

A Responsible Cultural Heritage Consumption for Senior Tourists in Nicosia

Gizem GÜVENBAŞ^{1*} , Mukaddes POLAY² 

ORCID 1: 0000-0003-1059-321X

ORCID 2: 0000-0002-4797-2056

¹ Rauf Denktas University, Faculty of Architecture and Engineering, Department of Architecture, 99010, Nicosia, North Cyprus.

² Eastern Mediterranean University, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Architecture, 99500, Famagusta, North Cyprus.

* e-mail: gizem.guvenbas@rdu.edu.tr

Abstract

Cultural heritage consumption plays a pivotal role in senior tourism, providing unique experiences and fostering a sense of connection with the past. This study focuses on the concept of responsible cultural heritage consumption for senior tourists in the historic Walled City of Nicosia. The primary objective is to examine the preferences and challenges of senior tourists in terms of accessibility and engagement with cultural heritage sites. Qualitative research was conducted through documentation, on-site observations and interviews to gather data about the cultural heritage consumption experiences of senior tourists. The research findings reveal that senior tourists are interested in experiencing authentic cultural heritage and desire opportunities for meaningful interactions with local heritage. However, limited accessibility and lack of age-friendly facilities pose significant barriers to their full participation in cultural heritage sites. The study highlights the need for responsible tourism practices that make cultural heritage inclusive for all age groups.

Keywords: Responsible tourism, cultural heritage consumption, senior tourists, inclusive access, Nicosia Walled City.

Lefkoşa'da İleri Yaş Turistler için Sorumlu Kültürel Miras Gereksinimi

Öz

Kültürel miras tüketimi, geçmişle ilgili bağlantı duygusunu geliştirerek, ileri yaş turizminin gelişiminde önemli rol oynamaktadır. Bu araştırma, tarihi Surlarla çevrili Lefkoşa Şehri'ndeki ileri yaş turistlerin kültürel miras gereksinimini incelemektedir. Çalışmanın amacı, ileri yaş turistlerin kültürel miras alanlarına erişimi ve katılımı konusunda karşılaştıkları tercihleri ve zorlukları incelemektir. Kültürel miras tüketimi bağlamında ileri yaş turistlerin deneyimleri hakkında gerekli verilerin elde edilmesi için çalışmada doküman araştırması, yerinde gözlemler ve görüşmeler yoluyla nitel bir araştırma yaklaşımına yer verilmiştir. Araştırma bulguları, ileri yaş turistlerin otantik kültürel miras değerlerine ulaşmak istediklerini ve yerel mirasla anlamlı etkileşimler için fırsatlar aradığını ortaya koymaktadır. Bununla birlikte, sınırlı erişilebilirlik ve yaşa uygun çevresel düzenlemelerin bulunmamasından dolayı oluşan engeller, ileri yaş turistlerin kültürel miras alanlarına tam katılımlarını önlemektedir. Çalışma, kültürel mirası tüm yaş grupları için kapsayıcı hale getiren sorumlu turizm uygulamalarına olan ihtiyacın altını çizmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Sorumlu turizm, kültürel miras tüketimi, ileri yaş turist, kapsayıcı erişim, Lefkoşa Surlarıçi.

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1. Introduction

The importance of promoting responsible tourism activities among seniors has increased with the rise of cultural heritage tourism and the aging population. Studying seniors' cultural heritage consumption patterns is critical in establishing inclusive and sustainable tourism practices since seniors include a substantial proportion of visitors.

Cultural heritage tourism has gained popularity as a way of engaging visitors with the tangible and intangible aspects of a destination's heritage. Simultaneously, the global population is going through an essential demographic shift, with seniors representing a significant proportion of travellers worldwide. This convergence offers an opportunity to investigate the role of seniors in cultural heritage consumption and to address their inclusive access needs in this context.

Previous studies have mainly focused on cultural heritage tourism, but there has been limited research on the specific behaviours and experiences of seniors in this field. Accordingly; the aim of this research is to investigate responsible cultural heritage consumption and examine how senior tourists access and use the cultural heritages of the Nicosia Walled City in North Cyprus. The research also emphasizes the importance of inclusive access and its impact on the consumption patterns of senior tourists. Understanding these aspects is vital in developing targeted strategies that enhance the experiences of seniors while preserving cultural heritage for future generations.

Cyprus is a Mediterranean Island that attracts visitors with its rich history, diverse cultural heritage, hot climate and stunning coastline. The tourism industry is a significant and profitable sector in Cyprus, which helps to boost the country's economy. Nicosia is the last divided capital of Europe, with Northern and Southern Nicosia currently housing two independent states separated by a buffer zone. In 2008, the Lokmacı Gate, which connects the two sides of Nicosia, was opened. This was a critical step in the growth of the city's tourist potential and the regeneration of its historical district. As a result, the Nicosia Walled City was designated as a "Special Tourism Zone," and a pedestrianization scheme was launched. Today, the historic city has become a centre of attraction and an open-air museum that houses many valuable cultural heritages, with its 6000-year-long history which influences the city's multicultural identity.

The aim of this research is to provide valuable insights that can assist policymakers, cultural heritage site managers and tourism industry stakeholders to create more inclusive and responsible tourism experiences for seniors. In this study; qualitative research methods were employed through documentation analysis, on-site observations and interviews. This combination allowed for a comprehensive understanding of seniors' motivations, preferences and behaviours concerning cultural heritage consumption. Documentation analysis was utilized to understand the development process of a site, while on-site observations and interviews were conducted to gain deeper insights into the how seniors interact with the heritage sites and their impacts on the surrounding environment and local communities.

This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on responsible tourism and cultural heritage consumption by examining the specific attitudes and behaviours of senior tourists. The findings are expected to inform sustainable tourism strategies and promote responsible cultural heritage consumption among seniors, enriching their travel experiences while preserving cultural and environmental heritage for future generations.

The research is structured as follows: The first section includes a literature review on responsible cultural heritage, senior tourism and inclusive access. The second section outlines the study's material and method. The third section presents the findings and analysis of seniors' cultural heritage consumption patterns in Nicosia. Finally, section four offers concluding remarks and suggestions for the future in this domain.

1.1. Responsible Cultural Heritage Consumption and Senior Tourism

According to the Dictionary of the Turkish Language Association (as cited in Köse & Yamaçlı, 2023, p.201), there are two definitions of tourism. The first definition describes tourism as a journey that

involves relaxation, entertainment and observation. The second definition includes all the facilities that aim to attract travellers to a region or country, including economic, cultural, technological aspects. Cultural heritage tourism, on the other hand, is a form of experiential tourism that focuses on experiencing, participating in and being stimulated by the cultural heritage. This includes performing and visual arts, historic sites and museums, festivities, traditional landscapes, language and traditional ways of life, such as food, beverages, and activities (Cros & McKercher, 2015; Lwoga & Mapunda, 2017). In recent years, cultural heritage tourism has been integrated into current tourism development strategies, such as 'responsible tourism' and 'sustainable tourism destination development' (Csapo, 2015, p.624).

Krippendorf (as cited in Caruana et. al, 2014, p.116) states 'responsible tourism' has been extensively researched over a long period of time. As the tourism industry advances in a more demanding and segmented market, it would need to adopt more "environmentally-oriented and socially responsible" marketing practices to maintain the consumer satisfaction. Various industry guidelines on responsible tourism has been developed to outline its main tenets and practices among practitioners. In particular, the Cape Town Declaration of 2002 describes responsible tourism as reducing negative economic, social and environmental impacts; fostering economic benefits for host communities; involving locals in decision-making; conserving natural and cultural heritage; enabling tourists to have more pleasurable interactions with locals and gain a deeper understanding of their cultural, socio-economic and environmental issues; allowing access for vulnerable segments as disabled people; being attentive to cultural differences; promoting mutual respect between visitors and hosts; and boosting locals' confidence (Cape Town Declaration, 2002).

It is vital to retrieve that the tourism industry is built on the relationships between individuals, locations and goods. The social and physical conditions of a destination, both at a micro and macro level, impact the industry (Hanafiah & Harun, 2010; Hanafiah et al., 2016). There are several sustainability issues associated with tourism such as the exploitation of resources, an unstable economy and changing tourist demand. The advantages of regeneration and resilience must also be promoted and made available to the locals and the region by those responsible for developing tourist policies (Hanafiah et al., 2016). Responsible Tourism Practice (RTP) has similar goals to sustainable tourism such as promoting social justice, environmental integrity and maximizing benefits to communities (Hanafiah et al., 2016).

In tourism research, the age range of senior tourists varies. United Nations (2015) reports seniors as those who are 60 years of age or older. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2015), seniors are individuals aged 65 and older. In European Union publications, the term of "senior" is used for people aged 55 and older (European Commission, 2014). However; different researchers preferred to use diverse age ranges to define seniors. Seniors are mentioned in some research as being 50 or older (Shoemaker, 2000), 55 or older (Fleischer & Pizam, 2002), 60 or older (Huber et al., 2018) and 65 or older (Jang et al., 2009; Nikitina & Vorontsova, 2015; Sert, 2019).

As stated by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2015), the global population is aging rapidly. In 2009, over 730 million people over the age of 60 made up almost 10% of the population, which is 20% increase from 2000. By 2050, the number is expected to rise to one-fifth of the world's population aged 80 and older, with over 20% of the total population being over 60 years old (WHO, 2015). As their population grows, seniors represent a significant market group for the tourist industry due to their growth rates, income, health and beliefs about life (Jang et al., 2009; Sert, 2019). Since they are mainly in retired position, seniors have more time and resources to devote tourism-related activities than other age groups (Kim & Kim, 2018; Sert, 2019).

Senior travellers play a crucial role in the tourism sector as their numbers and affluence continue to increase (Chen & Wu, 2009; Liew et al., 2021). Accordingly; senior individuals can make significant contributions to the tourism industry and they are generally considered to have sufficient time and amount of money to spend. As a result, seniors are able to extend their duration period to stay, spend more money, travel further and more frequently (Fleischer & Pizam, 2002; Sert, 2019).

Borja, Casanovas & Bosh (cited in Alén et al., 2012, p.7) asserts that the senior population will contribute significantly to the growth of the tourism industry. This segment of tourists is greatly experienced and demands a higher level of service from the industry. In addition, they may prefer to avoid from the peak seasons due to their retirement status. Disabled people are also included in this demographic because they have similar accessibility needs as seniors. Enhancing accessibility not only assists seniors and disabled but also pregnant women, children and families, who may have temporary disabilities. In general, increased accessibility is advantageous for all people.

1.2. Inclusive Access and Senior-Friendly Cultural Heritage Sites

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2013), allowing people with disabilities to travel is essential in establishing responsible tourism. Its General Assembly Resolution A/RES/578 (XVIII) approved the "Declaration on the Facilitation of Tourist Travel" in 2009, which aimed at enabling travel for individuals with disabilities. This declaration is a critical component of any strategy that focuses on promoting responsible tourism. As a result, mainstreaming disability concerns as an intrinsic element of applicable sustainable development strategies will ensure inclusive and accessible tourism for all (UNWTO, 2013). The increasing prevalence of disability among travelling seniors in industrialized nations necessitates the development of accessible environments, transportation and services, to boost the market value of the accessible tourism sector.

Inclusive access is a key aspect that takes into account diverse behavioural patterns. It involves designing, planning, and managing changes to ensure that needs of all individuals, regardless of age, ability, or situation, are considered. The achievement of inclusive access necessitates design solutions that pave the way to restore maximum use (Goodall, 2010; Güvenbaş, 2021). Senior tourism and accessible tourism are closely related concepts that should be considered together since disability is often associated with elderly people. Inclusive access needs of senior tourists could be integrated into responsible tourism practices. Attention can be given to requirements of suitable arrangements for elderly individuals as well as other disability groups in this context. Elderly people typically have bone loss, muscle disorders, difficulties with balance, extreme tiredness, vision and hearing impairments. Problems with movement, spatial awareness and mental ability are common among the elderly people when they are using the built environment. Seniors who are asked why they don't prefer to walk, often cite issues such as; the distance between destinations, insufficient sidewalks, a lack of places to relax and fear of crime that makes the use of urban settings difficult (Türel et al., 2007; Güvenbaş, 2021).

The quality of the physical environment influences the mobility of senior tourists in cultural heritage sites. The level of mobility in these sites greatly influence seniors' ability to fully engage in communal activities, encompassing their capacity to move around an area without obstacles (IDGO, 2007; Türel et al., 2007; Kwok & Ng, 2008; Fadda et al., 2010, Yung et al., 2016).

In cultural heritage sites; the physical inaccessibility could be related to both macro land-use patterns and micro-scaled features of urban planning and design. Senior tourists may face difficulties in access to cultural heritage sites because of the diverse barriers:

- Improperly designed public & private transportation activities
- Problems related to physical infrastructure of pedestrian routes (sidewalks, pedestrian crossings, curb ramps)
- Insufficiently designed street furniture and amenities (benches, lighting elements, ATMs, etc.)
- Inadequate design of building entranceways (e.g. having stairs and hand-opened doors)
- Inadequate public information and signage (Güvenbaş, 2021; Güvenbaş & Polay, 2021).

To create senior-friendly cultural heritage sites, designers and planners must consider significant provisions to upgrade the quality of public and private transportation, pedestrian routes, street furniture, building entranceways and signage.

- **Public and Private Transportation:** Accessible transportation is vital for establishing responsible cultural heritage sites. Bus stops should be located within reasonable proximity to

accommodate seniors who may have walking difficulty. Public vehicles must be designed ergonomically, with ramps, safe stair geometry, contrasting stair nosing, handrails and grab bars to ensure the safety and comfort of all passengers (Güvenbaş, 2021). To facilitate entry and exit of people with disabilities, designated loading and unloading zones should be located closer to tourist attractions. Car parking spaces should be wide enough with an access aisle provided senior tourists to travel comfortably between automobiles and wheelchairs (UNWTO, 2013).

- **Pedestrian Routes:** Sidewalks, walkways, curb ramps and pedestrian crossings are among the pedestrian routes which need to be designed carefully to ensure effortless access of senior visitors. Accessible facilities should be provided along clear, obstruction-free and continuous pedestrian paths. Sidewalk width, gradient, surface material and grids are among the crucial design components that must be integrated into conservation plans (Güvenbaş, 2021).
- **Street Furniture and Amenities:** Resting areas, telephone booths, water fountains, ATMs, garbage bins, bollards, and public toilets include street furniture and amenities that should be properly dimensioned to prioritize the comfort and safety of senior visitors to cultural heritage sites.
- **Building Entranceways:** Entranceways must be designed with appropriate width, slope and surface covering material to ensure the safety of all users. Adequate material selection should be made to prevent potential dangers and appropriate ramps must be provided to address the level of inequalities.
- **Public Information and Signage:** All signs such as direction signs, information signs and location maps should be designed in a clear, visible and simple form to increase legibility both during the day and night. Signage should carefully be placed to avoid harming or altering the historical character of the heritage sites.

2. Material and Method

2.1 Study Area

The Nicosia Walled City was selected as the study area. Nicosia City, the last divided capital in Europe, is located at the heart of Cyprus Island (Figure 1). It is currently home to two distinct states. After the conflict between Turks and Greeks, the city along with the rest of Cyprus Island were divided into Northern and Southern regions by a buffer zone. The Turks moved to the North while the Greeks inhabited the Southern side of the city (Güvenbaş & Polay, 2023).

Nicosia has a significant historic urban quarter with remnants of numerous ancient cultures that once traversed Cyprus: Ancient times (7500 BC); Persians (525 BC); Romans (58 BC-395 AD); Byzantines (395-1192); Lusignans (1192-1489); Venetians (1489-1571); Ottomans (1571-1878); British (1878-1960); Turks and Greeks- Republic of Cyprus- (1960-1974); After 1974 Turks (North Nicosia) and Greeks (South Nicosia). Today, many historical, architectural and cultural heritages have remained with its 6000-year-long history which influences the city's multicultural identity (Güvenbaş, 2021).

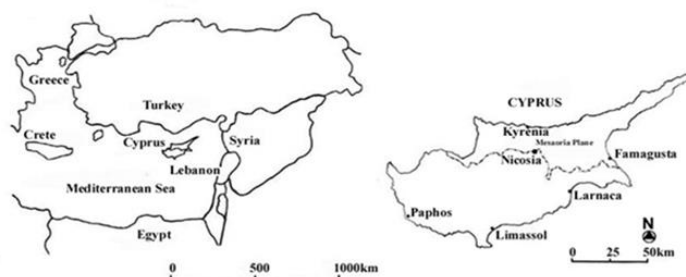


Figure 1. Location of Cyprus and Nicosia (Fasli, 2010)

The buffer zone which is under the control of the United Nations serves as a border between the two states. In 2008, the Lokmacı Gate, located within this zone, was opened. In this research, the main pedestrian axis connecting the Kyrenia and Lokmacı Gates was selected as a case study. Accordingly; three streets –Kyrenia Avenue, Asmaalti and Arasta Streets– and their close surroundings were evaluated for this study (Figure 2). The study aims to identify positive and negative factors that influence the accessibility and utilization of cultural heritage sites by senior tourists.

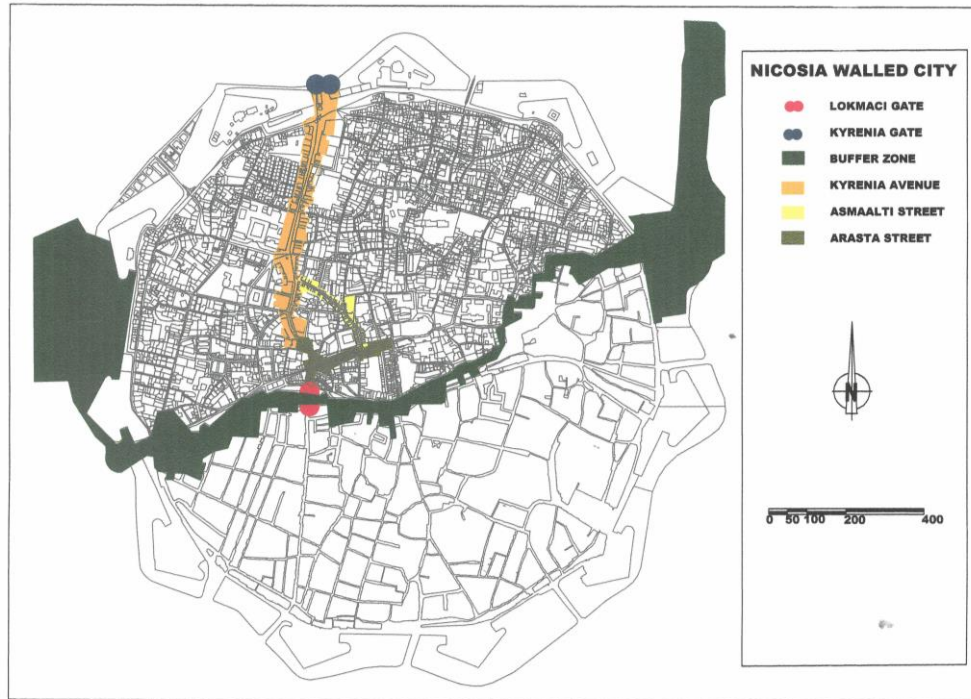


Figure 2. Boundaries of a Case Study Area (Modified from Nicosia Turkish Municipality, 2022)

2.2. Research Method and Procedure

Qualitative research methods - documentation, on-site observation and interviews - were employed in the study. This combination allowed for a comprehensive assessment of the needs, preferences and behaviours of seniors in terms of cultural heritage consumption.

In the preliminary stage of research, documentation analysis was done with written and visual documents in order to identify the historical background and the development process of the site. In particular, governmental reports were obtained to get more detailed data about tourism development strategies and processes in Nicosia. Following the documentation analysis, on-site observations were carried out to determine the existing barriers that hinder senior tourists from accessing and using cultural heritage sites. During on-site observations, problematic features were determined, photographed and recorded in inventory forms. In the final stage; face-to-face interviews were conducted with business owners, staff and senior tourists. The interview forms were systematically prepared and consisted of three sections. In the first section, respondents were asked to provide demographic information such as age, gender, nationality, purpose of visit and mobility situation. The second section of the interview form contained open-ended questions to gather respondents' opinions on the quality of public and private transportation facilities, pedestrian infrastructure, building entrances, street furniture and public information. The third section included two critical open-ended questions:

- Who should take responsibility for ensuring accessible tourism facilities in Nicosia?
- How can accessibility be improved for disabled and elderly users?

3. Findings and Discussion

In the following section, the findings of documentation analysis, on-site observations and interviews are given separately.

3.1. Findings of Documentation Analysis

Before the gate was opened, the Nicosia Walled City had suffered from social, financial and environmental obsolescences. Due to the buffer zone surrounding the south and the development of new areas to the north, access and utilization have decreased. As a result, some changes were necessary to revitalize the historic urban district (Güvenbaş & Polay, 2023).

In 2008, a committee assigned by the Prime Minister developed a plan for the conservation, revitalization and development of the city. The committee believed that Lokmacı Gate presents an opportunity to enhance the city's economic facilities and the overall image of a historic urban site. The report's primary objective was to establish a focal point while considering the area's perspective. According to committee, strategic conservation approaches could not only improve the physical environmental quality of the Nicosia, but also lead to social and economic revitalization by attracting both tourists and residents (Lefkoşa Surlarıçı İzleme, Koordinasyon & Yönlendirme Kurulu, 2008).

The report outlined various measures to revitalize the city. These measures included economic; physical, social, cultural, legal, organizational and financial considerations. This study only focuses on the physical and spatial measures of the report that are related to transportation and pedestrian infrastructure as follows:

- Making arrangements for the mobility of the disabled which will prioritize regular public transportation, pedestrians and bicycle access to discourage private vehicle entry into the walled city and improve access to the region;
- Selection of public transportation modes, connections, transit durations and terminating points with regard to the inner and outer walls;
- Establishing pedestrianization schemes including pedestrian-oriented details like benches, streetlights, bike parking, urban furniture and amenities that would attract visitors to experience cultural heritage sites.
- Installation of suitable car parking in the adjacent areas to the pedestrian zones and also the closest points of tourism destinations.
- Creating spaces for vehicles that will shuttle tourists through the area
- Adaptation of more accessible loading and unloading activities for public transportation
- Illumination of the area and the important cultural heritage sites.

Since, the Walled City was declared as a "Special Tourism Zone", a pedestrianization project has been scheduled to upgrade the quality of the historic urban quarter in terms of architectural aesthetics, pedestrian infrastructure and landscaping. The Nicosia Turkish Municipality carried out the "Arasta and Asmaaltı Pedestrianization Project" for the primary thoroughfares that connect the Lokmacı to the Asmaaltı and Arasta Regions (Figure 3).

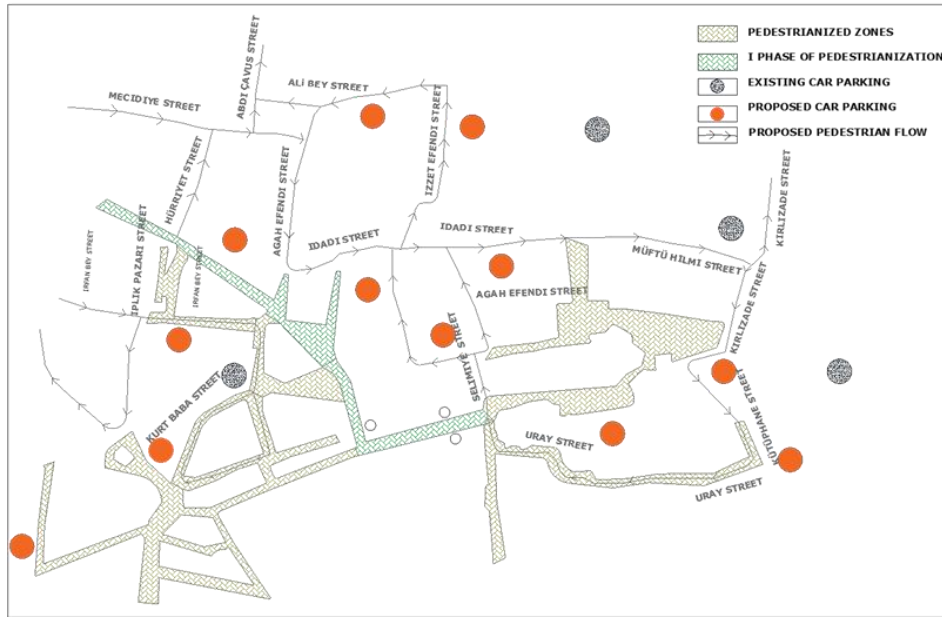


Figure 3. Pedestrianization Project of Arasta and Asmaaltı Streets (Modified from Lefkoşa Surlarıçi, İzleme, Koordinasyon & Yönlendirme Kurulu, 2008; Güvenbaş & Polay, 2023, p. 63)

The implementation of pedestrianization project was launched in 2013 and it was concluded in three distinct stages. The majority of the Arasta and Asmaaltı regions that are within the boundaries of the case study were pedestrianized in the first phase. The completed works of the pedestrianization project can be enumerated as following.

- Upgrading signage's quality.
- Installation of street lighting elements.
- Installation of more urban furniture including direction maps, resting elements, flower pots and tensile canopies.
- Preparation of tourist guidebooks.
- Printing of a foot map.
- Painting of pedestrian ways with a blue line for tourist walking tour.
- Printing of the city maps.
- Refurbishment of four existing public toilets.

The project was completed and contributed greatly to the revitalization of the region. Currently, pedestrianization efforts within the walls of North Nicosia are being carried out in some other areas. As a result, the research findings are expected to contribute in fostering the city's prosperous growth, as pedestrianization project is in progress.

3.2. Observation Findings

During the on-site observations, the quality of public and private transportation facilities; pedestrian routes infrastructure; street furniture and amenities; building entrances and public information and signage were examined.

3.2.1. Public & private transportation facilities

Public transportation vehicles can only stop at the bus stops in Kyrenia Gate, which may increase the walking distance to intended destination. Improperly designed public transportation restricted the accessibility of senior tourists. Vehicles without ramps, grab bars, handrails and proper signage are not available for seniors, particularly those with mobility and visual impairments. The number of curbside parking facilities is enough, but they are not appropriate for seniors since they don't have any drop-off zones with curb ramp designs (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Public and Private Transportation Facilities Create an Obstacle for Senior Tourists (Güvenbaş, 2023)

3.2.2. Pedestrian routes infrastructure

Establishing proper pedestrian infrastructure is crucial to make the historic city enticing to senior tourists. Pedestrian seniors require an integrated pedestrian network that seamlessly links each starting to its destination. Observation results revealed that problematic situations of pedestrian roads such as sidewalks, pedestrian crossings and curb ramps prevent cultural heritage sites from being easily accessible by senior tourists. The equipment and shopping vendors placed on sidewalks by business owners hampered senior tourists' access to the cultural site (Figure 5). Curb ramps are not functional and do not satisfy the needs of elderly visitors.



Figure 5. Parked Vehicles, Shoppings Stalls and Equipments were Restricted Usage of Sidewalks by Senior Tourists (Güvenbaş, 2023)

Ensuring the enduring effects on responsible cultural heritage consumption entails improving inclusive access which requires routine maintenance for the heritage sites. Insufficient maintenance facilities create perilous conditions for pedestrians, stemming from uneven pavements on pedestrian roads and the absence of zebra markings at pedestrian crossings (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Poor Maintenance Facilities Pose Danger During the Usage of Pedestrian Routes (Güvenbaş, 2023)

In addition to these; the presence of parked cars on curb ramps and the absence of speed control ramps on the vehicle roads provide considerable hurdles to the access of heritage site.

3.2.3. Street furniture and amenities

Street furnishing elements are problematic for senior tourists, particularly for those with disabilities. Benches without backrest are neither safe nor pleasant. ATMs are commonly positioned on raised platforms, posing challenges for seniors with wheelchairs. Urgent measures are necessary to install more practical and accessible street furnishing in the city to improve the accessibility and enjoyment of its cultural assets (Figure 7).

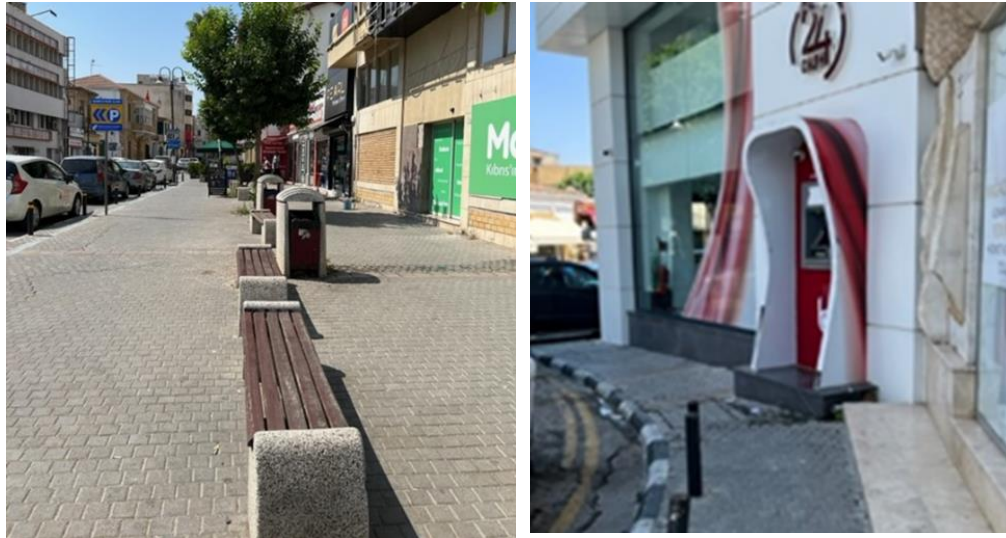


Figure 7. Street Furniture Elements and Amenities Need to be Refurbished since They are not Usable for Senior Tourists (Güvenbaş, 2023)

The case study area contains four public toilets. Intermittent closures affect some, while others are distant from areas experiencing significant tourist activity. The current number of public toilets is inadequate, necessitating the installation of more facilities. Improper design of public toilets may cause difficulties in use, especially for people with mobility devices. The study's findings reveal a scarcity of appropriate public amenities for senior tourists visiting the historic urban quarter.

3.2.4. Building entrances

The quality of entranceways is among the other determinants that may restrict tourists' consumption at cultural heritage sites. Improper choice of flooring materials and inconsistent levels of the entranceways could be given as problematic issues that impede access of seniors. The observation results indicate that ramps are designed at the entrances of the Great Inn and Gamblers Inn which are

the significant landmarks of the Nicosia. During the renovation of the Great Inn, the intention of a slippery surfaced ramp without handrails generates safety problems for senior tourists. Some shop owners added movable ramps at the entrances as others preferred to keep the existing narrow entrances with high steps (Figure 8).



Figure 8. a. Undulated Pattern of the Entranceway, b. Slippery Surface of Great Inn Building Entrance, c. Portable Ramp at Shop Entrance, and d. City Museum Entrance with Leveled Surface is not Appropriate for All Seniors (Güvenbaş,2023)

3.2.5. Public information and signage

Insufficient signage poses challenges for senior tourists, making information and ticket sale counters inaccessible. Both audio (preceded by a tone) and visible (characters on electronic boards or large displays) signs are absent at tourist facilities such as bus stops, information desks and ticket sales. In general, the deficiency in signage leads to legibility problem for senior tourists. The inadequate number of direction signs and the neglect of maintenance for existing signage along the blue tourist route contribute to orientation difficulties (Figure 9).



Figure 9. Public Information and Signage are Poor in Quality and Create Orientation Difficulties (Güvenbaş,2023)

Accessible tourism services and amenities should be marked with simple and easily discernible symbols, displayed in a size and colour that contrasts with their surroundings.

3.3. Interview Findings

Since business owners and staff are witnesses to numerous incidents and the most attentive users of the area, they were included in the interview process. A total of 32 interviews were conducted, with 17 involving business owners and staff, and the remaining 15 involving senior visitors of the Nicosia Walled City.

The following section summarizes relevant interview findings under two distinct sub-headings with the opinions of participants represented by different codes. The first section includes the opinions of business owners and staff. Business owners were coded as B1, B2, B3,.....B10. Staff participants

were given with the codes of S1, S2, S3.....S7. The second section presents the interview findings with senior tourists which were coded as T1, T2, T3.....T15.

3.3.1. Interviews with business owners and staff

The majority of shop owners claimed that public transportation was insufficient to offer access within the city walls. The main difficulty is the scarcity of bus stops serving in Nicosia. Bus stops are only located at Kyrenia Gate which is deemed too far from the cultural heritage sites primarily clustered around the Arasta and Asmaalti regions. Some participants underscored the absence of public transportation not only in Nicosia but across all of Northern Cyprus. One of the business owners who has mobility impairment and visual deficiency explains his opinions;

"I am 81 years old. I have never used public transportation since having cataract surgery two years ago. The distance to the bus stop is too far. It is not available for seniors. Public transportation vehicles should have ramps and sufficient signage. Someone's help is required to use public transportation" (B1).

On the other hand, some of the participants emphasized that bus stops are usable and the main problem is their location and vehicle design that restricts accessibility of the heritage sites. Accordingly; they expressed, *"We don't prefer to use public transportation, so we have no idea....Do we have public transport?" (S1, S6, S7).*

The sentiments voiced by participants imply that public transportation is not sufficiently working and available for vulnerable user groups such as senior tourists. The absence of closer bus stops and accessible public vehicles is the most significant obstacle to public transportation facilities. Elderly travellers may experience limited accessibility, possibly due to the risk of developing disabilities related to transportation. Seniors who do not own a private vehicle are less accessible and more likely to have a "transportation-related disability" (Heiser, 1995; Gant, 1997; Bromley et al., 2007; Güvenbaş & Polay, 2021, p.1633).

The majority of business owners and staff asserted that the car parking areas are accessible to all individuals, including those with disabilities and the elderly. However, they noted that these parking areas are situated far from tourist attraction points. Additionally, some business owners emphasized the significance of ensuring seamless travel experiences for all visitors as follows;

"Pedestrian axes in car parking areas must be seamlessly connected to all pedestrian movement paths. Only then the walled city will be open to all users." (B2, B6, B8, B9)

Focusing solely on standards is insufficient for urban design and planning initiatives. Movement patterns between the parking lots and destination should offer different travel options and facilitate simple mobility. The primary objective should be to ensure seamless travel enabling all people to move effortlessly from their origin and destination (Hanson, 2004).

During the interviews, only two business owners/staff mentioned that curb ramps and pedestrian crossings are designed with ideal ergonomics, indicating a lack of hazardous situation (B7, B10). The rest of the business owners/staff interviewees expressed that neither curb ramps nor pedestrian crossings provide safety in usage.

"I've been here for about 20 years and have seen what pedestrians confront when crossing the street. One day, I saw a visually impaired uncle fall into the ground while crossing the street...How many more people have to be exposed to danger?... Why should elderly tourists come here?..." (B3)

The experiences and feelings shared by the interviewees suggest the insufficient and weak maintenance facilities of pathways, preventing easy and safe access to cultural heritage. Continuous maintenance is required to restore the dynamic mobility of senior tourists and ensure unhindered pedestrian circulation that provides a certain level of safety and comfort. In order to achieve inclusive access, regular maintenance is crucial after the completion of projects (Kirschbaum et al., 2001).

The business owners and staff evaluated street furnishing elements and public amenities. Business owners mostly stated that *"street furniture was properly positioned along the pedestrian ways and*

their configuration was not an obstacle any visitors. However; the number of resting facilities is not sufficient when we consider its usage density...Resting elements such as benches were not comfortable...Since they don't have any shading elements, they are not usable during the hot summer days... ATMs have ideal sizes and they can be easily used by everyone.” (B3, B10, S2, S5, S6). In addition to these; some of the business owners noted that “there were four public toilets, almost all of them are not available. Due to the technical problems, they were generally out of use.” (B1, B4)

The research findings present that open space facilities may not adequately cater to the needs of senior tourists who may experience extreme tiredness. There should be a focus on designing street furniture as pleasant sitting elements (Türel et al., 2007). Additionally, senior tourists may suffer from age-related muscle disorders and may require access to toilets more frequently. It is inevitable to mention that the lack of accessible public toilets adversely impacts tourism activities in the walled city.

According to the majority of business owner/staff participants, building entrances should be usable by all people, including seniors. *Two staff interviewees highlighted that “the entrances of shops were not proper for seniors with mobility impairment, since they had high steps and uncomfortable ramps as significant obstacles.” (S3, S4)*

Business owners/staff provided feedback regarding the quality of public information and signage. Almost all of them noted that inadequate maintenance of existing signage and public information has a detrimental effect on tourism facilities. The removal of the painted blue tourist route line from the ground and the poor legibility of city maps along the streets were cited as causing orientation difficulties, especially for senior tourists. Some shop owners also claim that the *“tourist leaves before reaching our shops because of the blue line that has been removed from the ground.” (B5, B7)*

As a result; the opinions of business owners and staff participants demonstrate that insufficient maintenance facilities of signage impede seniors from finding their routes. Seniors with mental retardation may encounter challenges in wayfinding (Mitchell et al., 2003).

When asked “Who should take responsibility for the accessible tourism facilities in the City of Nicosia?”, many business owners and staff emphasized that local and central authorities should take proactive measures to ensure responsible and inclusive tourism practices. In the final question, participants mentioned their recommendations on “how accessibility could improve in the walled city, especially for elderly and disabled tourists?” and several suggestions were provided by business owners and staff participants:

- Upgrading the quality of sidewalks and pedestrian crossings
- Integrating accessibility standards into public transportation
- Increasing the number of tourist guide services
- Adding adequate and appropriate lighting elements for pedestrian crossings
- Ensuring regular maintenance for pedestrian routes
- Adapting systematic public transportation schedules
- Providing alternative transportation modes
- Enforcing new laws regarding accessibility regulations.

Apart from the business owners and staff, interviews were also conducted with the senior tourists. The findings of senior interviews will be given in the following section.

3.3.2. Interviews with senior tourists

Senior tourists were interviewed to gain a better understanding of their experiences. A majority of them agreed that *“public transportation vehicles are not available because of their narrow doors and staircases. We often need to be accompanied by someone when using these vehicles...Lack of signage in vehicles and bus stops making our journeys difficult as well...It's challenging for an older person with a handicap to travel alone. One never knows what kind of difficulties you will face... You don't know*

where to go next when you get off the bus, there aren't any informative signs.” (T1, T5-T11). The interview findings show that the attitudes of senior tourists and business owners about public transportation facilities are almost similar. Improving accessibility indeed requires the implementation of alternative transportation modes.

During interviews with seniors, it was found that none of them had prior experience with the car parking areas in the walled city. Some tourists arrived by bus, while others walked from South Cyprus. Senior tourists evaluated the quality of pedestrian routes and almost all of them stated that there is no integrated pedestrian network that connects all tourist attractions without interruptions. Overcrowded sidewalks with shopping stalls and furniture obstruct pedestrian movement, forcing them to walk on the roadway instead of the sidewalks.

As implied by participant, coded as T2; *“I frequently come here for shopping and I can find traditional Cypriot products at very reasonable costs. Within the boundaries, there are two states, yet as I move from south to north, I face very poor infrastructure. I can't use my wheelchair without my daughter and grandchildren. Unmaintained pedestrian paths, pedestrian crossings and curb ramps scare me...Everything gets much more difficult when business owners occupy the sidewalks with their stalls.”* Provision of appropriate sidewalks and facilities encourages people to visit the historic urban corner (Güvenbaş & Polay, 2021).

According to senior travellers; street furniture and public services are generally insufficient. Senior respondents expressed unfamiliarity with the accessibility and usage of ATMs, as they had never used them before. One respondent stated, *“We've arrived for the first time today. We were fatigued after a long journey to the bus stations and couldn't find a suitable bench to relax on. The weather was quite hot and the seats in the sun were as so. We moved a long distance to find a cafe and sat there to rest...Until we reached the cafe, we couldn't see any public restroom to use it...In short, we have learned that you must pay for rest and other public services.” (T3,T12-T15)*

Additionally, senior visitors expressed their opinions about the quality of building entrances. The participant with code T4 sadly voiced her opinions; *“The building's entrances are completely inaccessible when steep steps and sliding surfaces are combined with small doorways. They are extremely dangerous. You must wait outside in the scorching sun for the group you are travelling together if you require a scooter or wheelchair as my husband”.* The inappropriate design of building entrances and the lack of sufficient and accessible toilets clearly demonstrate that necessary regulations are needed at different scales to ensure inclusive and responsible tourism activities for seniors (Azmin-Fouladi, 2007; Evans, 2009; Güvenbaş, 2021).

When interviewees were asked about who should be responsible for the provision of accessible tourism facilities in Nicosia, most of them suggested that all stakeholders, including the municipality, governmental departments such as tourism, business owners, local people and universities, should take responsibility for promoting accessible and inclusive historical context. More than half of the interviewees underscored the necessity for collaborative efforts among all stakeholders to enhance the quality of the historic environment. However, they also emphasized that local and governmental authorities should take a leading role in providing suitable arrangements and enforcing necessary laws. Finally, senior tourists have provided several recommendations that are essential for improving their experience in the walled city.

- Upgrading the pedestrian infrastructure's quality
- Integration of more resting areas with shading elements
- Installation of public toilets
- Improvement of the quality of public transportation facilities
- Enactment of new laws and regulations towards the attitudes of the business owners
- Adaptation of regular maintenance facilities

The findings of the study determined that the physical environmental quality is inadequate and does not meet seniors' needs for inclusive access. Consequently, there is an immediate need to develop

strategies for fostering responsible cultural heritage sites tailored to senior tourists in the Walled City of Nicosia.

4. Conclusion and Suggestions

Cultural heritage consumption plays an important role in the travel of senior tourists as it offers unique visitor experiences and fosters a sense of connection with the past. This study explores the concept of responsible cultural heritage consumption among senior tourists visiting the Walled City of Nicosia. The major goal is to investigate senior travellers' preferences and obstacles in accessing and participating in cultural heritage places.

Since current findings show that the population of elderly tourists has a significant proportion, promoting inclusive access can be accepted as a 'win-win' solution for the tourism industry in Nicosia. Accordingly; this research provides a valuable insights to cultivate responsible tourism practices by addressing the inclusive access needs and expectations of senior visitors. This may help to foster a harmonious coexistence between cultural preservation and sustainable tourism growth as well.

The Walled City of Nicosia has been declared a 'Special Tourism Zone' and intended for conservation and revitalization strategies after the opening of the Lokmacı Gate. The pedestrianization project has been implemented to upgrade its quality (Lefkoşa Surlarıçi İzleme, Koordinasyon & Yönlendirme Kurulu, 2008).

In this study, the senior tourists' inclusive access needs were measured through comprehensive research on documentation, on-site observations and interview surveys. The research results reveal that despite the presence of the pedestrianization, there are many failures in terms of physical qualities that negatively influence access and usage. In the study, the main problems are listed such as; inadequate public transportation facilities, improperly designed pedestrian routes, inaccessible building entrances, the lack of inclusive signage and public services.

Based on the findings, suggestions are given as follows;

- **Increasing Public Awareness with Community Engagement and Empowerment:** Encouraging the participation of the community to the development of conservation practices and tourism plans is recommended. In turn, this will empower local people to take an active role in preserving their cultural heritages and respectively sharing them with visitors.
- **Education and Awareness:** Education and training opportunities is required for all stakeholders- local communities, business owners, staff, design professionals, cultural heritage site managers, tourism department officers, tour operators. Training programs must be implemented to increase their knowledge about the importance of cultural heritage preservation and senior tourism.
- **Infrastructure and Accessibility:** It is crucial to create an infrastructure enhancing responsible tourism, such as well-maintained and equipped pedestrian networks, properly designed public transportation facilities and influential signage instalments that will make cultural sites accessible to all, including senior tourists. In the context of comprehensive conservation plans, prioritizing pedestrian access needs are essential.
- **Regulation and Enforcement:** Legislations and policies that enforce responsible tourism practices must be enacted. Penalties should be implemented for activities that harm cultural sites or disrespect pedestrian accessibility.
- **Collaborative Partnerships:** Fostering collaborations between government agencies, local communities, NGOs and private sector stakeholders is principal to achieve responsible tourism goals in the light of cultural preservation and sustainable growth.
- **Monitor and Evaluate Environmental Impact:** It is imperative to continuously monitor the impact of environmental design on tourism activities. This will enable stakeholders to understand the factors that negatively impact to the development of responsible cultural heritage sites and conservation actions.

In conclusion, this study illuminates the profound connection between senior tourists and responsible cultural heritage consumption in the Walled City of Nicosia. Understanding the preferences and behaviours of senior tourists contributes to developing a more responsive and inclusive historical context.

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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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