The Changing Face of a Religious City: tourism and the perceptional modernisation of a host community

Yasin Bilim
Necmettin Erbakan University Faculty of Tourism, ybilim@yahoo.com

Ozgur Ozer
ozgurozer64@gmail.com

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Tourism and its impacts on cultural or religious assets can be contentious issues for some communities, for other communities, however, tourism has been an important part of revenue production. Balancing the outcomes of tourism development is not an easy task particularly for religious sites. Some religious sites have recently become aware of tourism's positive gains - not so long ago, many religous beliefs did not permit the use of religious values for commercial benefits. In particular, muslims do not allow the selling of religious assets as a form of commercial production. But 'globalization' and economic reasons have lead to the transformation of many destinations. So, development of tourism results in new meanings - more than just faith and spirituality based ones - in religious sites. Although religious motivations can limit the residents' thinking on commercial gains, residents have to evaluate modern global trends. This study aims to show a case of a religious city's transformation, based on tourism development. Konya is a Central Anatolian religious city, well known for its hosting of Mevlâna and his museum (the English-speaking world knows him simply as **Rumi**, the greatest Sufi philosopher and theologian). When looking back into the past, because of the religious identity of Konya, residents had been recognised as a conservative community. According to research interviewees' statements, this conservative vision resulted in tourism being undervalued, even ignored by residents until the late 1990s. In addition to interviews, a questionnaire was developed for measuring residents' perception and a sample of 269 responses were evaluated. Questionnaire results show that most of the residents have positive perceptions of tourism's economic and social effects, despite having some drawbacks regarding environmental and social effects. Finally, it can be said, Konya, as a religious İslamic city, has transform into a modern commercial city and the economic and marketing effects of tourism have had a positive role in this process.

Key Words: religious, tourism, resident perception.

Introduction

According to Butler (1980), views on the development process of tourism residents' perceptions have an important role. The main focus point for residents is the effects of tourism on their personal and communal living. Although tourism seems a beneficial industry, perceptions of socio-cultural and environmental impacts may re-focus this perception on other issues. The relationship between tourism development processes and local reactions has been evaluated from different perspectives, and these evaluations mostly emphasise negative impacts such as carrying capacity problems and cultural corruptions, derived from multi-cultural movements (Uriely, Israeli and Reichel, 2003; Tosun and Timothy, 2003). Tosun (2001) implies that the economic impacts of tourism have been the foremost issue for both local governments and tourism researchers rather than the social and environmental

impacts, because these impacts have been perceived as the first indicators of tourism development with its positive regional results. On the other hand, reflecting on the social aspects of tourism, the development process more closely depends on community participation and residents' reactions as decisive factors for this process. Unlike economic impacts, social impacts of tourism emerge over a long period and the indicators of these impacts are realised by residents later than the economic indicators (Tosun and Timothy, 2003; Nyaupane, Timothy and Poudel, 2015).

Mass tourism destinations may evaluate these impacts utilising policy and planning frames. But, in religious destinations, impacts (especially negative ones) are not considered in the same context. Religiosity dimensions of the residents can lead to different reactions to

negative impacts, which may thus having more sensitive meanings (Olsen, 2008; Pavicic, Alfirevic and Batarelo, 2007).

Traditional culture (including religious beliefs) of the area is a main determinant for tourism development. If tourism investors or planners misinterpret the local religious and cultural heritage, resident attitudes will be negative towards the development (Uriely *et al.* 2003). Because spiritual meaning is unfashionable, many religious related tourism developments have been ignored (Griffin, 2007). For some religious communities, tourism is not an appropriate activity, and for others religious beliefs provide challenges to tourism development. But, globalising world conditions bring with them, debates on managing religious and cultural values in local communities. Evidence has been presented, however, to demonstrate that examining the accommodation of tourism in religious communities can be difficult (Jafari and Scott, 2014).

Some cases in literature (Din, 1989; Rimmawi and Ibrahim, 1992; Farahani and Musa, 2012; Jafari and Scott, 2014) examine tourism development in Muslim communities. Nearly all cases point out that the developmental of tourism in these communities is not a major priority. In the main, economic impacts and global policies have changed this process. Some recent cases indicate that despite the high level of Islamic beliefs, Muslim the community is developing more positive perceptions regarding tourism's socio-cultural impacts (Farahani and Musa, 2012). Considerations of such issues, examining the residents perceptions of tourism impacts, especially in Islamic destinations, is becoming more important.

This study aims to show a religious site's transformation process through tourism development. The main argument is grounded in changing resident perceptions, by evaluating a religious city case - the central Anatolian city of Konya. The great Muslim philopher **Mevlâna Jalāl ad-Dīn Muḥammad Rūmī** (the English-speaking world knows him simply as Rumi) lived in Konya. His philosophy is based upon love, humanity and tolerance and has influenced the whole world for centuries and enlightening many human beings. Especially for the Muslim world and the Turkish community, he receives much respect, because of his religious philosophy and his Muslim identity. This identity has affected Konya residents' worldview; their perception of tourism development has also developed out from this identity. While tourism development has only been realised since the late 1990's, today Konya Mevlana Museum is the second most visited museum in Turkey. The study aims to evaluate this dramatic change. In particular the effects of religious conservativeness and residents' opposition to development were examined and then the research tries to explain the roots of the tourism evolution process.

Tourism Development and Residents' Perceptions in Religious Cities

Tourism development, not only for religious sites but, for all kind of destination, has been a polemical issue, based on carrying capacity and socio-cultural impacts (Farahani and Musa, 2012; Tosun and Timothy, 2003; Uriely *et al.*, 2003). On the other hand, relating to all aspects of tourism development and local reactions, Bremer (2006) asserts that tourism and tourists can be regarded as modern subjects, and places of tourism have to be considered as part of the globalising movement. For religious cities, this discussion is more problematic as the spirituality of religious destination shapes the development process (Olsen, 2008). According to Hentrei and Pechlaner (2011), religious assets and spirituality add value the other tourism products and thus, the religiosity of the destination has a positive impacts on tourism development.

Today, arguments on host communities' perceptions towards tourism development are both positive and negative. Cultural development and exchange, social change, improvements of host community image, local public services education and conservation, and inter-cultural interactions are some the socio-cultural gains. However, cultural destruction, social instability, increasing crime rates, consumerism, over-commercialisation, changes in traditional values, brake up of traditional family life are some the socio-cultural costs (Hashimoto, 2002; Mbaiwa, 2004; Tosun, 2002). Resident reaction to costs and benefits is the main determining factor, and the roots of their reactions and attitudes depend on how the residents perceive tourism development. Based on Social Exchange Theory, residents evaluate tourism development in terms of expected level of costs and benefits. If the individual gets benefits from tourism, his / her perception will be positive (Diedrich and Garcia, 2009). This also means that humans and places have a social interrelationship and they are never unchanging. Global economic and modernisation conditions affect the perception of tourism and tourists by residents (Bremer, 2006).

Maybe the most important decision for the residents relates to managing tourism's socio-cultural impacts. It should be noted that tourism matures with a local community's hospitality and the development process is evaluated according to the reactions of residents (Tosun and Timothy, 2003; Farahani and Musa, 2012). Farahani and Musa (2012) assert that religion is one of the main factor that orient a communities' social and cultural beliefs. As tourism has a socio-cultural nature, it creates interactions between tourists and residents and shares the same places between different social groups. Bilim and Düzgüner (2015:7) assert that

> *religions perform their function in formation of moral life, social relationships and value judgements of society and cultural conditions while tourism also creates a sense of social interaction and provides opportunities to understand natural, social and cultural environments.*

Kurmanaliyeva, Rysbekova, Duissenbayeva and Izmailov (2014) point out that both religion and tourism share the same cutural and social assets. Therefore, tourism development in religious places involves many important relations between community, culture, religion and tourism. Planning for tourism, hence must better understand local social and religious contexts (Jafari and Scott, 2014; Kurmanaliyeva *et al.*, 2014; Uriely *et al.*, 2003).

There is a strong discussion on tourism's negative socio-cultural impacts which is directly related to the religiosity of a place. As seen in some previous discussions on tourism and religious community interactions (Farahani and Musa, 2012; Olsen, 2008; Jafari and Scott, 2014; Shunnaq, Schwab and Reid, 2008), religiosity of place is related to concern for moral standards, being conservative, having traditional attitudes and oversensitivity for religious beliefs in the face of tourism development, or requests to accommodate different beliefs. On the other hand, religious tourism has socio-cultural characteristics, as a social practice, changing community and social positions (Kumanaliyeva *et al.*, 2014). Blakwell (2007) says that religious tourism includes all types of travel based on religious motivation that doesn't need to incorporate belief in a specific religion. This motivation can encapsulate the experience of different social interactions and secular impressions, to see cultural heritages and artefacts in a religious place. Accordingly, on a global scale, religious motivated travel is increasing and religious tourism is developing an important role for places of religious conflict. Religious travel is a vehicle for reflecting and

cultivating perceptions of different world views and values of human life. On the other hand, religious traditions are making a sensation as an attraction for religious destinations and more importantly this sensation can be harnessed and used positively to feed understanding of the differences between cultures and religions (Theerapappasit, 2006).

Bilim and Düzgüner (2015) suggest that religious tourists' movements have recently received more attention in the literature, but host perceptions about tourism in religious places has not yet been examined very much. They also emphasise that unlike the religious tourists' impressions, host perceptions have been neglected. Some researchers (Jafari and Scott, 2014; Farahani and Musa, 2012; Shunnaq *et al.*, 2008; Rimmawi and Ibrahim, 1992) point out that the development of tourism in Muslim communities is a complicated discussion. According to Rimmawi and Ibrahim (1992), tourism was not an acceptable activity for Muslims because of the financial problems of these communities and it was misinterpreted as wasting time instead of spending time on Allah (God). In some Muslim countries, tourism development has been perceived as a potential threat to Islamic cultural values and traditions. Hence, tourism has not been a major development priority (Farahani and Musa, 2012). Tourism development in the Muslim community is different in nature from other destinations because it is subjecting people to actions derived from a set of beliefs and hence the community contrasts to tourism. There is also a discussion in this regard on the way tourism is orientated to the Western World and its values. So, accommodating the different values of tourism development may be difficult for these communities (Jafari and Scott, 2014).

Aziz (1995) says that Islam does not reject tourism or travel and does not directly avoid tourism development. But, the impacts of tourism on Islamic cultural values and traditions are perceived as potential threats. These discussions are generally focused on conservativeness and negative perceptions about tourism, but recently the diffusion of modernisation into Muslim communities is taking place (Rimmawi and Ibrahim, 1992; Farahani and Musa, 2012). Two Muslim countries, Malaysia and Turkey, are in the top 10 global destinations. Although both countries are mainly Muslim, and some parts of the countries are more conservative, they are also seen as moderate Islamic country. Saudi Arabia, which may be considered as more conservative than many other Islamic country, is also gaining benefits from tourism -

as an Islamic pilgrimage destination (Jafari and Scott, 2014; Farahani and Musa, 2012). It can be said for these Muslim destinations that modernisation and global movements are effecting community perceptions positively, leading these places to move beyond their traditional religious conservativeness. The key point of this discussion is how such development can occur while religious and cultural values are accommodated in a globalising world (Jafari and Scott, 2014).

Konya; as a Religious Destination

Reviewing governmental web pages (http://www.kultur.gov.tr/EN, http://www.konya.bel.tr, http://www.goturkey.com) provides a general destination profile, identifying different tourism potentials throughout Turkey. Konya, a city in the Central Anatolian Region of Turkey is one of the ten most populous cities in Turkey. It has been an permanent place of settlement and a cradle for many civilizations since people started to live a settled life (since 7000 BC). Thus, Konya is one of the oldest settlements in the world. Catalhoyuk, which is located within the province of Konya, is known as the site of the first cultivation in world history. Moving forward in history, it became the capital city of the Seljuk Empire in the 12th century and consequently experienced the most important Renaissance period of its long history. In the 13th century, Konya was completely transformed with Selcuk architecture. Because of its location in the middle of the barren Anatolian steppe, it used to be one of the most important trading centres on the Silk Road (see www.kultur.gov.tr/EN, www.konya.bel.tr, www.goturkey.com).

The great Turkish philosopher Mevlana, who believed in human love and said that mystical unity with God could be reached by the Sema, a whirling dance to music performed by the dervishes, lived in Konya and established a following here. Every year in December, Konya holds a Mevlana Week which includes

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performances of the Sema. Mevlana is buried with his father Bahaeddin Veled in the Green Tomb (Yesil Turbe), which has become the symbol of the city. The Dervish Lodge and Mevlana Museum adjacent to the tomb are open to the public.

Today Konya is still a centre of Sufic practice and teaching. The city is also an important place for Christians because St. Paul and St. Barnabas came there on one of their journeys in Asia Minor around 50 AD. St. Paul preached in Konya but angered both Jews and Gentiles so they had to leave the city and went to Derbe and Lystra.

Today, Konya has a modest but developing tourism industry, with a good range of accommodation and food providers (see Table 1), a wealth or religious-cultural features and a top class transport system.

Research Methodology

The research methodology for this project is based on two types of data collection techniques. Because previous data and any statistical research about residents' perceptions were not available, the first part of the methodology was by non-structured interviews. Two local mayors, two hotel managers who have lived in Konya since 1980s, three travel agency owners who are from Konya and live in Konya for a long time, and five residents joined the interview process. The Interview context was constituted of 5-8 questions related to observations about current tourism development and residents' reactions to tourism and tourists' activities in Konya.

The second part of the research was a questionnaire administered to residents. The questionnaire form had two main parts. The first part related to respondents' demographic indicators and the second part included scales regarding perceived impacts of tourism development. The measurement scale was adapted from Stylidis, Biran, Sit and Szivas' (2014) research about perceived tourism impact.

This questions in the scales were derived from a variety of other studies. Three main factors were evaluated as perceived tourism impacts: economic, socio-cultural and environmental. Additionally, some independent variables were used to measure residents' expectations from tourism development. A five-point, bipolar Likert scale was used (like, 1 - totaly disagree, 5 - totaly agree). Surveys were randomly distributed among residents through valid distribution and 269 completed responses were evaluated statistically.

Table 1 : Facts About Tourism in Konya
• In 2013, Konya had 41 tourism companies, licenced by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, with a bed capacity of 15,173 .
• In 2013 The City received 151,933 visitors (nearly 80,000 being foreign visitor). This equates to 223.281 overnight stays, with an average of 1.5 overnight stays per person.
• With 2,075,056 visitors in 2014, Mevlana Museum is the third most visited museum in Turkey.
http://yigm.kulturturizm.gov.tr

Findings and Discussion

The findings of interviews about residents' perception of tourism development in Konya are focused on three main discussion:

- religious conservativeness,

- development of tourism investments,

- evolution of perceptions in 1990s.

Interviews

There was a tourism boom in the first part of the 1980s in Turkey, especially in the west and south coast areas as sea-sand-sun tourism developed (Tosun, 1999). However, nearly all interviewees, when reflecting on that period, associate tourism perceptions of residents with communal conservative attitudes or frames. According to the interviews, the main challenge to tourism development in Konya the 1980s was residents' religious beliefs which respondents related to negative perceptions about other religions being encountered in Konya. There were historical / cultural reasons for this situation: Konya is a central Anatolian city and this region has a religious sensitivity more than other regions, thus, Konya has a religious image because of hosting Rumi who is an important Islamic philosopher. Secondly, Konya has historical cultural roots, as a Seljukian Capital City - this cultural sophistication creates a more protectionist approach by residents.

One interviewee said:

> until the early 1990s, there was not any restaurant, recreation area or souvenir shop around the museum and other places. It was a big problem for the travel agencies organising tours to Konya and was also effecting the residents' social life. Because of the conservative beliefs, residents were not accepting to join social activities and they didn't want to see foreigners entertained and looking curiously in their living and religious areas.

Other interviewees also pointed out this problem. On the other hand, a travel agency owner indicated that one of the main problem of tourism development in Konya in the 1980s was the booming popularity of sea-sand-sun tourism in Turkey. Turkey was almost exclusively a resort destination in this period and many tourism investments in resort areas were supported by the Turkish government. Focusing on resort destinations and targeting sea-sand-sun tourists resulted in disregard for cultural and religious tourism areas such as Konya and Capadocia. Tourism was presented as a movement to the sea, with services to foreigners. Although far away, these were not acceptable developments for the Muslim community especially those living in central parts of Anatolia. As a result, the image of tourism for those living in conservative sites was very negative. One respondent pointed out another issue related to this:

> In the 1980s, tourism had a negative image in Konya, related to serving foreigners. But, the conservativeness was not the main reason for disregarding tourism development. Konya didn't need to gain money from tourism. Manufacturing, commercial activities and agriculture were main economic activities and tourism was not seen as a useful alternative for the regional economics. Adding this to, residents' religious beliefs affected the residents' viewpoint.

> If Konya had bad economic conditions, tourism could be an alternative sector for residents . . . as seen like some coastal communities'.

According to general agreement, in the late 1990s, tourism development experienced an important positive trend in Konya. Interviewees' statements draw attention some points:

- There was a mass migration to Konya related to employment opportunities. This development caused a social transformation. Religious conservativeness tended to moderate approaches. However, an increased university student population had a significant impact on this change.

- Some economic issues pushed locals to alternative sectors. The potential of Rumi had been discovered by residents. Rumi has a strong religious identity, and the marketing and image power of this potential had gained economic interests.

- Tourism had been seen as a vehicle for the branding of Konya. Seljukian assets and Rumi were the main image makers for generating foreign interest and investors.

- Global economic, socio-cultural and environmental developments have been inevitable issues for Konya as a commercial, cultural and crowded city.

- Between Capadocia and Antalya, Konya occupies a transitional position. This line has been a famous corridor for tour operators. When this trend turned on this destinations, Konya had to be active on this route willingly or not.

Table 2 : General Mean Values of the Variables	
Perceptions of tourism development	General mean values (according to 5 points likert scale)
Economic impacts	4.417
Socio-cultural impacts (reverse coded)	3.533
Environmental impacts (reverse coded)	3.705

- Konya has been ruled by conservative political parties for many years. This political construction and conservative administrative strategies have driven opinions, perceptions and reflections of residents on tourism development. Still today, political decisions based on the issue of religious conservative consideration are in evidence.

Survey

As mentioned before, the second part of the study is based on questionnaire results. Firstly, looking at the distribution of the respondents characteristics—the majority of the respondents were male (62.2%), between 35-44 years old (49.1%), married (84.3%), with at least one child (85.8%) and graduated from primary school (53.5%). Respondents' monthly incomes are generally around 1000 Turkish Liras (42.5%) (this income is considered to be at a poor level). More than of half have lived in Konya for more than 21 years (51.9%) and they define themselves as real residents of Konya (72.2%).

To provide a simplified overview of the perception measurements a table of General Means is presented, sorted by general mean values of the statistical indicators (see Table 2).

According to respondents, the economic impacts of tourism receive the most positive perceptions. Perception of socio-cultural and environmental impacts are more moderate. As Bremer (2006) emphasises, tourism is a material practice and global effects orient the communities to economic conditions that mean to move towards more tangible values. As mentioned in interview results, global economic development is one of the main factor changing resident perceptions. But,

respondents' perceptions of socio-cultural impacts are lower compared with perceptions on economic impacts. Examining the roots of this result, probably religious conservativeness can be identified as a factor. According to the interview results, the current level of resident religious conservativeness is not like the past 30 years. Residents have some suspicions and make arguments based on Islamic beliefs, but economic factors seem to have strong importance. Farahani and Musa (2012) concur with this supposition, giving credible examples of similar changes throughout the Islamic world.

Residents also have some ideas regarding tourism development. These expectations tend towards the positive aspects of tourism (see Table 3). Particularly, respondents' expectations about marketing efforts for tourism are more positive than other expectations. The reason of this expectation can be related to gaining benefits for the marketing of other products of the region. Alternatively, this may be based on the suggestion of a modern city image by using tourism's popular image. Residents know that traditionally, Konya has been respected as conservative city, however, on the other hand, respondents point out the importance of social consciousness. This can be accepted as indicating a changing view of residents. When comparing modern Konya with that of the 1980s, perceptional and expectational changes are remarkable.

Table 3: Tourism Development Needs in Konya	
Statement	Mean
Marketing efforts for tourism must be increased	4.3302
Konya needs more acccomodation facilities	4.0489
The services quality in Konya must be better	4.0152
Social consciousness must be focused on tourism in Konya	3.9625

Conclusion

Community participation has been an important area of attention for tourism planners. In this study, most of the discussion has been on host perceptions (Tosun and Timothy, 2003). Although the 1980s was a booming period for Turkish tourism, many central regions did not avail of these developments. Therefore, perceptional change did not happen regarding tourism and this, these regions were too late to take part in tourism developments (Tosun, 2001). Added to this, because of their religious identities, some cities also had more negative perceptions about tourism. In religious cities, residents perceived tourism as a threat to their religious and socio-cultural assets. The conservativeness of the residents then caused further negative attitudes (Farahani and Musa, 2012; Jafari and Scott, 2014).

Konya is one these religious cities. Even in conservative central Anatolia, the city would have been considered as a most conservative city. As mentioned above, although Konya hosted the great philosopher Rumi, the city didn't avail of any related development. According to the study interviewees, conservative society perpetuated this result until late in the 1990s. Recently, however, global changes have effected religious communities. Konya has been one of these communities. Questionnaire results support this idea and statistical evaluation shows that residents now have a more positive impressions of tourism, especially in relation to its economic impacts. Expectations of residents are also more positive. Comparing the current situation with the situation in the 1980s as recounted by interviewees, various indicators emphasize the changing positive perceptions of tourism development. This study highlights the perceptional modernization of tourism development by evaluating the changes in opinions of a case study religious community.

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