world, built by the Romans and dedicated to the god Hercules. It was an important spa center in the Roman Empire and, later, in the Austrian Empire, known for its Baroque architecture and its European renown.

Currently, the resort has 17 mineral springs, 8 of which are used for therapeutic purposes. Thermal waters (sulphurous, salt, calcium and sodium) have temperatures between 20°C and 67°C and are recommended for treating rheumatic, dermatological, respiratory, neurological and digestive diseases. In addition to classic therapies, patients benefit from modern procedures: electrotherapy, massage, sauna, hydrotherapy and kinesiotherapy. The natural and historical tourist attractions in the surroundings - the Haiducilor Cave, the Steam Grotto, the Roman ruins - complete the tourist and recovery experience (LocuriDinRomania, 2025).

Figure 6. Băile Herculane Resort



Source: LocuriDinRomania: Atracții și obiective turistice jud. Caraș-Severin, 2025

Figure 7. Reșița Steam Locomotive Museum



Source: LocuriDinRomania: Atracții și obiective turistice jud. Caraș-Severin, 2025

The Locomotive Museum in Resita (Figure 7) represents a unique heritage objective in that it brings together, in an open-air exhibition, 16 locomotives built over time in the Resita factories. Among the pieces of great historical value are the first locomotive made in Reșița, in 1872, as well as one of the two forest locomotives manufactured in 1925 at the locomotive plant of the former U.D.R. company. In its current form, the museum offers a synthesis of almost a century of evolution of the machine-building industry in this area, illustrating the essential role played by Resita in the technological development of the Bârzava valley (LocuriDinRomania, 2025).

Mehedinți County:

Located between Dubova and Ogradena, *Cazanele Dunării - the Danube Boilers or the Danube Gorge (Figure 8)* stretch for about 9 km and are part of the spectacular Danube gorge. Here, the river narrows between rocky slopes, reaching a width of only 250 m and a depth of more than 75 m, offering a landscape of rare beauty in Europe. The area is also known for its historical value, being the place where you can see Trajan's Road, carved into the rock by the Romans, and the Tabula Traiana, a Latin inscription dedicated to Emperor Trajan. In addition to these vestiges, tourists can visit the Mraconia Monastery and the impressive sculpture of King Decebalus, carved into the rock. The Danube Boilers are also an ideal space for relaxation and outdoor activities - fishing, boating, water sports or hiking in nature (LocuriDinRomania, 2025).

Figure 8. Cazanele Dunării (The Danube Gorge)



Source: LocuriDinRomania: Atracții și obiective turistice jud. Mehedinți, 2025

The statue of Decebalus (Figure 9) is carved into the rock, on the left bank of the Danube, between the localities of Eșelnița and Dubova, near Orșova, in the spectacular area of the Small Boilers. The bas-relief is the tallest stone sculpture in Europe, standing 55 meters high.

Figure 9. The Decebalus Rock Sculpture, Danube Gorge



Source: LocuriDinRomania: Atracții și obiective turistice jud. Mehedinți, 2025

The initiative belonged to the businessman and historian Iosif Constantin Drăgan, who wanted through this work to pay homage to the Dacian roots of the Romanian people and its role in the formation of European civilization. Made between 1994 and 2004 by a team of 12 sculptors-climbers coordinated by the artist Florin Cotarcea, the sculpture required difficult rock modeling work, including the use of over a ton of dynamite. The project, valued at over one million dollars, represents today an important cultural and tourist landmark, being the expression of a historical vision that combines monumental art with national identity (LocuriDinRomania, 2025).

Figure 10. Severin Fortress



Source: LocuriDinRomania: Atracții și obiective turistice jud. Mehedinți, 2025

Built as a strategic point on the Danube, *the Severin Fortress (Figure 10)* was one of the most important military strongholds in the area.

Control of the fortress meant access to the bridge over the river, which is why it was intensely disputed over the centuries by the Hungarians, Bulgarians and

Ottomans. Important alliances were signed here, such as the one initiated by Sigismund of Hungary or Mircea the Elder, as Ban of Severin. In 1524, the fortress was almost completely destroyed by the troops of Suleiman the Magnificent, leaving only one tower standing - known today as the Tower of Severus. The ruins of the fortress and the tower can be visited in Drobeta-Turnu Severin, evoking the glory of an era when this area represented an essential defense gate for the Romanian Lands (LocuriDinRomania, 2025).

Dolj County:

Located in the southern part of Craiova, *Romanescu Park (Figure 11),* formerly known as Bibescu Park, was arranged starting in 1897, under the guidance of the French architect Édouard Redont, at the initiative of the local administration. The official inauguration took place in 1903, in the presence of King Carol I. The park covers almost 100 ha, being one of the largest natural urban parks in South-Eastern Europe. It includes a 4 ha artificial lake, an elegant suspension bridge, the ruins of a tourist castle, a gazebo, an amphitheater and a currently unused hippodrome. The artistic value of landscape design has been internationally recognized, the project being awarded the gold medal at the Universal Exhibition in Paris in 1900 (LocuriDinRomania, 2025).

Figure 11. Nicolae Romanescu Park , Craiova



Source: LocuriDinRomania: Atracții și obiective turistice jud. Dolj, 2025

Cula Cernătestilor (Figure 12), located in the village of Cernătești, 37 km from Craiova, is one of the few rural fortified constructions preserved in Oltenia. The term "cula", of Turkish origin, designates the boyar dwellings built with a defensive role against invasions.

Built at the end of the eighteenth century and extended in the nineteenth century, the edifice belonged to the Cernătescu family, a boyar family involved in the local cultural and educational life. In the last century, the building went into decline,

being saved by the efforts of the local community and transformed into a museum point in the interwar period. Restored and currently managed by the Oltenia Museum, Ethnography Department, the kula remains a symbol of boyar architecture and community resistance in southwestern Romania (Muzee de la sat, 2025). In Dolj County there are other kula, such as: Cula Izvoranu-Geblescu from Brabova commune, one of the best preserved kulas in the region, dating back to the eighteenth century. Also, in the village of Almăj, there is Cula Poenaru, a representative construction for the boyar defense architecture in the area.

Figure 12. Cula Cernăteștilor from Cernătești



Source: Muzee de la sat, 2025

These edifices reinforce the idea that Dolj County had an important role in the rural defensive network in Oltenia, and their preservation contributes significantly to the cultural identity and tourist potential of the region (Muzee de la sat, 2025).

Bistrețu Lake (Figure 13) is located in the south of Dolj County, between the localities of Cârna, Plosca and Bistreț, in the Danube floodplain area. It is an important objective both from an economic point of view, through fishing activities, and from a scientific perspective, due to its ornithological value. Since July 10, 2008, the lake has been in the custody of the Oltenia Museum in Craiova.

The ecological importance of the area derives from the presence of a significant number of rare, vulnerable or endangered bird species globally. With an area of approximately 18.67 km² and a volume of 28 million m³, it is the largest lake in Dolj County and the second largest in Romania. In the past, the lake was connected to the Danube, but during the communist period part of the pond was sanitized to

expand agricultural land. Fishing is allowed only during legal periods, the most common species being carp, Romanian carp and pike (LocuriDinRomania, 2025).

Figure 13. Lacul Bistreț̦u - in the Danube Floodplain



Source: LocuriDinRomania: Atracț̦ii ș̦i obiective turistice jud. Dolj

Southwest Romania, with a mix of spectacular nature and multicultural heritage, offers a solid platform for the development of sustainable tourism, especially in its rural, cultural and ecological forms. Integrating the memory of Ada Kaleh into the region's tourism strategies can bring not only a distinctive element of regional branding, but also an opportunity for identity and economic regeneration for local communities.

The geographical and cultural diversity described in this sub-chapter forms the basis for the tourism revitalisation strategies analysed in the following sub-chapters, in particular in the context of Ada Kaleh Island and the intangible heritage.

13.3. ANALYSIS OF KEY TOURISM INDICATORS (2019–2024)

Table 1, entitled Tourist Accommodation Establishments by Type and County shows the dynamics of the development of tourism infrastructure in southwestern Romania, compared to the values recorded at national level, in the period 2019–2024. The reference years are 1990 and 2019. There is a significant increase in the total number of accommodation units nationwide, from 3,213 in 1990 to 13,538 in 2024, which represents an increase of 421.35%. Compared to 2019, the increase is of 161.13%. This trend is also reflected at the level of the three counties analyzed, but with different growth rates.

Table 1. Tourist accommodation establishments by type and County

(number of units)

Types of tourist accommodation establishments	Counties	1990	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2024/1990 %	2024/2019 %
Total	Total RO	3,213	8,402	8,610	11,736	12,201	12,697	13,538	421.35	161.13
	Dolj	25	68	62	62	59	61	61	244.00	89.71
	Mehedinți	22	83	96	146	165	170	182	827.27	219.28
	Caraș-Severin	63	244	258	316	334	337	353	560.32	144.67
Hotels	Total RO	830	1,608	1,581	1,583	1,602	1,601	1,608	193.73	100.00
	Dolj	14	31	29	30	26	29	29	207.14	93.55
	Mehedinți	7	13	13	14	14	14	14	200.00	107.69
	Caraș-Severin	18	32	34	35	35	35	34	188.89	106.25
Hostels	Total RO	-	323	328	332	313	316	329	-	101.86
	Dolj	-	7	5	6	5	4	4	-	57.14
	Mehedinți	-	8	9	9	9	9	8	-	100.00
	Caraș-Severin	-	11	12	13	10	9	11	-	100.00
Rented apartments and rooms	Total RO	-	-	-	2,590	3,081	3,591	4,411	-	-
	Dolj	-	-	-	1	2	3	3	-	-
	Mehedinți	-	-	-	37	47	53	66	-	-
	Caraș-Severin	-	-	-	48	67	69	89	-	-
Motels	Total RO	-	219	214	215	207	198	194	-	88.58
	Dolj	-	4	4	4	3	2	2	-	50.00
	Mehedinți	-	3	3	3	3	1	1	-	33.33
	Caraș-Severin	-	4	4	4	4	5	5	-	125.00
Tourist villas	Total RO	1551	709	752	752	758	756	703	45.33	99.15
	Dolj	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	100.00	50.00

	Mehedinți	4	4	5	5	5	4	4	100.00	100.00
	Caraș-Severin	10	4	4	4	3	4	5	50.00	125.00
Tourist chalets	Total RO	226	222	226	222	220	223	218	96.46	98.20
	Mehedinți	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	100.00	100.00
	Caraș-Severin	16	19	19	21	19	20	19	118.75	100.00
Bungalows	Total RO	-	557	458	503	493	475	460	-	82.59
	Mehedinți	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	-	-
	Caraș-Severin	-	4	3	4	3	4	4	-	100.00
Campsites	Total RO	217	58	61	67	71	84	107	49.31	184.48
	Dolj	5	-	-	-	-	-	1	20.00	-
	Mehedinți	1	-	-	-	-	2	2	200.00	-
	Caraș-Severin	4	2	3	4	4	4	5	125.00	250.00
Tourist inns	Total RO	-	47	43	44	39	41	38	-	80.85
	Caraș-Severin	-	6	5	4	5	4	3	-	50.00
Tourist cottages	Total RO	-	82	92	112	127	155	201	-	245.12
	Mehedinți	-	-	-	1	1	2	2	-	-
	Caraș-Severin	-	4	5	6	6	7	7	-	175.00
Tourist guesthouses	Total RO	-	1,669	1,729	1,745	1,696	1,642	1,574	-	94.31
	Dolj	-	14	14	11	10	9	8	-	57.14
	Mehedinți	-	13	14	14	14	12	13	-	100.00
	Caraș-Severin	-	70	73	73	71	71	68	-	97.14
Agrotourism guesthouses	Total RO	-	2,800	3,022	3,460	3,484	3,498	3,578	-	127.79
	Dolj	-	10	9	9	12	13	12	-	120.00
	Mehedinți	-	41	50	61	70	71	70	-	170.73
	Caraș-Severin	-	86	93	97	105	103	100	-	116.28

Source: own calculation after INS, 2025; "-" data is unavailable

Caraș-Severin registers the most consistent increase in the total number of units compared to 1990 (from 63 to 353, +560%) and compared to 2019 of 144.67% (from 244 to 353), maintaining a diversified tourist profile. The development of agro-pensions (100 in 2024) and tourist pensions (68) confirms the orientation towards rural and ecological tourism. Notable increases are also noted in the segment of apartments and rooms for rent (89), as well as holiday cottages. The county has begun to capitalize more and more on its natural mountain and spa potential.

Mehedinți highlights the most spectacular relative evolution: from only 22 units in 1990 to 182 in 2024 (+827%) and compared to 2019, from 83 to 182 (219.28%). This development is supported by the increase in the number of agrotourism pensions (70) and tourist pensions (13), but also by the emergence of new forms of accommodation such as hotel apartments. This dynamic reflects a progressive capitalization of the potential offered by the Danube Boilers area and of the natural and historical heritage.

Dolj, on the other hand, lags behind the other two counties, with a total increase of only 244% compared to 1990, from 25 to 61 units and even a decrease compared to 2019 (-10%). The number of hotels has remained relatively constant, and the development in the area of pensions is modest. However, there is a slight increase in agrotourism units, a sign that there is a potential for this type of tourism in the rural area of Dolj, although not fully exploited.

The analysis carried out by types of accommodation units showed that hotels were relatively stable in number in all counties, for the period 2019-2024, which suggests a ceiling in the development of this type of classic infrastructure. On the other hand, agro-pensions and tourist guesthouses were the most dynamic forms of accommodation, especially in Mehedinți and Caraș-Severin.

Apartments and rented rooms have recorded a strong growth in recent years, a sign that informal or alternative tourism (Airbnb, Booking) is developing.

Although not mentioned in the table, the accommodation units in the category "Dormitories and camps for pupils/preschoolers" marked a sharp decrease, indicating a withdrawal of the state from the social tourism organization.

Southwestern Romania is experiencing a significant development in tourism, especially in Caraș-Severin and Mehedinți counties, due to the natural and cultural potential capitalized in recent years. Investments in non-hotel accommodation structures (pensions, apartments, agropensions) have proven to be the most dynamic and efficient. Dolj needs a clearer strategy to stimulate rural and

agrotourism tourism. This reality should be a signal to local and regional authorities to develop coherent policies to support tourism, especially in the context of sustainable development strategies.

Table 2, Tourist accommodation capacity by type of Tourist accommodation establishments and County, provides a detailed picture of the evolution of tourist accommodation capacity in Romania and in the counties of Dolj, Mehedinți and Caraș-Severin, in the period 2019–2024, with reference years 1990 and 2019. Nationwide, total accommodation capacity has increased by more than 27.37% since 1990, reaching almost 450,000 places in 2024. The evolution reflects the trends of development and diversification of tourism infrastructure, especially in the last decade, amid policies supporting rural, ecological and cultural tourism.

Caraș-Severin County stands out for the highest accommodation capacity among the three counties analyzed (10,846 places in 2024), with an increase of over 18% compared to 1990. This confirms the high potential of the county for mountain and spa tourism, especially in areas such as Baile Herculane or the Cheile Nerei-Beușnița National Park. There is also a diversification of the types of units, with a significant contribution from agrotourism guesthouses and rented rooms/apartments. With the exception of hotels and hostels, in 2024, most accommodation places in the county were found in agropensions (1,747), tourist pensions (1,372) and rented rooms/apartments (1,299).

In Mehedinți County, the increase is even more spectacular: from 2,407 places in 1990 to 3,854 in 2024, representing an increase of over 60%.

Particularly important is the development of agro-pensions (1,048 places in 2024) and accommodation spaces in apartments and rooms for rent (1,055 places in 2024). Of course, before 1990 they did not exist and this fact indicates an accentuated orientation towards rural and family tourism, in areas such as Orșova or the Danube Boilers.

Dolj County, although it registers a moderate increase in accommodation capacity (+36% compared to 1990), still remains below the national average. In 2024, 2,637 places were available, with a low contribution of alternative accommodation (pensions, rooms for rent), signaling an insufficiently capitalized tourist potential, especially in the plain areas, Lake Bistrețu or the peri-urban spaces around Craiova. At the same time, the decrease in available places in hotels and hostels compared to previous years suggests a stagnation of the traditional hospitality sector.

Table 2. Tourist accommodation capacity by type of Tourist accommodation establishments and County

(number)

Types of Tourist accommodation establishments	Counties	1990	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2024/1990 %	2024/2019 %
Total	Total RO	353,236	356,562	358,119	410,291	422,114	433,487	449,928	127.37	126.19
	Dolj	1,929	2,905	2,712	2,738	2,486	2,561	2,637	136.70	90.77
	Mehedinți	2,407	2,429	2,661	3,361	3,621	3,653	3,854	160.12	158.67
	Caraș-Severin	9,164	9,184	9,623	10,641	10,572	10,604	10,846	118.35	118.10
Hotels	Total RO	167,979	198,294	195,370	197,706	201,278	202,611	203,655	121.24	102.70
	Dolj	1,147	1,979	1,906	1,917	1,745	1,865	1,890	164.78	95.50
	Mehedinți	1,243	1,041	1,083	1,157	1,129	1,037	1,037	83.43	99.62
	Caraș-Severin	5,034	4,447	4,620	4,718	4,713	4,757	4,651	92.39	104.59
Hostels	Total RO	-	13,721	13,808	14,184	13,551	13,496	13,550	-	98.75
	Dolj	-	321	233	262	232	196	196	-	61.06
	Mehedinți	-	327	347	347	347	347	307	-	93.88
	Caraș-Severin	-	272	337	377	270	242	329	-	120.96
Rented apartments and rooms	Total RO	-	-	-	45,784	54,728	62,915	76,878	-	-
	Dolj	-	-	-	10	20	54	54	-	-
	Mehedinți	-	-	-	520	704	830	1,055	-	-
	Caraș-Severin	-	-	-	717	982	1,035	1,299	-	-
Motels	Total RO	-	8,599	8,572	8,779	8,340	8,325	7,755	-	90.18
	Dolj	-	145	145	145	97	63	63	-	43.45
	Mehedinți	-	67	67	67	67	21	21	-	31.34
	Caraș-Severin	-	135	135	135	135	147	147	-	108.89
Tourist villas	Total RO	46,757	16,665	17,124	17,325	17,457	17,450	16,953	36.26	101.73
	Dolj	42	34	17	17	17	17	17	40.48	50.00

	Mehedinți	400	24	48	48	48	42	42	10.50	175.00
	Caraș-Severin	1,138	92	96	89	70	92	105	9.23	114.13
Tourist chalets	Total RO	12,430	6,216	6,331	6,356	6,256	6,067	6,022	48.45	96.88
	Mehedinți	110	10	10	10	10	10	10	9.09	100.00
	Caraș-Severin	1,056	448	446	600	427	441	431	40.81	96.21
Bungalows	Total RO	-	3,758	3,771	3,938	3,968	4,085	3,869	-	102.95
	Mehedinți	-	-	10	10	10	10	10	-	-
	Caraș-Severin	-	80	68	80	64	80	76	-	95.00
Campsites	Total RO	46,473	10,513	11,521	10,636	10,677	11,406	12,845	27.64	122.18
	Dolj	255	-	-	-	-	-	40	15.69	-
	Mehedinți	12	-	-	-	-	50	50	416.67	-
	Caraș-Severin	252	120	160	166	182	166	206	81.75	171.67
Tourist inns	Total RO	-	2,603	1,968	1,649	1,640	1,672	1,493	-	57.36
	Caraș-Severin	-	355	331	191	325	290	208	-	58.59
Tourist cottages	Total RO	-	2,503	2,662	3,122	3,518	4,012	4,899	-	195.73
	Mehedinți	-	-	-	8	8	24	24	-	-
	Caraș-Severin	-	52	74	92	92	100	108	-	207.69
Tourist guesthouses	Total RO	-	35,198	35,312	35,387	34,587	33,930	33,000	-	93.76
	Dolj	-	257	264	231	186	178	161	-	62.65
	Mehedinți	-	244	266	266	266	234	250	-	102.46
	Caraș-Severin	-	1,384	1,397	1,478	1,470	1,435	1,372	-	99.13
Agrotourism guesthouses	Total RO	-	49,053	52,389	55,778	56,850	58,086	59,980	-	122.28
	Dolj	-	169	147	156	189	188	208	-	123.08
	Mehedinți	-	716	830	928	1,032	1,048	1,048	-	146.37
	Caraș-Severin	-	1,648	1,748	1,787	1,691	1,668	1,747	-	106.01

Source: own calculation after INS, 2025; "-" data is unavailable

Compared to the data in Table 1, a more accelerated evolution of the accommodation capacity can be observed in relation to the number of units, which suggests an increase in the size or occupancy of the existing structures, especially in the counties of Caraș-Severin and Mehedinți. These data indicate a real opportunity to consolidate sustainable tourism in southwestern Romania, through local and regional policies adapted to the geographical and cultural specificity of each county.

The evolution of tourist arrivals in tourist reception structures in Romania, by type of units and by counties, in the period 1990–2024 is presented in Table 3. At national level, the total number of arrivals increased moderately (by about 18.5% compared to the reference year 1990 and an increase of more than 8% compared to 2019, before the pandemic) during the analyzed period, reaching almost 14.6 million people in 2024. Although the pace of recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic is visible, the growth in the period 2019–2024 is only 8.9%, which suggests a relative stagnation compared to other European states.

The counties analyzed reflect a different dynamic. Dolj is the only county that records in 2024 an exceeding the value of 1990 (+10.7%), with a sharp increase after 2019 (+61%). This evolution can be explained by the expansion of urban tourism (especially in the city of Craiova) and by the development of agrotourism. Caraș-Severin County, although it has a solid tourist tradition, especially in mountainous and spa areas, registers a regression compared to 1990 (-23%), with a slight decrease compared to 2019, which indicates a possible need to diversify the offer or improve the infrastructure.

Mehedinți follows a similar trajectory, with a significant decrease compared to 1990 (-24%), but a slight increase compared to 2019 (+1.5%).

In terms of types of accommodation structures, hotel arrivals remain dominant, but a slight decrease is observed nationwide (-2.3% between 2019–2024). However, the strong advance of agrotourism guesthouses is interesting, which attracted over 1.32 million tourists in 2024, consolidating their role in rural tourism. Also, apartments and rooms rented (including through digital platforms) show a significant increase in all three counties, especially in Mehedinți (+228% between 2021 and 2024), confirming recent trends in preference for flexible and individualized accommodation.

On the other hand, traditional structures such as motels, campsites or tourist villas are experiencing a stagnation or even a significant decrease.

Table 3. Tourist arrivals in tourist accommodation establishments by type of establishment and by county

(number of persons)

Types of Tourist accommodation establishments	Counties	1990	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2024/1990 %	2024/2019 %
Total	Total RO	12,296,552	13,374,943	6,398,642	10,205,322	12,588,333	13,910,956	14,569,794	118.49	108.93
	Dolj	167,135	114,844	55,179	78,154	109,028	187,783	184,977	110.68	161.07
	Mehedinți	149,802	112,174	78,241	97,668	103,257	111,967	113,903	76.04	101.54
	Caraș-Severin	309,525	244,623	144,665	205,199	227,343	238,654	238,168	76.95	97.36
Hotels	Total RO	9,289,487	9,274,954	4,116,681	6,203,693	7,943,950	8,672,380	9,060,420	97.53	97.69
	Dolj	130,988	90,245	43,215	5,9873	88,808	154,906	154,507	117.96	171.21
	Mehedinți	107,826	49,656	25,358	29,374	29,159	38,808	43,974	40.78	88.56
	Caraș-Severin	203,468	161,069	88,796	127,531	153,106	163,524	165,107	81.15	102.51
Hostels	Total RO	-	393,038	175,049	221,748	252,745	278,369	273,757	-	69.65
	Dolj	-	4,232	1,427	1,695	1,768	4,306	4,870	-	115.08
	Mehedinți	-	10,634	7,964	7,260	4,975	4,343	3,123	-	29.37
	Caraș-Severin	-	4,829	2,989	3,881	2,972	4,067	5,521	-	114.33
Rented apartments and rooms	Total RO	-	-	-	835,090	1,171,801	1,462,209	1,773,176	-	-
	Dolj	-	-	-	126	1,207	1,177	1,097	-	-
	Mehedinți	-	-	-	6,598	12,377	19,467	21,638	-	-
	Caraș-Severin	-	-	-	11,826	14,961	15,915	19,711	-	-
Motels	Total RO	-	276,928	143,308	201,249	235,788	246,238	242,591	-	87.60
	Dolj	-	4,990	4,838	5,046	3,936	4,742	3,401	-	68.16
	Mehedinți	-	3,645	2,861	4,080	4,650	2,579	2,242	-	61.51
	Caraș-Severin	-	2,123	940	1,248	1,007	830	1,171	-	55.16
Tourist villas	Total RO	848,585	463,600	267,338	382,473	420,838	437,492	407,498	48.02	87.90

	Dolj	337	1,707	515	347	584	726	604	179.23	35.38
	Mehedinți	14,700	336	2,763	3,638	4,089	3,671	3,768	26.63	1,121.43
	Caraș-Severin	20,740	1,928	1,396	1,857	2,881	1,949	1,683	8.11	87.29
Tourist chalets	Total RO	500,874	153,374	95,370	130,051	131,805	137,390	124,697	24.90	81.30
	Mehedinți	381	921	484	536	309	474	300	78.74	32.57
	Caraș-Severin	48,623	4,649	3,317	4,374	4,130	1,890	1,570	3.23	33.77
Bungalows	Total RO	-	40,370	36,464	44,587	33,983	41,635	36,147	-	89.54
	Mehedinți	-	-	23	65	5	-	-	-	-
	Caraș-Severin	-	2,886	1,919	2,545	2,037	1,766	910	-	31.53
Campsites	Total RO	700,771	60,341	50,982	39,056	47,507	43,006	62,084	8,86	102.89
	Dolj	4,431	-	-	-	-	-	52	1,17	-
	Mehedinți	-	-	-	-	-	135	311	-	-
	Caraș-Severin	2,597	445	538	999	805	674	644	24.80	144.72
Tourist inns	Total RO	-	25,152	15,464	16,550	17,744	18,224	17,062	-	67.84
	Caraș-Severin	-	5,262	2,986	3,529	2,959	2,441	2,058	-	39.11
Tourist cottages	Total RO	-	20,556	20,086	27,673	31,348	48,795	57,972	-	282.02
	Mehedinți	-	-	-	80	40	133	339	-	-
	Caraș-Severin	-	496	1207	1278	2522	1965	1137	-	229,23
Tourist guesthouses	Total RO	-	1,254,476	654,397	893,859	977,694	1,037,475	1,012,361	-	80.70
	Dolj	-	6,840	2,286	4,317	5,670	12,167	11,046	-	161.49
	Mehedinți	-	13,659	10,791	13,775	13,686	8,867	7,831	-	57.33
	Caraș-Severin	-	31,967	20,186	22,363	22,491	23,132	19,633	-	61.42
Agrotourism guesthouses	Total RO	-	1,272,878	755,436	1,087,327	1,181,699	1,306,683	1,323,848	-	104.00
	Dolj	-	6,830	2,898	6,750	7,055	9,759	9,400	-	137.63
	Mehedinți	-	33,323	27,997	32,262	33,967	33,490	30,377	-	91.16
	Caraș-Severin	-	28,269	20,391	23,768	17,414	20,411	19,023	-	67.29

Source: own calculation after INS, 2025; "-" data is unavailable

The data in Table 3 suggest that Romanian tourism is going through a period of structural transition, with a reorientation towards alternative and sustainable forms, closer to the current needs of tourists. For the south-western region, fully capitalizing on this potential requires investments in infrastructure, digitalization, territorial marketing and coherent local policies to support entrepreneurship in tourism.

The analysis of data on overnight stays in tourist reception structures in Mehedinți, Caraș-Severin and Dolj counties (Table 4) highlights a series of structural trends and temporal dynamics relevant to the development of tourism in the south-western area of Romania.

First of all, at the level of the entire analyzed region, there is an evolution influenced by the pandemic context of 2020–2021, followed by a gradual recovery in the period 2022–2024. The year 2020 marks a significant decrease in the total number of overnight stays, in all counties and on most types of structures, which reflects the impact of mobility restrictions and economic uncertainty on tourist flows. Since 2022, the data indicate a steady recovery, and in 2023–2024 values are close to or, in some cases, higher than those of the pre-pandemic period.

From a comparative point of view, Caraș-Severin stands out as the county with the highest volume of overnight stays overall, supported by the attractiveness of the mountainous area, the Danube Gorge and the Băile Herculane spa resort). Mehedinți also shows a positive dynamic, but at a low level, while Dolj registers the lowest values, which can be explained by its predominantly urban and transit profile, with a less diversified tourist offer compared to the other two counties.

The analysis by types of accommodation structures shows a clear dominance of hotels in the total number of overnight stays, which confirms the predominant orientation towards conventional and organized forms of tourism. However, there is a progressive increase in alternative segments - tourist and agrotourism guesthouses, campsites and bungalow-type units - especially after 2021. This evolution suggests a reorientation of demand towards more flexible forms of tourism, close to nature and rural areas, a trend consonant with the dynamics of post-pandemic tourism at European level. Another important aspect is the different distribution of performance between urban and rural structures. Guesthouses and agrotourism units, although they have smaller volumes compared to hotels, register a relatively stable evolution and, in some cases, a higher growth rate. This trend confirms the opportunity to develop rural tourism and capitalize on local heritage, including by integrating cultural narratives such as that of the memory of Ada Kaleh, into coherent regional strategies.

Table 4. Overnight stays in tourist accommodation establishments by type of establishment and by counties

(number)

Types of Tourist accommodation establishments	Counties	1990	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2024/1990 %	2024/2019 %
Total	Total RO	44,551,804	30,086,091	14,579,140	22,747,562	27,044,372	29,691,592	30,837,328	69.22	1.02
	Dolj	333,068	208,692	97,343	119,977	176,751	302,912	289,288	86.86	1.39
	Mehedinți	341,439	232,325	154,106	206,199	221,047	230,973	225,458	66.03	0.97
	Caraș-Severin	1,576,194	789,936	439,922	594,593	664,558	671,575	660,287	41.89	0.84
Hotels	Total RO	30,793,879	21,785,080	9,963,078	14,654,143	17,858,810	19,286,125	19,770,147	64.20	0.91
	Dolj	268,962	166,463	75,475	93,055	143,467	249,710	242,880	90.30	1.46
	Mehedinți	246,290	115,286	52,458	78,804	86,131	97,351	103,764	42.13	0.90
	Caraș-Severin	1,196,012	563,751	292,991	414,134	492,517	494,219	489,056	40.89	0.87
Hostels	Total RO	-	848,870	372,366	458,116	508,857	556,542	557,612	-	0.66
	Dolj	-	6,776	2,366	2,515	3,443	8,440	7,806	-	1.15
	Mehedinți	-	21,117	13,007	12,064	7,981	6,472	5,046	-	0.24
	Caraș-Severin	-	18,731	10,290	14,096	11,146	14,395	20,571	-	1.10
Rented apartments and rooms	Total RO	-	-	-	1,912,248	2,493,104	3,079,050	3,818,714	-	-
	Dolj	-	-	-	247	2,103	2,371	2,064	-	-
	Mehedinți	-	-	-	13,633	22,788	35,829	33,264	-	-
	Caraș-Severin	-	-	-	26,062	34,522	35,915	40,406	-	-
Motels	Total RO	-	440,135	237,787	316,404	364,367	385,415	371,583	-	0.84
	Dolj	-	10,769	10,168	8,366	6,015	6,823	4,745	-	0.44
	Mehedinți	-	6,049	4,589	5,715	5,972	2,802	2,985	-	0.49
	Caraș-Severin	-	5,464	2,523	1,972	1,194	1,668	1,959	-	0.36
Tourist villas	Total RO	-	1,039,641	593,440	865,471	885,701	949,886	864,172	-	0.83

	Dolj	-	3,283	1,018	645	1,104	1,511	1,199	-	0.37
	Mehedinți	-	828	4,100	5,241	5,886	5,474	5,193	-	6.27
	Caraș-Severin	-	7,276	4,218	4,964	5,246	3,660	3,472	-	0.48
Tourist chalets	Total RO	1,051,528	266,010	161,230	214,004	218,605	240,108	223,707	21.27	0.84
	Mehedinți	2,895	1,755	1,158	1,210	881	1,137	806	27.84	0.46
	Caraș-Severin	143,596	12,472	7,850	9,316	10,414	4,150	3,707	2.58	0.30
Bungalows	Total RO	-	125,843	97,065	110,098	78,440	101,510	82,453	-	0.66
	Mehedinți	-	-	29	168	10	:	:	-	-
	Caraș-Severin	-	6,723	4,251	5,598	4,222	3,867	1,662	-	0.25
Campsites	Total RO	2,371,744	208,643	169,244	123,671	153,380	124,111	201,342	8.49	0.97
	Dolj	4,792	-	-	-	-	-	60	1.25	-
	Mehedinți	-	-	-	-	-	289	490	-	-
	Caraș-Severin	15,586	950	918	1,790	2,795	1,468	1,383	8.87	1.46
Tourist inns	Total RO	-	62,278	36,234	36,863	37,993	42,427	37,161	-	0.60
	Caraș-Severin	-	14,783	5,411	6,254	6,438	6,416	5,306	-	0.36
Tourist cottages	Total RO	-	44,298	49,824	60,127	64,706	93,546	112,592	-	2.54
	Mehedinți	-	-	-	120	60	241	867	-	-
	Caraș-Severin	-	1,266	3,275	3,925	4,791	2,815	2,539	-	2.01
Tourist guesthouses	Total RO	-	2,324,217	1,201,697	1,605,766	1,754,388	1,837,049	1,777,419	-	0.76
	Dolj	-	10,532	3,190	7,130	10,229	19,837	16,543	-	1.57
	Mehedinți	-	19,813	17,302	21,343	23,446	14,005	12,001	-	0.61
	Caraș-Severin	-	84,487	56,716	51,094	49,313	54,509	45,880	-	0.54
Agrotourism guesthouses	Total RO	-	2,518,605	1,515,305	2,089,781	2,265,633	2,529,052	2,559,867	-	1.02
	Dolj	-	10,869	5,126	8,019	10,390	14,220	13,991	-	1.29
	Mehedinți	-	67,477	61,463	67,901	67,892	67,373	61,042	-	0.90
	Caraș-Severin	-	71,014	51,479	55,388	41,837	47,953	44,346	-	0.62

Source: own calculation after INS, 2025; "-" data is unavailable

Overall, the data indicate a recovery of the tourism sector in the analyzed region, but also the existence of territorial and structural disparities. Growth potential remains significant, in particular by strengthening alternative forms of tourism, creating integrated thematic products and harnessing natural and cultural heritage in a sustainable manner.

In this context, the capitalization of the memorial heritage of Ada Kaleh Island is part of a favorable framework of regional development, supported by the positive dynamics of the segments of guesthouses, tourist villas and agrotourism structures.

The analysis of the data presented in Table 5 on the index of net use of tourist accommodation capacity in operation (by types of structures and by counties, in August, period 2019–2024) highlights a differentiated dynamic both at regional level (Mehedinți, Caraș-Severin, Dolj) and according to the type of accommodation units. At the Total level, it can be seen that 2020 marks a generalized decrease in the occupancy rate, which can be explained by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mobility and tourism activity. Subsequently, the period 2021–2024 indicates a recovery trend, with values that, in some cases, exceed the level of 2019. In 2024, the 2024/2019 report (%) shows a significant increase at national level and in Dolj County (over 130%), which suggests a consolidation of tourist demand in these spaces. On the other hand, in Mehedinți and Caraș-Severin, the values are more moderate, close to or slightly above the 2019 reference level, indicating a slower, but relatively stable recovery.

As for hotels, they remain the structures with the most constant occupancy rate, especially in Caraș-Severin and Dolj, where the 2024 values are close to or exceed the 2019 level. Mehedinți also registers a notable increase in 2024 compared to 2019 (over 130%), which may reflect an intensification of tourist flows in the area of the Iron Gates and the Danube Gorge. The evolution indicates that hotels remain the main support of organized tourism and short stays during the peak period (August). Hostels show a more pronounced variability. In some counties (e.g. Dolj), the 2024/2019 index exceeds 130%, suggesting an increase in the low-budget tourism segment or youth tourism. On the other hand, in Mehedinți the values are lower and oscillating, which may indicate a limited supply or an unstable demand for this type of structure. Apartments and rooms for rent highlight an interesting evolution: after the decrease in 2020, they record in 2024 values comparable to or higher than in 2019, especially in Caraș-Severin. This trend reflects the reorientation of tourists' preferences towards more flexible forms of accommodation, perceived as safer and more adapted to individual or family tourism, a trend accentuated after the pandemic.

Table 5. Net occupancy rate of tourist accommodation establishments in operation, by type of accommodation establishment and by county, on a monthly basis
(percentage)

Types of Tourist accommodation establishments	Counties	August, 2019	August, 2020	August, 2021	August, 2022	August, 2023	August, 2024	2024/2019 %
Total	Total RO	52.10	39.10	48.50	45.10	45.70	46.60	89.44
	Dolj	21.50	15.20	18.10	21.50	35.80	29.80	138.60
	Mehedinți	57.10	60.70	49.60	50.30	46.30	46.60	81.61
	Caraș-Severin	54.70	49.60	48.80	42.00	47.70	49.70	90.86
Hotels	Total RO	62.40	44.70	57.30	53.80	54.80	55.10	88.30
	Dolj	24.80	16.00	20.50	23.90	40.10	34.60	139.52
	Mehedinți	56.30	58.20	51.10	53.60	49.10	53.80	95.56
	Caraș-Severin	72.00	61.60	62.90	54.10	62.40	67.20	93.33
Hostels	Total RO	40.30	25.90	35.10	30.20	31.30	35.20	87.34
	Dolj	5.60	3.30	4.40	3.70	15.90	7.60	135.71
	Mehedinți	41.10	34.80	23.30	24.00	11.20	18.60	45.26
	Caraș-Severin	55.70	57.00	60.80	54.60	41.10	57.60	103.41
Rented apartments and rooms	Total RO	-	-	49.00	42.50	41.20	45.30	-
	Dolj	-	-	0.00	53.30	9.80	11.60	-
	Mehedinți	-	-	39.40	35.20	39.70	30.00	-
	Caraș-Severin	-	-	31.60	29.90	35.60	29.30	-
Motels	Total RO	22.80	20.30	23.30	24.00	24.90	24.90	109.21
	Dolj	23.60	24.40	11.80	14.80	37.30	9.80	41.53
	Mehedinți	62.20	91.80	84.40	78.20	57.90	42.10	67.68
	Caraș-Severin	49.70	27.10	14.90	10.60	21.80	12.70	25.55
Tourist villas	Total RO	49.60	37.60	49.00	43.00	43.10	43.10	86.90

	Dolj	29.30	26.70	13.10	11.60	6.50	8.30	28.33
	Mehedinți	-	100.00	92.20	88.60	80.90	78.00	-
	Caraș-Severin	32.50	39.40	55.20	32.80	23.70	39.80	122.46
Tourist chalets	Total RO	29.70	29.00	27.40	29.20	28.80	31.50	106.06
	Mehedinți	100.00	100.00	100.00	97.70	100.00	99.40	99.40
	Caraș-Severin	21.80	22.70	15.10	24.50	8.00	5.60	25.69
Bungalows	Total RO	57.90	37.00	43.30	35.70	42.80	29.70	51.30
	Mehedinți	-	3.20	12.90	-	-	-	-
	Caraș-Severin	76.10	63.60	58.30	61.50	71.80	47.50	62.42
Campsites	Total RO	35.70	31.30	30.50	29.70	23.70	35.70	100.00
	Dolj	-	-	-	-	-	2.60	-
	Mehedinți	-	-	-	-	19.40	36.10	-
	Caraș-Severin	15.60	9.20	14.90	9.10	18.20	21.20	135.90
Tourist inns	Total RO	29.90	32.90	33.70	27.60	33.20	32.30	108.03
	Caraș-Severin	39.00	33.00	28.30	25.70	41.50	21.90	56.15
Tourist cottages	Total RO	36.00	39.20	35.80	28.20	30.20	31.40	87.22
	Mehedinți	-	-	-	-	12.10	87.10	-
	Caraș-Severin	41.80	44.60	39.50	49.70	21.20	33.70	80.62
Tourist guesthouses	Total RO	35.00	28.10	33.30	31.50	32.20	32.40	92.57
	Dolj	13.00	6.70	17.10	21.40	33.10	36.20	278.46
	Mehedinți	47.90	46.50	44.90	42.10	37.20	35.30	73.70
	Caraș-Severin	43.30	41.40	36.10	29.00	33.20	33.30	76.91
Agrotourism guesthouses	Total RO	34.70	31.80	32.40	30.50	31.50	31.20	89.91
	Dolj	22.10	18.60	15.40	19.30	24.70	24.40	110.41
	Mehedinți	68.40	72.30	58.70	63.10	57.10	59.50	86.99
	Caraș-Severin	30.50	33.50	33.70	25.30	29.70	30.80	100.98

Source: own calculation after INS, 2025; "-" data is unavailable

Motels and tourist villas are experiencing significant fluctuations. In some cases, the 2024 values remain below the level of 2019 (for example, motels in Dolj), suggesting a greater vulnerability of these structures to changes in demand. However, in other situations (Caraș-Severin), there are signs of recovery above the pre-pandemic level, which can be correlated with transit tourism or the development of nature tourism. The structures specific to rural tourism - tourist guesthouses, agrotourism guesthouses, chalets and campsites - show a relatively favorable evolution after 2021. In several cases, the 2024/2019 index is above 100%, which indicates a consolidation of rural and proximity tourism. This trend is relevant for Mehedinți and Caraș-Severin counties, where natural resources (Danube Gorge, Iron Gates Natural Park) favor nature and experiential tourism. The increase in occupancy in these structures suggests a shift in demand towards authentic experiences, countryside and outdoor activities.

Overall, the analysis highlights three main conclusions. First, 2020 represents a negative inflection point, followed by a gradual recovery and, in some cases, exceeding the pre-pandemic level. Secondly, there are structural differences between the counties: Dolj seems to register a more dynamic growth in recent years, while Mehedinți and Caraș-Severin have a more balanced evolution, but closely related to seasonality and summer tourism. Thirdly, accommodation structures in rural areas and alternative ones (apartments, pensions, agropensions) are gaining ground, reflecting a transformation of tourist behavior towards more flexible and experience-oriented forms.

From the perspective of the development of tourism around the memory of Ada Kaleh and rural tourism in the Danube Gorge area, these data support the potential of strengthening the small accommodation segment and thematic tourism products, which can capitalize on both the cultural heritage and the natural resources of the region.

The data analyzed in this section outline a regional tourism sector in recovery and diversification, with a progressive orientation towards alternative and sustainable forms of tourism. They demonstrate that there is a functional infrastructure and a real flow of visitors in the counties of Caraș-Severin, Mehedinți and Dolj - necessary but not sufficient conditions for building a tourism product with a distinct identity and long-term competitiveness. What is missing from the quantitative equation is the narrative dimension: an element of cultural differentiation that gives coherence and depth to the regional tourism offer, beyond natural resources. The section that follows argues that this dimension can be provided precisely by a place that no longer exists - the island of Ada Kaleh. The

paradox that we propose for analysis is that the physical absence of the island does not cancel, but on the contrary intensifies its potential as a cultural resource: the memory of a lost place can generate forms of attachment, narrative and identity with a symbolic force that the existing heritage does not always produce to the same extent.

13.4. ADA KALEH – THE STORY OF A LOST WORLD

On May 16, 1972, the Iron Gates I hydropower complex was inaugurated, a project of technical-economic cooperation between Romania and Yugoslavia.

With the formation of the reservoir, with a length of about 130 km and a volume of 2.2 billion m³, the island of Ada Kaleh was completely submerged. Its disappearance meant not only the loss of a territory, but also the dissolution of a Turkish community that had survived for almost five centuries successive changes in sovereignty and geopolitical transformations in the region.

Located in the Danube Gorge, about 3 km downstream from the city of Orșova, Ada Kaleh was a small island - about 1.75 kilometers long and between 400-500 meters wide - but with a huge strategic importance (Figure 14). Referred to as the "Key to Serbia, Hungary and Romania" in Ottoman documents, the island was for centuries a checkpoint on Danube navigation and a military stronghold at the crossroads of three empires: Ottoman, Habsburg and Russian (Muzeul Regiunii Porților de Fier, 2021).

Figure 14. Ada Kaleh Island, general view (Postcard from 1943)



Source: Historia.ro, 2025

13.4.1. Historical highlights

The first documentary attestation of the island dates back to 1430, when the Teutonic Knights mention it under the name of Saan. Over the centuries, the island has borne numerous names, reflecting the succession of powers that have claimed or administered it. The most well-known name - Ada Kaleh - comes from the Turkish language and literally means "Fortress Island", expressing its initial function as a defensive and control point.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Ada Kaleh was disputed in the Austro-Ottoman wars, and the fortifications were remodeled in relation to the military strategies of the time. A landmark is the Treaty of Belgrade (1739), which records the cession of the island to the Ottoman Empire and sets the framework for a period of Ottoman influence.

The explicit omission of the island in the text of the Treaty of Berlin (1878) generated an ambiguous legal status, rare in the diplomatic practice of the time. Ada Kaleh functioned, de facto, as an Ottoman enclave, although it was surrounded by territories under Austro-Hungarian (later Romanian) administration. This dual arrangement allowed for the maintenance of Ottoman civil authority and the preservation of traditional structures of self-government, favoring the maintenance of a distinct way of life. Thus, cultural and economic practices were preserved, which, in other spaces, were quickly standardized through administrative modernization. The arrangement gave the inhabitants of Ada Kaleh extraordinary privileges: complete exemption from customs duties and excise duties - the island functioned as a free port; exemption from military service; local self-government; participation in the Ottoman elections. In 1908, the inhabitants of Ada Kaleh voted in the Turkish parliamentary elections, a remarkable fact for an island located 900 km from Istanbul (Muzeul Regiunii Porților de Fier, 2021).

The center of spiritual life on the island of Ada Kaleh was the mosque, built in 1903-1904 on the ruins of a medieval Franciscan monastery. On this occasion, Sultan Abdul Hamid II offered a massive imperial carpet (16m x 9m, 480 kg) for the island's mosque, symbolizing the continuous spiritual connection with Istanbul (Do Paço, 2025).

The period 1878–1923 is often described in the literature as the island's "golden age", due to the relative stability and maintenance of economic privileges that favored the development of trade and tourism. Protected by its ambiguous legal status, Ada Kaleh has become a popular tourist destination due to its distinct cultural specificity.

The major change occurred in the interwar period, when sovereignty over the island was clarified internationally. In 1919, Romania declared sovereignty over Ada Kaleh, definitively confirmed by the Treaty of Lausanne (July 24, 1923). Tax privileges were revoked, leading to higher prices of products and reduced tourism. Many residents chose to emigrate to Turkey. Although there have been episodes of rebalancing (including temporary measures to restore some facilities), the general trend of the twentieth century has been one of gradual diminishing of the special status (Popescu-Judetz, 2002; 2006).

The installation of the communist regime in 1945 marked the beginning of a process of decline, generated by the repressive and restrictive policies imposed on the local community.

In 1970, the waters of the Danube covered the island forever.

13.4.2. Life on the island

Ada Kaleh was essentially a mostly Turkish and Muslim community. Ottoman documents show that the Turks on the island came from various regions of the empire. Its cultural profile was built through coexistence and permanent contact with neighboring spaces, which produced a complex local identity. In the regional collective imagination, Ada Kaleh was perceived as a distinct cultural space, associated with the Ottoman East, but geographically integrated into Central and South-Eastern Europe (Constantin, 2005).

The Turkish dialect spoken on Ada Kaleh belonged to the Rumelite (Balkan) group of the Turkish language, retaining many archaic features of medieval Ottoman Turkish. The local dialect reflected a complex process of linguistic contact, integrating borrowings from Romanian, Serbian, Hungarian and German, along with the preservation of some Arabic and Persian lexical elements specific to the Ottoman tradition (Popescu-Judetz, 2002; 2006).

The island's economy was supported by a combination of specialized agriculture, handicrafts, and trade. An element with a strong identity imprint was the cultivation of roses and their use for aromatic products (oils, rose water, perfume), figs, vines, vegetables and aromatic herbs. At the same time, the island became known for the production and sale of goods with symbolic and tourist value: oriental delicacies, tobacco products, handicrafts and jewelry (Bulzan, 2013). The most important enterprise was Ali Kadri's cigarette factory, which produced different brands of cigarettes and cigars (Do Paço, 2025).

Figure 15 illustrates archival images taken in the 60s and 70s, capturing the landscape, architecture and atmosphere specific to the island of Ada Kaleh, evoking its former charm.

Figure 15. Ada Kaleh - old photographs, 1968



Souce: Imago Romaniae, 2021; Europeana, 2025

Tourism was a key source of income, especially in the interwar period when Ada Kaleh became a popular destination for day trips. Visitors and spent time exploring the bazaar, enjoying Turkish coffee, and buying souvenirs (Bulzan, 2013; Țuțui, 2010).

After 1945, the policies of the communist state directly affected the Turkish community by restricting the freedom of emigration, deportations (including to Bărăgan, in 1951), confiscation of property, closure of Turkish-language education and the abolition of traditional economic activities, culminating in the bankruptcy of the cigarette factory in 1967 (Popescu-Judetz, 2002; 2006).

13.4.3. Relocation

The process of evacuation of the island's inhabitants took place in stages between 1965 and 1967, affecting about 750 people from 150 households. The authorities offered three options: emigration to Turkey, relocation to Dobrogea, in Constanța or moving to Şimian Island, where the architectural heritage was to be partially rebuilt.

The most attractive option for many residents, moving to Şimian Island (Figure 16), has largely proved to be a broken promise. The authorities promised that part of the architectural heritage of Ada Kaleh would be transferred to Şimian Island, located downstream of the Iron Gates hydroelectric plant, between Romania and Serbia, and that the inhabitants would be able to move there, reconstituting the community (Georgescu, 2013; Historia.ro, 2025). At first, Şimian Island experienced a short period of development, a restaurant and a swimming pool were built here, then it was abandoned. Although some elements were moved (fragments of the fortress, tombstones), the reconstruction project was never completed due to financial constraints and lack of administrative continuity. Those who chose this option found themselves distributed in other localities.

Figure 16. Şimian Island, the place where elements from Ada Kaleh Island were relocated



Souce: Georgescu A., 2013

In 1967 the last family left the island of Ada Kaleh.

Among the heritage elements saved before the flood are the imperial carpet, transferred in 1965 to the Carol I Mosque in Constanța (Do Paço, 2025); an impressive collection of objects (kitchen utensils, agricultural tools, folk costumes, jewelry, religious manuscripts) stored at Muzeul Regiunii Porților de Fier; parts of

the medieval fortress, tombstones, decorative elements moved to Şimian Island, although many were left in a state of abandonment; photographs and footage of the island in the last years before the sinking, materials that today constitute a precious visual archive, made by a team of Romanian and Yugoslav documentary filmmakers; Oral recordings - interviews with survivors.

What could not be saved was the intangible heritage: the unique, oriental atmosphere, the bazaar, the local dialect, and above all, the community with its complex network of relationships.

13.5. SYMBOLIC REVITALIZATION AND DIRECTIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURISM AROUND THE MEMORY OF ADA KALEH

Currently, the ruins of the Ada Kaleh fortress are about 30 m below the current level of the Danube, which makes it impossible to directly access the site under normal tourist conditions. However, physical disappearance did not mean cultural disappearance: Ada Kaleh persists in the Romanian and Turkish collective memory, functioning as a symbol of a multicultural past and a historical loss associated with hydropower modernization.

In the absence of material support, the island continues to exist through a set of remembrance practices and cultural representations, which can be interpreted in terms of the concept of a "place of memory" (lieu de mémoire): a space that retains its relevance not through physical presence, but through the symbolic, affective and narrative density accumulated over time.

13.5.1. Contemporary mechanisms of memory maintenance

The memory of Ada Kaleh is maintained today through complementary channels, with cultural, educational and identity functions:

- Museification and movable heritage: permanent exhibitions and collections that include saved objects, photographs and documents (e.g. Muzeul Regiunii Porților de Fier).
- Commemorative events: festivals and cultural events (such as the "Ada Kaleh Days") that symbolically reactivate musical, gastronomic and narrative repertoires.
- Cultural representations: literature, film, documentary, photography, which reconstruct the imaginary of the island and transmit it intergenerationally.

- Oral History: Interview projects and testimonial archives that preserve subjective experiences of place and dislocation.
- Digital memory: marking the toponym in digital spaces (Google Maps - Figure 17), with the effect of a contemporary symbolic "monument".

Figure 17. Google Maps - Ada Kaleh, 2025



Souce: Google Maps, 2025

These forms of remembrance create a solid basis for a responsible symbolic revitalization, with the potential for integration into cultural and tourist products with educational value (Opriș, 1986) .

The associated Ada Kaleh heritage can be understood as a set of immaterial components that allow the transformation of memory into an active cultural resource, without artificially substituting historical reality:

- gastronomy and culinary practices (sweets, coffee, recipes and consumption rituals);
- crafts and commercial practices (bazaar-type micro-economies, handicrafts, symbolic objects);
- orality and micro-toponymy (stories, legends, family histories, names and local landmarks);
- spirituality and interethnic coexistence (tolerance, cohabitation, religious identity);
- identity symbols (the rose, the perfume, the bazaar, the oriental atmosphere).

The key, from the perspective of sustainable tourism, is that these elements are used for cultural interpretation (interpretive storytelling), not for the simplified commercialization of the exotic or trauma (Țuțui, 2010).

A tourism revitalization strategy associated with Ada Kaleh needs an integrated framework, based on three operational principles:

1. Cultural authenticity - the symbolic reconstruction must be based on verifiable sources (documents, photographs, museum objects, testimonies), avoiding the "invention" of an imaginary Orient.

2. Community participation - local communities must be involved as actors of the cultural product (gastronomy, guidance, crafts, narration), not just as a social setting.

3. Sustainability and education - the tourism product must produce local economic benefits, but also educational results (cultural literacy, historical empathy, responsibility towards heritage).

In this framework, Ada Kaleh can become a regional narrative node that gives coherence to an area with major natural resources (the Danube Gorge), offering an extra uniqueness and cultural depth.

13.5.2. Ada Kaleh and her connection with Mehedinți, Caraș-Severin and Dolj counties

Mehedinți County has the strongest connection through the proximity of Orsova, as a historical point of access and intermediation of commercial and tourist relations.

In Orșova and in the neighboring localities (Dubova, Eșelnița), the memory of Ada Kaleh remains alive in the consciousness of the elderly population who visited the island or had relations with the Turkish community. Photographs and oral testimonies collected by local historians and anthropologists can document life on the island, traditions, prominent personalities and the drama of the evacuation Bulzan, 2013; Țuțui, 2010).

Consequently, the county can assume the role of the main center of memorial tourism by:

- an Ada Kaleh museum/interpretation center (exhibitions, multimedia, oral archives);
- a thematic naval route ("In the footsteps of Ada Kaleh") to the submerged area, with narrative guidance. When the level of the Danube drops significantly (periods of drought), the partial ruins of the island become barely visible,

providing a strong emotional tourist experience. These moments can be promoted as "special events";

- the inclusion of Şimian Island as a space for reflection and commemoration (with minimal rehabilitation and interpretive signage);
- Annual event (cultural festival) with an educational component and community participation. The event could include Ottoman music, oriental dance, Turkish gastronomy (Turkish delight, baklava, coffee), craft fair inspired by the island's traditions, film screenings and documentaries, and reunions of descendants of the former community;
- partnerships with institutions and organizations of the Turkish community.

Although the administrative link is not direct, Caraș-Severin County can integrate Ada Kaleh as a symbol in larger projects, where the island represents an interpretive resource for cultural and educational tourism:

- Danube multiculturalism (Banat as a space for coexistence); Caraș-Severin is the county with the richest ethnic diversity in the region, still preserving significant communities of Serbs, Germans (Banat Swabians), Croats, Czechs, Hungarians. This multicultural mosaic is similar, in principle, to the diversity that characterized Ada Kaleh, although the ethnic components are different.
- the forced transformations of the landscape with the hydropower arrangements. Other Danube localities in Caraș-Severin were also affected by the construction of the Iron Gates I Dam: entire areas were submerged, communities relocated, the river landscape radically transformed;
- thematic routes that connect the ethnic heritage (Serbian, Czech, German, etc.) with the memory of Ada Kaleh, as a landmark of lost diversity;
- multiethnic cultural festivals and events: Integrating the memory of Ada Kaleh into existing festivals or creating new events that celebrate diversity;
- educational partnerships.

In the case of Dolj, the relationship is rather of the "Danube cultural corridor" type:

- The Danube as a circulation axis that allowed the spread of products and the commercial imaginary;
- the city of Craiova as a potential hub for academic research at the University of Craiova, gastronomic and cultural events;

- the development of gastronomic products and routes inspired by Danube cultural exchanges, starting from the fact that some traditional Oltenian dishes have Ottoman roots or influences: cabbage rolls, sweets with honey and nuts (similar to baklava);
- institutional partnerships (museums, theaters, philharmonic).

In addition, although preliminary investigations carried out by multibeam echosounder (MBES) indicate a relatively good conservation of the underwater structures of the former island (unpublished data), their tourist exploitation through underwater archaeology remains limited by technical, institutional and conservation constraints (Soare, 2023). In this context, the focus shifts from the material dimension of Ada Kaleh's heritage to its memorial and symbolic potential, which can be integrated into sustainable local development strategies.

Harnessing this potential can significantly contribute to boosting Romanian tourism, an economic sector with considerable potential, but still underexploited, which continues to be an important source of attraction for both investors and foreign tourists (Smedescu, 2013; Tenie et al., 2018).

In this regard, such approaches can support the consolidation of Romania's image as a relevant destination for rural and countryside tourism on the international tourism market, contributing to the diversification of the offer and to increasing the competitiveness of the national tourism product (Stefan et al., 2013).

The memory of Ada Kaleh thus becomes not only a landmark of the past, but a strategic vector for sustainable development, heritage education and cultural reconnection (Opriș et al., 2012).

13.6. FROM ADA KALEH (ROMANIA) TO HALFETI (TÜRKİYE): COMPARATIVE APPROACHES TO SUBMERGED CULTURAL HERITAGE

13.6.1. Historical and Geographic Context

In this section, the Halfeti district in Şanlıurfa Province (Türkiye), which experienced a trajectory comparable to that of Ada Kaleh, is examined. A substantial part of Halfeti was inundated following the impoundment of the Birecik Dam in the region. While this outcome parallels the fate of Ada Kaleh, a key difference is that portions of Halfeti remain above water, whereas Ada Kaleh is now entirely submerged. The two sites also differ in geomorphological setting: Ada Kaleh was a river island, while Halfeti is located along the riverbank. The present analysis focuses specifically on the submerged area within the administrative boundaries of Savaşan village in the Halfeti district.

Halfeti lies approximately 120 km from the city centre of Şanlıurfa, on the eastern bank of the Euphrates River and near the provincial boundary between Şanlıurfa and Gaziantep. The population of Halfeti district in 2024 is reported as 43,023. Due to partial inundation associated with the construction of the Birecik Dam (completed in 2000), the settlement area - particularly the section within Savaşan village - was relocated to a new site about 10 km from the former centre. This new settlement is commonly referred to as Yeni Halfeti (New Halfeti). Historically, Halfeti represents an ancient settlement area shaped by successive civilizations (Kodas and Özcelik, 2022).

According to local historiography, Halfeti was founded in 855 BC by the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III. Following its conquest, the settlement was reportedly named Shitamrat. In subsequent periods, it underwent several name changes reflecting successive political and cultural influences. The Greeks referred to it as Urima, while Assyrian sources mention the names Kal'a Rhomeyta and Hesna the Romaye. After the Arab conquest, the settlement became known as Kal'at-ül Rum. Later, during the Byzantine period, it was called Romaion Koyla (Şanlıurfa Metropolitan Municipality, 2025).

Figure 18. Halfeti District



Source: Şanlıurfa Metropolitan Municipality, 2025

Figure 18 presents an image of Halfeti district.

The earliest known settlement associated with present-day Halfeti was Rumkale, strategically established at the confluence of the Euphrates (Fırat) River and the Merzuman Stream. Surrounded by water on three sides, Rumkale possessed

significant defensive advantages (Boyraz and Bostancı, 2016, p. 86). However, by the mid-nineteenth century, the administrative and residential center shifted from Rumkale to what is now Halfeti (within the present boundaries of Savaşan village).

This relocation was largely necessitated by the geographical constraints of Rumkale, whose topographical structure did not permit further spatial expansion (Taş, 2021). Additionally, recurrent rockfalls in the area increasingly threatened the safety of the settlement, reinforcing the need for relocation (Boyraz and Bostancı, 2016, p. 87).

13.6.2. Cultural Landscape and Tourism Transformation

In recent decades, tourism has become increasingly prominent in Halfeti, driven by the area's altered waterscape, historical fabric, vernacular architecture, and natural attributes (Yurddaş, 2019). The district has developed into an attractive tourism destination due to its combined natural, historical, and cultural features (Çifti et al., 2017). Key attractions include the Ulu Mosque, Rumkale, the Rumkale Cistern and Ditch, the black rose (Boyraz and Bostancı, 2016, p. 102), Kanterma Inn, Aziz Nerses Church, Başvarma Monastery, Gürkuyu Church (Olcay et al., 2017) and the Feyzullah Efendi Mansion (see also Jolly blog, 2018).

Halfeti's built environment is commonly characterized by the use of Nahat stone - a locally available calcareous stone that is relatively easy to carve and hardens upon exposure to air - contributing to a compact settlement texture and a distinctive architectural identity (Boyraz and Bostancı, 2016, p. 87).

The area contains mosques, inns, historic and commercial buildings, as well as schools and residences. In addition, the black rose, known for growing uniquely in the Halfeti region, has entered popular cultural representations, including novels such as The Black Rose of Halfeti (Keskin, 2021). Compared with other rose varieties, the black rose is typically shorter, with slender stems, layered petals, and a notable fragrance. It generally blooms in spring and autumn. Its colour appears nearly black at the bud stage, shifting toward deep red as the flower opens fully (Akmese and İkinci, 2019).

Following the rise of the Euphrates water level after the Birecik Dam became operational in 2000, large parts of the old settlement were flooded and a new settlement area (New Halfeti) was established.

Figure 19 presents Halfeti prior to the construction of the Birecik Dam.

Figure 19. Halfeti District before the Construction of the Birecik Dam (Savaşan village area)



Source: Urfanatik, 2025

The former settlement (often referred to as Old Halfeti) subsequently became a tourism attraction (Bulut and Adıgüzel, 2024). In 2013, Halfeti was awarded the Cittaslow designation (Akmese & İkinci, 2019, p. 588). The district also features a distinctive culinary profile, including dishes such as shabout fish kebab, plum pan, and kebat jam, as well as a range of traditional handicrafts (Olcay et al., 2017).

Figure 20. Halfeti District after the Birecik Dam (Savaşan village area)



Source: Urfanatik, 2025

Figure 20 shows Old Halfeti after inundation.

13.6.3. Evaluation of Similar and Different Features of Ada Kaleh and Halfeti

Both Ada Kaleh and Halfeti occupied strategic riverine positions within their respective regions: Ada Kaleh on the Danube and Halfeti on the Euphrates. In both cases, dam construction and subsequent reservoir formation triggered major landscape transformation and population relocation. However, while Ada Kaleh is entirely underwater today, parts of Halfeti remain above the waterline, producing a partially submerged landscape in which buildings - including residences, historic structures, and religious sites - can still be observed.

The sites also differ in spatial configuration: Ada Kaleh was an island settlement, whereas Halfeti developed along the riverbank. Nevertheless, both contexts suggest potential for tourism development when investments are aligned with sustainability principles. For example, before inundation, Halfeti's economy relied primarily on agriculture and animal husbandry. After inundation, tourism-related water transport expanded substantially; approximately 50 boats operate for tourism purposes, with capacities commonly ranging from 30 to 50 passengers. Annual visitation is reported at approximately 750,000 tourists, who come to experience the landscape and associated heritage assets.

Rural and alternative tourism products could be developed in both areas by supporting local production and place-based narratives. In the case of Ada Kaleh, historically emblematic goods such as Turkish coffee and Turkish delight could be reinterpreted and reintroduced as heritage-inspired products, provided that such initiatives avoid superficial "nostalgia branding" and instead draw on documented cultural practices.

Given that agriculture is constrained in Halfeti due to stony and rugged terrain (Bulut and Adıgüzel, 2024), rural development strategies increasingly emphasize rural tourism as a complementary income source (Demir et al., 2023). Planning efforts could include small-scale accommodation appropriate to local conditions, the production and marketing of locally made souvenirs, and the promotion of regional food and beverages. For long-term viability, cooperative models are particularly relevant, as they can strengthen community participation and improve the distribution of benefits.

Diving tourism may also be considered for both Ada Kaleh and Halfeti, where feasible and safe. However, all tourism planning should explicitly account for the destination's carrying capacity (Çifti et al., 2017) and incorporate local residents' perspectives in decision-making processes (Aydemir and Kazoğlu, 2016).

Finally, Halfeti has recently gained increased visibility in national and international visual and social media through films, television series, and commercial productions, which has contributed to higher visitor numbers (Kayran, 2023). Comparable media-based strategies could be explored for both Ada Kaleh and Halfeti - especially through documentary and narrative formats that foreground local histories, displacement experiences, and cultural memory, rather than treating the sites merely as scenic backdrops.

13.7. CONCLUSIONS

The construction of the Iron Gates I Dam, started in the 1960s within the Romanian-Yugoslav cooperation, was an emblematic project of socialist industrial modernization. In economic and energy terms, the project aimed at hydroelectric production and improved navigation. In social and cultural terms, however, the consequences included displacements, territorial reconfigurations and the loss of heritage landmarks.

In the case of Ada Kaleh, the eviction of the community involved limited options (migration, regional resettlement, resettlement projects), and the promises of symbolic reconstruction remained, for the most part, fulfilled. The submergence of the island produced an identity rupture: the community was separated from the space that organized its social and cultural life, and the memory of the island was transformed from direct experience into a transmitted story.

From a contemporary perspective, Ada Kaleh becomes an example of the tension between development and heritage: a recurring dilemma in public policies, where the cultural costs of modernization are often underestimated. In this sense, the island can be interpreted as a case of lost heritage, but not non-existent: material loss has generated an intensification of memory, and memory has become, in turn, a cultural resource.

Ada Kaleh illustrates a paradox relevant to heritage and tourism: although the island no longer exists on a material level, it continues to produce meaning, attachment and identity. As such, it can be integrated into a sustainable tourism strategy not as a "replacement" for the lost island, but as an interpretive framework for the region: a story about coexistence, mobility, loss and memory.

By articulating the intangible heritage (gastronomy, practices, orality) with the natural and cultural resources of the Danube area, Ada Kaleh can become an element of differentiation and strategic coherence for the development of rural and cultural tourism, provided that this valorization is built responsibly, participatively and in the long term. Ada Kaleh is not just a historical subject, but a tool for

narrative planning: an axis on which thematic routes, local brands, cultural events and interpretive experiences, including digital ones, can be built.

The Halfeti case demonstrates that submerged heritage landscapes can be integrated into the planning of sustainable rural tourism through strategies that combine the architectural adaptation of accommodation units to the local character, the promotion of traditional products and crafts, cooperative production models and the regulation of tourist flows according to the support capacity of the destination. In both cases - Ada Kaleh and Halfeti - the loss of a physical place paradoxically intensified the cultural significance attributed to it, generating forms of heritage that operate through memory, narrative and identity, rather than through tangible presence.

The question that guided this chapter - to what extent the intangible cultural heritage of an irretrievably lost site can constitute a viable resource for the sustainable development of rural tourism - receives, in the light of the analyses carried out, a nuanced answer. Quantitative data confirm the existence of a functional and growing regional tourism sector, capable of supporting small-scale thematic tourism products. The analysis of Ada Kaleh's heritage demonstrates that the collective memory of a vanished place can generate attachment, narrative and identity with a symbolic force comparable, sometimes superior, to that produced by the existing heritage. And the case of Halfeti validates the transferability of this model: physical absence is not an obstacle to tourism capitalization, but can even become the premise of a distinct cultural offer, provided that authenticity, community participation and sustainability are structurally integrated into the planning.

The original contribution of this chapter lies in the articulation of a tripartite analytical framework - regional quantitative indicators, intangible heritage of a lost site, and international comparative perspective - applied to a geographical and cultural context insufficiently represented in the literature. The southwestern area of Romania, with its historical complexity and its underexploited tourism potential, offers a fertile ground for the development of rural tourism models that are not based exclusively on infrastructure or existing heritage, but on the critical and creative recovery of cultural memory. Through this approach, the chapter proposes absent heritage as a legitimate analytical and strategic category in sustainable tourism studies.

Future research could delve into several directions opened by the present study: empirical investigation of the perception and reception of Ada Kaleh's memory among local communities and current visitors; the assessment of the economic

feasibility of the tourism products proposed in section 13.5; extending the comparative framework beyond the Romania - Türkiye parallel, by including other submerged or displaced heritage sites in the European and Mediterranean space. Also, the institutional involvement of Düzce University in future joint research opens the perspective of academic and applied collaboration projects that would transform the conclusions of this chapter into concrete instruments of tourism policy.

Within the thematic framework of this volume - developed in academic partnership with Düzce University (Faculty of Tourism, Türkiye) - this chapter contributes a Romanian case study that is both empirically grounded and conceptually open to cross-national comparison. The dialogue between the Romanian and Turkish research perspectives, institutionalized through this collaboration, has enabled a more rigorous articulation of the shared analytical categories: submerged cultural heritage, intangible heritage valorization, sustainable rural tourism, and community-based planning. The comparative dimension, anchored in the Halfeti - Ada Kaleh parallel, demonstrates that such loss-based heritage sites, when approached through responsible and participatory frameworks, can generate meaningful and economically viable cultural tourism products. It is hoped that this chapter, situated at the intersection of regional tourism analysis, cultural heritage studies, and comparative policy reflection, will contribute to the broader scholarly conversation on sustainable rural tourism that this volume seeks to advance.

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