

Integration of Congress Tourism to the Cultural Tourism Destinations as an Economic Product

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Abstract

Congress tourism, which can be evaluated within the context of the relationship between leisure time, business, and tourism, has evolved into an economic sector with important contributions to national economies. Qualified and committed individuals are required in order to maintain a competitive structure within the context of event management in tourism. This study aims to reveal the opinions of the boutique hotels managers located in Safranbolu-Turkey on the integration of congress tourism to cultural tourism of Safranbolu. Within this context, a survey with the participation of 81 boutique hotel managers was conducted. We have found that the boutique hotel managers are in the idea that congress tourism will increase the existing prestige of Safranbolu, increase tourism revenues and contribute to the extension of tourism season. Besides, the boutique hotel managers believe that the congress tourism will have positive economic impacts on related sectors and have contributions to innovations in boutique hotels. Finally, the managers drew attention to the problems of lack of public support, coordination, and promotion.

Keywords: Economic product, congress tourism, boutique hotels, Safranbolu.

1. Introduction

Event management within the context of leisure time, business and tourism has evolved into an economic sector with important impacts on national economies. However, qualified and committed personnel is required in order to maintain a competitive structure within the context of event management in the labor-intensive tourism sector (Jalilah ve Daudb, 2016: 69). Congress tourism, which provides transportation, accommodation and food and beverage facilities to individuals that travel in order to attend a meeting, turned into an alternative tourism type, whose share within events tourism has been rapidly increasing over time. It contributes not only to economic development by maintaining foreign exchange inflow and employment opportunities, but also to cultural development by providing social dialogue. Furthermore, competition in congress tourism sector is increasing due to the fact that those that involve in congress tourism spend more compared to ordinary tourists (Arslan, 2008).

Turkey is an important tourism center that has the potential for the development of alternative tourism types, including sports, health, ecotourism, and congress tourism. Among these alternative tourism types, congress tourism should be specifically supported as an important economic sector and its share in Turkish tourism, which is currently 10%, should be increased (Akova ve Baynazoğlu, 2012). This study aims to provide contributions to the integration of congress tourism as an additional economic product to the cultural tourism in Safranbolu, which is an important cultural tourism center for domestic and foreign tourists and which was added to the list of UNESCO World Heritage sites.

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Within this context, this study reveals the opinions of the managers of boutique hotels on congress tourism in Safranbolu. Previous studies on congress tourism have dealt with the economic impacts and planning of congress tourism, motivational factors of the visitors, perceptions of target groups and conventional quality dimensions in congress tourism (Braun, 1992; Grado et al 1998; Rittichainuwat et al, 2001; Baloğlu and Aşk, 2001; Kim et al. 2003; Severt et al. 2007; Kim et al. 2012). However, neither of these studies have focused on the opinions of the managers or owners of boutique hotels on congress tourism. Physical or virtual marketing and promotion of a good or service depends on accurate cost calculation and pricing. In this sense, the expectations of the stakeholders that will have an impact over the economic good or service is required for increasing the benefits to be obtained from the good or service in its life cycle.

2. Congress Tourism

Congress tourism, which is a tourism type that has an economic impact with the participation fee and the expenses made by the attendees during and after the congress, has increased in importance as a consequence of globalization process (Braun, 1992). The interest in congress tourism has increased since the attendees, which mostly belong to upper-income class, are likely to extend their stay after the congress in order to visit the region that the congress convened (Zengin and Eryılmaz, 2013). The study of Grado et al. (1998) found that the tourists that participate in congress tourism spend more money than other types of tourists, and consequently, provide more revenues for rural tourism destinations. The motivations of congress tourists include sightseeing, self-improvement and business and organizational activities (Rittichainuwat et al., 2001). High number of congress participants and overnight stays, huge expenses made by the international congress delegates, expenses made by the congress attendees before and after the congresses and the positive effects of congresses on different sectors within the congress site led many countries and cities to promote the development of congress tourism (Kim et al., 2003).

Congress tourism should be well-planned in order to maintain its contributions to other types of tourism within the region (Baloğlu and Aşk, 2001). Planning is required in order to maintain the involvement of the congress attendees and their associates in other types of tourism facilities and to convince them for extending their stay. The plans that will increase the economic contributions of congress tourism should consider the participation in the event, congress organization, and the potential expenses to be made by the attendees before and after the congress. Geographical location, natural and historical beauties, climate, travel agencies, transportation, accommodation and food and beverage facilities and other tourism infrastructures are the preconditions for the development of congress tourism in a destination (Aymankuy and Sarıoğlu, 2008). According to the 2015 statistics, Turkey ranks the 6th in terms of the number of visitors and the 12th in terms of tourism revenues (UNWTO, 2015). This important destination with high number of tourism attractions may be considered as an ideal destination for the development of congress tourism.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Field

Safranbolu is an important tourism destination with its Ottoman-style houses, natural beauties, and its proximity to large cities, such as Ankara and Istanbul. Furthermore, the city, which was added to the UNESCO World Heritage list in 1994, is a popular destination for the foreign tourists. Despite the fact that Turkish cities such as Beypazarı, Göynük, Taraklı and Odunpazarı share similar architectural characteristics, the natural beauties of Safranbolu, and especially the canyons that pass through the city, makes Safranbolu a more attractive place. The unique architecture of the buildings and streets of the city that reflect Safranbolu's identity attracts tourists from all around the world to this important destination of culture tourism. The number of foreign visitors, which was 5.876 in 2000 increased to 37.204 as of 2014 (Gürbüz, 2009; Türker, 2013; Ayaz et al., 2015).

3.2. Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to reveal the opinions of the boutique hotel managers that operate in Safranbolu on the concept of congress tourism as an additional component of culture tourism with potential contributions for economic development. With this, we hope to develop a new perspective on the potential positive and negative impacts of congress tourism for the boutique hotels.

3.3. Importance of the Study

High education levels of the congress tourists and relatively higher amount of expenses made by these tourists make congress tourism an attractive economic sector. Various studies have found that the average expenses made by the congress tourists are three times higher than those made by the tourists that involve in other tourism types. For example, the average expenses made by the coastal tourists amount around 600 to 700\$ whereas the same average for the congress tourists may be around 2.000\$. Congress tourism is further attractive as it is not seasonal, like the other tourism types. Consequently, the competition among the destinations to gain a higher share of international congress tourism market is rapidly increasing. Today, various public and private institutions support the development of congress tourism. Turkey is one of the important tourism destinations within the context of congress tourism. The importance of this study stems from its potential contributions to the development of congress tourism in Safranbolu, which is a highly important cultural tourism destination in Turkey. The study will shed light on the opinions of the boutique hotel managers on congress tourism and their expectations from congress tourism.

3.4. Research Methods and Hypotheses

This research is a descriptive study in terms of its aims. Descriptive studies are those that try to find an answer to the questions of "what is it?" and "what is happening?" in order to describe the situation at one point of time (Ural and Kılıç, 2006). Likewise, this study evaluates the potential integration of congress tourism to the existing cultural tourism potential of Safranbolu from the perspective of the boutique hotel managers. In this study, the dependent variable is the perception of the boutique hotel managers on congress tourism whereas their demographic characteristics are the independent variables. The study proposes to test the following hypotheses:

H₁: There is a meaningful relationship between the gender of the boutique hotel managers in Safranbolu and their opinions on congress tourism.

H₂: There is a meaningful relationship between the age of the boutique hotel managers in Safranbolu and their opinions on congress tourism.

H₃: There is a meaningful relationship between the education levels of the boutique hotel managers in Safranbolu and their opinions on congress tourism.

H₄: There is a meaningful relationship between the managerial positions of the boutique hotel managers in Safranbolu and their opinions on congress tourism.

H₅: There is a meaningful relationship between the managerial experience of the boutique hotel managers in Safranbolu and their opinions on congress tourism.

3.5. Universe and Sampling

The universe of this study comprises the managers of all boutique hotels that operate within the borders of the Safranbolu district of Karabük province. Data obtained from the Karabük Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism and Safranbolu Tourism Office reveals that there are 105 boutique hotels. 84 of these boutique hotels have licenses issued by the municipality whereas 21 have tourism operation licenses. Overall, each boutique hotel has one manager. The survey with 81 of the managers that accepted to take part in the research was conducted between 05.05.2016 and 30.05.2016.

3.6. Data Collection and Analysis

Survey technique was used to collect primary data. The questionnaire consisted of two main parts. The first part had 6 questions on the demographic characteristics of the managers. The second part included 20 items that the participants were asked to evaluate by using five-point Likert scale (1-Strongly Disagree; 5-Strongly Agree). The items in this part were based on the studies of Arslan (2008) and Pembegül (2008) on congress tourism perceptions and were further developed in consultation with the academicians. A pilot study on 30 participants was conducted and the number of items in the second part was reduced to 18 based on feedbacks of the managers that participated in pilot study. Data obtained was analyzed by using statistical software.

Firstly, we conducted frequency analysis in order to determine the demographic characteristics of the participant managers. Next, we calculated the average scores and standard deviation for the responses of the participants to the items on the questionnaire. Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test was used to analyze the extent to which the responses of the participants matched with the normal distribution. Since the p value was found higher than 0,05, we used parametric tests. We, then, compared the opinions of the participants on congress tourism with their demographic characteristics. We used independent sample t-test for the comparison of bivariate groups and one way ANOVA for the multivariate groups. Finally, Tukey's test was used for bilateral comparison of the groups that had different variance analysis.

4. Findings

Table 1 shows the descriptive characteristics of the participants. Accordingly, 76,5% of the participants were male, 43,2% were between the ages of 30 and 39, 38,3% were university graduates, 81.5% were general managers of the boutique hotels, 33,3% had a managerial experience of one-to-four years.

Table 1: Descriptive Findings on the Boutique Hotel Managers (n=81)

Variables		f	%	Cumulative %
Gender	Female	19	23,5	23,5
	Male	62	76,5	100
Age	20-29	14	17,3	17,3
	30-39	35	43,2	60,5
	40 and over	32	39,5	100,0
Educational Status	Primary school	7	8,6	8,6
	High school	25	30,9	39,5
	Associate degree	18	22,2	61,7
	Bachelor's degree	31	38,3	100,0
Management Position	Department manager	15	18,5	18,5
	General manager	66	81,5	100,0
Managerial Experience	1-4 years	27	33,3	33,3
	5-9 years	16	19,8	53,1
	10-14 years	24	29,6	82,7
	15 years and over	14	17,3	100,0

Table 2 shows the opinions of the participant managers on congress tourism. Most of the participants agreed that "congress tourism will force the boutique hotels in Safranbolu to increase innovation" ($\bar{x}=4,32$). This item was followed with the expression that "congress tourism will increase the prestige of Safranbolu" ($\bar{x}=4,19$) and "congress tourism will contribute to the development of alternative tourism in Safranbolu" ($\bar{x}=4,18$). The statements that the participants mostly disagreed were "congress tourism will increase the amount of foreign exchange in Safranbolu" ($\bar{x}=3,50$), "boutique hotels will be negatively affected by congress tourism if they are not well-organized" ($\bar{x}=3,58$), "congress tourism will extent the tourism season in Safranbolu" ($\bar{x}=3,65$), and "congress tourism will decrease the probability of economic loss for the boutique hotels" ($\bar{x}=3,65$). These findings indicate the managers of the boutique hotels in Safranbolu feel that their hotels are not ready to meet the demands of congress tourism in terms of equipment, personnel, and process management so that they feel the necessity for innovation. They also show that the managers believe that they will be negatively affected by the development of congress tourism in Safranbolu if they are not well-prepared.

Table 2: Opinions of the Boutique Hotel Managers on Congress Tourism (n=81)

Expressions		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree or Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	\bar{x}	σ
Congress tourism will force the boutique hotels in Safranbolu to increase innovation	f	2	1	13	18	47	4,32	0,95
	%	2,5	1,2	16,0	22,2	58,0		
Congress tourism will increase the prestige of Safranbolu	f	2	3	13	22	41	4,19	1,00
	%	2,5	3,7	16,0	27,2	50,6		
Congress tourism will contribute to the development of alternative tourism in Safranbolu	f	2	3	11	27	38	4,18	0,97
	%	2,5	3,7	13,6	33,3	46,9		
Congress tourism will increase employment opportunities of boutique hotels in Safranbolu	f	4	5	11	25	36	4,03	1,13
	%	4,9	6,2	13,6	30,9	44,4		
Congress tourism will contribute to the development of new economic sectors in Safranbolu	f	1	9	15	23	33	3,96	1,07
	%	1,2	11,1	18,5	28,4	40,7		
Congress tourism will increase the employment opportunities for the sectors other than boutique hotels	f	3	6	19	18	35	3,93	1,14
	%	3,7	7,4	23,5	22,2	43,2		
Congress tourism will decrease the probability of economic loss for the boutique hotels in Safranbolu	f	7	9	14	25	25	3,65	1,27
	%	8,6	11,1	17,3	30,9	30,9		
Promotions made by the managers of the boutique hotels themselves will lead to coordination problems	f	4	12	18	21	26	3,65	1,21
	%	4,9	14,8	22,2	25,9	32,1		
Congress tourism will extent the tourism season in Safranbolu	f	8	12	17	13	31	3,58	1,38
	%	9,9	14,8	21,0	16,0	38,3		
Boutique hotels will be negatively affected by congress tourism if they are not well-organized	f	13	7	18	11	32	3,51	1,48
	%	16,0	8,6	22,2	13,6	39,5		
Congress tourism will increase the amount of foreign exchange in Safranbolu	f	9	6	23	20	23	3,50	1,28
	%	11,1	7,4	28,4	24,7	28,4		

We conducted reliability and factor analysis in order to test the hypotheses stated above. In order to determine whether the expressions of the boutique hotel managers are suitable for factor analysis, we conducted KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy (0,740) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Chi-Square/df /Sig: 310,287/55/ 0,000). The findings of these tests indicate that primary data was suitable for factor analysis. Besides, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was 0,809, indicating the reliability of the scale.

Factor analysis indicated in Table 3 shows that the opinions of the boutique hotel managers can be grouped under four categories: direct regional impact, indirect regional impact, positive impacts on boutique hotels and negative impacts on boutique hotels. The priority of the managers of the boutique hotels in Safranbolu were direct regional impact ($x=4,02$), positive impacts on boutique hotels ($x=4,00$), indirect regional effects ($x =3,76$) and negative impacts on boutique hotels ($x =3,58$), respectively.

Table 3: Factor Analysis on the Opinions of the Boutique Hotel Managers on Congress Tourism

Factor	\bar{x}	σ	Factor Loading	Cronbach Alpha	Variance Explained (%)
Direct Regional Impact	3,76	1,06			21,874
Congress tourism will increase the prestige of Safranbolu	4,18	1,00	0,821	0,790	
Congress tourism will extent the tourism season in Safranbolu	3,56	1,38	0,790	0,788	
Congress tourism will increase the amount of foreign exchange in Safranbolu	3,50	1,28	0,777	0,764	
Indirect Regional Impact	4,02	0,88			18,650
Congress tourism will increase the employment opportunities for the sectors other than boutique hotels	3,93	1,15	0,841	0,792	
Congress tourism will contribute to the development of alternative tourism in Safranbolu	4,17	0,97	0,794	0,792	
Congress tourism will contribute to the development of new economic sectors in Safranbolu	3,95	1,07	0,648	0,798	
Positive Impacts on Boutique Hotels	4,00	0,88			17,942
Congress tourism will force the boutique hotels in Safranbolu to increase innovation	4,31	0,96	0,757	0,798	
Congress tourism will increase employment opportunities of boutique hotels in Safranbolu	4,02	1,13	0,731	0,788	
Congress tourism will decrease the probability of economic loss for the boutique hotels	3,65	1,27	0,683	0,792	
Negative Impacts on Boutique Hotels	3,58	1,10			12,819
Boutique hotels will be negatively affected by congress tourism if they are not well-organized	3,53	1,48	0,822	0,816	
Promotions made by the managers of the boutique hotels themselves will lead to coordination problems	3,63	1,21	0,783	0,823	
Total Cronbach's Alpha / Variance Explained (%)				0,809	71,285

K-M-O Measure of Sampling Adequacy: 0,740

Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Chi-Square / df / Sig): 310,287/ 55/ 0,000

Table 4 shows the results for testing the first hypothesis on the relationship between the gender of hotel managers and their opinions on congress tourism, which was analyzed by using independent sampling t-test. The table shows meaningful difference between gender and the perception dimensions of "indirect regional impact" and "negative impacts on boutique hotels. This finding indicates that the H_1 may be partially accepted. Male managers are more positive on indirect regional impact factor ($\bar{x}=4,10$) compared to female managers. Female managers are also less optimistic about the negative effects of congress tourism for boutique hotels ($\bar{x}=4,07$) compared to male managers.

Table 4: Opinions on Congress Tourism according the gender of Boutique Hotel Managers

Variables	Gender	n	\bar{x}	σ	t	P
Direct Regional Impact	Female	19	3,43	1,04	1,548	0,12
	Male	62	3,86	1,05		
Indirect Regional Impact	Female	19	3,64	0,96	2,191	0,03*
	Male	62	4,14	0,83		
Positive Impact on Boutique Hotels	Female	19	3,70	0,96	1,754	0,08
	Male	62	4,10	0,84		
Negative Impact on Boutique Hotels	Female	19	4,07	0,96	-2,288	0,02*
	Male	62	3,43	1,10		

*($p < 0,05$)

Tables 5 and 6, which show the results of the testing of the hypotheses on the relationship between age and education of the hotel managers and their opinions on congress tourism, indicate no meaningful difference for both of the hypotheses. Based on these findings, H_2 and H_3 are rejected. These findings imply that the hotel managers that provide service for the cultural tourism in Safranbolu are in the idea that the development of congress tourism in the destination will provide indirect regional impacts, such as employment opportunities for sectors other than boutique hotels, development of alternative tourism facilities and development of other sectors. Additionally, the managers expressed the positive impacts of congress tourism on Safranbolu as the increase in innovative practices of boutique hotels, further employment opportunities and the decrease in potential economic loss. Finally, the managers believed that the boutique hotels will be negatively influence by the development of congress tourism if the hotels are not well-organized and if there is the problem of coordination.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Economic development is mostly associated with the increase in GDP per capita. It helps the developed countries to maintain their competitive position and the developing countries to eliminate underdevelopment. Tourism has the potential to help the countries to maintain or increase their development levels when the regional characteristics and the suitable tourism types are taken into consideration. Congress tourism is a type of alternative tourism that may maintain regional and national development. With the increase in the demand for congress tourism due to the process of globalization, congress tourism may be added as a new economic product to the existing types of tourism in a particular region. Despite the global recession in recent times, congress tourism is gaining pace. Congress tourism, which includes a considerable number of visitors in a specific region, who spend a considerable amount of money, can only be developed if there are conference halls, offices, exhibition centers, visual and audial equipment, high-quality hotels and services, and diverse visit, food and beverage services that can meet the diverging demands of visitors from different countries (Ficarelli et al., 2013).

Accurate statistical data, especially on the number of visitors, which are collected by public or private institutions, accommodation facilities that meet diverging demands and travel agents that specialize on congress tourism are required to estimate the development of congress tourism in a particular region (<http://www.congress.is>). However, the most important factor for the potential development of congress tourism in a region is the opinions and attitudes of the stakeholders. Based on these assumptions, this study evaluated the opinions of the managers of boutique hotels on congress tourism in Safranbolu, which is a highly important cultural tourism destination in Turkey. Within this context, we reached to 81 managers of boutique hotels in order to find the relationship between the demographic characteristics of the managers and their opinions on congress tourism as an additional economic product for cultural tourism in the region. We mainly found that the participant managers were predominantly male between the ages of 30 and 39, who were mostly university graduates and had an experience of one-to-four years in management. Based on factor analysis, we also classified their opinions into four categories, namely, direct regional impact, indirect regional impact, positive impact on boutique hotels, and negative impacts on boutique hotels.

Regarding the direct positive impacts of congress tourism, the participants were in the idea that congress tourism would increase the prestige of Safranbolu, extend the tourism season and increase the flow of foreign exchange to the city. Indirect influences of congress tourism that were stated by the managers include the employment opportunities for the sectors other than boutique hotels, development of alternative tourism types and the opportunity for the development of new sectors. Regarding the positive impacts of congress tourism on boutique hotels, the managers expressed that congress tourism would trigger innovative practices in boutique hotels, increase their employment opportunities and decrease the potential for economic loss.

On the negative side, the managers expressed that the development of congress tourism may have negative effects if the hotel managers do not organize well for the requirements of congress tourism and do not establish coordination for the promotional activities. The study found statistically meaningful relationship between the gender of boutique hotel managers and their opinions on the possible contributions of congress tourism to economic development. Regarding the direct regional impact of congress tourism, male participants were more positive compared to the female managers. On the other hand, female managers were more pessimistic about the potential impact of the development of congress tourism on boutique hotels.

The findings of this study show that the opinions of the managers of boutique hotels in Safranbolu regarding the development of congress tourism include direct regional impacts (prestige, prolonged tourism season, foreign exchange), indirect regional impact (development of new sectors, employment opportunities, development of alternative tourism types), positive impacts on boutique hotels (innovation, employment, decrease in economic loss), and negative impacts (coordination problems, difficulties in promotion). Further studies on different stakeholders, such as non-governmental organizations, public administrators, local inhabitants etc. may help us to develop new perspectives on the potential impact of congress tourism for different stakeholders and the city of Safranbolu. Based on the findings, we may suggest the followings for the development of congress tourism in Safranbolu:

- Congress tourism may help Safranbolu to extent its tourism season
- Congress tourism may provide additional revenue for Safranbolu given the fact that congress tourists spend usually more than the ordinary tourists
- Development of congress tourism may increase occupancy rates. Besides, innovation that is required for congress services may result with better facilities for congress tourism.
- Congress tourism will increase the prestige of Safranbolu, especially with the participation of bureaucrats, scientists and well-known managers in congresses held in Safranbolu.
- Public opinion is important for the development of congress tourism in Safranbolu, especially for the transportation and congress organization facilities.
- Congress tourism will definitely have valuable contributions for Safranbolu, firstly to the local inhabitants. This development will have impacts on national budget, GDP, state income, employment, interregional development, and other sectors in the long run.

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