

EVALUATION OF HERITAGE CHALLENGES IN ŞİRİNCE: A 'BEST TOURISM VILLAGE' THROUGH THE LENS OF THE 2022 ICOMOS CHARTER FOR CULTURAL HERITAGE TOURISM

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ABSTRACT

The recognition of Şirince as a Best Tourism Village (BTV) by UN Tourism in 2023 underscores its cultural and natural significance. The BTV initiative aligns with the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. However, the absence of explicit references to the 2022 International Charter for Cultural Heritage Tourism by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) in the 2023 and 2024 BTV application guides raises important questions about the integration of rural conservation into sustainable tourism policies.

Guided by the 2022 ICOMOS Charter, this study examines the challenges of balancing tourism-driven benefits with conservation in heritage-rich rural destinations and evaluates Şirince's alignment with BTV criteria. The classified nature of BTV evaluation data prevents direct analysis. To address this limitation, the research adopts a consumer-centered approach, analyzing 166 visitor reviews on TripAdvisor from 2020 to 2024.

To code the content analysis, the researchers derived and categorized challenges from the ICOMOS Charter into causal (tourism dependency, overtourism, commodification) and resulting (e.g., loss of authenticity,) challenges to better understand tourism-related pressures. The findings reveal significant dissatisfaction with commodification, which erodes the village's authenticity and spirit of place, and overcrowding, which contributes to the degradation of heritage. Social degradation also emerges as a critical issue, with visitors frequently citing fraudulent practices by vendors. Accessibility challenges further hinder Şirince's ability to provide an inclusive tourism experience.

The study highlights gaps between the BTV criteria and the principles of responsible cultural tourism advocated by ICOMOS. While the BTV initiative promotes sustainable rural tourism, its limited emphasis on heritage conservation leaves challenges unaddressed in heritage-rich rural destinations like Şirince.

By analyzing visitor-driven data, this research sheds light on the interplay between tourism development and rural conservation. Future research could explore the integration of international frameworks like BTV and ICOMOS or investigate the potential of responsible tourism in Şirince and similar rural destinations.

Keywords: Cultural Tourism, ICOMOS, Best Tourism Village, TripAdvisor, Şirince.

ŞİRİNCE'DEKİ MİRAS ZORLUKLARININ DEĞERLENDİRİLMESİ: 2022 ICOMOS KÜLTÜREL MİRAS TURİZMİ TÜZÜĞÜ MERCEĞİNDEN BİR 'EN İYİ TURİZM KÖYÜ'

ÖZET

Şirince'nin 2023 yılında UN Tourism tarafından En İyi Turizm Köyü olarak tanınması, köyün kültürel ve doğal önemini vurgulamaktadır. En İyi Turizm Köyü girişimi, BM 2030 Sürdürülebilir Kalkınma Gündemi ile uyum içindedir. Ancak, programın 2023 ve 2024 başvuru kılavuzlarında Uluslararası Anıtlar ve Sitler Konseyi'nin (ICOMOS) 2022 tarihli Uluslararası Kültürel Miras Turizmi Tüzüğü'ne açık bir referans verilmemesi, kırsal koruma ile sürdürülebilir turizm politikalarının bütünleştirilmesine dair önemli soruları gündeme getirmektedir. 2022 ICOMOS Tüzüğü'nden yola çıkan bu çalışma, turizme dayalı faydalar ile koruma arasındaki dengeye ilişkin zorlukları inceleyerek Şirince'nin En İyi Turizm Köyü ölçütlerine uyumunu değerlendirmektedir. Gizli

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tutulan değerlendirme verileri nedeniyle doğrudan bir çözümleme mümkün olmadığından, araştırma 2020-2024 yılları arasında TripAdvisor'daki 166 ziyaretçi yorumunu çözümlen tüketici odaklı bir yaklaşım benimsemiştir. Araştırmacılar, içerik çözümlenmesinin kodlamasında kullanmak üzere ICOMOS Tüzüğü'nden çıkardıkları zorlukları nedenler (turizme bağımlılık, aşırı turizm, metalaşma) ve sonuçlar (ör. özgünlüğün kaybı) olarak sınıflandırmıştır. Bulgular, köyün özgünlüğünü ve yerin ruhunu aşındıran metalaşma ile mirasın bozulmasına yol açan aşırı kalabalık konusunda önemli bir memnuniyetsizlik olduğunu göstermektedir. Ayrıca, ziyaretçiler sıkça satıcıların sahtekarlık olarak nitelendirilen uygulamalarını dile getirmiştir. Yetersiz altyapı gibi erişim sorunları da Şirince'nin kapsayıcı bir turizm deneyimi sunmasını engellemektedir.

Çalışma, En İyi Turizm Köyü ölçütleri ile ICOMOS'un sorumlu kültürel turizm ilkeleri arasındaki uyumsuzlukları ortaya koymaktadır. En İyi Turizm Köyü girişimi sürdürülebilir kırsal turizmi teşvik etse de, mirasın korunmasına yeterince vurgu yapılmaması, Şirince gibi kültürel açıdan zengin kırsal destinasyonların karşılaştığı zorlukları ele almada eksikliklere yol açmaktadır.

Ziyaretçi odaklı verilerin çözümlenmesine dayanan bu araştırma, turizm gelişimi ile kırsal koruma arasındaki ilişkilere ışık tutmaktadır. Gelecekteki araştırmalar, En İyi Turizm Köyü ve ICOMOS gibi uluslararası çerçevelerin bütünleştirilmesini inceleyebilir veya Şirince ve benzeri kırsal destinasyonlarda sorumlu turizmin gizil gücünü değerlendirebilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kültür Turizmi, ICOMOS, En İyi Turizm Köyü, TripAdvisor, Şirince.

1. INTRODUCTION

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)¹, which was renamed UN Tourism in 2024, launched the Best Tourism Villages (BTV) initiative in 2021 to recognize villages exemplifying sustainable tourism practices. In 2023, Şirince, a historic village in the Selçuk district of İzmir Province, Türkiye, was included among the 54 Best Tourism Villages of 2023 worldwide.

The initiative's evaluation criteria align with the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, encompassing nine areas of economic, social, and environmental sustainability. In 2022, the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) issued the International Charter for Cultural Heritage Tourism: Reinforcing Cultural Heritage Protection and Community Resilience through Responsible and Sustainable Tourism Management, addressing critical issues such as tourism dependency, overtourism, and commodification (ICOMOS, 2022). However, the application guides for the BTV program's 2023 and 2024 editions make no explicit reference to ICOMOS's recommendations. This omission within the UN Tourism framework raises important questions, given the interconnections between rural development, cultural tourism, and conservation policies.

Motivated by this tension, this study examines Şirince's current situation through the lens of the challenges outlined in the 2022 ICOMOS Charter and evaluates its alignment with the BTV criteria. The classified nature of UN Tourism's evaluation data on Şirince precluded direct analysis, prompting an alternative approach. This study instead focuses on visitor perspectives to understand the village's recent challenges, utilizing TripAdvisor comments from 2020 to 2024 as the primary dataset for content analysis, offering insights from the consumer's point of view.

¹ The organization was known as the WTO from 1975 to 2003, as UNWTO from 2003 to 2024, and will be referred to as UN Tourism after 2024.

The study begins by examining the evolution of common challenges highlighted in international cultural tourism documents, with a particular focus on ICOMOS, to reveal emerging concepts, approaches, and priorities. A brief literature review follows, addressing concerns about overtourism² in rural destinations. Background information on the BTV initiative and Şirince is then provided, followed by a review of recent studies identifying issues arising from unsustainable tourism in the village. The methodology section outlines the coding approach used in the content analysis, with findings subsequently presented and discussed.

2. TOWARDS THE 2022 ICOMOS CHARTER: EVOLUTION OF CULTURAL TOURISM CHALLENGES IN INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS

Since their establishment, international conservation organizations such as UNESCO and ICOMOS have issued charters, declarations, recommendations, and guides that serve as standard-setting texts for urban and rural conservation. Some of these documents focus on specific issues, and with a central emphasis is undoubtedly on cultural tourism.

ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Cultural Tourism (ICTC) was established in 1970, and ICOMOS's first document on tourism, the Charter of Cultural Tourism, dates back to 1976. It was the first international doctrinal text with a particular focus on cultural heritage and tourism (Martínez, 2022; Gowen et al., 2023). The Charter defines cultural tourism as "that form of tourism whose object is, among other aims, the discovery of monuments and sites." While highlighting the benefits of cultural tourism, it also warns against its risks, such as "the massive and uncontrolled use of monuments and sites," urging the international community "to respect and protect the authenticity and the diversity of cultural values" (ICOMOS, 1976).

Another significant development in 1970 was the transition of the International Union of Official Travel Organizations (IUOTO) from a non-governmental organization to an intergovernmental organization. This transition led to the establishment of the World Tourism Organization (WTO) in 1975, which became an executing agency of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), 2016).

In 1983, the UN General Assembly established the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) to prepare a report on 'sustainable development,' later published in 1987 to be known as the Brundtland Report, or Our Common Future (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Although the report did not explicitly mention cultural or sustainable tourism,

² While several researchers, such as Miroglu (20026), Costa and Melotti (2012), Hascoët (2019), and Rössler (2023), also use the term 'hypertourism' as a synonym for 'overtourism,' the latter term is preferred in this article, as it is used in the 2022 ICOMOS Charter.

the growing prominence of the term ‘sustainability’ sparked debates that eventually led to the definition of ‘sustainable tourism’ (Gowen et al., 2023).

In 1999, two significant documents were published. The first is *Tourism at World Heritage Sites: The Site Manager's Handbook*, a collaborative effort by ICOMOS ICTC and WTO, though its full text could not be accessed. The second document is the *International Cultural Tourism Charter - Managing Tourism at Places of Heritage Significance*, adopted by ICOMOS. While the 1999 Charter does not explicitly define ‘cultural tourism’, it is understood that the concept expands beyond the exploration of monuments and sites to include the appreciation of the cultural environment. The Charter cautions that excessive or poorly managed tourism, along with related development, can jeopardize the physical integrity, ecological setting, and significant characteristics of heritage, as well as the culture and lifestyles of host communities and the visitor experience. The Charter outlines six core principles, which can be summarized as: (1) protecting and enhancing cultural significance and local identity while fostering cultural exchange; (2) balancing the needs of conservation and tourism; (3) enhancing the visitor experience; (4) involving host communities; (5) ensuring that tourism benefits host communities; and (6) promoting tourism that respects and enhances cultural heritage (ICOMOS, 1999). According to Gowen et al. (2023), the 1999 Charter was groundbreaking in three keyways: it incorporated diverse dimensions of sustainability, actively involved host communities, and places special emphasis on visitor experience, especially regarding cultural heritage sustainability and carrying capacity. Building on the foundations of the 1976 Charter, the 1999 Charter further underscores the risks of unplanned tourism, including its potentially destructive impacts on heritage and local communities (Martínez, 2022).

In 2003, the World Tourism Organization (WTO) was acknowledged as a specialized agency by the United Nations and renamed as the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), 2016). Concurrently, starting in 1999, visitor management and tourism issues were gradually integrated into the framework of UNESCO World Heritage Sites through updates to *The Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (Gowen et al., 2023). However, Martínez (2022) emphasizes that despite the evident negative effects of unmanaged tourism, the Operational Guidelines did not comprehensively address these issues until 2010.

In 2015, the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by the UN, encompassing 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), marked a pivotal moment for integrating sustainability into tourism policies. In response, ICOMOS updated the 1999 Charter to align with the 2030 Agenda and address the increasing risks of mass cultural tourism, including overtourism (Martínez, 2022; Gowen et al., 2023). This effort culminated in the adoption of the ICOMOS International Charter for Cultural

Heritage Tourism: Reinforcing Cultural Heritage Protection and Community Resilience through Responsible and Sustainable Tourism Management in 2022 (hereafter referred to as the 2022 Charter). Gowen et al., (2023) emphasize that the 2022 Charter introduces new concepts not mentioned in previous ICOMOS Charters. One of these concepts is 'responsible tourism' as defined in the Preamble of the Charter: "The responsible management of tourism is a shared responsibility of governments, tour operators, tourism businesses, destination managers and marketing organizations, site management authorities, land-use planners, heritage and tourism professionals, civil society, and visitors." (ICOMOS, 2022). The distinction between sustainable and responsible tourism lies in their focus (Sommer, 2021). According to UNWTO (United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) & United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), 2005), sustainable tourism addresses the overall sustainability of the tourism industry by applying the three pillars of sustainable development. Whereas responsible tourism emphasizes specific actions and strategies by stakeholders to reduce the negative impacts of tourism activities (Goodwin, 2016).

The 2022 ICOMOS Charter outlines seven principles for responsible cultural tourism management, which can be summarized as follows: [1] Heritage Protection: Conservation is central to responsible cultural tourism planning, [2] Strategic Management: Management plans are based on monitoring and carrying capacity, [3] Public Awareness: Sensitive interpretation and presentation, [4] Community Rights: Access and engagement in participatory governance, [5] Stakeholder Cooperation: Raise awareness and reinforce cooperation, [6] Resilience Building: Capacity development, risk assessment and adaptive planning, [7] Climate Action: Integration of measures in conservation.

The need for this new approach stems from the challenges emphasized in the 2022 ICOMOS Charter. Eight critical challenges can be identified in the text, three of which (C1, C2, and C3) function as both causes and challenges, while the remaining five (E1, E2, E3, E4, and E5) can be interpreted as their effects, forming a cause-and-effect relationship. The causal challenges, as derived from the Charter by the researchers, are as follows:

[C1] Tourism-dependency: Explicitly highlighted as a vulnerability of communities whose economies heavily rely on tourism, making them less resilient to external shocks.

[C2] Overtourism: Identified as a phenomenon that leads to congestion and unacceptable degradation of both tangible and intangible heritage.

[C3] Commodification (including standardization): Refers to rapid commercialization that undermines cultural integrity and places irreplaceable assets at risk.

The resulting challenges, as derived from the Charter by the researchers, are:

[E1] Degradation of tangible and intangible heritage and lack of interpretation of heritage: Tourism pressures lead to physical deterioration of tangible heritage and the distortion of intangible heritage. Additionally, there is a critical need for sensitive interpretation to preserve authenticity and enhance visitor understanding.

[E2] Loss of spirit of place, local identity, and authenticity: Risks include the erosion of authenticity and the loss of the distinct cultural character of destinations.

[E3] Environmental degradation: Unmanaged tourism growth poses significant risks, especially for heritage sites linked to natural landscapes.

[E4] Social degradation (local people, external tradespeople, and visitors): Threats include the displacement of locals, gentrification, stakeholder conflicts, and diminished quality of life for residents.

[E5] Problems of accessibility in terms of rights: Unregulated tourism may lead to inequitable access to cultural heritage, restricting its use and enjoyment for both local communities and visitors.

Beyond these tourism-specific challenges, the Charter also highlights external disturbances, such as disasters, climate emergencies, conflicts, and crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. While these issues may not directly stem from tourism, they exacerbate existing vulnerabilities and underscore the need for resilient strategies.

The evolution of international frameworks, culminating in the 2022 ICOMOS Charter, illustrates how foundational challenges like tourism-dependency, overtourism, and commodification serve as catalysts for further risks.

3. TOURISM-DEPENDENCY, OVERTOURISM AND COMMODIFICATION RELATED PROBLEMS IN RURAL DESTINATIONS

Tourists are the consumers of attractions in a destination (Seyhan, 2023). While cultural tourism has historically played a supportive role in the conservation of cultural heritage, since the 1960s and 1970s, it has frequently exceeded the carrying capacity of many destinations worldwide (Martínez, 2022). This phenomenon has been increasingly referred to as overtourism in recent years (Peeters et al., 2018; Capocchi et al., 2019; Buitrago Esquinas et al., 2023), becoming a prominent focus of tourism research, particularly after 2017 (Seyhan, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic had a distinctive role in the process. Bringing severe undertourism, the pandemic took its place as one of the most significant challenges the tourism industry has ever faced (Milano & Koens, 2022; Seyhan, 2023). Moreover, as Martínez (2022) stresses, the tourism sector's harsh recovery efforts from the economic loss caused by the pandemic worsens the situation regarding cultural heritage. The OECD Report on

Tourism Trends and Policies 2024 (OECD, 2024) confirms that international tourist arrivals in 2023 exceeded pre-pandemic levels in many OECD countries. These shifts have fueled contrasting tendencies: on one hand, a return to high tourism numbers, and on the other, a growing movement toward ethical, responsible, and sustainable tourism (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020).

The tourism industry, primarily driven by the private sector, prioritizes profit, often aligning stakeholders' interests with commercial objectives (Seyhan, 2023). Combined with overtourism, these profit-driven motives can commodify destinations, transforming them into mere economic assets resulting in excess commodification. Although overtourism is more commonly associated with urban areas (Adie et al., 2019; Popescu et al., 2023; Nádasi et al., 2024), recent studies have highlighted its increasing relevance in rural destinations. In villages, the small scale and limited resources exacerbate issues like tourism-dependency and commodification, disproportionately affecting rural communities.

Despite the popularity of many rural destinations among travelers, the lack of statistical data on day visitors makes it challenging to quantify overtourism in these areas (Popescu et al., 2023; Nádasi et al., 2024). Nevertheless, qualitative and empirical research has revealed critical problems in such locations. For example, Adie et al. (2019) conducted pre-pandemic research on European residents' perceptions of overtourism. While rural communities generally regarded overtourism as less threatening than urban residents, smaller heritage sites face unique challenges, including limited infrastructure and heightened risks of cultural erosion under visitor pressure (Adie et al., 2019).

Using satellite imagery, Seyhan (2023) demonstrated how overtourism transformed the social, economic, and physical landscape of Olympos in undesirable ways. The study highlighted that unplanned tourism development in rural heritage destinations often leads to rural gentrification or overtourism-driven transformation of the landscape. Nádasi et al. (2024) emphasized that some rural European destinations have little economic importance beyond tourism, highlighting their excessive dependency on this sector. Similarly, Popescu et al. (2023) revealed that even rural destinations, such as Cinque Terre, Capri-Anacapri, Alberobello, Hallstatt, Giethoorn, Oia, Tobermory, Ciocănești, Viscri, Bran, Mărginimea Sibiului, and Săpânța, face overtourism pressures, with tourists far exceeding local capacities measured by density per inhabitant and per square kilometer. Vegnuti (2020) further noted that overtourism in Cinque Terre transformed a once cultural and natural asset into a degraded, overcrowded experience.

4. THE VILLAGE OF ŞIRINCE

Şirince is a mountain village with fertile valley soils, located 8 kilometers from the Selçuk district of İzmir, at an altitude of 400 meters. Its origins date back to the 5th century AD (Akyüz, 1995, as cited in Köşklük Kaya, 2012, p. 119). In the 19th century, Şirince was a Greek village under Ottoman rule.

Following the Turkish and Greek Population Exchange in 1923, the village was vacated by its Greek residents and resettled by Turks from Greece.



Figure 1. Location of Şirince in Google Earth.

The name Şirince translates to ‘pleasant’ or ‘charming’ in Turkish. Historically called Çirkince (‘ugly’) to deter outsiders and preserve its isolation, the village was renamed Şirince during the Early Republican Era by the İzmir governor (Selçuk Kaymakamlığı, 2019). According to the latest data from TÜİK, its population is 454 (TÜİK, 2023).



Figure 2. A View from Şirince. (Photograph by Ebru Danişık, 2023).

Şirince is located near significant cultural landmarks, including Ephesus, the Cave of the Seven Sleepers, the House of the Virgin Mary, St. John's Basilica, and the Isa Bey Mosque. According to Semenderoğlu and Çakıcıoğlu (2007), Şirince has evolved as an alternative tourism destination orbiting these globally renowned sites rather than serving as a standalone attraction.

The village's houses are typically two-story structures that blend harmoniously with the topography. With their whitewashed facades and consistent architectural elements, these traditional houses create a unified aesthetic, forming the distinctive texture of the area (Bozkurt, 2021, p. 22). In 1984, Şirince was designated as an 'Urban Conservation Site,' while the surrounding area was classified as a '3rd-degree natural site' (Kaplan et al., 1997, as cited in Kılıçaslan et al., 2012, p. 267).

Şirince has a Mediterranean climate with abundant maquis vegetation, pine, and olive trees. The village is nationally known for peaches, alongside olives, figs, and grapes. Its renowned wines are a key income source for locals, who also produce and sell olive oil, soap, dried herbs, fruits, vegetables, and traditional products like tarhana, noodles, and molasses. Handmade textiles and crafts are also sold in the market (Turkey Campus, 2009).

5. LITERATURE REVIEW ON ŞİRİNCE

Şirince has been the focus of numerous studies over the past decade, exploring its tourism-driven transformations. While the aims of these studies vary and do not always focus on challenges, several have identified critical issues the village faces.

Aysin (2014) examines the decline of traditional culture in Şirince, attributing it to population loss over time. Another significant issue highlighted is the obstructive presence of street stalls that conceal the facades of historic houses, complicating efforts to preserve the village's architectural integrity. Ogun and Gövdere (2015) analyze the impacts of rural tourism on Şirince's development, noting both benefits, such as economic growth, and challenges, including insufficient infrastructure, visual pollution from commercial signage, and the displacement of traditional crafts by non-local goods. Türkay and Yağın Kayıkçı (2018) study the socio-cultural transformations triggered by tourism, documenting negative outcomes such as overcrowding, environmental degradation, and stakeholder conflicts, while emphasizing the erosion of Şirince's cultural authenticity and identity. Similarly, Alımanoğlu (2018) investigates the commodification of Şirince, noting its shift from a traditional lifestyle to a commercialized hub dominated by mass-produced goods and tourism-driven practices. Koca (2019) evaluates Şirince's architectural sustainability, finding that modern renovations often fail to align with ecological and cultural conservation principles. Baştan (2020) further explores the environmental impacts of unregulated tourism, noting its role in degrading natural and historic assets and diminishing residents' quality of life. Bozkurt (2021) discusses the risks to Şirince's cultural

landscape posed by modern interventions designed to accommodate tourism. Erdil (2023) provides a socio-economic analysis of Şirince, identifying a decline in traditional practices and community bonds. Findings suggest that while residents appreciate the economic benefits of tourism, these changes have resulted in the loss of the village's original character and authenticity.

With Şirince's designation as a Best Tourism Village in 2023, it has become necessary to reexamine these previously identified problems from a global cultural heritage conservation perspective. The 2022 ICOMOS Charter provides a valuable framework for this purpose. This study distinguishes itself from prior research by analyzing visitor perspectives through online reviews, offering a consumer-centered approach to understanding the challenges associated with tourism in Şirince.

Notably, Ongun et al. (2021) conducted a study to uncover visitors' touristic experiences in Şirince, analyzing 824 Turkish reviews on TripAdvisor up to September 28, 2020. Their findings reflect a general appreciation for Şirince's traditional houses, churches, and local products, alongside criticisms of issues such as overcrowding and high prices. This current research extends the analysis to the period after 2020, focusing on the interplay between the 2022 ICOMOS Charter and the Best Tourism Village initiative to provide an updated and nuanced understanding of Şirince's evolving challenges.

6. BEST TOURISM VILLAGE INITIATIVE

The Best Tourism Villages (BTV) initiative, established by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in 2021, aims to recognize rural destinations that excel in sustainable tourism practices. The initiative promotes rural tourism as a positive force for economic transformation, cultural conservation, and community well-being. Villages selected for the program exemplify efforts to safeguard natural and cultural heritage while advancing the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), 2023).

The BTV initiative is open to villages nominated by UNWTO member states. Each country can propose up to eight candidates per selection cycle, and these candidates must meet specific eligibility criteria: [1] Low population density (fewer than 15,000 inhabitants); [2] Presence of traditional activities such as agriculture, forestry, livestock, or fishing and [3] A lifestyle reflecting community values and rural traditions (World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), 2023).

Table 1. Nine areas of evaluation according to 2023 Application Guide with a summary of the descriptions (World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), 2023).

Evaluation Area	Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	Description
1. Cultural and Natural Resources	SDGs 8, 11, 12, 15	Recognizes villages that protect and promote tangible and intangible heritage and natural landscapes.
2. Promotion and Preservation of Cultural Resources	SDGs 8, 11, 12	Highlights policies and initiatives to responsibly market and sustain cultural assets.
3. Economic Sustainability	SDGs 5, 8, 9, 17	Evaluates tourism's role in fostering entrepreneurship, job creation, and economic resilience.
4. Social Sustainability	SDGs 1, 2, 4, 5, 8, 10, 11, 12, 17	Measures inclusivity, gender balance, and the empowerment of youth and vulnerable populations in tourism.
5. Environmental Sustainability	SDGs 7, 12, 13, 15, 17	Assesses the promotion of eco-friendly tourism practices and efforts to minimize environmental impact.
6. Tourism Development and Value Chain Integration	SDGs 8, 9, 10, 12	Focuses on innovation, local gastronomy, product development, and integrating tourism into the local economy.
7. Governance and Prioritization of Tourism	SDGs 9, 17	Examines governance structures, including community engagement and public-private partnerships.
8. Infrastructure and Connectivity	SDGs 9, 17	Considers the adequacy of transport, digital infrastructure, and access to essential services.
9. Health, Safety, and Security	SDGs 3	Evaluates public health and safety measures, emergency preparedness, and access to healthcare services.

The Best Tourism Villages initiative selection process occurs in multiple stages. Initially member states submit applications containing detailed profiles of candidate villages, including tourism data and supporting materials like videos. These submissions are then reviewed by an independent, multidisciplinary advisory board that evaluates each village based on nine key criteria outlined in the Areas of Evaluation guide (Table 1). Finally, villages selected for the BTV designation are announced during international UNWTO events, highlighting their accomplishments in sustainable tourism practices. Villages which receive the BTV title are required to submit biennial reports to track their ongoing efforts and ensure adherence to the program's goals. Villages that demonstrate potential but do not fully meet the criteria are placed in the Upgrade Programme, which offers targeted assistance to enhance their compliance with BTV standards (World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), 2023).

7. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative content analysis is a systematic and versatile research method widely applied in social sciences to examine qualitative data across various representations, including textual, visual, and

auditory forms. It expands the concept of "text" beyond written or spoken words to encompass descriptions, opinions, and emotions (Preiser et al., 2021). Its goal is to uncover patterns, themes, and meanings within the data, enabling researchers to interpret communicative characteristics and broader phenomena (Krippendorff, 2018).

Coding is a fundamental step in content analysis, involving the categorization of qualitative data into meaningful units to identify patterns, themes, or underlying meanings relevant to the research objectives (Krippendorff, 2018). Hsieh and Shannon (2005) identify three common approaches to content analysis based on the timing and source of codes, as well as threats to reliability: conventional, directed, and summative (Table 2).

Table 2. Major coding differences among three approaches to content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1286, Table 4).

Type of Content Analysis	Study Starts With	Timing of Defining Codes or Keywords	Source of Codes or Keywords
Conventional content analysis	Observation	Codes are defined during data analysis	Codes are derived from data
Directed content analysis	Theory	Codes are defined before and during data analysis	Codes are derived from theory or relevant research findings
Summative content analysis	Keywords	Codes are defined before and during data analysis	Keywords are derived from interest of researchers or review of literature

For the purposes of this study, the summative content analysis approach was adopted, with reliability grounded in credibility and internal consistency (Weber, 1990). This approach allows researchers to expand their analysis by performing latent content analysis, which involves interpreting the underlying meaning of the content (Holsti, 1969, as cited in Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Latent content analysis further enables the inclusion of alternative expressions and the evaluation of content quality in the analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

The categories for the summative content analysis in this study were predefined, based on the eight interconnected challenges and problems related to tourism in historic sites, as outlined in the 2022 ICOMOS Charter. Of these, three challenges are identified as causes, while the remaining five are considered results. This distinction creates two main categories: causal challenges and resulting challenges. The specific challenges within these categories serve as the sub-categories for the analysis. Table 3 outlines the coding framework used in the summative content analysis.

Table 3. The coding of the summative content analysis.

Main Theme	Categories	Sub-categories
Challenges emphasized in the 2022 ICOMOS Charter	Causal challenges (C)	[C1] Tourism-dependency [C2] Overtourism [C3] Commodification (including standardization)
	Resulting challenges (R)	[E1] Degradation of tangible and intangible heritage and lack of interpretation of heritage [E2] Loss of spirit of place, local identity, and authenticity [E3] Environmental degradation [E4] Social degradation (local people, external tradespeople, and visitors) [E5] Problems of accessibility in terms of rights

The Charter also highlighted other critical challenges, including disasters, climate emergencies, conflicts, and risks such as those experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, as these challenges were considered external disturbances rather than directly related to tourism by the researchers, they were excluded from the analysis categories.

Data for the analysis was collected from the TripAdvisor reviews page for ‘Şirince Köyü’ (listed as ‘Sirince Koyu’ in the English version). TripAdvisor, a globally recognized travel recommendation platform, offers an alternative to traditional face-to-face data collection through visitor comments (Sánchez, 2022). This approach was deemed suitable for evaluating consumer perspectives on the challenges highlighted in the 2022 ICOMOS Charter.

As of December 1, 2024, a total of 1,531 reviews in various languages were posted, distributed as follows: 752 rated as ‘Excellent,’ 434 as ‘Very Good,’ 219 as ‘Average,’ and 63 each as ‘Poor’ and ‘Terrible.’ Since Ongun et al. (2021) already analyzed 824 Turkish reviews up to September 28, 2020, providing a general overview of visitor experiences in Şirince, this study focuses on the period starting in 2020. While reviews from January 1, 2020, to September 28, 2020, overlap between the two studies, this minor repetition is considered insignificant. Accordingly, for a general evaluation, the final dataset comprises 166 reviews, spanning 11 languages (Table 4), from January 1, 2020, to December 1, 2024.

Table 4. Language distribution of the reviews between 01.01.2020 and 01.12.2024.

Turkish	110
English	40
German	4
Spanish	2
Greek	1
French	3
Russian	1
Dutch	2
Swedish	1
Polish	1
Indonesian	1
Total	166

Data was collected manually from the TripAdvisor website and compiled into an Excel document. Reviews in Turkish and English were retained in their original form, while non-English reviews were translated into English. Two AI tools, Microsoft Copilot and ChatGPT 4.0, were tested for translation (Table 5). ChatGPT 4.0 was ultimately selected for its nuanced output, with Microsoft Copilot used to verify translations for accuracy and reduce potential exaggeration. This dual-check process was also utilized when translating Turkish expressions and terms used in this article to maintain consistency and validity.

Table 5. Comparison of Microsoft Copilot and ChatGPT 4.0 translations: Two examples.

Translation of a Portuguese comment	Microsoft Copilot	"I went to Sirince because I didn't know what else to do on my last day in Selcuk. It was a very pleasant surprise. An unpretentious place with beautiful landscapes and very pleasant. It was well worth it!!"
	Chat Gpt 4o	"I went to Şirince because I didn't know what else to do on my last day in Selçuk. It was a very pleasant surprise. An unpretentious place with beautiful landscapes and a very enjoyable atmosphere. It was well worth it!"
Translation of a Korean comment	Microsoft Copilot	"The village of Sirince is located 10 minutes by dolmuş from Selcuk. It's a really great place to visit for 1-2 hours on a day trip. It felt similar to Safranbolu, and it was very interesting because you can taste and buy various wines."
	Chat Gpt 4o	"Şirince village, located about 10 minutes away from Selçuk by dolmuş, is a great place to visit for a short trip of 1–2 hours. It had a vibe similar to Safranbolu and was an incredibly interesting spot where you could taste and buy a variety of wines."

Initially, two researchers collaborated to identify the main theme and challenges articulated in the 2022 ICOMOS Charter. These challenges were analyzed and found to exhibit a cause-and-effect relationship. Based on this observation, the challenges were classified into two groups: causal challenges and resulting challenges. All the identified challenges subsequently served as subcategories under the related category for the summative content analysis.

To ensure the reliability of findings and minimize researcher bias, both researchers independently analyzed the comments. Each researcher identified expressions corresponding to the predefined subcategories, cross-checking and validating their findings to reach consensus. In the final stage, the independently derived analyses were compared and synthesized into a unified dataset, ensuring comprehensive and accurate representation of the challenges.

8. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The data was initially reviewed to gain a general overview, including the monthly distribution of reviews by year, the frequency and percentage of reviews by rating, and general positive opinions about the Şirince experience. Subsequently, the analysis focused on reviews containing negative expressions, which were categorized into subcategories. Finally, the relationship between these findings and the nine evaluation areas of the BTV initiative by UN Tourism was explored by cross-interpretation.

8.1. General Overview

In total, 166 reviews were pre-analyzed. Table 6 and Figure 3 collectively illustrate the monthly distribution of TripAdvisor reviews for Şirince from 2020 to 2024, providing a detailed view of seasonal and annual trends in visitor activity.

Table 6. Monthly distribution of reviews by year.

	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	Total
January	2	1	-	-	7	10
February	2	-	1	1	2	6
March	1	3	1	3	6	14
April	2	3	2	2	2	11
May	1	3	6	-	-	10
June	2	3	2	3	1	11
July	-	3	6	5	9	23
August	4	1	2	10	13	30
September	3	2	3	4	3	15
October	1	3	3	4	4	15
November	2	1	3	3	2	11
December	-	2	2	4	2	10
Annual total	20	25	31	39	51	166

Both the table and the figure highlight seasonal variations, showing a clear peak in review activity during the summer and early autumn months, especially from July to September. This peak aligns with the higher tourist traffic during these periods. Conversely, review counts drop significantly in the winter months, such as January and February, reflecting a seasonal decline in tourism engagement.

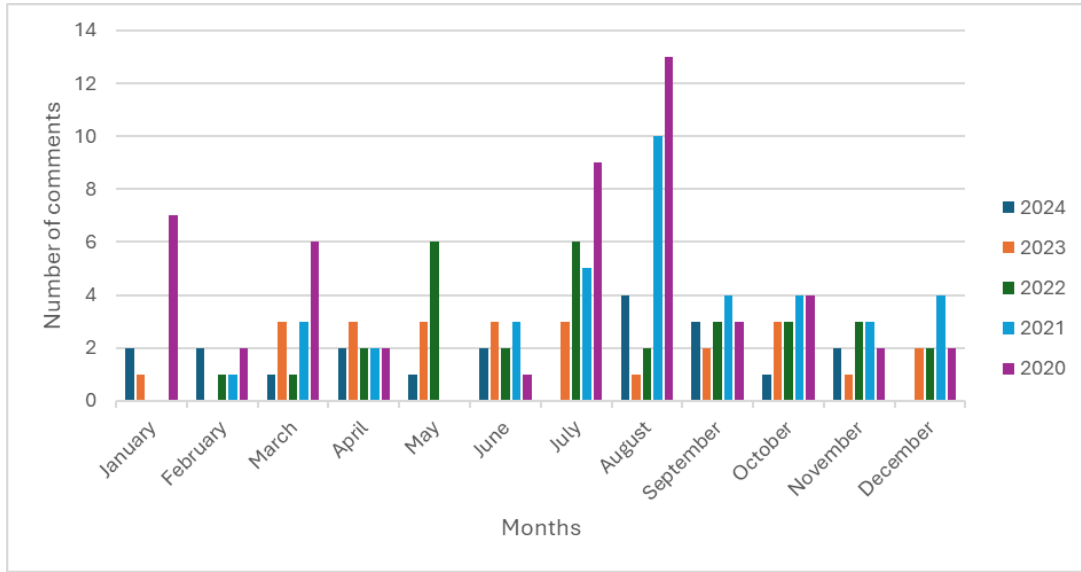


Figure 3. Monthly distribution of reviews by years.

Table 7 summarizes the distribution of TripAdvisor reviews for Şirince based on their ratings, providing insights into visitors' overall impressions. The majority of reviews are highly positive, with 38.55% rated as ‘Excellent’ and 18.07% as ‘Very Good.’ Combined, these categories account for over half of all reviews (56.62%), indicating a generally favorable perception of the village.

Table 7. Review frequency and percentage by rating.

	Frequency	Percent
Excellent (*****)	64	38.55
Very good (****)	30	18.07
Average (***)	29	17.46
Poor (**)	14	8.43
Terrible (*)	29	17.46
Total	166	100

However, a significant portion of reviews highlights mixed or negative experiences. Ratings of ‘Average’ constitute 17.46% of the total, while ‘Poor’ and ‘Terrible’ reviews account for 8.43% and 17.46%, respectively. Combined, ‘Poor’ and ‘Terrible’ ratings make up 25.89% of all reviews, suggesting that notable issues or challenges significantly affect visitor satisfaction.

This distribution emphasizes a polarized visitor experience, where positive ratings dominate but negative feedback is not negligible. These insights underline the importance of addressing recurring concerns to enhance the overall tourist experience in Şirince.

The positive feedback from visitors can be summarized as follows:

- **Strategic Location:** Proximity to major attractions like Ephesus and Kuşadası makes Şirince a convenient stop for travelers.
- **Cultural and Historical Significance:** Visitors appreciate the conserved heritage, including historic houses, churches, and the Taş Mektep.
- **Natural and Scenic Beauty:** Praised for its picturesque landscape and tranquil environment, offering a relaxing experience (see Table 8 for examples of expressions).
- **Commitment to Conservation:** Admired for conserving its unique charm and character.
- **Mathematics Village as an Attraction:** Recognized for engaging cultural and educational events, enhancing appeal.
- **Visible Progress:** Positive feedback on road improvements and accessibility.
- **Cleanliness and Environmental Quality:** Visitors value the absence of pollution.
- **Authentic Local Products:** Celebrated for quality goods like wine, crafts, herbs, and traditional dishes.
- **Welcoming Locals:** Sincere, friendly shopkeepers contribute to a hospitable atmosphere.
- **Economic Benefits of Tourism:** Tourism's positive impact on the local economy is widely acknowledged.

Table 8 illustrates visitor comments emphasizing Şirince's natural and scenic beauty, highlighting the village's tranquil atmosphere and picturesque landscapes as key factors in its positive reception. It is included as an example to validate the analysis of positive feedback, providing evidence for the category of scenic beauty while demonstrating the approach used, without requiring detailed examples for all positive comment categories.

Table 8. Examples of expressions for natural and scenic beauty.

Don't forget to enjoy the village's scenery and its magnificent nature.
Wonderful views.
Drinking Turkish tea or coffee against the magnificent view is soothing.
The village atmosphere and scenery are perfect.
The scenery and cool air were very pleasant.
A beautiful view.
The scenery is incredibly beautiful.
Along the way, accompanied by wonderful views.
During a quiet time, climb up to the village and see the view.
It has such a beautiful view that you may want to stay longer.
The scenery is marvelous for photography, a place that must be seen.
Cafes with comfortable terraces offering beautiful views.
A very pleasant and beautiful place in terms of atmosphere.
An atmosphere that feels like it has come straight from Italy.
A place with an atmosphere where you can find peace.
A tranquil atmosphere.

8.2. Analysis of Negative Reviews

Out of the 166 pre-analyzed reviews, 79 were entirely positive, with no mention of negative aspects. Additionally, 3 reviews focused on hotel experiences rather than the village itself. To ensure the analysis focused on critical feedback, these 82 reviews (79 positive and 3 hotel-focused) were excluded, leaving a dataset of 84 reviews containing negative expressions. These reviews were categorized based on the causal ([C]) and resulting ([E]) challenges, with subcategories informed by visitor comments and guided by researchers' deliberate preferences in classification.

Not every review provided brief expressions; instead, short expressions that could be extracted from relevant reviews are presented in Table 9 and 11. Repeating or very similar expressions were counted as the same unless a nuance in meaning was identified. Table 10 and 12 illustrate examples from the reviews for each category and subcategory, selecting only the parts of comments relevant to the analysis rather than entire reviews.

Visitor reviews categorized under causal challenges reflect tourism dependency ([C1]), overtourism ([C2]), and commodification ([C3]). The categorization process involved decisions to prioritize certain interpretations based on recurring themes or contextual cues from the comments. (Table 9 and 10)

- **[C1] Tourism Dependency:** While some reviews explicitly noted the village's dependency on tourism—such as "purely geared towards tourism"—other comments implied this issue through broader critiques of the village's economic structure, which researchers grouped under this subcategory.
- **[C2] Overtourism:** Reviews highlighting overcrowding, like "packed with people" and "so crowded that it was impossible to see anything," were straightforwardly classified under this

category. However, researchers also opted to include expressions describing indirect consequences of crowding, such as delays in accessing parking or attractions.

- **[C3] Commodification (Including Standardization):** Feedback relating to over-commercialization was diverse, including remarks like "everything is focused on commerce" and "completely monetized." Researchers placed comments here if they reflected a transformation of the village into a marketplace, even when the connection to cultural commodification was implied rather than directly stated.

Table 9. Causal challenges (C) and expressions from comments.

Sub-categories	Number of diverse expressions	Expressions from comments
[C1] Tourism-dependency	7	purely geared towards tourism, example of tourism gone bad, too touristy, tourist trap, poorly managed tourism, lost to tourism, rely on tourism
[C2] Overtourism	6	fray of tourists, so crowded, bustling with tourists, packed with people, crammed, crowds have taken over this place too
[C3] Commodification (including standardization)	32	full of junky tourist shops and vendors, filled with vendors everywhere, the village has turned into a souvenir shop, one stall after another, nothing more than a tat market, commercialization of the area a bit overwhelming, lost its charm with all the shops, selling tourist junk, somewhat commercialized, completely turned into a marketplace, sacrificed to commerce, completely commerce-oriented, products sold everywhere in Turkey, too commercial, is it a marketplace or a village?, their only concern is commerce, focused on commerce, more of a marketplace than a village, monetized, greed for money, fallen victim to capitalism, everything designed to sell something, too many stalls, too many vendors, turned everything and everywhere into commerce, extremely commercial, everyone is a seller, turned into a shopping mall, marketplace village, Şirince Marketplace, commercial concern, turned into a disgrace for the sake of profit

Table 10. Causal challenges (C) and examples to subcategories.

Sub-categories	Number of total reviews	Examples from comments in the reviews
[C1] Tourism-dependency	16	"The 'village' is purely geared towards tourism" "Too touristy"
[C2] Overtourism	12	"I can say that it is a village lost to tourism, or rather just an area." "So crowded that it was impossible to see anything" "The village is bustling with tourists from all around the world" "It was very crowded, packed with people; we couldn't even sit down comfortably somewhere to have a coffee."
[C3] Commodification (including standardization)	46	"They've turned it into more of a marketplace than a village." "History and the village have been sacrificed to commerce. Completely commerce-oriented" "Now, all the streets are focused on commerce. Their only concern is trade and money. Şirince is no longer charming; soon, it might even turn into a wholesale market like Tahtakale. It's become worse than places like Assos, Sığacık, Antalya Kaleiçi, Urla Art Street, Kaş, or Amasra."

Resulting challenges represent the broader effects of the causal challenges, with categorization often involving interpretation to match the spirit of the ICOMOS framework.

- **[E1] Degradation of Tangible and Intangible Heritage and Lack of Interpretation:** Reviews like "dilapidated" and "you can't see the history" were clearly aligned with this subcategory. Researchers also included comments that highlighted inadequate signage as an example of poor interpretation.
- **[E2] Loss of Spirit of Place, Local Identity, and Authenticity:** Reviews indicating the loss of authenticity, the fakeness of sold products, and the lack of a distinct atmosphere were categorized under this subcategory. Many visitors criticized the products marketed as "local," noting that they were not genuinely local but mass-produced items found in other tourist destinations. Expressions such as "artificial" and "everything is full of lies and deceit" highlight these concerns. Remarks like "from Şirince to 'Çirkince,'" directly referenced the erosion of authenticity. Additionally, several reviews described Şirince as a place "hyped by advertisement," suggesting that its popularity is inflated and does not align with the actual experience.
- **[E3] Environmental Degradation:** Although less prominent, one significant remark—"street animals on the verge of starving to death"—was included here, reflecting researchers' preference to include in this subcategory.
- **[E4] Social Degradation (Local People, External Tradespeople, and Visitors):** Comments related to the behavior of local vendors, including dishonesty about the authenticity of products (phrases such as "fraud") and changes in the village's demographic structure, were categorized under this subcategory. Many reviews explicitly referred to sellers as "fraudulent" or "dishonest," criticizing them for falsely claiming that products were locally produced when they were not. Additionally, several visitors noted that the demographic structure of the village has shifted, with many traders appearing to be non-locals who come solely for business purposes.
- **[E5] Problems of Accessibility in Terms of Rights:** Accessibility complaints, such as "the village entrance is a disaster" and "hard for elderly or disabled visitors to cope," were classified here. Researchers included related remarks about parking and road conditions due to their direct impact on equitable access.

Expressions and examples from the comments are provided in Tables 11 and 12. No short expressions were identified under [E3].

Table 11. Resulting Challenges (R) and examples to subcategories.

Sub-categories	Number of diverse expressions	Expressions from comments
[E1] Degradation of tangible and intangible heritage and lack of interpretation of heritage	10	basically a ruin, just a lot of rundown buildings, no signs or directions, can't see the houses or the history, poor and neglected, looks like a bomb hit it, not well-preserved, very neglected and ignored, not well-maintained or beautiful, dilapidated and run-down
[E2] Loss of spirit of place, local identity, and authenticity	32	former simplicity is gone, from Şirince to 'Çirkince', not much else that gives the impression of an old village, lost authenticity, slight departure from authenticity, no charm, hyped up for no reason, Şirince turning into Kuşadası :(, overrated, no different from a typical Turkish village, it lost the vibe, natural charm is gone, artificial, losing its value, not worth it, main cultural aspect has been lost, artificial village, fake wine, become a terrible place, doesn't have a unique dish, the charm of village life is gone, everything is full of lies and deceit, no authenticity, did not meet my expectations, didn't enchant me much, fame precedes itself, nothing to see, lost its charm, losing charm, very shabby place, they've ruined the village, become a disgrace
[E3] Environmental degradation	0	
[E4] Social degradation (local people, external tradespeople, and visitors)	14	shopkeepers need to get their act, full of unauthorized parking attendants, shopkeepers think you're an easy touch, focused on pushing things onto visitors, zealous hawkers, shopkeepers constantly harassing, sellers like leech, like no villagers left, people are very rude and self-interested, ruined because of the shopkeepers, fraud, disrespectful behavior, very aggressive bazaar workers, shopkeepers criticize each other
[E5] Problems of accessibility in terms of rights	6	disorganized, poor condition, very hard for an old or disabled person, not suitable for strollers, parking is a problem, roads are in poor condition

Table 12. Resulting Challenges (R) and examples to subcategories.

Sub-categories	Number of total reviews	Examples from comments in the reviews
[E1] Degradation of tangible and intangible heritage and lack of interpretation of heritage	23	"Nothing like the church, etc., has been conserved; it's basically a ruin. (I couldn't even tell if it was a church at first)." "Just a lot of rundown buildings. Some attempts of rehabbing but far from what the guidebooks tout" "There are only a few beautiful houses. Even to see those, there are no signs or directions."
[E2] Loss of spirit of place, local identity, and authenticity	44	"It's a shame; how have we turned a place as charming as its name into something so ugly? :(" "Artificial village, fake wines" "Hello, I first visited this village in 1996. It was truly a beautiful place back then. We came back occasionally after that, and the last time I visited was in 2006. Now, it's 2020, and the village's houses are hidden behind the tents of the market vendors. It's become a disgrace, a marketplace village. It has turned into a place fitting its old name." "Street animals are on the verge of starving to death!"
[E3] Environmental degradation	1	
[E4] Social degradation (local people, external tradespeople, and visitors)	45	"It's a location that has completely failed when it comes to businesses. There are negative situations, such as shopkeepers constantly harassing visitors to make a sale." "Sellers like leech" "I guess there are no villagers left; it feels like everyone comes from outside just to work here."
[E5] Problems of accessibility in terms of rights	6	"Entering the village is a complete disaster. The parking areas for vehicles are disorganized, and the places where cars are parked are in poor condition. Cars scrape the ground underneath." "Very hard for an old or disabled person to cope with" "Not suitable for strollers."

The analysis revealed that "Commodification (including standardization)" ([C3]) and "Loss of spirit of place, local identity, and authenticity" ([E2]) were the most prominent issues based on 32 expressions from 46 reviews and 32 expressions from 44 reviews, respectively. The reviews for these subcategories had the most diverse expressions, indicating multifaceted dissatisfaction. In contrast, reviews about "Social degradation (local people, external tradespeople, and visitors)" ([E4]) were numerous but more repetitive, suggesting common grievances among visitors with only 14 expressions were identified from 45 reviews.

The most significant findings of the analysis come from subcategories [E2] and [E4]. [E2] highlights the perception that Şirince has lost its unique character and cultural integrity due to over commercialization and excessive promotion. While, subcategory [E4] emphasizes significant dissatisfaction with the lack of trust and authenticity in interactions between visitors and traders, as well as concerns about the erosion of the village's traditional social fabric.

8.3. Evaluation of Best Tourism Village (BTV) Criteria

To evaluate the Best Tourism Village (BTV) criteria, Şirince's tourism challenges were compared with the nine areas of evaluation. Table 13 provides a comprehensive assessment of Şirince's alignment with the BTV criteria, highlighting both strengths and shortcomings identified through content analysis. While the village demonstrates notable achievements in areas such as local product integration and natural resource preservation, critical issues like commodification ([C3]) and social degradation ([E4]) undermine its sustainability goals. For instance, visitor feedback on the over-commercialization of local goods and the sale of non-local goods falsely marketed as local directly contradicts with the BTV objective of sustaining cultural authenticity. Furthermore, ongoing challenges such as overtourism ([C2]), poor infrastructure ([E5]), and governance gaps emphasize the need for strategic management to balance tourism growth with conservation efforts. Overall, the findings reveal that while Şirince meets several BTV criteria, significant gaps remain in areas like the promotion and preservation of cultural resources, economic resilience, social cohesion, and environmental sustainability, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to ensure its long-term viability.

Table 13. Cross-checking the BTV criteria with the research findings.

BTV Evaluation Area	Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	Description of the Evaluation Area	Findings from the Content Analysis
1. Cultural and Natural Resources	SDGs 8, 11, 12, 15	Recognizes villages that protect and promote tangible and intangible heritage and natural landscapes.	Findings emphasize both the village's rich cultural heritage and its degradation due to poor preservation efforts (IE1). Reviews frequently criticized the neglect of historic sites and insufficient interpretation.
2. Promotion and Preservation of Cultural Resources	SDGs 8, 11, 12	Highlights policies and initiatives to responsibly market and sustain cultural assets.	Visitor feedback points to commodification (IC3) undermining Şirince's cultural authenticity (IE2). Mass-produced goods marketed as local products and over-commercialization diminish the perceived uniqueness of the village, conflicting with the criterion's goal to sustain cultural assets responsibly.
3. Economic Sustainability	SDGs 5, 8, 9, 17	Evaluates tourism's role in fostering entrepreneurship, job creation, and economic resilience.	While tourism contributes significantly to the local economy, comments suggest an overreliance on tourism (IC1), posing risks to economic resilience. Additionally, issues such as fraudulent practices by vendors (IE4) undermine consumer trust and long-term economic viability.
4. Social Sustainability	SDGs 1, 2, 4, 5, 8, 10, 11, 12, 17	Measures inclusivity, gender balance, and the empowerment of youth and vulnerable populations in tourism.	Negative feedback highlights social degradation (IE4), with many reviews criticizing the behavior of vendors and the eroding connection between the local population and the village. Complaints about an influx of non-local traders exacerbate concerns about inclusivity and community cohesion.
5. Environmental Sustainability	SDGs 7, 12, 13, 15, 17	Assesses the promotion of eco-friendly tourism practices and efforts to minimize environmental impact.	Visitor reviews rarely addressed environmental concerns (IE3). However, isolated comments, such as the plight of street animals, point to a need for greater focus on ecological sustainability.
6. Tourism Development and Value Chain Integration	SDGs 8, 9, 10, 12	Focuses on innovation, local gastronomy, product development, and integrating tourism into the local economy.	Comments celebrating Şirince's local products, such as wines and olive-based goods, show progress in integrating tourism with local production. However, criticisms about the authenticity of these products (IE2) suggest missed opportunities for reinforcing value chains.
7. Governance and Prioritization of Tourism	SDGs 9, 17	Examines governance structures, including community engagement and public-private partnerships.	Reviews reflect a lack of strategic tourism management, with widespread issues such as overtourism (IC2), insufficient parking, and unregulated commercial practices. These challenges highlight the need for governance structures that balance conservation with tourism development.
8. Infrastructure and Connectivity	SDGs 9, 17	Considers the adequacy of transport, digital infrastructure, and access to essential services.	Accessibility issues (IE5), including poor road conditions and inadequate facilities for elderly and disabled visitors, are recurring concerns.

9. CONCLUSION

Şirince's designation as a Best Tourism Village (BTV) underscores its cultural and natural significance, yet this study highlights substantial challenges that threaten its sustainability. Using the 2022 ICOMOS Charter as a framework, the research evaluated visitor perspectives and identified critical tensions between tourism-driven economic benefits and rural conservation.

A major issue is the commodification of the village ([C3]), which has eroded its authenticity ([E2]) and unique spirit of place. Visitor critiques of mass-produced goods marketed as local and an over-commercialized atmosphere reflect this transformation. These concerns align with the 2022 ICOMOS Charter's call for tourism practices centered on cultural heritage conservation. Overreliance on tourism ([C1]) further reduces resilience, contrary to sustainability goals, while overtourism ([C2]) exacerbates challenges. Complaints about overcrowding and long waits point to the need for management plans guided by carrying capacity assessments, as advocated by ICOMOS principles. These factors have also contributed to the degradation of tangible and intangible heritage ([E1]), with neglected historic sites and a lack of interpretive efforts highlighted in reviews.

Social degradation ([E4]) emerged as another key concern. Reports of fraudulent practices by traders, an influx of non-local vendors, and the erosion of community cohesion reflect failures to empower and engage local stakeholders. Addressing these issues requires participatory governance that aligns with the Charter's principles of recognizing community rights and promoting active involvement in tourism management.

Accessibility ([E5]) is also a pressing issue, with reviews criticizing inadequate infrastructure for elderly and disabled visitors. These gaps fail to meet the ICOMOS Charter's principle of equitable access to cultural heritage. While environmental concerns ([E3]) were less frequently mentioned, some reviews highlighted neglected animal welfare, pointing to a broader need for ecological awareness.

To align with responsible tourism principles and BTV criteria, Şirince must adopt holistic management strategies that balance conservation with sustainable development. Recommendations include creating management plans that incorporate monitoring and carrying capacity, fostering participatory governance, restoring authenticity, and improving accessibility and infrastructure.

This study's consumer-centered approach offers valuable insights but also highlights areas requiring further investigation. Future research could explore how to align the BTV framework with recent conservation charters like the 2022 ICOMOS Charter for Cultural Heritage Tourism and earlier documents such as the 2008 ICOMOS Charter for the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites (ICOMOS, 2008) and the 2017 ICOMOS-IFLA Principles Concerning Rural

Landscapes as Heritage (ICOMOS, 2017). Investigating the potential of responsible tourism, or 'responsustainable tourism' in Mihalic's (2016) words, in Şirince and other rural destinations represents another important avenue for research. Addressing these areas will enhance our understanding of the complex interplay between tourism and conservation, ensuring that villages like Şirince thrive as models of sustainable rural tourism.

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