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Perceptions of tourism students on thermal tourism in
Afyonkarahisar

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of thermal tourism through the opinions of tourism students. Students getting tourism education is the population of this study. A questionnaire was used as the data collection instrument, and 1135 students in various levels of tourism departments participated in this study. According to the results, students see the existence of a university as the strength and non-existence of an airport as the weakness of Afyonkarahisar. Besides, they think that thermal tourism's being done during the year is the opportunity and construction problems' negative effects on tourism are the threats.

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1. Introduction

Turkey is among the top six countries in terms of tourist destinations, and among the top twelve countries in tourism income. (UNWTO, 2013). This shows the importance of tourism as a sector in Turkey. The importance of tourism takes place in government policies and strategic plans related to tourism. Using tourism sources efficiently,

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getting more shares from tourism market and increasing the economic support of tourism are among the strategic targets of Turkey tourism. Another one of these targets is to improve alternative tourism opportunities. Thermal tourism is a type of tourism which can be improved as an alternative to sea-sun-sand tourism, the traditional Turkey tourism, and can be done during 365 days of the year. Providing the expected benefits from thermal tourism is only possible by making situation analysis, managing the current situation and planning the future of this sector carefully. One of the ways to achieve this is to conduct regional SWOT analysis which identifies the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats regarding tourism (Emir, 2011). It can be said that SWOT analysis is a subjective evaluation achieved by listing the data that are helpful in understanding, discussing and decision making process in a logical order (Gürlek, 2002). SWOT, which is an important method used to analyze weak sides of the rivals and form defending strategies against their strengths, is also a type of analysis helping managements to evaluate inner and outsider environment by determining the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (Kotler et al., 1999; Cebecioğlu, 2006; Akgemici, 2007; Kreiner and Wall; Haines, 2009: 154).

When the literature is examined, it can be seen that there are numerous studies on thermal tourism. It can also be seen that these studies mainly focus on the reasons why the destination is visited by tourists or determining the tourists' satisfaction levels regarding the tourism services and touristic managements in the region. In their study which tried to determine the thermal tourism potential of Kızılıcahamam Sey thermals, Göyün and Akpınar (2003) focused on the fact that the socio-economic development of local people can be ensured by enhancing the current tourism facilities and promoting them. In their study investigating the determining features of destination image, İlban et. al. (2008) found that Gönen is a clean and modern destination with a high quality of life; transportation is convenient and prices are cheap there; recreation activities and information about them are enough; its people are kind and friendly; it has got some superior features in terms of dishes and handcraft compared to other regions. In the study conducted by Tunçsiper and Kaşlı (2008) on thermal tourism of Gönen, it was stated that tourism has a significant effect on transportation, entertainment, beverage retailers, dairies, petrol stations etc.. Besides, in their study which aimed to identify the factors influencing the improvement of tourism, İlban and Kaşlı (2009) determined that marketing, recreational facilities, entrepreneur of private sector, planning, tourism variety and educated work power are the factors that may prevent the improvement of tourism in Gönen. Another study to identify the image of thermal tourism was carried out by Emir and Durmaz (2009) in Afyonkarahisar. The results of their study showed that Afyonkarahisar was evaluated as a good destination and it was trendy to join thermal activities in the region. On the other hand, the participants stated that the region was not safe and marketing services were not enough. In the study conducted by Serpen et. al. (2009), it was emphasized that a big geothermal pipeline was being planned to carry hot water to the hotels in Afyonkarahisar and this city would have the most important balneology facilities of Central Anatolia.

Taş (2012) investigated how Afyonkarahisar developed in terms of thermal tourism and thermal sources of the city. Sandıkçı and Özgen (2013) conducted the tourism SWOT analysis of Afyonkarahisar through the opinions of staff working in hotels with tourism management document. According to this, the thermal tourism image of the region and the existence of rich natural sources regarding health tourism were found to be the strengths of Afyonkarahisar. However, the weaknesses of Afyonkarahisar were found to be as not benefiting from government incentives enough and travel agents' ineffectiveness in performing their duties. On the other hand, the results showed that the airport founded near the region and thermal tourism's being done during the whole year were found to be the opportunities, and customers' increasing bargain power and new thermal destination investments for this market were found to be the threats. In the study conducted by Çiçek et. al. (2013) to identify the places of inner Anatolian thermals waters and thermal services in Turkish health tourism, it was found that the hotels in the region were for domestic market but they were insufficient for foreign markets.

2. Method

In this part, there will be a brief mention on data collection, participants, data analysis and results.

2.1. Data collection

A questionnaire was used as the data collection method. The questionnaire developed by the researcher by examining previous studies (Crouch and Brent Ritchie 1999; Mueller and Kaufmann, 2000; Tabak, 2003; Gökçe, 2006; Durgun, 2006; Durgun, 2007; Çelik and Murat, 2008; İlban et. al., 2008; Çelik, 2009; Wickramashinghe and

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