

Determination of the Recreational Landscape Potential of Tarsus (Mersin) District and Its Surroundings for Tourism

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Abstract

The study conducted an investigation into the effective utilization of Tarsus district's historical and cultural assets in Mersin province, with a focus on its tourism potential. The primary objectives were to promote the region and contribute to its economic, social, and cultural advancement. A survey was administered to gather information on dominant tourism types in Tarsus, including historical sites, cultural landmarks, local crafts, cuisine, caves, camping, wildlife, flora, gastronomy, local resources, natural attractions, and aesthetics. The results highlighted Tarsus' prominence due to its cultural heritage, historical structures, and natural wealth. Despite Tarsus's cultural diversity and tourism potential, the study revealed its current underrepresentation and various challenges, including the vulnerability of historical assets, insufficient infrastructure, and unguided utilization. The study suggests adopting a sustainable approach that balances conservation with utilization to address these issues and help Tarsus attain the recognition it rightfully deserves in the field of recreation and tourism.

Keywords: Mersin-Tarsus, recreation, tourism, landscape architecture, sustainability.

Tarsus (Mersin) İlçesi ve Yakın Çevresinin Turizme Yönelik Rekreatif Peyzaj Potansiyelinin Belirlenmesi

Öz

Bu çalışmada Mersin iline bağlı Tarsus ilçesi tarihi ve kültürel zenginliklerinin etkin şekilde kullanımını ve bölgenin turizm yönünü keşfetmek amacıyla yapılmıştır. Araştırmada yörenin tanıtılmasına yardımcı olmak ve halkın ekonomik, sosyal ve kültürel anlamda gelişmesini katkı sağlamak hedeflenmektedir. Çalışma kapsamında yapılan anket çalışmasında katılımcılara Tarsus kentinin turizm alanında tarihi mekânlar, kültürel yapı, yöresel el sanatları, yöresel yemekler, mağaralar, kamp / karavan, fauna, flora, gastronomi turizmi, yöresel zenginliği, doğal çekicilikleri ve güzellikleri gibi hangi turizm türlerinin baskın olduğu gibi pek çok soru yöneltilmiş ve bölgenin turizm potansiyeli belirlenmeye çalışılmıştır. Elde edilen sonuçlar değerlendirildiğinde Mersin iline bağlı Tarsus ilçesinin özellikle kültürel mirası, tarihi yapıları ve doğal kaynak zenginliği ile ön plana çıktığı görülmektedir. Çalışma sonucunda, rekreasyon ve turizm potansiyeli açısından önemli bir kültür mozaiğine sahip olan Tarsus ne yazık ki pek çok açıdan bugün hak ettiği yerde olmadığı koruma kullanma dengesi içerisinde sürdürülebilir yaklaşımla gerekli önlemler alınması gerekliliği ortaya konulmuştur.

Anahtar kelimeler: Tarsus (Mersin), rekreasyon, turizm, peyzaj mimarlığı, sürdürülebilirlik.

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1. Introduction

With the development of urban living worldwide and changes in people's work and living conditions, a different system has emerged to enable a socially and physically higher quality of life. Tourism constitutes the main foundation of this system. As a result of this differentiation, people seek to distance themselves from the intensified urban lifestyle to relax, take a break, explore while traveling, and engage in communication with different individuals. This phenomenon has a significant impact on individuals' physical and mental rejuvenation and transformation.

Tourism not only involves a change of place but also facilitates self-renewal, transformation, and mental relaxation. Moreover, due to its contributions to the economy and national development, tourism is an ever-evolving, developing, and empowering phenomenon.

To comprehensively and accurately analyze the tourism sector, it is essential to correctly define the tourism concept. The definition of tourism holds particular significance for continuously evolving countries. As a social science discipline with humans as its subject, tourism has grown in accordance with changing demands, particularly with the rapid development of technology.

Tourism is derived from the Latin word "tornus," meaning "to turn" or "return." The term "tour" was initially used in the 18th century for young British nobles who visited European cultural and natural landmarks as part of their education. Subsequently, with the advancement of transportation means, mass tourism began to take place. The tourism sector has a long history. In the past, people traveled to different locations due to work or trade-related reasons, which led to the emergence of various trade routes (e.g., the Silk Road and the Spice Route) (Bulu & Eraslan, 2008).

Tourism is a vital industry for modern societies, encompassing various economic, social, and cultural dimensions. The significance of tourism is underscored by the following points as indicated in the literature (Lundberg 2017; Bunghez, 2016; Uğuz, 2014; Akpınar Külekçi, 2013; Sezgin & Ünüvar, 2009; Rita 2000):

- **Economic Contribution:** Tourism significantly contributes to a country's economy. It fosters the growth of local businesses, generates employment, and boosts revenue. Tourists make a wide range of expenditures, including accommodation, dining, transportation, and shopping. Furthermore, the tourism sector also contributes to various other industries such as agriculture, construction, and services.
- **Cultural Interaction:** Tourism facilitates the convergence of different cultures and enhances cultural understanding. Tourists celebrate cultural diversity by experiencing various traditions, languages, cuisines, and lifestyles. Simultaneously, local communities have the opportunity to showcase their own cultures by interacting with tourists.
- **Regional Development:** Tourism can contribute to the development of economically disadvantaged regions. Infrastructure improvements are made in areas that attract tourists, new job opportunities are created, and the living standards of local communities are elevated.
- **Environmental Conservation and Sustainability:** Managing tourism sustainably is essential for environmental protection. Academic research provides guidelines for the preservation of natural resources and the minimization of environmental impacts. The sustainability of tourism contributes to the conservation of natural beauty and resources for future generations.
- **Scientific Research and Education:** Tourism garners substantial interest in the academic world. Research related to tourism aids in understanding and guiding industry trends. Additionally, academic programs exist that offer education in tourism management and sustainable tourism.

Considering the economic, cultural, environmental, and societal impacts of tourism, it holds significant importance. The ethical and sustainable management of the tourism sector can further enhance its positive effects.

Tourism is an important bridge to get acquainted with people from different cultures and establish communication with them. Tourism activities should be carried out without causing harm to the natural environment and cultural heritage. When organizing tourism activities, they should be in harmony with the cultural values of the region. If such harmony and order are absent, negative impacts on cultural values are inevitable (Uslu & Kiper, 2006).

Tourism highlights the unique characteristics, activities, and natural and cultural landscapes of a region as a whole. It fosters the development and preservation of the natural environment and cultural heritage (Uslu & Kiper, 2006).

Tarsus district hosts highly significant artifacts that bridge the past and the present. Therefore, Tarsus is a highly prominent tourism and recreation center. This study aims to establish the foundation for the region to attain the value it deserves by researching and analyzing the natural fragrance, physical, social, and cultural environment of Tarsus and its surroundings to identify the region's tourism potential. The existence of tangible and intangible cultural heritage in Tarsus and its vicinity is considered to contribute to the development of tourism. This study aims to create a framework for the promotion and preservation of the cultural heritage found in Tarsus and its surroundings as well as passing it on to future generations. Additionally, the study attempts to identify suitable tourism activities by analyzing the natural and cultural structure of the region. The reason for selecting Tarsus district and its surroundings as the study area is due to the natural landscape features, historical and cultural values, and existing tourism assets it contains. It is disheartening that despite possessing such riches, the region remains inadequately promoted, and its tourism opportunities are not fully developed. This study aims to raise public awareness, enhance the existing tourism potential, promote the region, and lay the groundwork for future studies and activities related to sustainable tourism and recreational activities. Furthermore, the study seeks to take the lead in planning the promotion of tourism assets in the study area and directing tourism activities appropriately.

2. Material and Method

2.1. Material

The main materials of this study consist of survey forms prepared to determine the tourism potential of the area and the recreational landscape potential, as well as the natural and cultural resource values of Tarsus district and its surroundings. General information regarding these values is provided below:

Tarsus is a district located in the southern part of Turkey and is affiliated with the province of Mersin. It is situated in the western part of the Mediterranean Region and the Çukurova region. The area lies between 36-37° north latitude and 34-35° east longitude. The study area covers a significant portion of the Mediterranean Basin, and the province of Mersin has an approximate area of 15,803 km². Tarsus district is located to the east of the Mersin province (Figure 1). The districts of Mersin province include Akdeniz, Anamur, Aydıncık, Bozyazı, Çamlıyayla, Erdemli, Gülnar, Mezitli, Mut, Silifke, Toroslar, Yenişehir, and Tarsus, with Tarsus being the largest district in Mersin province (Anonymous, 2023a). In terms of research materials in the study area, various survey forms conducted in different periods, as well as various maps and documents, have been utilized.

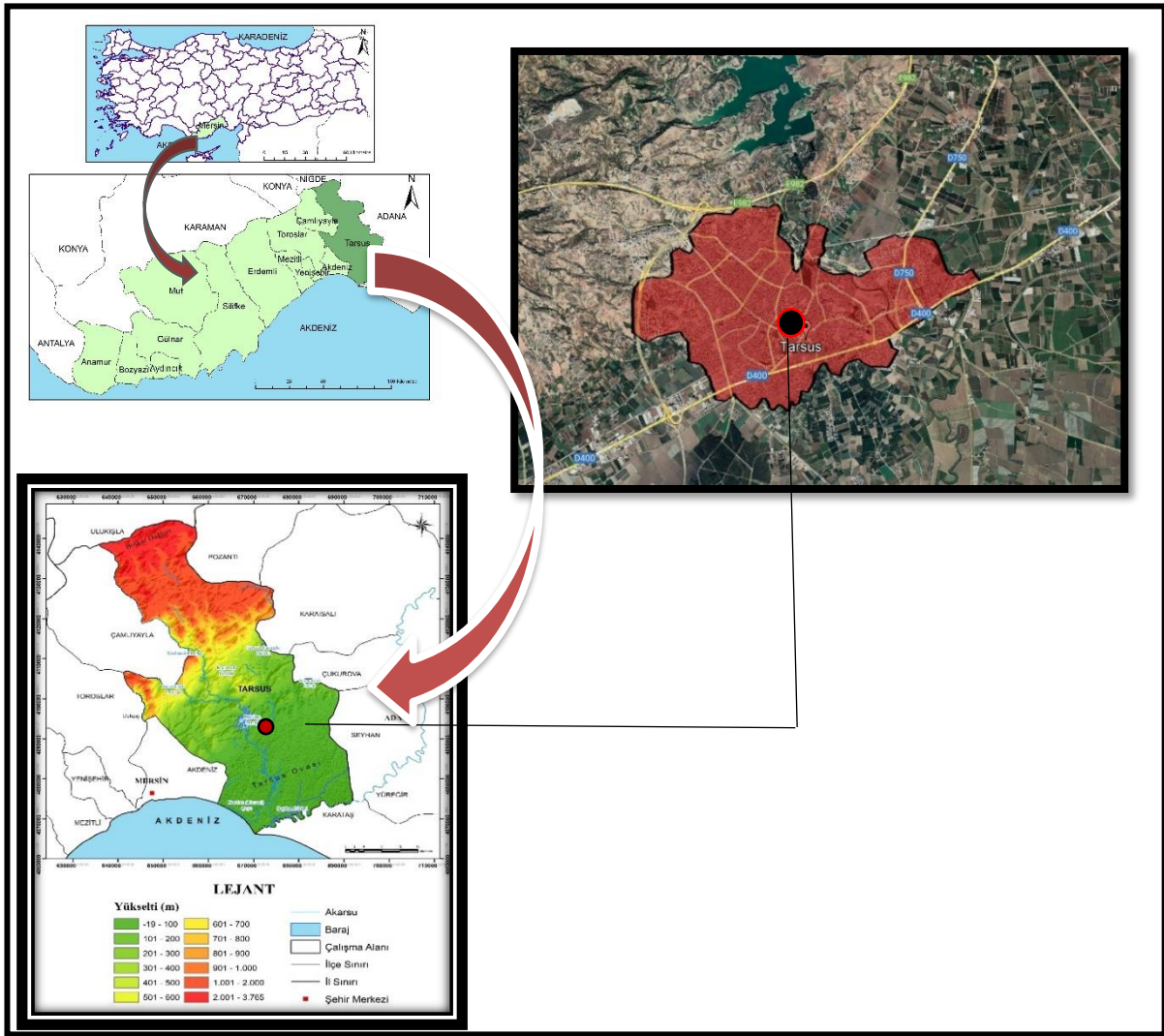


Figure 1. Location of the study area

2.2. Natural landscape features of Tarsus and its surroundings

The study area boasts a diverse range of natural landscape features, including its geological, geomorphological, topographic, vegetation, climate, and hydrographic characteristics. When examining the geological structure of Tarsus and its nearby regions, it becomes evident that the western-northwestern part is composed of structural units belonging to the Bolkar Mountains. This mass, which comprises high mountains, hills, and plateau areas, is accompanied by the Tarsus Plain in the foreground. Notably, the Eshab-Kehf hill, located within the structural units of the Bolkar Mountains, stands out as one of the most significant parts of Tarsus and its surroundings (Hocaoğlu, 2003; Gürani, 1999; Anonymous, 2023b).

Regarding geomorphological features, the Tarsus district presents diverse landforms. A considerable portion of Tarsus consists of plains, mountains, and plateaus. Towards the north of the study area, one can find the high parts of the Central Taurus Mountains, specifically the Bolkar Mountains. Southwards, stretching towards the Mediterranean coasts, there are plateau regions, karstic terrains, and the flatlands where the city center of Tarsus is situated. The average heights of the mountainous regions range from 1750 to 3600 meters, and the mountainous areas become more dense towards the north of the study area. Several significant valleys and gorges are present in the study area, including the Kadıncık Stream Valley and Gorge, Keşbükü Stream Valley and Gorge, Tarsus (Berdan) Stream Valley, Deliçay Stream Valley, and Cehennem Dere Stream Valley (Hocaoğlu, 2003; Kelleboz, 2019).

The formation of the Tarsus River Delta and Floodplain, akin to the vast delta region of Çukurova, is shaped by the combined influence of effective processes. The rivers that played a role in the formation of the Çukurova Delta had an impact on different parts of the delta, causing its expansion in specific

directions during various periods. This area also constitutes a shared alluvial delta floodplain formed by the sediment transportation of the Tarsus River and Seyhan River. Within the delta-floodplain, several swamps can be found, including the Karabucak Swamp located southwest of Tarsus city, the Aynaz Swamp east of Kulak village, the Dipsiz Göl Swamp west of the mouth of the Seyhan River, and the Tuz Gölü Swamp observed west of Tuz Gölü (Hocaoğlu, 2003).

The soil structure of the region is formed by the fragmentation and weathering of rocks and organic materials of various sizes, followed by the mixing of organic materials. The soil properties of the area indicate the dominance of Red Mediterranean soils (Kırmızı Kahverengi Akdeniz toprakları), which are zonal soils affected by climate conditions (Hocaoğlu, 2003).

Regarding its natural vegetation potential, the Tarsus region exhibits significant diversity. The primary factors influencing the characteristics of natural vegetation in each region are climate, altitude, and soil, resulting in distinct vegetation types across different areas. The natural vegetation in this region mainly comprises needle-leaved forests and maquis formations, which are characteristic vegetation of the Mediterranean climate (Hocaoğlu, 2003).

In the northern part of Tarsus, the Central Taurus Mountains are present, while the southern part is bordered by the Mediterranean. Tarsus covers an area of approximately 2,026 km². The areas with altitudes up to 500 meters are dominated by species such as *Olea europaea* L. var. *europaea* L. (Olive tree), *Laurus nobilis* L. (Bay laurel), *Ceratonia siliqua* L. (Carob tree), and *Myrtus communis* L. subsp. *communis* L. (Myrtle tree). At elevations around 1000 meters, *Quercus coccifera* L. (Kermes oak) and *Pinus brutia* L. (Aleppo pine) communities are prevalent, while at 2000 meters, extensive forest areas consist of *Pinus nigra* L. (Black pine), *Cedrus libani* A. Rich. (Lebanon cedar), *Abies cilicia* subsp. *cilicica* (Cilician fir), and *Juniperus excelsa* subsp. *excelsa* L. (Greek juniper). In the flatlands, typical vegetation includes *Citrus aurantium* L. (Orange), *Chamaerops humilis* L. (Mediterranean fan palm), *Phoenix dactylifera* L. (Date palm), and various fruit trees (Anonymous, 2023c).

Grape cultivation covers 110,000 decares in the Tarsus region. The area between Sayköy, Cinköy, Ulaş, İbrişim, Dedeler, and Taşkuyu villages is predominantly dedicated to grape vineyards (Anonim 2023d).

There are two afforestation areas within the study area. The first one is the Karabucak forest located between 5 and 2.5 meters contour lines in the south of Tarsus. The other afforestation area is situated on coastal dunes to prevent dune migration (Hocaoğlu, 2003).

The Karabucak Forest is primarily composed of eucalyptus trees and is renowned for being Turkey's first eucalyptus forest. It was established to drain a previously swampy area. The forest consists of two parts: the Güresin Forest, covering an area of 885 hectares, situated close to Tarsus city, and the coastal pine (*Pinus pinea*) dominated section stretching towards the Mediterranean coast. Among the eucalyptus trees, '*Eucalyptus rostrata*' is the most widespread species (Anonymous, 2023b).

Tarsus experiences a Mediterranean climate, characterized by hot and dry summers and mild and rainy winters. The inner parts of Tarsus have a continental climate, with cooler and dry summers and cold winters with snowfall in high-altitude areas (Anonymous, 2023e).

The hydrographic structure of the area plays a crucial role in determining the natural appearance of the environment, including moving water bodies, groundwater, and surface waters. The Tarsus River, together with the Seyhan and Ceyhan Rivers, have created a shared plain (Çukurova) and a common delta by transporting sediment (Hocaoğlu, 2003).

The length of the Tarsus River is approximately 142-150 km (Figure 2). The upper parts of the Tarsus River flow through the undulating terrain of the mountains, while as it descends, it narrows into deep valleys until it reaches the plain. The Tarsus River gathers waters from an area of approximately 2,000 km², which is mainly comprised of high rainfall regions in the high parts of the Central Taurus Mountains. As a result, the water flow is abundant in both summer and winter (Torun, 2014).

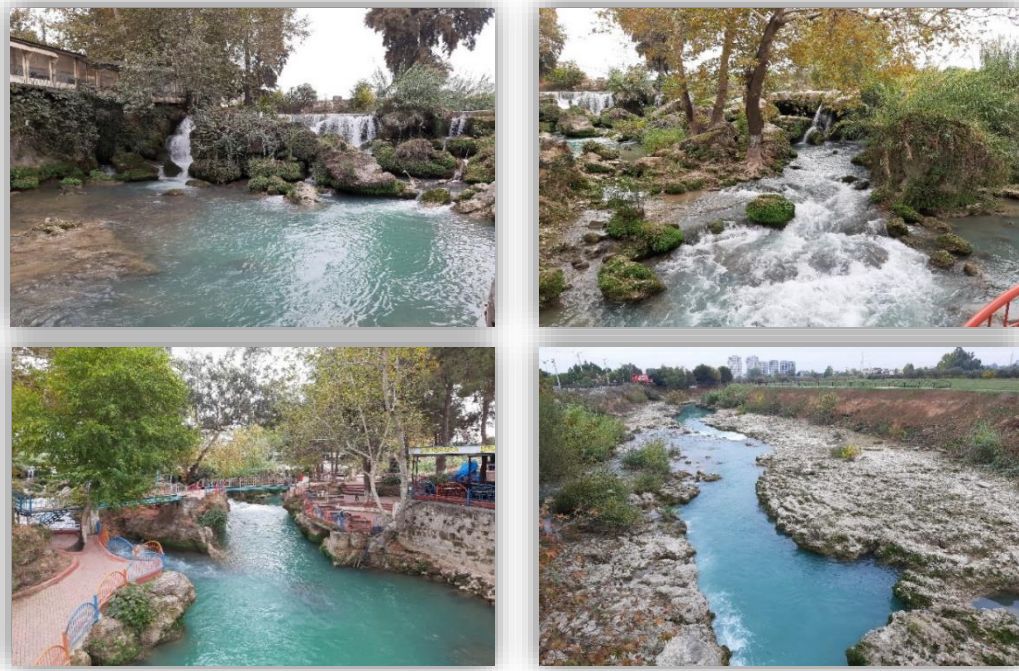


Figure 2. Waterfall formed by the Tarsus River in the City Center (Original)

When examining the socio-economic structure of Tarsus, it is evident that the city has been home to various civilizations, particularly due to its rich historical background. Tarsus is a district located in the Mediterranean region of Turkey, within the province of Mersin. The name "Tarsus" is believed to be derived from the name Tarhon (Tarkon), the founder of Cilicia and the city's oldest god. Over time, the name of the city has been used as "tarzi" in Assyrian, "tarz" in Aramaic, and "Tarsos" in Greek. Later on, the name "Tarsus" was replaced with "Toros," and in Latin, it became "Tarsus," which has remained so until today. According to known sources, Tarsus has a history dating back approximately ten thousand years. Consequently, it possesses a diverse and rich culture due to the civilizations it hosted. As the capital of Cilicia, the district of Tarsus is considered to be one of the earliest settlement areas in Anatolia, which was revealed after archaeological excavations carried out in Gözlükule in 1934. The excavations in Gözlükule indicated that the history of Tarsus began during the Neolithic period and continued until the Middle Bronze Age. However, the exact date and method of Tarsus' establishment have not been entirely clarified. The most emphasized information suggests that the city of Tarsus was founded by the Assyrian ruler Sardanapal. Following the rule of the Assyrians, it came under the dominion of Alexander the Great. After Alexander, Tarsus, along with all of Cilicia, fell under the rule of the Seleucids. In 246 BC, Tarsus came under the administration of Egypt. However, after 66 BC, when Cilicia became a Roman province, Tarsus became its center (Engin, 2004; Çokan, 2017; Sakar, 2019). Tarsus is home to numerous architectural heritages (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Views from Kubat Pasha Madrasa (Original)

Due to its location on trade routes, Tarsus holds a significant position. During the Ottoman Empire, Tarsus was situated along caravan and postal routes. It experienced important developments in terms of economic and commercial activities, especially during the Ottoman era. Today, Tarsus is a center for trade and industry in Mersin. It is the most developed district in terms of industry after Mersin. In addition to industrial establishments that process agricultural products, there are factories producing agricultural tools, machine spare parts, and machine tools, as well as confectionery, brick, and ceramic factories that are essential for the country's economy. The first Chamber of Commerce in Turkey was established in Tarsus in 1879. Agriculture plays a significant role in Tarsus' economy. 51% of the district's land is used for agriculture, while 28% is forested (Torun, 2014; Anonymous, 2023g).

This study was conducted to determine the recreation and tourism potential of the Tarsus district, which is a part of the Mersin province. In the first phase, the purpose of the study and the selection of the area were made, and the social, physical, and cultural evaluations of the area were conducted. Based on these assessments, it was determined that Tarsus has a rich heritage, particularly in terms of its historical, cultural, and natural resources. Literature related to tourism, including digital data and written sources, was utilized to research the topic. Frequency analysis was employed to analyze the data obtained from surveys conducted with the residents of Tarsus. Qualitative and quantitative variables were considered together to determine suitable recreational and tourism activities for the area. The recreation and tourism potential of the study area was determined through surveys based on the preferences and expectations of the local population, interest groups, visitors, and experts familiar with the area. The formula used to determine the sample size is as follows (Özdamar, 2003; Yazicioğlu, 2004; Lai & Nepal, 2006):

N: Total population size, n: Sample size

P: Observed rate of X in the population

Q: (1-P): Unobserved rate of X in the population

Z α : $\alpha = 0.05$ (corresponds to 1.96)

d: Sampling error

For $\alpha = 0.05$ and (d = 0.10) sampling error, taking (p = 0.5; q = 0.5) and the total population size of Tarsus city as 346,715, the sample size is calculated as:

$$N = 346,715 * 0.5 * 0.5 * (1.96)^2 / [(346,715-1) * (0.10)^2] = 96$$

The Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK) has reported the population of Tarsus city as 346,715 (Anonim, 2023e). According to this calculation, the sample size for Tarsus city is 96. To conduct the survey with the local people of Tarsus and expert groups who are familiar with the region, ethical approval was obtained. Thus, a total of 100 people were surveyed, considering the margin of error.

The study aimed to determine the recreation and tourism potential of the study area based on the preferences and expectations of the participants, including the local population, interest groups, visitors, and experts familiar with the area.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. Determination of Public Perspectives on Tourism Recreational Landscape Potential of Tarsus District and Its Surroundings

A survey was conducted with 100 people between April 19 and May 17, 2021 in order to evaluate the tourism and recreational activities of the local people and visitors in the Tarsus district of Mersin province. The prepared standard questionnaire forms were applied face to face by interviewing the participants one-on-one. As a result of the survey, a lot of information was obtained about the interest of the people of Tarsus in tourism, the tourism potential of Tarsus, the expectations and demands of the people of the region from tourism, and the importance of historical, touristic and recreational activities in the region.

The demographic characteristics of the participants in the survey study conducted to determine the point of view towards historical, touristic and recreational activities in Tarsus district and its

surroundings are given in Table 1. As can be seen in the table, 37% of the participants are male and 63% are female. The highest age distribution was seen in the age range of 26-45 (48%). 43% of the participants are married and 57% are single. The highest education level was at the undergraduate level with 52%, while the lowest education level was at the graduate level (2%). Considering the social status and occupational groups of the respondents, 21% are students, 17% are housewives, 13% are self-employed and civil servants. When the monthly income distributions are examined, 41% of the participants declared that they have an income level of 0-2000 TL, 14% 2001-3000 TL, 17% 3001-4000 TL, 16% 4001-5000 TL and finally 12% 5001 and above.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the participants in the survey conducted in Tarsus District

Individual Characteristics	Variables	Percent (%)
Gender Distribution	Male	37
	Female	63
Age Distribution	18-25	33
	26-45	48
	46 and over	19
Distribution by Marital Status	Married	43
	Single	57
Distribution by Education Levels Primary	Primary	6
	Secondary Education	5
	High school	23
	Associate Degree	12
	Bachelor	52
	Master	2
Social Status and Occupational Group Distribution	Student	21
	Self-employment	13
	Officer	13
	Housewife	17
	Farmer	2
	Worker	15
	Other	19
	Distribution by Monthly Income Status	0-2000
2001-3000		14
3001-4000		17
4001-5000		16
5001 and above		12
Total		100

The respondents were asked how many years they had lived in Tarsus. To this question, 39% were born in Tarsus, 13% answered less than 1 year, 6% 1-5 years, 11% 6-10 years, 2% 11-15 years, 29% more than 15 years (Figure 4).

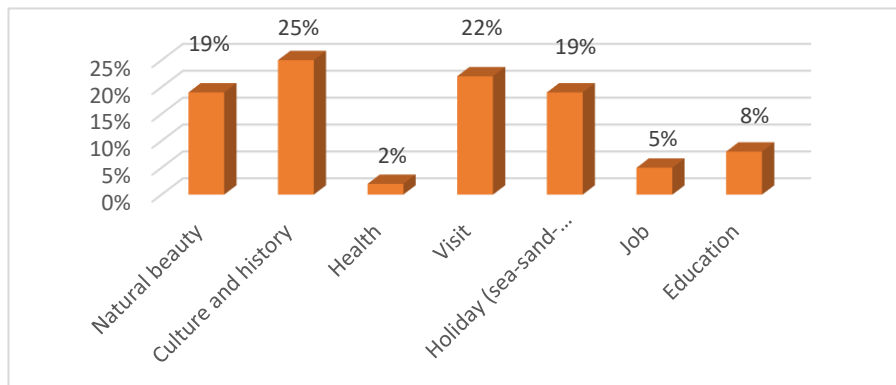


Figure 4. Responses of the participants to the question 'How long have you been living in Tarsus?'

Respondents were asked for what purpose they made their travels. To this question, 19% stated that it was for natural beauty, 25% for culture and history, 2% for health, 22% for visiting friends, 19% for vacation (sea-sand-sun), 5% for work, 8% for education (Figure 5).

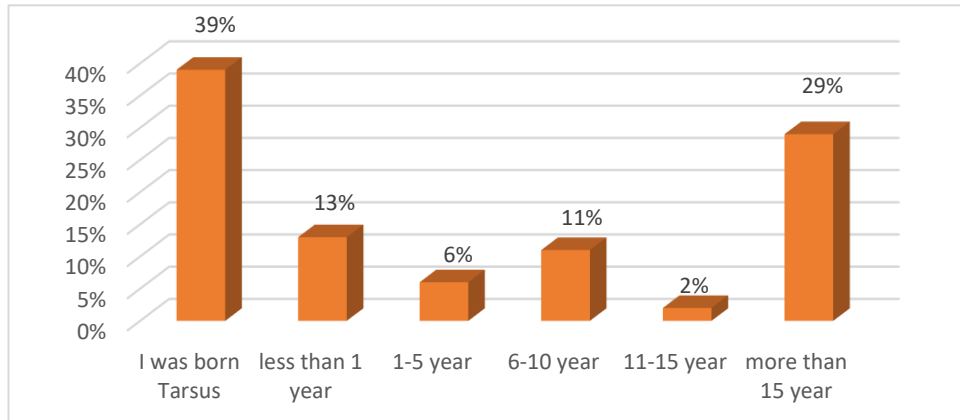


Figure 5. Responses of the participants to the question "For what purpose do you travel?"

The participants were asked a question about whether they had participated in a tourism activity related to entertainment, culture, history, nature or for a different purpose, and 84% of the respondents answered yes, 16% answered no (Figure 6).

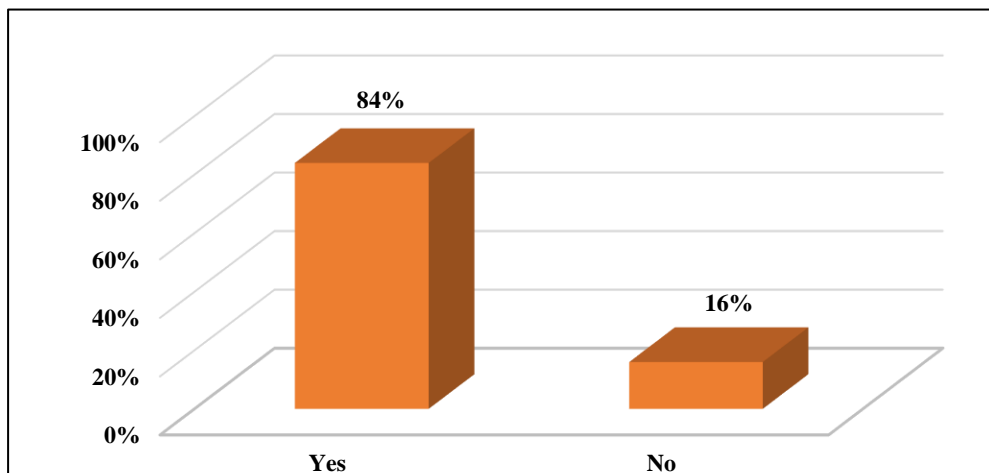


Figure 6. Responses of the participants to the question "Have you ever been involved in a tourism activity related to entertainment, culture, history, nature or for a different purpose?"

When the answers given to the questions asked to the participants about what the concept of tourism means, the most preferred option (48%) was the trips to rest, see and get to know. Then, 14% stated that nature-related tours and excursions included activities, and 17% stated that there were activities that provide escape from stress and relaxation. The least preferred options were a phenomenon that enables various communities to connect (6%), activities that promote the development of trade and industry (6%), and a phenomenon that helps local development (6%) (Figure 7).

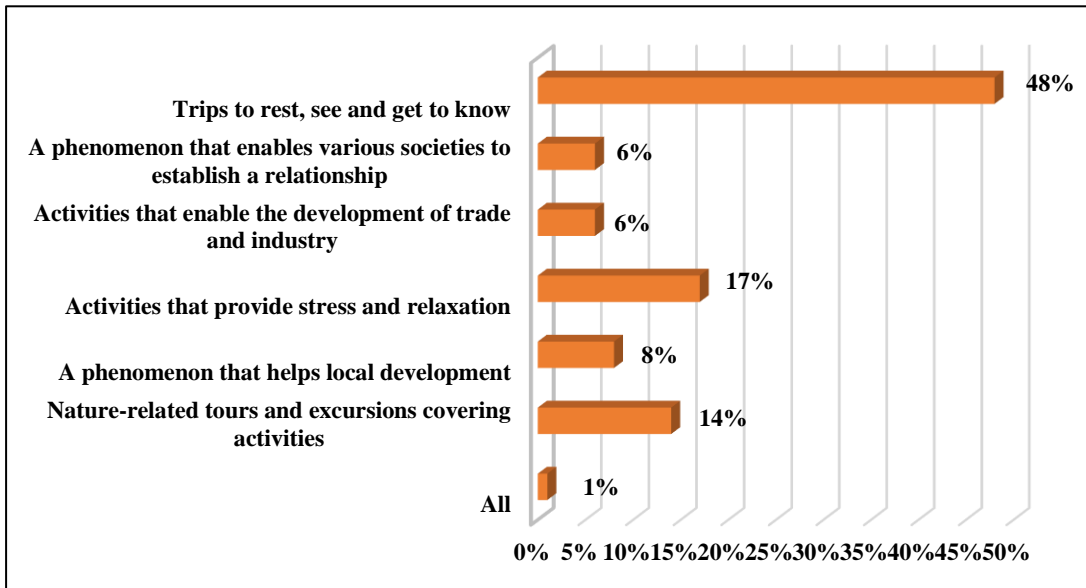


Figure 7. Responses of the participants to the question “What does the concept of tourism mean to you?”

Different answers to the verbal question, "What is the first thing that comes to mind when hearing the name Tarsus," is given in Figure 8. As seen in the figure, the most preferred option was History (24%), Gastronomy tourism (8) and Ashab-ı Keyf (8%), while the least preferred option (1%) was Ulu Mosque.

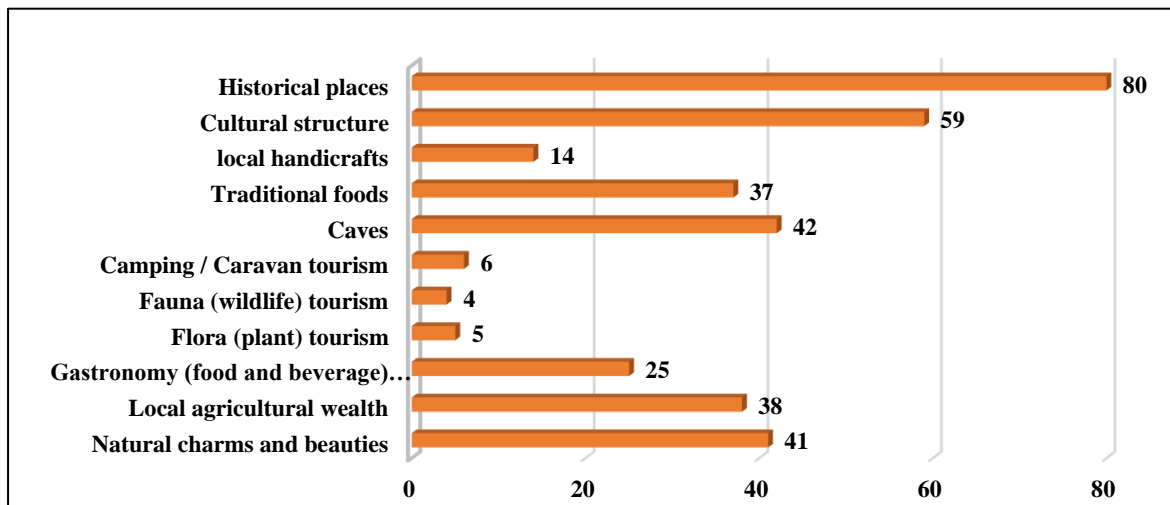


Figure 8. Responses of the participants to the question “Which of the following is Tarsus known for?”

Participants in the tourism area of the city of Tarsus (Historical places, Cultural structure, Local handicrafts, Local food, Caves, Camp / Caravan tourism, Fauna (wildlife) tourism, Flora (plant) tourism, Gastronomy (food and beverage) tourism, Local richness, It was asked which ones (natural charm and beauty) were referred to. Participants were asked to rank their first three choices from these options (Figure 9). According to the results obtained, the most preferred option was historical places (80%), followed by cultural structure (59%) and caves (42%). The least preferred tourism activities were camping / caravan tourism (6%), Flora tourism (5%), and Fauna tourism (4%).

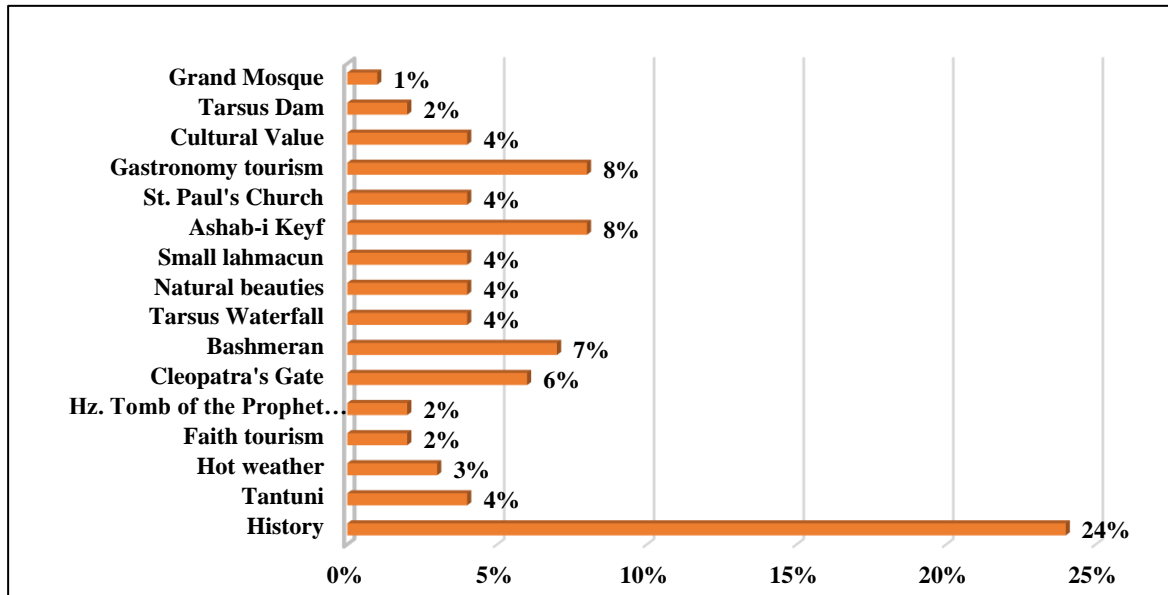


Figure 9. Responses of the participants to the question “Which of the following is Tarsus known for?”

The participants were asked to rank their first three preferences in the question which type of tourism is more suitable for the development of Tarsus City (Figure 10). Accordingly, the most preferred tourism types were cultural tourism (54%) and historical tourism (52%), faith tourism (39%), and highland tourism (35%), respectively. The least preferred tourism activity was Fauna (wildlife) tourism with 1%.

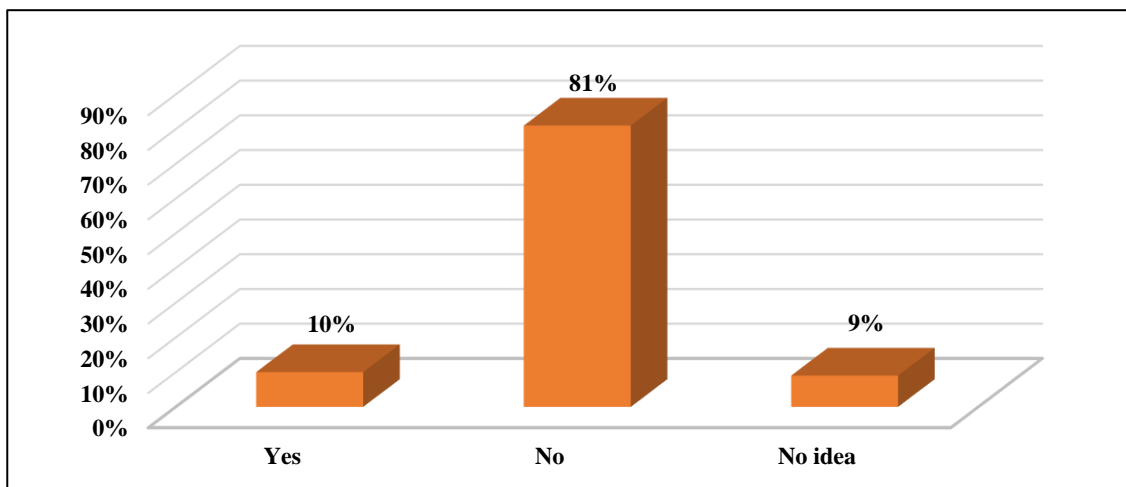


Figure 10. Responses of the participants to the question “Which type of tourism do you think Tarsus region is more suitable for development?”

When the answers were given to the question about whether the city of Tarsus has been adequately promoted or not, 10% of the participants answered yes to this question, 81% said no, and 9% had no idea (Figure 11).

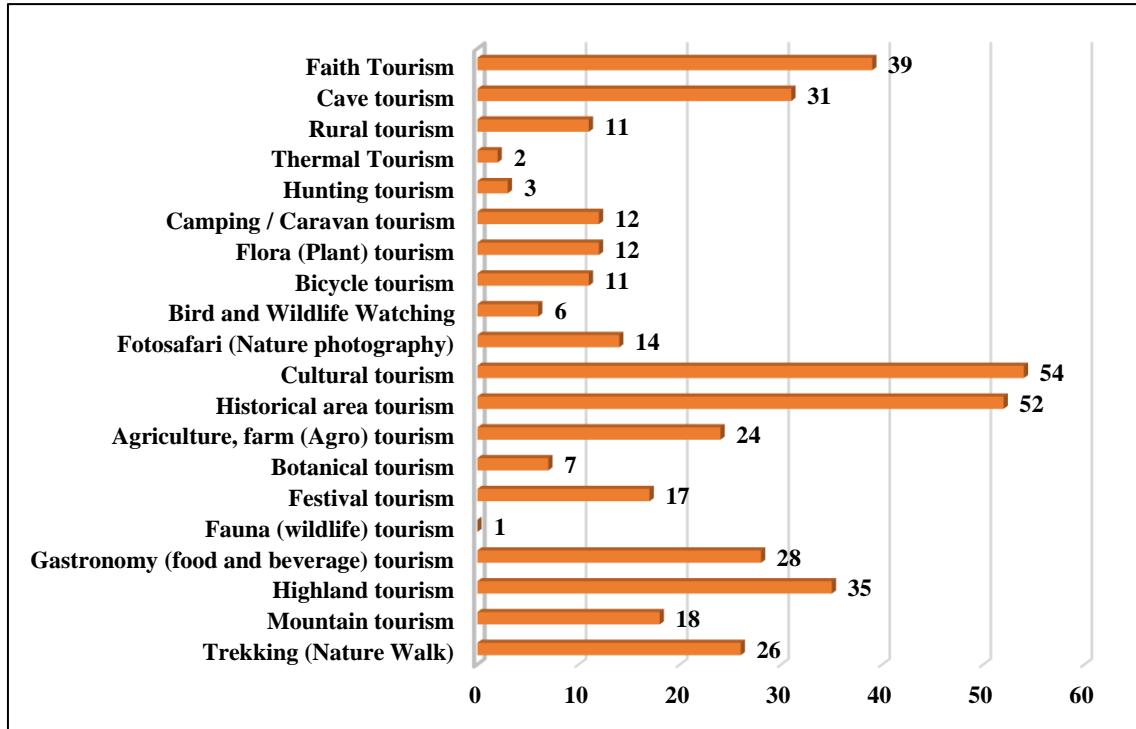


Figure 11. Responses of the participants to the question “Do you think Tarsus is promoted enough?”

Participants were asked whether they wanted the city of Tarsus to develop. 99% of the respondents answered “yes” to this question and 1% answered no (Figure 12).

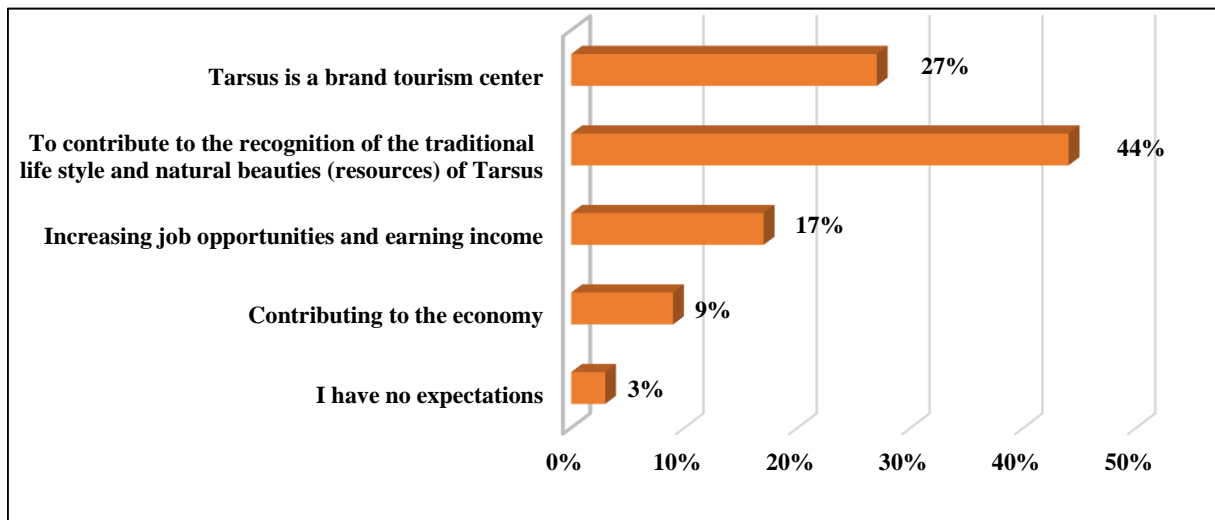


Figure 12. Responses to the question “Do you want tourism to develop in your district?”

Participants were asked what their expectations are from the development of tourism in Tarsus. The biggest expectation (44%) of the local people from the development of tourism in the city of Tarsus was to contribute to the recognition of the traditional lifestyle and natural beauties (resources) of Tarsus. Then, respectively, 27% of the participants answered that the city of Tarsus is a brand tourism center, 17% of them increasing job opportunities and earning income, and 9% of them are contributing to the economy. 3% of the respondents stated that they have no expectations for the development of tourism in the district (Figure 13).

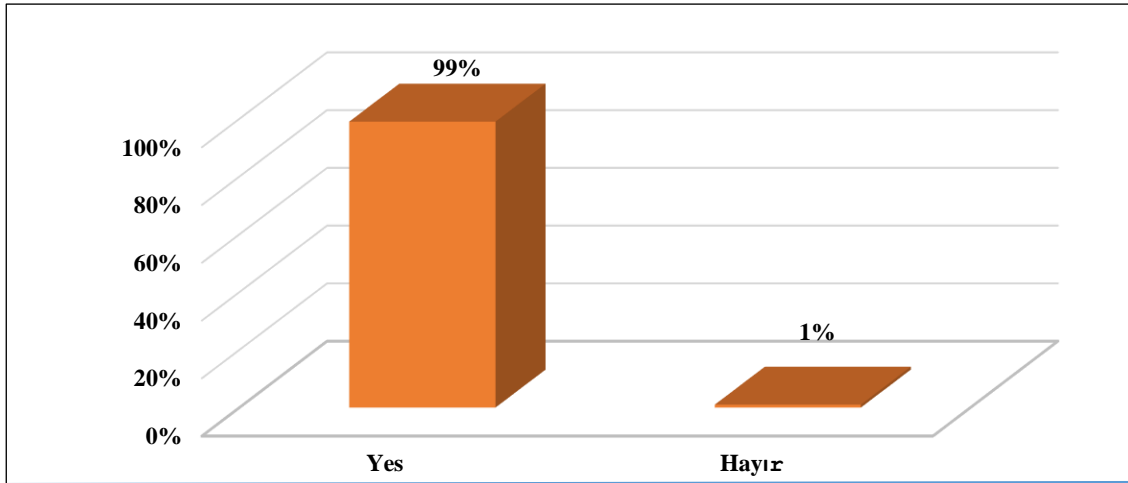


Figure 13. Responses of the participants to the question “What are your expectations from the development of tourism in Tarsus?”

When the answers given to the participants to the question of which factors could negatively affect the development of tourism in Tarsus districts were examined, 47% said that the most important negative effect from Tarsus is the inadequacy of accommodation facilities, 36% inadequacy of tourism activities, 7% inadequacy of transportation, 6% in educational opportunities. inadequacy, 3% of them gave answers as lack of security. 1% of the respondents stated the inadequacy of health facilities as the most important obstacle to the development of tourism (Figure 14).

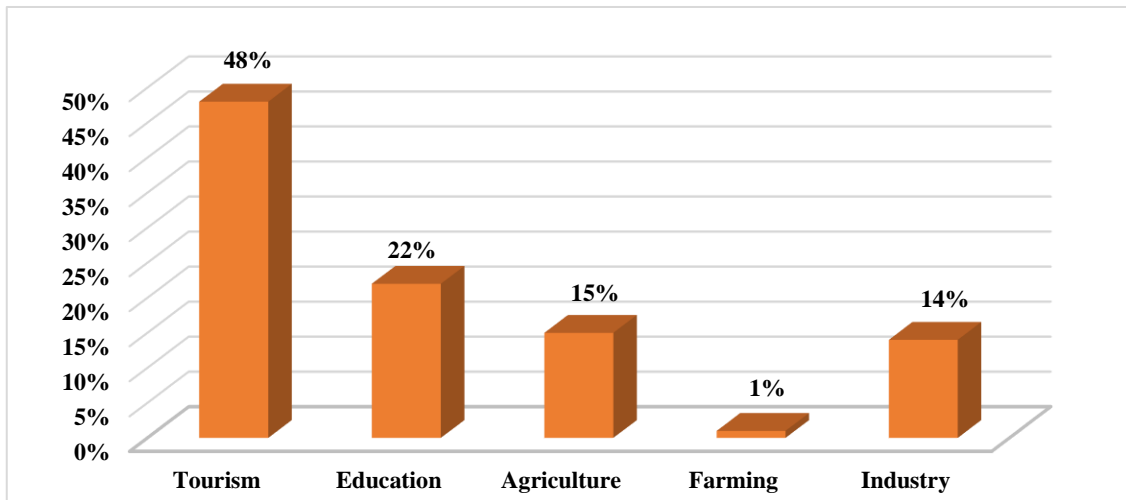


Figure 14. Responses of the participants to the question "Which of the following factors negatively affect the development of tourism in Tarsus?"

“Which sectors should be given priority in the development of the district in Tarsus and its surroundings?” The answers they gave to the question asked as the following were 48% tourism, 22% education, 15% agriculture, 14% industry and 1% animal husbandry (Figure 15).

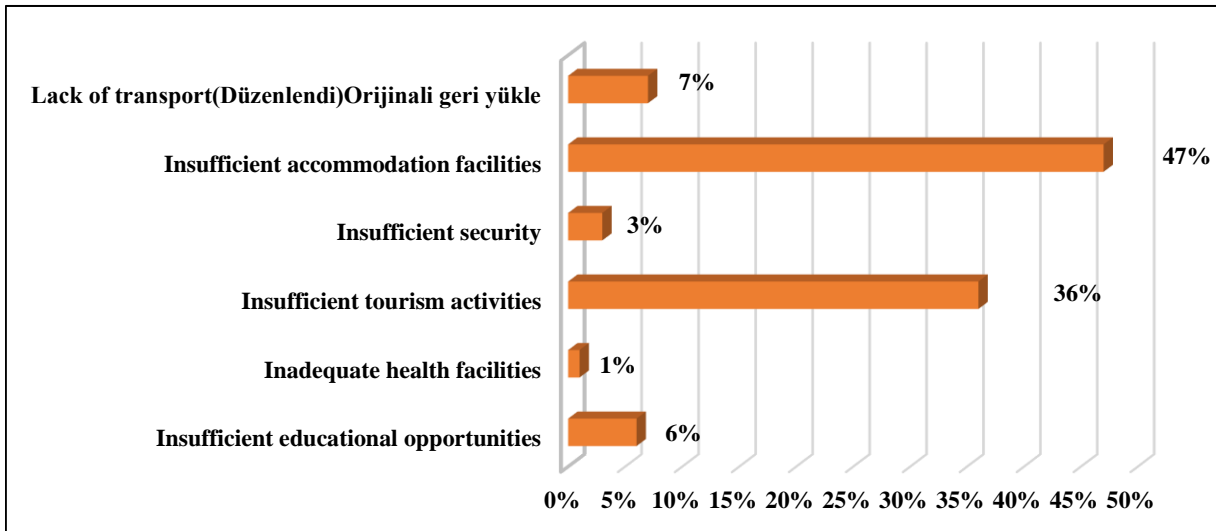


Figure 15. Responses of the participants to the question "Which of the following sectors should be given priority in the development of the district in Tarsus and its vicinity?"

4. Conclusion and Suggestions

To understand ourselves and our society, urban landscapes should be regarded as cultural clues and, thus, as germane areas for conducting research (Aşur et al., 2022; Aşur & Akpınar Külekçi, 2020; Rüzgar et al., 2022; Kaplan & Örucü, 2019).

Tarsus, the focus area of this study, is a district located in the southern part of Turkey, connected to the province of Mersin. Tarsus district is situated to the east of Mersin province. The districts of Mersin province include Akdeniz, Anamur, Aydıncık, Bozyazı, Çamlıyayla, Erdemli, Gülnar, Mezitli, Mut, Silifke, Toroslar, Yenişehir, and Tarsus. Tarsus is the largest district in Mersin province.

Tarsus district boasts a diverse topographic structure, different landscape characters, with natural assets such as mountains, forests, plateaus, and rivers, varying between sea level at the Mediterranean coast and elevations of up to 3000 meters in the northern region. The Mediterranean climate dominates the area, and the surrounding region of Tarsus is rich in diverse plant species. Additionally, Tarsus district is known for its caves, historical structures, and traditional way of life, making it a significant potential destination for tourism. Therefore, sustainable tourism activities in Tarsus should focus on maintaining a balance between conservation and utilization of these natural assets.

In order to promote tourism and recreational potential and contribute to the development of the region, it is recommended to consider the following aspects based on on-site observations, surveys, and literature sources regarding Tarsus district and its immediate surroundings:

- The proximity of natural and historical sites in Tarsus district and the ease of transportation present a favorable advantage for tourism. Being a district with the potential for vibrant tourism and recreational activities, Tarsus should develop well-planned initiatives through participatory, conservation-oriented, and rational approaches. The positive attitude of local residents towards the development of tourism, as indicated in the survey, holds significant importance in fostering tourism activities. Studies by Sinkovics & Penz (2009) have shown that the positive perception of tourists by the local community increases the desire of tourists to travel.
- Local community views and perceptions regarding tourism development will have a positive impact when active community engagement and employment opportunities are provided. Tourism planning and its growth can lead to changes in economic, social, and environmental perceptions within the community (Jamal & Getz, 1995). In Tarsus, there are significant expectations for economic and employment opportunities associated with tourism development. Considering the survey results, which indicate that the region is primarily

associated with historical sites and cultural heritage (80% and 59%, respectively), Tarsus has considerable potential for historical and cultural tourism. This aspect should be taken into account when planning future tourism activities.

- Tourism development can drive local economic growth, generate new employment opportunities, increase revenue, tax income, foreign exchange, and contribute to the development of other industries (Ko & Stewart, 2002). The development of winter tourism in the Karboğazı ski center in Tarsus, which currently lacks sufficient facilities, can lead to the development of other related industries.
- Tarsus district benefits from a well-developed transportation infrastructure, including highways, railways, and the Mersin port. The ongoing construction of the Çukurova Regional Airport will also significantly enhance transportation.
- To further boost tourism in Tarsus, it is essential to focus on restoration efforts to preserve the original state of historical sites and carry out effective promotion campaigns.
- Improving people's standard of living and providing better living conditions are closely related to the country's economic growth. Tourism is an important sector that can achieve better results in a shorter time frame with fewer financial resources and investments. Therefore, given that tourism was the first and most preferred option for the development of Tarsus district in the survey (48%), prioritizing tourism activities in the region is necessary. It is crucial to protect the fertile agricultural lands of Tarsus Plain from urbanization and preserve the natural beauty of the district to increase tourism activities.
- Proper promotion of Tarsus' natural, historical, and cultural attractions is necessary.
- Historic Tarsus houses can be renovated and converted into museums or accommodation facilities for visiting tourists.
- The Tarsus beach, which holds significant potential for sea tourism, is currently in a neglected state. With appropriate investments and promotion, it can become a significant source of revenue for the country and a prominent regional and international sea tourism destination.

To fully realize the tourism potential of Tarsus district, it is essential to emphasize the significance of its cultural assets and natural landscape, identify and promote its tourist attractions. Visitors can explore Tarsus by starting from the Cleopatra Gate in the city center and visiting nearby sites such as Gözlükule Mound. Other historical places within walking distance include St. Paul's Church, St. Paul's Well, Tarsus old houses, and the ancient road. Visitors can then continue to explore Bilal-i Habeş Mosque, Ulu Mosque, Kırkkaşık Bedesten, Kubat Pasha Madrasa, Old Mosque, remnants of the Roman Bath, the Tomb of the Prophet Daniel, and Şahmeran Bath. Additionally, Ashab-ı Keyf and Taşkuyu Cave, located 12 km northwest of Tarsus, offer fascinating attractions and opportunities for paragliding from Ashab-ı Keyf Hill. Visitors can also enjoy the region's local cuisine, shopping venues, and other facilities to cater to their basic needs. In summary, Tarsus district and its nearby surroundings, with its mountains, hills, rivers, vast forests, intriguing geological and geomorphological formations, and historical and cultural structures, offer a remarkable destination that eagerly awaits visitors.

Acknowledgements and Information Note

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Author Contribution and Conflict of Interest Declaration Information

All authors contributed equally to the article. There is no conflict of interest.

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