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The evolution and transformation of camping and coastal campgrounds in Antalya, Turkey

Abstract

The large number of tourism facilities along the coasts of Antalya, which is one of the world's most-visited tourist attractions, led to extinction of many cultural and landscape elements that attract tourists and local community towards the coasts. The camping sites, which bear the traces of temporary accommodation and transient lifestyle of the local community in places called 'oba' locally, are on the brink of shutdown today. Since these transformation on the coastline of Antalya impede the social and cultural lifestyles of local community, this subject becomes important within the context of both tourism and socio-cultural evolution. From this viewpoint, it is aimed to analyze the impacts of coastal structuring and commercialization on the coastal campgrounds that increased along with mass tourism development in Antalya. In this paper, the evolution and transformation of camping and coastal campgrounds in Antalya are investigated, and root causes and resultant effects of this transformation are qualitatively presented by using oral history method from the viewpoint of the witnesses.

Key words: campground; hospitality; camp and caravanning; coastal recreation; Antalya; Turkey

Introduction

The social and economic changes introduced by the postmodern era increase the value of natural environments and amplify nature-based recreational activities especially in developed countries (Akama & Kieti, 2003). When it is considered from the viewpoint of global economic growth, it is possible to include nature-based tourism as a key indicator for novel experiences. In this area, camping and caravanning are amongst the most significant forms of nature-based tourism. Campgrounds are considered an important part of the vacation experience for the campers. For adventurers, it can represent a wild experience. For families, camping is an escape, a vacation, and an affordable way of accommodation (Hardy, Hanson & Gretzel, 2012).

In many places throughout the world, city-dwellers can find themselves surrounded by nature in a short time by means of nearby campgrounds (Timothy & Teye, 2009). Although it is observed that the campgrounds are often established near forests and around historical ruins, the coastal areas are the most preferred camping sites in the world (Kearns & Collins, 2010). Indeed, the coasts have always been significant locations that intrigue all societies throughout history, and the issue of utilization and protection of these areas has always been important. This especially applies to the Antalya coastline in Turkey.

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Ironically building gigantic touristic investments along the coastline of Antalya, in order to let people get in touch with nature, led to the development of a concrete jungle and the extinction of the characteristics which originally attracted tourists and the local communities to the region. The campgrounds, which gave people the opportunity to enjoy natural beauties, are now on the brink of shutting down. It is proposed in this study to analyze the change caused by increasing coastal structuring and commercialization in Antalya and the effects of this change on evolution and transformation the campgrounds, and eventually on camping, and caravan tourism overall. When the academic studies, considered within the context of tourism establishments are reviewed, it is observed that traditional tourism establishments, such as hotels, motels and holiday resorts, are frequently highlighted as the subject of study. However, no research articles regarding campgrounds in Turkey were encountered.

Methodology

The study aims to analyze the socio-cultural change caused by increasing coastal structuring and commercialization in Antalya and the effects of this change on the campgrounds, and eventually on camping, and caravan tourism overall. It traced the process of evolution and transformation of camping, and coastal campgrounds in Antalya by utilizing oral history method. Oral history is defined as a method of systematic interviews that seek to preserve for posterity the memories of ordinary men and women who have had an opportunity to observe events of significant historical value (Lehane & Goldman, 1977). Oral history, which is also named as the 'encountered/experienced memory of the past', is not only limited to a recorded interview, but can also be a planned, structured or semi-structured analysis of a certain topic (McAdoo, 1980; Thompson, 2000).

The empirical data used in this paper is obtained through a set of 20 questions long semi-structured interviews with 21 people, including 5 former employees of the Ministry of Tourism and the Bank of Tourism, 6 local residents and 10 domestic campers who have regularly visited those campgrounds. The informants were determined by snowball sampling, and advice from the president and the members of the Camping and Caravan Federation of Turkey. The face-to-face interviews were held in Antalya and Istanbul by researchers between 2013 and 2015. 2 of the participants were female, 19 were male. Their ages ranged from 52 to 85. A total of 36 hours of voice recording was obtained after interviews, and they were decoded by Turkish History Foundation.

In the following sections, firstly the term "camping" as an alternative accommodation, the history of camping, and caravanning in Antalya are briefly explained. Secondly, the development of camping and caravanning, which started out as the 'oba' culture from the viewpoint of the local community and turned into a significant tourism type over time, is discussed by two periods (1960-1980 and 1980-Present). In order to reflect the opinions of the interviewed individuals properly, direct citations have been used.

Camping as an alternative accommodation

Natural environments and resources are treasures that should be protected and utilized in a manner consistent with protecting the region while taking into consideration how the area fits into national and local economic development strategies. Indeed, camping and caravan tourism generates high levels of income in many countries. The annual return for the caravan industry in Europe was €10.6 billion in 2009, and the return generated by caravan tourism was €14.4 billion (Timothy & Teye, 2009).

In line with increasing momentum of camping and caravan tourism, the camping and caravanning facilities in the United Kingdom (UK), which originated an image of a low cost, poor-quality vacation, are increasingly turning into facilities that offer high-quality and comfort. Camping and caravan tourism in the UK is particularly popular among families with young children and retired individuals. Since the manufacturing of the first caravan in Bristol in 1885, the usage area of caravans has expanded and it is now an important type of accommodation available for use in the European tourism industry. The revenue generated from the caravan industry in the UK is £3 billion. This sector provides employment for 90,000 people. 11% of British citizens prefer to stay in trailer parks in their vacations. In Wales, these campgrounds are usually situated along coastlines, in forests or in valleys (Page, 2011). Today, the campgrounds, which are the key components of camping and caravan tourism, are one of the most popular recreative activities, and maybe one of the earliest accommodation types in the Western World. Hunters and gatherers, conquerors, explorers and pilgrims participated in a lifestyle that was generally camping. In modern times, camping is now considered a leisure and recreational activity (Timothy & Teye, 2009).

In literature, a camping experience is described in various ways (Brooker & Joppe, 2013). It can be described as a lifestyle activity, which is carried out temporarily in tents, caravans or similar accommodation types in the wilderness or at an organized campground. Since the caravan campers do not park in random places, but prefer to stop by and utilize well-equipped campgrounds, where they can meet their basic needs, the terms 'camp' and 'caravan' are often used interchangeably. Many campgrounds in countries, such as the United States and Canada, also offer services for permanent accommodation. However in Turkey campgrounds are limited to the tourism sector as short-term camping sites and an alternative form of accommodation. Thus, campgrounds in Turkey offer service mostly as recreational campgrounds around coasts, lakes, rivers, forests and historical ruins, away from the city centers. These campgrounds offer people alternative accommodations regardless of their socio-economic status (Timothy & Teye, 2009).

These alternatives vary by countries and by campgrounds. The campgrounds in countries, where camping, and caravan tourism is well-developed, offer various accommodation alternatives, along with fulfilling the basic needs of the campers. For example, the camping, and caravan industry is described as 'Tourist Park Industry' in Australia. The Tourist Parks offer various accommodation alternatives such as caravans, tents, bungalows, lodges, park cabins, vacation apartments, bunkhouses and chalets (Breen, Seers, Robert, Elspeth & Carlsen, 2006). In Canada, many of the private campground enterprises offer services to caravans and tents (Government Working Group on Recreation Vehicle Park Development, 2008). In Turkey, caravans, tents and bungalows are often seen together in campgrounds.

Regardless of the accommodation services offered by the campgrounds, the infrastructure and service utilities, as well as the location of the campground are also important. According to Coltman (1989), the factors that affect the location of the campgrounds are accessibility from the highways, appealing sceneries and utilities. For example, the essential requirements to meet the infrastructural needs for caravans are electricity, water and restrooms. Indeed, these needs are quite simple, affordable and easily accessible. The short-term rate of return for campground investments is high and these facilities require fewer personnel compared to other facilities with the same capacity. Besides, the investment policies of these countries accelerate the establishment of the campground facilities (Gračan, Zadel & Birin, 2010).

The historical context of camping, and caravanning in Antalya

Having about 630 km of coastal length due to its geographical position, Antalya is located at the south end of Turkey and the city is considered as one of the most important tourism regions in the country (Figure 1). There are many ancient cities, ports, mausoleums, sandy beaches, verdant forests and rivers that run along this coast near Antalya. Aside from its center, there are significant numbers of tourist attractions in Kaş, Demre, Kemer, Beldibi, Manavgat, Alanya and Gazipaşa districts. Antalya is one of the exceptional regions throughout the world, since it can be open for tourism activities all year round, and visitors can swim in the sea nine months of the year. The city also has one of the largest seaports, and the second largest airport in Turkey. Along with the airways, the city is also connected to domestic and international markets through highways and maritime lines, and this increases the touristic capacity and value of the city (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2013). With its wide transportation network, total number of people who visited Antalya was 11,941,954 in 2014. From the largest to least, the international tourists travel from Russia, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK (Alanya Touristic Hoteliers Associations, 2014).

Figure 1
Study area



Source: ArcGIS, ArcMap 10.

With its rich natural and cultural landscape characteristics, Antalya features alluring tourism aspects that appeal to a wide spectrum of people. While the coastline is considered ideal for sea-sand-sun tourism, its rich cultural heritage appeals to cultural tourism. The mountainsides have a significant potential for trekking, mountain climbing, camping and eco-tourism (Öztürk & Eraydın, 2010). With its crystal clear coasts, coves, sandy beaches, forests and rivers, Antalya has a considerable potential for camping, and caravan tourism (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2013).

1960 -1980: The camp life that started with 'oba'

The population of Antalya, which includes millions of people today, was inhabited by about 50,000 people in the 1960 and was characterized as "the city, where the scent of orange blossom lingers in the air". Tourism, as a vital point of Antalya's economy, was not as developed and sophisticated as it is today (Antalya Government, 2010, p. 46). The coastline, where a Mediterranean microclimate is prevalent, used to host temporary accommodations for the local people, instead of large-scale tourism facilities (Ortaçşme, 2005). These structures, named 'oba' were either tents or wooden cabins that had one or two rooms; these were portable structures built along the seashores and intended for the local people to shelter in more comfortably (Figure 2). The 'obas' were raised structures, with approximately 0.5 or 1 meter of ground clearance, in order to prevent water inflow and to protect occupants from snakes, scorpions and other venomous pests. With the establishment of the Antalya Regional Directorate of Tourism in 1964, 'obas' started to offer services to local people and transformed into a tradition where local people could spend their entire summer.

Figure 2
Konyaaltı Beachpark 'oba' lifestyle (1972)



Source: Hüseyin Çimrin's archive.

"Since Antalya is in the Torrid Zone, the use of the coastline is not only for entertainment and leisure. As you get closer to the sea, the life and climatic conditions change. Therefore 'obacılık', moving to the coastline, plateau and coast relationship is a vital need for the people, which arise from the climate..." (Local community member).

The region, which lacked accommodations except for tents and cabins, used to host tourists, who brought their own caravans. These foreign campers used to settle among these 'obas' on the coastline or would migrate to one of those pristine coves.

"Before coastal resorts, it was caravanning, which actually brought touristic dynamism to the coastline of Antalya... The caravan tourists were mostly the expat Turks, working as blue-collar employees in overseas... We were able to observe the increasing numbers of caravans arriving from Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and Austria..." (Local community member).

The gas prices were reasonable in those days, and the caravans were favoured as an affordable accommodation alternative. Since British Petrol established mocamps in easily accessible distances by caravans starting from the Western Turkey, Antalya became a transit point for caravan tourists (Antalya Government, 2010). One out of every 14 tourists who visited Turkey during those years may have stayed in British Petrol's Mocamps. Seven mocamps, which continued to offer service until 1985, hosted 80,000 guests of which 80% of those guests were of foreign origin, visiting from 64 different countries. Approximately 23,000 of those visitors were Germans, and they were followed by Turks, Italians, Austrians, the French, and the Australians (British Petrol, 2012).

"My camping adventure began in 1966, when I was 15 and traveled the entire country by myself... There were not many organized campgrounds except for British Petrol (BP) Mocamps. Caravans have not yet been manufactured in Turkey and the main camping instrument was tents... We sewed a tent on the back of our car; since we couldn't find rubber, we used to make cushions out of the sponges at home and put them under the tent" (Camper).

In the 60s, Antalya became one of the most popular places for individual tourists. Since there were no airports in Antalya back in the 1970s, the only tourists visiting Antalya were caravan tourists and backpackers called hippies (Antalya Government, 2010). After the 1960s, tourism was considered as a driving force for economic development and growth in both the private and public sectors (Nohutçu, 2002).

Domestic tourism blossomed after the mid-1970s. Antalya is now a tourism city, which was planned and developed on sectoral basis with the influence of these businesses. In the late 1970s, extensive tourism projects were developed. In particular, the Southern Antalya Tourism Development Project played a key role in the development of the region. With this project, which was initiated in 1974, a target was set to develop 25,000 beds and complete the required infrastructure. The sole purpose of this project was not to create an investment zone to entertain tourists through increasing the bed capacity of the region; it was aimed at meeting the needs of the local people, such as infrastructure, healthcare, education and employment (Öztürk & Eraydın, 2010; Göymen, 2000). For this purpose, in order to make sure that the domestic tourists and the local communities continued to use the coastline, campgrounds were built along the coastline within the scope of this project.

1980: Present campgrounds fading into oblivion

Although camping was not popular in an organized way during the 1980s, social tourism still existed. By that time, there were campgrounds established and operated by the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Forestry as well as some private entities that supported camping and caravanning activities in Antalya.

In the 1980s, the Turkish Bank of Tourism (TURBAN) also encouraged investments into this sector via credit aids. With its facilities, TURBAN thus became an industry leading and archetypal establishment by sharing its knowledge and experiences regarding tourism management. Kemer Kızıltepe Kamping (1980 – 1988) and Beldibi Kamping (1984 – 1988) were among the campgrounds around Antalya that were run by the Bank of Tourism (Figure 3). Thus, Antalya, which was only accessible by the sea until the 1960s, became one of the most important tourism centers when the city attained infrastructure services after 1980 with the increasing numbers of campground investments.

"When 'Kızıltepe Kamping' was opened, there were almost no other facilities around. There were also a volleyball court within the campground area, which was structured as reception, café and restaurant. The campers were able to put up their own tents or accommodate in caravans" (Camper).

Figure 3
Map of camping areas in Antalya



Source: ArcGIS, ArcMap 10.

In line with these developments, tourism was promoted as a brand new sector within the scope of economic and political objectives in 1980. The subsidies granted to entrepreneurs under the tourism planning decisions of the government accelerated the demand for developing holiday resorts (Doğaner, 2012). Thus, Antalya became a popular tourism center for private investors with its rich natural and cultural heritages, crystal clear water and beautiful coasts, historical structures and mild climate. With these incentives, numerous hotels and holiday resorts were built along the shore (Ortaçesme & Atik, 2012).

The government allocated tourism regions to 297 investors for 95,178 beds between 1983 and 1997 (Göymen, 2000). As the employment opportunities increased in line with these investments, Antalya began to allow immigrants from rural areas. While the population of the city was 173,501 in 1980, it increased to 378,208 in 1990. Population increases reached 82.97% between 1985 and 1990. Along with the development of tourism, social and technical infrastructures were also improved as well as urban services. Population growth and migration also continued to increase through the 2000s (Ortaçesme & Atik, 2012).

However, since the population has been increasing with domestic migration and the city is visited by millions of tourists each year, the urbanization of the coastline could not be avoided.

In line with the increasing migration and the demand from retirees to acquire secondary houses in this region, the construction sector also gained dynamism in 1980s and high-rise apartment blocks began to rise in Antalya. In a study, which analyzed the change in land use between 1991 and 2004 in Kemer, one of the most significant tourism centers of Antalya, it was reported that the urban land use

increased approximately 10 times. The results also show that the tourism and secondary house land use increased approximately 14 times. On the other hand, it was observed that the coastal dunes and beaches decreased by 37.2% and permanent crop fields decreased by 2.1%. Therefore, it was concluded that the most important reason for land use changes in Kemer region was the pressure of tourism development and secondary housing markets (Sönmez, Onur, Sarı & Maktav, 2009).

As investments increased, based on denser population and growth, the desire to expand spread to previously protected areas. The zoning prohibition for Lara, which was a natural protected area on the West Coast of Antalya, was removed after the 1980s and the region was zoned for construction. This had an adverse effect on 'oba' life of the local people. The people, who used to make use of the coastline because of the microclimate, returned back to the highlands. Thus, the increasing demands of the private sector particularly affected the campgrounds along the coastline as these regions developed into properties with high commercial yield.

"The population of the local residents of Antalya decreased within the overall population. For about 10 years, the people of Antalya began to go up to the highlands, since they could not go to the coastline..." (Local community member).

Although all of these investments and rapid urbanization were well received in terms of economic development and tourism, the natural resources and cultural values were neglected and the environmental carrying capacity of the coastline was overburdened. The results of studies conducted about Antalya support this observation. In their study, which examined the effects of tourism on the development of sustainable tourism along the coastline of Antalya, Kaya and Smardon (2001) reported that the environment, socio-economic and political structure of Antalya were adversely affected. In this study, it was particularly emphasized that it is crucial to make plans to minimize the increasing adverse effects of coastal tourism.

In another study, which reported that there were problems regarding environmental planning, issues regarding Antalya's outdoor areas and green fields were reviewed in terms of legal legislations, future planning and implementation of development. In this research, it was discussed that these problems were caused by rapid urbanization, legal loopholes, inadequate planning approaches and administrative issues (Ortaçesme, 2005).

Burak, Doğan and Gazioglu (2004) discussed the effect of urbanization and tourism on the coastline, the urban population increasing with migrations led to illegal housing. It is also stated in this study that the small coastal cities are becoming more and more urbanized as a result of the corporate incentives granted for tourism investments. Since the fertile lands of Antalya are turned into tourism facilities, the cultivated areas are diminishing and the farmers are using more fertilizers to maintain output on smaller plots. This causes both soil and water pollution in ecologic terms.

Even though the ad hoc restructuring of the coastline along Antalya protected the sustainability of campgrounds to a large extent, there are several factors leading to a decrease in the number of these facilities. The Gulf War (1991) and War in Yugoslavia (1992) hindered continual development of camping, and caravan tourism substantially. During the Gulf War, the tourists either tried to choose a safer destination or avoided travelling. As a result of these wars along with political oppression through the 1990s, tourist spending decreased significantly in Turkey, Egypt, Mexico and Slovenia (Sönmez, Apostolopoulos & Tarlow, 1999).

"Until the early 90s, there were too many foreign caravans visiting Turkey. Increasing oil prices had an adverse effect on tourist arrivals in Turkey... Security issues arouse due to the economic crisis following the

War in Yugoslavia. Since it became practically impossible to arrive in Turkey by land, the campers began to prefer Greece, which has the same climatic conditions" (Former employee of the Bank of Tourism).

In recent years, it is observed that there are some bureaucratic barriers that prevented camping development in Antalya, as well as all over the country. The following factors may be included among these barriers: poor service quality in campgrounds due to a lack of supervision, high private consumption tax rates applied on caravans, and legislations that prevent international tourists from leaving caravans in Turkey for more than six months (Ötügen, 2010). With all of these adverse conditions, investments into campgrounds, especially in Antalya, have decreased and the leading archetypal campgrounds on the coastline were replaced by five-star hotel facilities.

"The campgrounds in Antalya were initially granted to the private sector, and then to the investors as touristic facilities with functional changes and the campgrounds faded out in both areas" (Former employee from the Ministry of Tourism).

Conclusion

Camping, and caravan tourism is sensitive to nature, allows local people to increase benefits in their communities, and protect the ecological sensitivity of the area. Small groups, who prefer campgrounds founded around the regions with scenic beauties (seashores, lakes, rivers, forests and historical ruins), away from the noise of the cities and the highways, do not lead to destructive effects against tourism centers with natural and cultural resources. Thus, campgrounds have been offering service to camping, and caravan tourism for many years as the facilities, which ensure that the ecological balance is protected to allow visits to stay in touch with nature.

Having many rich natural and cultural resources, it is very important for Antalya that their facilities should be economic, functional and eco-friendly, and should be properly located to preserve natural resources. However, in order to extend the market, the tourism investments began to gradually spread along the coastline and within the greenbelt. This manifested itself with profitable yet potentially harmful investments for the natural habitat, such as five-star accommodation facilities, motels, luxury summer resorts, along the coastline of Antalya that decreased real access to the natural environment. Within this context, the authors attempted to form a conceptual framework that scrutinizes the changes caused by increased structuring along the coastline of Antalya, and the effects of these changes on camping, and caravan tourism and campground facilities.

The development of camping, and caravan tourism in Antalya was reviewed for two critical time periods. Between 1960 and 1980, when the influences of nomadic culture still continued, the local communities used to leave their permanent homes for micro-climate purposes and build temporary campgrounds along the coastline of Antalya. This period is characterized as the initial period, when the camping culture in Antalya began. These temporary accommodation areas along the coastline, which represent the archetypes of camping, were transformed into organized campgrounds within the scope of Southern Antalya Tourism Development Project, which was approved in 1976, and hosted many domestic and international campers.

Lastly the transformation of campgrounds from the 1980s till present is investigated. In the early 1980s, many campground facilities were built along the coastline of Antalya both by public and private sectors' campground investments. However, campground investments from the government could not be sustained and thus investments with higher potential commercial yields were preferred over campgrounds along the coastline. This led to a development of mass tourism and massive destruction, particularly

along the coastline. Following these touristic structuring, which restricts local people from utilizing the coastal areas, the construction of permanent and secondary houses increasingly continued and this had a negative effect on the campgrounds along the coastline. In addition, it was observed that increasing tax rates, high private consumption tax rates applied to the caravans, and the drawbacks in legislations for caravan tourists decreased the demands for campgrounds. Thus, as from the 2000s, the government has begun to allocate the campground areas to big investors. Today, as the campgrounds begin to disappear, organized camp life in Antalya almost comes to an end.

Although Antalya is one of the most significant locations for camping, and caravan tourism and coastal recreation, the region lacks a comprehensive coastal management plan. There are also issues regarding the green fields arising from the drawbacks in legal legislation. The responsibilities, which are assigned to various departments of different organizations for planning and implementation, make things difficult for coordinating cooperation. Thus, if the coastal areas are administrated by a single authority, the corporate communication would be easier and there would be a greater chance for sustainable coastal use. Within this context, it is necessary that the government should revise its policies regarding the management of camping, and caravan tourism. It is essential that the government should improve the coastal investments, should encourage the operators of these facilities by reducing the taxes, and should support campground facilities, which are eco-friendly accommodation models, by maintaining the quality standards of the remaining campgrounds.

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