

Perceptions of Residents Living in Sultanahmet Towards Tourism

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ABSTRACT

This study identified the perceptions and attitudes of residents living in the Sultanahmet area of Istanbul regarding tourism. The perceptions and attitudes of the residents towards tourism were analysed within the framework of the Social Exchange Theory. The study interviewed 18 individuals, including residents and business owners from the Sultanahmet area. A qualitative approach was adopted for the study, and the data have been analysed using content analysis. The participants' perceptions of tourism were categorised under three main headings: economic, sociocultural, and environmental. While the participants emphasised the financial contributions of tourism, they also focused on the negative environmental impacts of tourism. Sultanahmet's residents mainly perceived the socio-cultural effects of tourism positively. The results of this study are expected to shed light on tourism planning and the development of appropriate strategies for the region, which could benefit relevant authorities.

Keywords: Social Exchange Theory, Hippies, Residents' tourism perceptions, Sultanahmet, Türkiye

Introduction

Tourism events constitute a complex phenomenon where economic, sociocultural, and environmental impacts converge. These effects resulting from tourism activities directly influence tourists and employees in the tourism sector and residents living in the destination, that is, all tourism stakeholders. Enhancing the positive perceptions of these effects and mitigating their negative perceptions is crucial for the well-being, happiness, and future of tourism in the region for the local community. In the tourism context, the local community refers to residents of a particular destination or region where tourism activities occur. Studies emphasise the importance of local community involvement in tourism development to achieve sustainable outcomes. Research shows that local people's perceptions and attitudes towards tourism can significantly influence the success of tourism initiatives and regional tourism development.

Tourism, as a global phenomenon that impacts society and the environment, requires support from all stakeholders in a specific destination to ensure sustainable development. As proposed by the Social Exchange Theory, stakeholders must perceive that positive impacts outweigh the adverse effects within the context of tourism. This perception is crucial for stakeholders' endorsement of tourism.

This study aims to examine the transformation of Sultanahmet, Istanbul, into a major tourism centre through the lens of social exchange theory, focusing on hippies who arrived from Europe in the 1970s. Sultanahmet became a destination for the hippie youth en route to Kathmandu from Europe, leading to significant sociocultural and economic changes. Sultanahmet's socio-cultural and economic changes should be considered distinct from the hippie movement, as it can be regarded as the first considerable tourism movement to Türkiye after the Republic era. Sultanahmet, having become a magnet for hippies because of its mosques, baths, underground cisterns, and remnants from the Byzantine era, has become an important tourist attraction. This study examines the changes brought about by the hippies in Sultanahmet after the Republic era and how it has gradually evolved into one of the most significant tourist attractions in Istanbul. The region's sociocultural, economic, and environmental transformations will be examined through oral history.

The results of this exploratory study, approached from a qualitative perspective, will serve as a guiding tool for tourism policymakers, considering the support of the residents of the Sultanahmet area towards tourism and their expectations from tourism. Following the study's objective, the theoretical framework of the research, the Social Exchange Theory, was explained,

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and previous studies in the tourism field under the scope of this theory were discussed. In the methodology section, emphasis was placed on the research questions, and the adopted approach and methodology for the study were explained. Based on the interviews, content analysis was performed in the finding section. The findings are interpreted in the conclusion section, and recommendations are provided for future research.

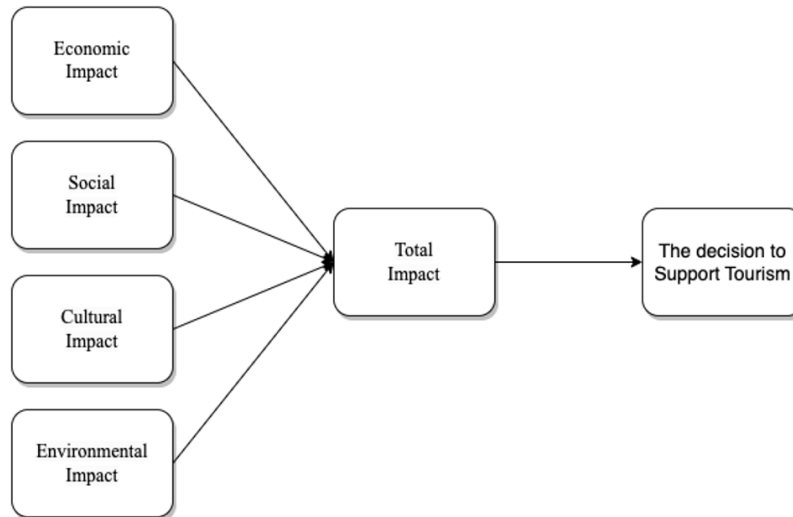
Social Exchange Theory

The theoretical foundation of this study is based on social exchange theory, which views social relationships between individuals as a process of resource exchange. This theory is rooted in social behaviour theories, which that individuals engage in social relationships with the expectation that they will be rewarded (Lambe et al., 2001). Several sociologists (Homans, 1958; Blau, 1960, 1964; Emerson, 1962) and researchers in social psychology (Thibaut & Kelley, 1963) have made significant contributions to the development of social exchange theory (Bolat et al., 2009). Sociologist Homans (1958) was the first to view social behaviour as an exchange relationship. Thibaut and Kelley (1963), similar to Homans (1958), approached social relationships as exchange relationships, stating that parties collaborate to achieve desired outcomes. Blau (1964) was the first to use the term "Social Exchange Theory" to describe social relationships as an exchange process. Emerson's (1962) approach to the theory focuses on power and commitment in exchange relationships. According to the researcher, power imbalances among individuals can destabilise social relationships. The sustainability of social exchange relationships between individuals depends on mutual commitment (Lambe et al., 2001; Bolat et al., 2009).

The Social Exchange Theory (SMT) can be examined under three assumptions (Özkalp, 2005, p. 35). The first assumption of SMT is that individual behaviours are shaped within a rational framework. According to this assumption, individuals choose the most suitable and rewarding option among various alternatives to avoid losses or select alternatives that cause the least possible harm. The second assumption is the principle of diminishing marginal utility. According to this assumption, individuals can become saturated with the rewards they receive. If an individual obtains something vital to them, their value may diminish, at least in the short term. The third assumption is that in a social exchange situation, individuals expect a balance between giving to the other party and receiving from the other party.

Based on these assumptions, the benefits and costs of social relationships between individuals must be considered to understand social exchange theory. According to this assumption, to evaluate the outcome of a relationship, one must examine the ratio of rewards to costs in that relationship. This can be expressed in a simple mathematical equation: $\text{rewards} / \text{costs} = \text{outcome}$ (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). This simple equation also applies to residents living in tourism regions. The benefits that tourism brings to the local community are expected to outweigh the costs that tourism incurs for the local community.

When reviewing the literature, it is evident that the support given by the local community to tourism is commonly approached within the framework of the Social Exchange Theory (Andereck et al., 2005, p. 1061; Látková & Vogt, 2011, p. 52; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2012, p. 998; Erdoğan 2013, pp. 36-37). According to this theory, local communities' perceptions of tourism and their support for tourism development depend on the outputs or benefits they receive from tourism (Yoon et al., 2001, p. 364; Ward & Berno, 2011, p. 1557). According to the theory, if the rewards/benefits obtained by the local community within the context of the tourism industry exceed the costs they incur, they are more likely to support tourism (Ward & Berno, 2011, p. 1557; Tam et al., 2013, p. 387; Erdoğan 2013, pp. 36-37). In this context, the four factors shown in Figure 1 may positively or negatively impact the decision to support tourism.



Source: Yoon, Gürsoy, and Chen 2001, 364

Figure 1. Effects of Tourism and Support for Tourism

Literature Review

The examination of the tourism literature reveals that the Social Exchange Theory is utilised as a beneficial theory in the development of tourism plans and in uncovering the perceptions, attitudes, and reactions of the local community towards tourism (Perdue et al., 1987; Ap, 1992; Jurovski et al., 1997; Yoon et al., 2001; Teye et al., 2002). Studies on tourism movements and social exchange theory indicate that researchers began exploring this relationship around 1980. Mainly, prominent tourism journals such as *Annals of Tourism Research*, *Journal of Tourism Research*, and, to a lesser extent, *Tourism Management* have published numerous studies that examine the relationship between tourism and the Social Exchange Theory.

One of the earliest studies that examined perceptions of local community and social exchange was conducted by Perdue, Long, and Allen (1987) in Colorado. In this study, the researchers attempted to explain the local community’s perceptions and attitudes towards tourism, using the Social Exchange Theory, among those who participated in recreational activities (such as camping and fishing) and those who did not. The findings revealed no significant difference in the perceptions of the local community regarding tourism between those who participated in recreational activities and those who did not. The researchers explained this by that during peak seasons, local communities might avoid visiting areas frequented by tourists or participate less in such activities. Additionally, the study emphasised that the overall satisfaction of both groups with the developmental impact of tourism on recreational activities might have contributed to the need for more differentiation in their perceptions of tourism.

Looking at tourism and social exchange theory from a different perspective, Jurors, Ursal, and Williams (1997) investigated the factors that lead to positive local community support for tourism. This study identified economic gains, use of tourism resources, ecocentric attitudes, and community belongingness as exchange factors influencing local communities’ support for tourism.

eye, Sönmez, and Sırakaya (2002) conducted a study in the Elmina region of Ghana, where they examined the local community’s perceptions towards tourism, taking into account the assumptions of social exchange theory. In this study, the researchers found that the local community was satisfied with the benefits of tourism to the region in exchange for the resources offered to tour operators and tourists. Because of this mutual relationship, it was revealed that the local community turned a blind eye to the traffic congestion, pollution, and disruptions in local services caused by tourism.

Unlike previous studies, Soon, Gürsoy, and Chen (2001) adopted social exchange theory through structural equation modelling. The study was conducted in the Norfolk region, and the researchers explained their choice of this region based on the presence of tourist attractions, such as historical and cultural sites, themed parks, and beaches. The results supported the Social Exchange Theory. The model of the study was based on the assumption that economic, sociocultural, and environmental impacts influence the total perception of the local community, which, in turn, affects their decision to support tourism. Among the variables, economic impacts were found to have the most significant proportional effect on total perception, followed by sociocultural impacts. The local community’s perception of environmental impacts was negative. Because of the effects, total perception had a 57% share in the decision to support tourism, according to the research findings. The study indicated that even though the local community might have to bear certain costs regarding tourism, they would enter into a mutual exchange relationship considering the benefits they would obtain from tourism in return for these costs.

In their study conducted in the Arizona region, McGehee and Andereck (2004) obtained results that supported Social Exchange Theory. However, they also found different outcomes from the assumptions advocated by this theory. The study revealed a positive relationship between economic factors and Social Exchange Theory, while a negative relationship was found between environmental and sociocultural factors. The researchers attempted to explain this situation for two reasons. First, they that the lack of trust in the local community regarding planning authorities could result from this situation. Second, the researchers mentioned that regional rather than individual interests might drive local communities' tourism development. This could explain their study's negative associations between sociocultural and environmental factors and the Social Exchange Theory.

Wang and Pfister (2008) examined a rural area's early stages of tourism development using social exchange theory. They emphasised that local communities in this area obtained various social benefits from the development brought about by tourism, even if they could not directly derive economic benefits from tourism. Because of this positive perception, the researchers pointed out that the local community was willing to support further tourism development. On the other hand, Six, Lee, and Leung (2013) investigated the perceptions of Hong Kong locals towards Chinese tourists, whom they called the "Chinese tourist wave," under three main categories: economic, sociocultural, and environmental impacts. In this study, Hong Kong residents positively perceived the economic impacts and negatively perceived the socio-cultural and environmental impacts.

Özel and Kozak (2017) analysed the perceptions of local communities in the Cappadocia region using social exchange theory and evaluated their economic, sociocultural, and environmental perceptions. The research findings indicate that despite the negative effects of tourism, the positive benefits outweighed the adverse effects for the local community in the cost-benefit analysis. As a result, it was concluded that the local community strongly supported the tourism industry, which is an essential finding of this study. Another significant result of the research was the identification of the local community's negative perceptions towards tourism. This identification provided valuable insights for local authorities and policymakers regarding specific negative perceptions, offering meaningful opportunities for implementing new regulations to eliminate these negative perceptions. Research has underscored the importance of applying social exchange theory to deepen our understanding of how residents feel about tourism, especially in relation to sustainable practises and the incorporation of frameworks for sustainable tourism development (Olya, 2020). Additionally, it has been pointed out that it is crucial to consider residents' viewpoints on the effects of tourism and their satisfaction levels, exposing a complicated relationship between tourism growth, satisfaction, and tourism support (Akay, 2022). These studies highlight the changing nature of tourism development and the pivotal role residents' attitudes and perceptions play in the broader scope of social change theory.

Generally, these studies have common characteristics when the literature is evaluated. One such point is that the local community perceives tourism as positive in economic terms but negative in environmental and sociocultural aspects. Another point is that in the studies conducted, the local community's benefits from tourism exceeded the costs of tourism. Therefore, the literature indicates that local communities generally support tourism development.

An analysis of studies combining Social Exchange Theory and tourism in the literature reveals that quantitative research methods are more prevalent than qualitative research methods. Quantitative research provides significant information about the level of support the local community provides for tourism and offers valuable insights into general opinion. However, more than quantitative research is required to comprehensively understand the local community's perspectives towards tourism and its interaction with the surrounding environment. This study employed qualitative research to examine texts from the Türkiye Tourism History Project. The socio-cultural, economic, and environmental changes in Sultanahmet, which are significant in Turkish tourism, were examined. Deep interviews were conducted with business owners and individuals who witnessed Sultanahmet's development in the 1970s and currently reside in the area. By determining local communities' and business owners' perceptions of tourism, this study aims to shed light on the conditions under which local communities support tourism development and to contribute significant insights to practitioners and the existing literature.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative approach to reveal the local community's perspectives on tourism in Sultanahmet. The data were collected using the interview method. This research aims not to test hypotheses or make generalisations but to examine the region's socio-cultural, economic, and environmental changes in conjunction with tourism.

To access the thoughts and perceptions of multiple individuals within the same social group and obtain clues about the cultural patterns of their thoughts and behaviours (Glesne 2013, p. 10), an interpretative perspective was adopted in this study. Qualitative research obtains verbal fragments of information by an inductive approach (Kozak, 2014, p. 87). The critical aspect is identifying research questions based on conceptual and theoretical frameworks. The research questions developed for this study are as follows.

- How did the first tourism movement start in the Sultanahmet region?
- What are the local community's perspectives on tourism in Sultanahmet, specifically economic, sociocultural, and environmental aspects?
- What are the opinions of the local community in Sultanahmet regarding tourism's positive and negative impacts?
- Under what conditions do local communities support tourism and its development in Sultanahmet?

The perceptions of the local community living in the Sultanahmet region towards tourism should not be examined independently of the region's culture, history, and characteristics. In other words, the perspectives of the local community regarding tourism should be considered in the context of the region's culture and historical features. Individual perceptions and thoughts are shaped by society and culture (Gough & McFadden, 2001). Therefore, providing information about the Sultanahmet region, including its cultural background and historical significance, is appropriate for this study.

Study Area: Sultanahmet University

Sultanahmet is one of the oldest settlements in Istanbul, dating back 1500 years. It is located in the Eminönü district of Istanbul. With its rich historical and cultural heritage, Sultanahmet is one of the most essential centres in Istanbul and Türkiye. It can be considered one of the most popular tourist destinations in Istanbul, along with Hagia Sophia Square. Sultanahmet Square is the largest square in the Sultanahmet district. The square was used as a hippodrome during the Byzantine and Roman periods. During the Ottoman period, it was known as "At Meydanı" (Horse Square), where ceremonies and horse races were held (Yıldırım, 2004, p. 73).

Sultanahmet Square was developed around the Sultanahmet Mosque. The square consists of four different areas that are close to each other. The first area was created in 1939 by arranging the surroundings of Hagia Sophia. The pool between Sultanahmet Mosque and Hagia Sophia dates back to that era. Another area that forms part of Sultanahmet Square is the old hippodrome area where the German Fountain and obelisks are located. In 1898, Emperor II reigned. Wilhelm built the fountain in memory of his visit to the region. The Emperor also landscaped the surroundings of the hippodrome and the obelisks. Horse chestnut trees (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) that are still seen in At Meydanı today date back to that time. The third area that makes up the square is smaller than the others and is close to the Sultanahmet Mosque. This area is landscaped with trees for tourists. The fourth floor is located between the Courthouse and Firuz Ağa Mosque. In this area, there are remnants of a palace dating back to the Byzantine period (Tekeli, 1996; Gültekin, 1996; Bağbaşı, 2010).

Sultanahmet Square is home to many historical structures from both the Byzantine and Ottoman periods. Some historical structures from the Byzantine era include the Hippodrome, the Obelisk of Theodosius, the Serpentine Column, the Walled Obelisk, the Obelisk of Theodosius I, the Hagia Sophia, and the Basilica Cistern. From the Ottoman period, there are several mosques, baths, and mansions in Sultanahmet, such as the Ibrahim Pasha Palace, Sultanahmet Mosque, Firuz Ağa Mosque, İshak Pasha Bath, Haseki Bath, and Talat Pasha Mansion. The Sultanahmet area, which contains deep traces of Istanbul's historical development, is of significant importance to tourism due to its architectural and monumental structures. Sultanahmet is a place where religious, cultural, and historical landmarks are gathered, and its proximity to accommodation and commercial centres allows it to host domestic and international tourists from all walks of life. This vibrant region experiences intense tourism activity, making it crucial to understand residents' perceptions of tourism and identify the factors influencing their support. This understanding is essential for ensuring the sustainability of tourism in the region.

Sample

The data for this study were collected within the scope of the "Türkiye Tourism History" project. The project started in 2012, and the first part was completed in 2015, with 10 volumes. The second part of the oral history study was continued with focus group interviews as of 2018.

The Türkiye Tourism History project represents the most comprehensive oral history study in Türkiye's tourism sector. A total of 522 individuals were interviewed across Türkiye. While identifying interviewees, three workshops were held in Eskişehir, Istanbul, and Antalya. Participants in these workshops included former tourism ministers, undersecretaries, bureaucrats, investors in tourism, hotel managers, tour guides, journalists, and academics. After these workshops, the individuals who were the source of the interviews were identified. In other words, using a snowball sampling method based on workshop participants, other individuals were reached. For the Sultanahmet region, 16 interviews were conducted. Ten interviews occurred in August 2014, and an additional six individuals participated in a focus group discussion in October 2019. The transcription of these interviews was completed in 2022. The residents of the Sultanahmet region are listed in Table 1. The Sultanahmet region is an utterly touristic destination. Therefore, people in this region are very interested in tourism. For this reason, the people defined as local in the

research are tourism-related people, such as hotel or travel agency owners, food and beverage operators, tourism journalists, and publishers.

Table 1. Participant Profile

| Participant Code | Demographic Features |
|------------------|--------------------------------------|
| P1 | Male, 70, Hotel owner and operator |
| P2 | Male, 81, Travel agency owner |
| P3 | Male, 74, Food and beverage operator |
| P4 | Male, 56, Travel agency operator |
| P5 | Male, 72, Hotel owner and operator |
| P6 | Male, 63, Tourism journalist |
| P7 | Male, 65, Tourism publisher |
| P8 | Male, 70, Tourism journalist |
| P9 | Male, 50, Hotel operator |
| P10 | Male, 58, Tourism publisher |
| P11 | Female, 41, Tourism researcher |
| P12 | Male, 73, Tourism consultant |
| P13 | Male, 70, Tourism researcher |
| P14 | Male, 70, Travel agency operator |
| P15 | Male, 73, Notary |
| P16 | Male, 69, Journalist |

Data collection

The questions directed to the participants were prepared in an open-ended format. These questions were designed to determine residents' positive and negative perceptions of tourism in Sultanahmet. Before describing the questions, a literature review was conducted, and previous studies on the attitudes and perceptions of the local population towards tourism were examined. A questionnaire was created based on existing literature (Haley et al., 2005; Lankford & Howard, 1994; Long & Kayat, 2011). Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 10 participants in August 2014, each lasting approximately 25 to 60 minutes.

In October 2019, a focus group study was conducted with six participants who had witnessed the beginning of tourism in Sultanahmet, had lived in the area for many years, and had worked in the tourism industry. During the interviews, the researcher did not direct the participants but allowed them to express their thoughts freely. However, the researcher attempted to keep the discussions on track by using open-ended questions prepared within the scope of the study. One of the authors conducted the interviews in moderation, and the interviews were recorded on camera with the participants' consent. These interviews, which involved six individuals, lasted for 120 min. The recorded interviews were transcribed after obtaining permission from the participants. The data used in this study was obtained before 2019, when ethics committee approval was not mandatory. However, documents were received from the interviewees proving that they participated voluntarily.

Validity and Reliability

The most important criteria for evaluating qualitative research are the credibility and trustworthiness of the data collected, analysed, and reported (McMillan, 2000). Guba and Lincoln (1989) described validity and reliability as distinct concepts in qualitative research. These are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba, 1981, pp. 83-88). In this study, several strategies were adopted to meet these four criteria. To enhance the study's credibility, the research method was first chosen based on the research objectives and questions, and all stages of the study were planned coherently using qualitative research

methods. A thorough literature review and fieldwork were conducted to diversify the data sources. Data were collected from 16 participants to ensure data diversity. Before conducting the interviews, participants were provided detailed information about the topic and their voluntary participation was emphasised. For transferability, the researchers included sufficient information that would allow another similar study to be conducted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Purposeful sampling methods were used to ensure transferability, and the study thoroughly described the data obtained (Guba, 1981, p. 86). The snowball sampling method, a purposeful sampling method, was used in this study to achieve transferability.

In qualitative research, another criterion for establishing the validity and reliability of a model is data consistency. In this study, several methods were followed to ensure consistency.

The research questions and design were planned in harmony with each other. An exploratory research approach was adopted, and an interviewing technique was employed. The interviews were recorded with the participants' consent. After the data were transcribed, blind coding was performed by two researchers who were unaware of each other's coding. Once consensus had been reached between the researchers regarding the coding, the data interpretation phase was initiated.

The confirmability criterion that researchers should be unbiased (Erlanson et al., 1993). To reduce researcher bias, the data were coded by two researchers. The two researchers achieved 90% agreement in coding. The study's limitations were mentioned, and the research process, design, and data analysis were described in detail to provide an audit trail.

Data analysis

The data analysis phase applied content analysis to the interview data. The recorded interviews were transcribed and recorded. The interview texts were carefully read, and a code list (open coding) was created. After completing the coding process for all texts, the relationships and patterns between the codes were identified and grouped under main and sub-categories (axial coding) (Patton, 2018). The categories and sub-categories formed from the data analysis were named according to the study objectives and theoretical framework.

Findings

Different researchers coded the transcribed data, and as a result, the main themes were identified in line with those found in the literature (Yoon et al., 2001; McGehee & Andereck, 2004). These main themes were identified as economic, social, and environmental, and the axial coding phase was initiated. Based on these main themes and subthemes, the perceptions of residents in the Sultanahmet region towards tourism were presented.

Economic impacts

According to the findings from the interviews conducted in the study, all participants stated that tourism significantly contributes to Sultanahmet's economy and its surrounding areas. Based on the interviews, the factors influencing Sultanahmet's economy were presented under two main categories: Contributions of the Hippies to Sultanahmet and Contributions of Tourism to Sultanahmet. The positive and negative effects of tourism in Sultanahmet are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Perceptions of the economic effects of tourism in Sultanahmet

| | |
|---|--|
| Economic Impacts | |
| Contributions of Hippies to Sultanahmet | |
| Benefits | First mass tourist group to visit Sultanahmet |
| | Opening of new hostels due to the need for accommodation in Sultanahmet |
| | Bringing foreign currency to the region |
| | Positive contributions to Türkiye's image when they return to their own countries |
| Costs | No specific opinion was provided. |
| Contributions of Tourism to Sultanahmet | |
| Benefits | Environmental arrangements made in the region |
| | Significant financial contributions to the region and Istanbul |
| | Job creation |
| | Opening of accommodation facilities |
| | Opening of small bus companies during the Hippie era |
| | Opening of travel agencies |
| | Opening of souvenir shops dependent on handicrafts |
| | Revival of the carpet industry |
| | Development of guiding services |
| | Opening of food and beverage establishments |
| Costs | Departure of old and local tradespeople from the region |
| | Commercialization of the region only from an economic perspective |
| | Opening of too many hotels |
| | Customer loss due to lack of importance given to customer satisfaction by tradespeople |

Contributions of the Hippies to Sultanahmet

According to the participants, the hippie movement played a pioneering role in mass tourism activities in Sultanahmet. While tourists and researchers had visited Sultanahmet before the hippies, these visits were more individual and did not reach large numbers. "Tourism in Sultanahmet started with hippies in the 1970s. At the end of the hippie movement, they returned to their countries and spoke positively about Türkiye. As a result, in the following years, many European and American tourists came to Türkiye" (P3). As the number of hippies visiting Sultanahmet increased in the 1970s, there was a need for inexpensive accommodation in the area. When hippies began to come to Sultanahmet, only the Yücelt Hostel was operating, but later, other hostels, such as the Sultan, Oriol, and Sultan 2 Hostels, were opened. During that period, Sultanahmet transformed into a region known for its hostels.

Tourism Contributions to Sultanahmet

After the 1970s, Sultanahmet became a centre with tourist concentration because of its historical and cultural attractions. The hippie movement intensified in Sultanahmet in the 1970s produced a new business sector, namely bus transportation. Kathmandu became a leading destination for hippies coming from America or Europe. This led to the initiation of bus services from Sultanahmet to Kathmandu via Iran, and the first bus transportation activities were initiated in Sultanahmet. During the same period, the number of hostels increased, and food and beverage establishments opened. This was because Sultanahmet served as hippies' departure, arrival, and meeting points. Hippies travelling from different regions to Kathmandu often met in Sultanahmet and continued their journeys together. In short, the significance of this region lies in being a meeting point for various travellers, also known as a "meeting point." Sultanahmet has retained its importance for tourists visiting Istanbul.

As we move from the 1970s to the 2000s, the tourism movement towards Sultanahmet has remained unchanged. "In the 2010s, an average of 2.5-3 million people visited the area during the day (the number decreases to 25-30 thousand in the evenings)" (P7). Consequently, the increasing number of tourists visiting the area has led to a proportional increase in regional spending. Hostels in the area gradually gave way to hotels, and numerous accommodation facilities were opened. This enabled economic vitality in Sultanahmet due to the tourism movement. Subsequently, many travel agencies, souvenir shops, and food and beverage establishments were opened in the area, leading to increased labour demand and new employment opportunities.

Tourism has provided significant economic gains for Sultanahmet. However, economic gains in the area have occasionally declined due to changes in tourist profiles, international political crises, terrorism, and earthquakes. The participants evaluating the tourist profiles in Sultanahmet emphasised that the profile of tourists significantly impacts the region's economic gains. For example, they mentioned that Middle Eastern tourists tend to negotiate even during meal orders (P4), Middle Eastern tourists usually prefer areas close to shopping centres but away from minarets (P16), and European tourists often consume alcoholic beverages with their meals, thus affecting revenues (P1). As a result, the participants stated that their tourist profile in Sultanahmet mainly consisted of European and Far Eastern tourists.

With tourists' increasing interest in Sultanahmet, travel agencies have been established in the area, leading to the employment of numerous guides working for these agencies. Additionally, in 2011, Sultanahmet Square and its surroundings were closed to vehicle traffic. Walking routes, paths, and directional signs were implemented in the area to create an identity.

While the intensification of tourism in Sultanahmet has had positive effects, it has also brought about several negative impacts. One of the most significant adverse effects is the displacement of local and long-established merchants from Sultanahmet. Participant P5 stated, "Until the early 2000s, many people engaged in accommodation businesses in the area knew each other. However, after the 2000s, people we had never seen before, who were not from the region, and even those we had never heard of, opened hotels in Sultanahmet. This situation has negatively affected the region." This transformation of businesses in Sultanahmet has led to new local merchants trying to financially exploit tourists with the perception that "they are coming once, so what harm is there in selling products at exorbitant prices." This, in turn, has negatively affected the image of the region and even Istanbul as a whole. "The area started to be perceived solely as a centre focused on economic gain, disregarding all its historical and cultural features" (P14).

Sociocultural impacts

One of the most significant socio-cultural outcomes of tourism for the residents of Sultanahmet is that it has fundamentally changed the region's way of life, altering the local people's perspectives on social life and their attitudes towards visiting tourists. In the 1970s, the middle-aged and older generations hesitated to connect with the Hippies; however, they adapted to the tourism movement in subsequent years. Meanwhile, the younger generation in the area developed close relationships with visiting tourists, aiming to learn foreign languages and make new friendships. Table 3 presents the perceived socio-cultural changes, benefits, and costs of tourism in Sultanahmet.

Table 3. Perceptions of the Socio-Cultural Effects of Tourism in Sultanahmet

| Socio-Cultural Effects | |
|------------------------|---|
| Benefits | The region's people have a positive attitude towards tourism and tourists. |
| | The local people have started to learn foreign languages. |
| | The cultural exchange started with the tourists coming to the region. |
| | Cultural and historical elements in Sultanahmet have started to be preserved. |
| | Hippies instilled freedom in the youth of the time. |
| | Hippies taught the local people tolerance and a new philosophy of life. |
| | Turkish culture has become known to tourists. |
| | Friendlier and closer relationships have been established with tourists. |
| Costs | The cultural values of the region have been commercialized. |
| | There have been short-term bans on alcohol. |
| | Syrian immigrants have concentrated in Sultanahmet due to the tourist crowds in the region. |

Hippies have had various effects on Sultanahmet's residents. Some of these effects include instilling a sense of freedom, tolerance, and a new philosophy of life among local youth. P5, currently engaged in business activities in the area, expressed this impact by saying, "At first, we were trying to make friends to learn English. However, as we became friends, we also embraced their philosophies. There was no violence, fights, or bad words. Perhaps the most significant change has been seen in our family lives. The youth began to accept the idea of independence of their families."

The importance of these effects lies in the fact that some young individuals from that era later played significant roles in the tourism movement in Sultanahmet, either as employees or employers.

Tourism in Sultanahmet has mutually changed residents and tourists visiting the area. The preconceptions and biases of the locals towards the tourists, and vice versa have been positively shattered. One participant mentioned that when tourists arrived in the region, their clothing style, manner of speaking, and social behaviours started appealing to them, as they seemed different (P2). Another participant emphasised the mutual change, stating, "When they come to Istanbul, to Sultanahmet, you realise they have a very different perception of us (Turkish people). They imagine us as sword-carrying, fez-wearing, and turbaned men. However, when they come and get to know us, their perceptions completely change" (P8).

Despite its positive aspects, the tourism movement in Sultanahmet has also brought adverse sociocultural effects to the region. While historical structures and cultural values have been preserved and restored, the primary aim for their preservation has been to ensure the region's economic continuity. As a result, these values have been commercialised and monetised from a socio-cultural perspective. Although the exteriors of buildings reflect historical and cultural values, their interiors often show signs of modernisation. For example, although the exteriors may have a wooden appearance, the interiors may be concrete (P9), indicating the commercialisation of the region's architecture and characteristics. Another negative aspect is the occasional ban on alcohol sales. These alcohol restrictions, especially for European and American visitors, create a negative impression of the area.

"Once upon a time, for example, the authorities here banned the sale of alcohol, and I discussed it with them. It is impossible for business owners not to sell wine because they have to close down their shop if they do not. Just like how Zemzem water is sacred, their wine is also sacred. When someone sits down, they drink their wine, eat their meal, and come here to enjoy the flavours of this place after all. We should not interfere with that, and management should pay attention to this" (P15).

Environmental impacts

The unique view of the historical peninsula and the presence of landmarks such as the Hagia Sophia Museum, Topkapı Palace, Blue Mosque, and Basilica Cistern make Sultanahmet one of the most important attractions in Istanbul. As a result, while historical and cultural elements of the region are being preserved, they are also being inadvertently degraded. Table 4 presents residents' perceptions of the positive and negative environmental impacts of tourism in Sultanahmet.

Table 4. Perceptions of the residents regarding the environmental impacts of tourism in Sultanahmet

| Environmental Effects | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Benefits | Transformation projects have been carried out and the preservation of the region's mansions has been ensured. |
| | The environmental arrangement of Gülhane Park has been made. |
| | Old structures have started to be preserved by converting them into hotels. |
| | Public transportation and tour buses have been facilitated to reach the region. |
| Costs | The environmental texture has been disrupted in the historic peninsula. |
| | Historic buildings have been damaged and additional floors have been added. |
| | Restoration works are constantly ongoing in the region. |
| | In afforestation works, trees unsuitable for the region were selected. |
| | Numerous public buildings have been constructed in the region. |

The residents prioritise restoring the area through its historical fabric and properly controlling these renovations. The loss of historical identity and the fabric of the region creates concern among residents. Despite the initiation of transformation projects and the protection of some buildings in the area, many buildings have been altered beyond recognition. Some buildings in the area have been converted into accommodation units to maintain their sustainability and continuity.

"Without obtaining permission from the Monument Council, one should not do anything here. Unfortunately, significant mistakes have been made in the past, and this place's fabric is changing daily. Those involved in this area's hotel and tourism business must unite and protect its historical fabric. If they do not protect it, the sustainable future of Sultanahmet will be in jeopardy. Today, I am sorry, but I am complaining." (P8)

The lack of preservation of buildings in the area and uncontrolled renovations have drawn the attention of residents. The replacement of wooden buildings with concrete structures in the area was described by participant R16 as follows: "...now they are building concrete structures there, for the past two years, they have been telling people how they should do it, pointing at the walls, and now they are building concrete structures on historical sites." (P16). This situation has been considered another negative aspect of the local community. Another negative aspect mentioned by the participants was the incorrect choice of tree species during the area's reforestation in the past. The participants stated that the trees in the area had grown too tall and obstructed the view of the historical buildings in the area. "The way Sultanahmet Square is planted with trees is completely wrong; there should never be such large trees. No large trees should be around any monument worldwide because they will obstruct visitors' view." (P6). Another issue is that some historical buildings in Sultanahmet are used by public administration, which prevents them from being opened for tourism. The usability of buildings in the area plays a crucial role in establishing the touristic identity of the region. For Sultanahmet to become a fully-fledged tourist centre in historical and cultural aspects, the surrounding environment needs to be carefully opened up to tourism.

Conclusion and Discussion

After analysing the interviews conducted within the scope of the research, three main dimensions of impact emerged: economic, sociocultural, and environmental effects. Tourism in Sultanahmet has affected residents in different periods. Especially during the hippie movement of the 1970s, economic and sociocultural impacts were positively welcomed in supporting the tourism movement. In comparison, in the 2000s, environmental factors led residents to embrace tourism more.

Studies conducted by Soon, Gürsoy, and Chen (2001) and Six, Lee, and Leung (2013) found that the economic impact of tourism is an essential factor in supporting local communities' tourism. Moreover, these studies did not indicate that socio-cultural effect impact supporting tourism by local communities. However, in this study, it can be argued that the socio-cultural change created by tourism makes a significant contribution to supporting tourism. Based on the interviews, it is evident that the local community in Sultanahmet is interested in learning foreign languages, meeting different cultures, and accurately conveying Turkish culture to tourists. Therefore, the socio-cultural changes brought about by tourism enhance residents' positive perceptions of the tourism movement.

However, after the 2000s, when the tourism movement in Sultanahmet began to be expressed in terms of millions of tourists, residents' focus shifted towards the environmental benefits of supporting tourism. This is one of the significant findings of the research. The fact that some interviewees were owners of hotels and businesses operating in Sultanahmet did not push the adverse environmental effects of tourism into the background. On the contrary, these participants have emphasised the environmental impacts of tourism rather than its economic effects. Their primary concerns are the unauthorised constructions that damage historical structures and incorrect restoration practises.

Overall, the study highlights the complex and evolving relationship between tourism and the local community in Sultanahmet. While economic and sociocultural effects were initially more prominent in supporting tourism, the growing tourism movement has drawn attention to the importance of preserving the historical and cultural integrity of an area. This study sheds light on the multidimensional impacts of tourism on local communities. It emphasises the need for balanced and sustainable tourism development in historical and cultural destinations like sultanahmet.

In this context, it can be emphasised that the interviewees expressed both positive and negative views regarding economic, sociocultural, and environmental impacts. Positive views mainly focused on economic and sociocultural effects, while negative views focused more on environmental effects. After the intensification of the tourism movement in the 2000s, participants' perceptions shifted towards environmental concerns, surpassing economic gains in importance. Participants were aware that economic sustainability is closely related to the preservation and continuity of historic structures. Residents of Sultanahmet are aware of the adverse environmental effects of tourism and support tourism when these effects are minimised.

This result is different from some existing studies in the literature. Previous research (Martin et al., 1998; Teye et al., 2002) has often emphasised tourism's economic gains while overlooking negative sociocultural and environmental impacts. However, the negative environmental impacts of tourism emerged as a significant concern for the residents in this study. In other words, the economic benefits derived from tourism in Sultanahmet come after environmental concerns in terms of importance. This finding that, as in other research, economic gains alone may not be sufficient to garner support for tourism. The local community's

emphasis on environmental concerns sets this study apart. This study contributes to understanding tourism's impacts on the local community in historical and cultural destinations like Sultanahmet.

Wang and Pfister (2008) stated that although local people do not directly benefit economically from tourism, they derive social benefits from tourism developments and are willing to support the further development of tourism due to this positive perception. In this study, participants who were aware of the negative impacts of tourism remained neutral regarding whether or not to support tourism. The overlapping aspect of both studies is that in both cases, local people were aware of tourism's social and economic benefits. However, there are areas where studies have diverged. Wang and Pfister (2008) reported that local people were willing to support further tourism development, but the respondents in this study remained neutral in their support. This may be due to concerns that tourism may bring economic benefits in the short term. However, in the long term, the historical and cultural fabric of the region will degrade, and economic gains will be unsustainable. When this study is compared with another study in the literature, there are overlapping aspects between the conclusions of Six, Lee, and Leung (2013) and this study. In both studies, although respondents were aware of the negative impacts of tourism, they tended to support tourism due to its economic benefits.

In addition, in a study by Özel and Kozak (2017) conducted in the Cappadocia region, residents generally perceived the socio-cultural effects of tourism as unfavourable, while in this study, residents of Sultanahmet perceived the socio-cultural effects of tourism as positive. The positive socio-cultural effects of tourism play an important role in supporting tourism for Sultanahmet's residents.

During the interviews conducted in this study, the participants tended to remain neutral regarding supporting or not supporting tourism, even though they were more aware of the adverse effects of tourism. This is because tourism brings economic benefits in the short term. However, in the long term, they fear that the historical and cultural structures of the region will be compromised and economic gains will not be sustained.

Practical recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, public administrations and policymakers should consider the residents' perceptions towards tourism. When creating new regulations, the positive and negative perceptions of the residents towards the tourism movement should be considered. The participants' sensitivity towards environmental regulations should be noticed, and careful attention should be given to environmental arrangements and restorations. If the environmental impacts of tourism are correctly interpreted by public administrations and policymakers, the support of local people in tourism will increase. Residents welcome tourism's economic and sociocultural effects positively, but they are susceptible to its environmental effects. Therefore, the proper restoration of historical regional structures, including external facades and internal designs, should be ensured.

Additionally, the landscaping should be carefully planned, considering the locations of historical buildings. Furthermore, it is essential to involve local communities in decision-making processes related to tourism development and to provide them with opportunities to voice their opinions and concerns. Engaging in dialog with the residents and incorporating their perspectives can lead to more sustainable and mutually beneficial tourism development in Sultanahmet. Finally, continuous monitoring and evaluation of the impact of tourism on the region should be conducted to identify potential adverse effects and implement necessary corrective measures. This can help balance economic gains and preserve the region's historical and cultural assets.

Recommendations for researchers

In future studies, it would be beneficial to include government officials and tourists in the research sample to diversify the perspectives. This helps obtain a wider range of insights. Moreover, quantitative research designs could be employed in the region for different studies to make the results more generalisable. Additionally, research in this area can focus on various dimensions, such as marketing, management, and recreation.

Limitations

A qualitative approach was adopted in this research, meaning the findings cannot be generalised to a larger population. Therefore, the study's results represent the opinions and thoughts of the 16 participants in the research sample. Additionally, because the content analysis method was used in the analysis phase, the coding and categorisation may have been influenced by the researchers' biases (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). Therefore, the results are based on the evaluation of data obtained from the interviews. Furthermore, the research sample does not include perspectives from government officials or tourists visiting the region, which is another limitation of this study.

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