

Tourism Potential of Agricultural Areas; The Case Study of Tea (*Camellia sinensis*) Gardens in Rize

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Abstract- The activities of agricultural landscapes in Turkey are quite diverse and cover large areas. Agricultural product type diversity is considerably high in the country thanks to global geographic position, which is characterized as a temperate transition zone on Northern hemisphere. One of the most important of these cultural landscapes is the area of Eastern Black Sea mainly Rize that is famous for tea cultivation. Tea is a plant that provides economical profits for the region, as well as being an important agricultural element that reflecting traditional culture and creates visual beauties. The socio-economic prosperity achieved through tea cultivation suggests that existing tea gardens in the region can also be used for eco-tourism or agro tourism purposes.

The aim of this study was to determine the agricultural tourism potential of the tea plantations in the Rize city. For this purpose, a questionnaire consists of 17 questions was prepared and applied to 100 respondents who are mainly tea farmers of the region.

The results revealed important findings regarding tourism activities in the region such as hiking inside the tea gardens, participating to harvesting practice and short staying in the area. Various recommendations for agricultural tourism suggested for tea gardens which are very aesthetic, cultural, natural and therapeutic. These suggestions were made according to usage and protection principals by considering long term sustainability of the region.

Keywords- Tea, Agricultural tourism, Sustainability, Rize, Turkey

I. INTRODUCTION

Protection and restructuring of rural areas considering their importance and functionality is lately increasing. Multiway recreational activities are improving and changing as a result of some impacts regarding ecologic, economic, sociologic and health issues. Furthermore tourism itself as one of the biggest means of economic development is continuously changing [1].

Recently, the old fashion of tourism (sea, sand and sun) is losing its popularity day by day. Instead, nature, health, culture and history tours are progressing and become more and more attractive in progress of time. Diversity and variation of demands and changing attitudes of tourism toward protecting environment lead to seeking for different tourism types.

Alternatively, “soft tourism, responsible tourism, green tourism and eco-tourism” are relatively new terms and definitions recognized and served by tourism sector. Although, among all types eco-tourism is receiving a great attention, an explicit definition of the term is not done yet. Most definitions made so far are much more considered in terms of sustainable development and ecology [2].

World Conservation Union (IUCN) describes ecotourism as: Environmentally responsible travel and visitation to natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features, both past and present) that promotes conservation, have a low visitor impact and provide for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local peoples [3].

Due to its historical, natural and cultural properties, as well as eco-tourism Turkey has a great potential for alternative tourism types. South Eastern Black Sea region has the highest priority for developing eco-tourism because of fascinating green coverage and biodiversity. Tea, hazelnut cultivations and anchovy fishing are main income means for South Eastern Black Sea. These particulars reflect main characteristics of the region and need to be diversified to meet growing economic expectations. The region is unique in terms of natural beauty, fauna, flora, mountains, delicious spring waters, forests and streams. Considering all of these, the region can be very attractive for eco-tourism. Tea gardens and their cultural connections can be evaluated to serve for local inhabitants as a new income area.

The region’s tea production meets 2,4 % of total world tea production and it is also the only area that tea cultivation is made in all Europe. This is a big opportunity that can be exploited to attract tourist for the region and improve the eco-tourism of tea gardens. The gardens can serve for incoming tourists as places to take nice photographs, live tea harvesting activities by wearing local attires and using special harvesting equipments. Furthermore, they can just cook their own harvested tea and drink it. They can listen the cultural story of the tea and taste delicious meals in the area. They can even stay in historical wooden made nice houses for several days. The wooden houses of fishing villages and mountain hamlets demonstrate authentic traditional culture of the region. Such diverse landscape provides opportunities for hiking, fishing, mountain climbing, canoeing, and mountain

biking. Moreover, different kinds of activities can be combined to make higher impact for attraction.

The purpose of the study is to investigate potential of tea gardens in South Eastern Black Sea for eco-tourism activities and make some implications by taking account advantages and disadvantages of the tea-tourism. Some suggestions are given to improve the tea-tourism in the region.

II. MATERIALS AND METHOD

Study Area

The region is situated along the South Eastern Black Sea coastal area. North Eastern Black Sea Mountains are lied nearby the sea. Mesoscale atmospheric features create orographic conditions in the region and lead to high precipitation rates. Yearly, precipitation rates reach up to maximum 2400mm in Rize and average rate is around 1000mm in tea cultivation areas through the year. Temperature is about 7-8 °C for winter and 24-25 °C for summer season with 14-15 °C yearly average. The study area is dominated by high humidity and relatively warm weather. Settlement areas are limited by geomorphology in the region and coastal areas are densely populated.

South Eastern Black Sea region is one of the poorest areas of Turkey. The mean annual income is very low therefore migration to big cities is very common in the area due to economical causes. According to last research data migration rate is approximately 11.02% Trabzon and Rize are the most developed cities of the region [4]. Other central places with relatively higher income are also suffering from limited land available for agriculture because of the steep and hilly character of the area does not let to increase alternative agriculture practices. Therefore, the region relies on tea and hazelnut agriculture market to make economic progress [5]. Tea cultivation and business have great importance for the region and create balanced revenue distribution (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Tea gardens of study area.

Tea cultivation is made in South Eastern Black Sea region in Turkey. 65 % and 21% of total tea production is produced in Rize and Trabzon respectively. The rest part is produced in Giresun, Ordu and Artvin along the Black Sea coast. For this reason, the study was carried out in Rize (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Study area

Methodology

After detailed literature research and realize of how important the term “Tea” for the region, a questionnaire is designed to determine tourism potential in the region. Different alternatives offered in questionnaire for respondents to get their real opinion about opening their lands for tourism. Totally 100 respondents completed the survey. Every respondent is allocated roughly 15 minutes to complete 17 questions on their point of view about tea-tourism and participation to probable practises [6]. Data coming from the survey is statistically processed and analysed to make meaningful assessment on eco-tourism potential of tea gardens in South Eastern Black Sea.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Recently, different expectations from tourism caused a pronounced rise in eco-tourism activities. To meet rising demand without making negative impacts on the other tourism markets and environment a sustainable and responsible approach must pursued. Sustainable development requires a detailed planning in terms of environment and economy [7].

Results show that tea garden owners have not thought any alternative activity to substitute for tea cultivation. Replies to questions in survey explain that farmers just used their gardens for agricultural purposes for years. They have not worried about cultural and aesthetic value of their gardens. During the survey, they even surprised after hearing that “Have you ever been thought to use your gardens for additional alternative revenue?”. To find out the relative interest of tourist on the gardens, tea farmers asked to make their comments on helping and welcoming of tourist groups. Our findings showed that hospitality is a common attitude in the area. Respondents have already helped for tourist groups to take photographs and try some delicious local meals such as corn bread, tea and yoghurt. But to reduce the poverty and make an alternative income these practises must be handled with care and organised professionally.

As an attraction facility aesthetic quality plays an important role in tourism. Findings made clear that local inhabitants evaluate the tea gardens with high visual quality scores. Results are also supported after personal communications with local peoples promoting tourist activities in the region. They even said that tourist groups have a request to wear local clothes and try harvesting of tea gardens. Figures 3 and 4 shows a summary of questionnaire carried out in tea production areas.

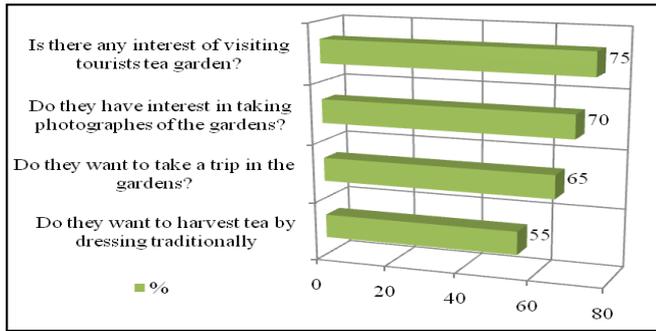


Figure 3. First part of survey results.

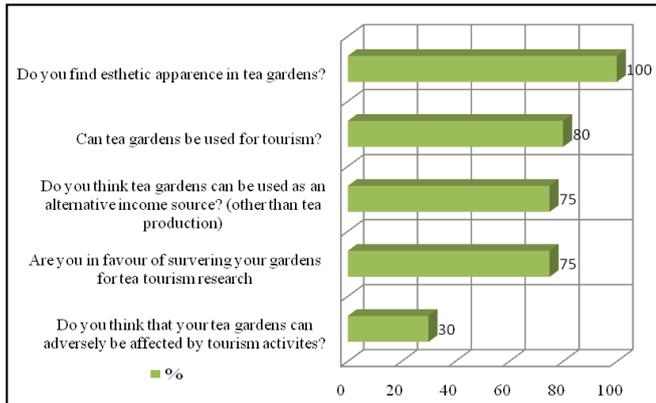


Figure 4. Second part of survey results.

According to local inhabitants tourism season starts in May and last until the end of August in the region. Another comment about the tourism season says that these areas must be also seen in winter and fall season with different flavours and colours of the year. Furthermore, local landowners are in favour of touristic activities and they willingly ready to serve for any activity in their own gardens without any prerequisite.

Even though, tea gardens take a great attention from tourists there is no scientific activity to analyse the situation in the region. The region has necessary infrastructure for all tourism types with five stars hotels, sandy shores and shopping facilities.

IV. CONCLUSION

It is unquestionable that eco-tourism rely on nature and natural resources to be sustainable. Therefore eco-tourism activities must be planned with intensive care to avoid any failure. Possible results regarding socio-culture and environment must be foreseen. Related strategies and actions must be carried out carefully [8]. To enable sustainability in macro level, resources must be used rationally with caution without diminishing their speciality. Predefined measures must be organized and applied to maintain sustainability [9].

Early results after this preliminary study are encouraging. A detailed eco-tourism potential survey must be started in the region by taking account all necessary measures to develop tea-tourism in the region. As a beginning, some model sites can be designed and reorganized to meet eco-tourism demands. General visual quality of a city is a complementary for any tourism related activity therefore new constructions must be follow traditional style to avoid visual degradation in the area. Additionally traditional wooden houses in the region can be restored to serve for tourism activities that are also important to preserve cultural heritage in the region. Local people must be encouraged to learn at least one foreign

language to help incoming tourists professionally. That is the best way to serve for the tourists without any need to ordinary tourist guide and make some additional money for the local inhabitants.

Green tea spa is another recommendation that can add more attraction for the region. There are already many spas in the region that at least some of them can be converted to green tea spas. It is well known that green tea very good antioxidant and has very good medication effects on the body. There also some efforts of governor and municipal authorities in Rize province for alternative use of tea product. Approximately, one million people are survive on tea market income in the region hence to improve the productivity and quality of the tea cultivation lands must be rehabilitated and renewed. Fragmentation of tea cultivation lands is another problem must be sorted out to conserve tea gardens in the area. Conserved areas can mitigate migration to another cities and help to equally disseminate general revenue in the region. Finally, similar questionnaires must be designed and implemented to get opinion of incoming tourists groups to get more realistic data for initiating a model study on tea-tourism in South Eastern Black Sea region.

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