



Destination Image of Lake Salda in the Lens of Tourists and Locals

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Abstract

Salda, included in the World's Top 100 Geological Heritage List in 2024 and declared as the representative of Mars on Earth, is a remarkable destination thanks to its natural beauty and rare features. The number of visitors seeking to discover this unique destination is increasing day by day, driven by its uniqueness and promotional activities. In this context, it is important to determine the image of this destination. The study aims to determine the destination image of Lake Salda from the perspective of domestic tourists and locals. A qualitative research design was adopted, and interviews were conducted with a total of 30 participants using the purposeful sampling technique. The data was examined through reflexive thematic analysis using the MaxQDA program. It was concluded that Lake Salda has a positive destination image with its natural beauties and safe environmental perception, but the problems experienced in the conservation and promotional processes of the area, the deficiencies in the infrastructure and superstructure in the destination, and the unconscious behaviors of individuals are factors that negatively affect this image. Future studies can examine the sustainability of the destination in more detail, determine strategies for awareness-raising practices, and focus on the current status of alternative accommodation opportunities in the area.

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INTRODUCTION

Sustainability refers to shaping individuals' production and consumption activities in a way that meets current needs while taking into account the needs of future generations. In this context, the conservation of environmental values in the use of natural resources is of great importance. Destinations are increasingly understanding the importance of sustainability, which is leading them to adopt various alternative practices (Sarıbaşı et al., 2016). Similarly, it is known that countries also attach importance to the sustainability of destinations and that there are measures taken within this scope. For instance, Lake Salda, one of Türkiye's noteworthy heritage sites, has become a remarkable destination with its unique features and conservation practices. Lake Salda was designated as a Special Environmental Protection Area by Presidential Decree No. 824 dated 14.03.2019 and is located within the boundaries of the Mediterranean Region in the Yeşilova district of Burdur province. The clear water and turquoise color of the lake make its landscape unique. The region provides a suitable habitat for endemic and endangered species by preserving the socio-cultural integrity of life. It is rich in biodiversity due to its wetland feature. In addition, it hosts critical species conserved by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) with its geological and chemical features. Lake Salda is also one of only two regions in the world with surface characteristics similar to Mars (General Directorate for Protection of Natural Assets, n.d.). A series of measures have been taken to ensure sustainable management in Lake Salda led by The Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Environment, Urbanisation and Climate Change. These measures include initiating biodiversity studies, determining the socio-economic structure of the area and determining the visitor carrying capacity, creating a smoke-free airspace and installing a 24/7 camera system. In addition, there are measures such as planning the viewpoints around the lake, improving water quality, conserving the unique white sand structure, solid waste management and collection of wastewater without harming the environment (Lake Salda, n.d.). According to the measures taken; it can be said that the value of Lake Salda is known for Türkiye and is also considered a destination that needs to be conserved. At the same time, Salda has increasing importance for the world. For example, as a result of the evaluations made at the 37th World Geological Congress held in South Korea in 2024, the “World's Top 100 Geological Heritage List” was announced. Lake Salda from Türkiye was included in the list as the “representative of Mars on Earth” and was registered as one of the world's rare geological formations with its stromatolites. In addition, Salda was among the world's top 200 geosite areas (Burdur Mehmet Akif Ersoy University, 2024). With all these features, Salda is a destination with high tourism potential for Türkiye (Aybar & İçigen, 2020).

A tourism destination is a geographical area that attracts tourists. It can be regarded as a country or a small city, with certain boundaries. Additionally, a tourist destination offers individuals various opportunities such as accommodation, attractions, events, transportation, restaurants, and entertainment. While marketing and branding activities are carried out to attract tourists, destination management organizations (DMOs) coordinate these activities. In these areas supported by legal regulations, stakeholders such as the private sector, public institutions, and NGOs cooperate. In addition, tourists' positive or negative perceptions and experiences about the destination play an important role (Morrison, 2023). Buhalis (2000) also mentioned that a destination can be a perceptual concept that can be interpreted subjectively. These perceptions can be formed by individuals depending on the travel itinerary, cultural background, purpose of visit, level of education, and past experiences. Therefore, it is thought that the destination image may also exhibit similar characteristics. Indeed, Ahmed (1991) emphasizes that individuals form “selected impressions” of a destination based on their interests. Moreover, these impressions are shaped by personal

thoughts and feelings about what the destination offers, rather than objective facts. Therefore, the image of a destination reflects the mental and emotional perceptions individuals hold about that place. Lin et al. (2007) emphasized the importance of image by saying that the cognitive and emotional aspects of a destination affect tourists' preferences for that destination. Moreover, destination image plays a crucial role in tourism development because it influences both the supply and demand sides of marketing (Tasci & Gartner, 2007).

In light of this information, it is considered important to determine the destination image of Lake Salda. A review of studies in the tourism literature reveals that, while research has been conducted in various contexts, studies specifically focusing on destination image appear to be lacking (Özmiş et al., 2018; Ceylan & Bulut, 2019; İnanır & Ogun, 2019; Temurçin et al., 2019; Akay, 2020; Aybar & İçigen, 2020; Ceylan & Bulut, 2020; Kılıç & Yozukmaz, 2020; Temurçin & Tozkopran, 2020; Yazıcıoğlu et al., 2020; Kasaroğlu, 2021; Yıldız, 2021; Kanıgür et al., 2023; Özmekik & Göktuğ, 2023; Ogun & Örnek, 2024). In this context, this exploratory study aims to determine the destination image of Lake Salda. Given that individuals visiting Lake Salda may exhibit diverse characteristics, interviews were conducted with both domestic tourists and locals, and the findings were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. In addition, it was determined whether the perceptions of Lake Salda's destination image among tourists and locals differed according to the identified themes.

Literature Review

In the literature, Lake Salda is evaluated from various perspectives. When the studies conducted on Lake Salda are evaluated, it is observed that these studies address the area's natural, environmental, geological, touristic, and recreational features in a multifaceted manner. The studies emphasize the threats to the unique ecosystem of the lake and the potential for sustainable tourism. Human impacts, pressures from mass tourism, inadequate infrastructure, and the need for environmental conservation are among the prominent issues. The studies indicate that sustainable tourism development should be achieved by preserving the natural structure of the lake and drawing attention to the importance of cooperation between local governments, researchers, and decision-makers in this process.

Braithwaite & Zedef (1996) examined Lake Salda regarding hydromagnesite stromatolites and sediments in highly alkaline waters enriched in magnesium, typically observed in areas covered with lake sediments. Yılmaz, Bedur & Uysal (2016) aimed to determine fifth-grade secondary school students' opinions and solution suggestions regarding the environment by evaluating the level of environmental awareness through the Lake Salda example. According to the study, it is seen that children accept pollution as an environmental problem. Water withdrawal, swamp formation, and loss of life are other issues observed by children. Kesici (2020) emphasized the importance of the biomineralization process, which causes different formations according to the characteristics of the water ecosystem for Lake Salda, and compared the geological formations of Salda and Alchichica Lakes, which show similar features. Another study conducted by Balcı et al. (2018) examined the geomicrobiology and microbial influences of Lake Salda. This study revealed that Lake Salda has a wide microbial diversity despite its extreme chemical conditions. Varol et al. (2020) discussed in detail the geological, hydrological, hydrogeological, and hydrogeochemical characteristics of the water resources in the southern part of the Lake Salda basin in their study. The study also concluded that the water is not suitable for drinking purposes. In another study aimed at searching the structural and geographical features of Salda studied by Arıtürk (2021), the effects of climate change on Lake Salda are evaluated. As a result of studies since the 2000s the effects of the decrease in rainfall and an increase in air

temperature are observed. Moreover, the negative effects of human and economic activities such as agriculture and forestry on water resources and ecosystems have been increasing day by day. In this respect, for sustainable wetland management and to conserve nature, decision-makers should initiate an adaptation and alignment process to climate change in Lake Salda. Tuncer & Deniz (2022) searched geomorphological features and utilization of the lake. Conducted study in the lake basin, especially organic agriculture on the coasts and in the Yeşilova Plain, and at the same time, necessary measures should be taken to prevent pollutants from livestock breeding from being released into the streams feeding the lake. Davraz & Aksever (2023) investigated the hydrological parameters controlling the level changes and analyzed their effects. Annual precipitation data from meteorological stations around Lake Salda were examined. The analysis of fluctuations revealed that precipitation is the most significant factor influencing the level changes in Lake Salda, while the effect of evaporation is less pronounced.

Yazıcıoğlu et al. (2020) analyzed the comments made about Lake Salda on the TripAdvisor travel review site between 2014 and 2019 within the scope of overtourism. As a result of the study, evaluations were made regarding the sustainability of the destination. The study suggests that advertising should focus on attracting quality visitor profiles, particularly instead of promoting mass tourism. Additionally, the pricing policy should be restructured to address the parking problem, the lake should be temporarily closed to allow natural regeneration, warnings should be issued to visitors, the carrying capacity should be determined, and the number of businesses in the area should be increased. Kılıç & Yozukmaz (2020) conducted a conceptual review on last-chance tourism. The research highlighted Salda Lake as one of the last-chance tourism destinations in Türkiye. Similarly, in another study on last-chance tourism by Küçükerin (2021), evaluations were made regarding Lake Salda. The study suggested that research specifically focused on travel agencies should be conducted for this destination. Kasaroğlu (2021) evaluated Lake Salda from the last-chance tourism perspective with the national press sources. In the study between the years 2012 and 2021, national press news focused on Lake Salda is examined. According to the results, the news in the press is far from evaluating the lake as a last chance for tourism. The news concentrated on promotion, tourism, and conservation activities. Ceylan & Bulut (2019) evaluated Lake Salda from a sustainability perspective. The researchers aimed to examine the effects of tourism on the natural area caused by visitor density and proposed conservation and sustainability-based solutions for the future. They emphasized that the shift of Lake Salda towards mass tourism should be controlled within the framework of planning and sustainable area management. Additionally, visitor control should be implemented to ensure the sustainability of the area. In another study, the same authors state that the locals in the Salda destination criticized the local governments' strict controls and bans in the area (Ceylan & Bulut, 2020). In the study researched by Temurçin & Tozkoparan (2020), which aimed to reveal the views of local tourists towards Lake Salda and their suggestions for tourism development, it was concluded that there were infrastructure and superstructure problems in the region as a result of interviews with local tourists visiting the region and solutions focused on conserving Lake Salda were presented. Additionally, to spread the tourism activities all over the year different and various recreational activities should be available around the lake. It has been determined that the district's current accommodation, food and beverage, and entertainment services have low-quality standards and are insufficient for the demands of tourists visiting the region. In the research conducted by Özmiş et al. (2018), the things that should be done to improve the physical conditions of recreational services in Lake Salda were determined in line with the visitors' opinions and it was concluded that the visitors found it important to build walking paths, picnic areas and camping areas around the lake. In addition, it was determined that visitors were willing to pay

an entrance fee when some physical facilities were provided. Aybar & İçigen (2020) interpret the internet news between 2013 and 2019 about Lake Salda. The study highlights “the promotion of Lake Salda and Salda Ski Center, interest from athletes and artists, visits by national authorities and investment incentives, environmental degradation, and the Nation's Garden Project.”. Additionally, the lake's color, unique nature, and the influx of domestic and international tourists have led to uncontrolled growth, amplified by social media attention. The study highlights the lake's potential and emphasizes the need for implementing measures to balance conservation and utilization to prevent ecological degradation. Another study indicated that camping, cycling, bird watching and paragliding were currently among the adventure activities in the Lake Salda basin. It was also concluded that the region has wind conditions suitable for windsurfing for both beginners and experienced individuals (Yıldız, 2021). Özkan & Alan (2021) emphasized the brand value of destination. Only brand awareness of the lake has been created, and other factors necessary for it to become a destination brand have been ignored. Especially the lack of social facilities and accommodation opportunities negatively affects the destination associations of visitors. However, while trying to address negative issues, the first thing that should not be forgotten and must be considered is the conservation and preservation of Lake Salda's natural structure. Kara et al. (2020) determined the physical carrying capacity of the beaches with the highest tourist traffic around Lake Salda. The study identified Beyaz Adalar and Yeşilova Public Beach, emphasizing that exceeding the daily visitor limit could lead to negative outcomes, such as disruption of the ecosystem. Additionally, it is highlighted that in general, if tourists coming to the destination use Lake Salda uncontrolled, it will harm the life of blue-green algae and other aquatic creatures, especially the turquoise color of the lake. In another study focusing on carrying capacity, it was concluded that the current number of visits to Lake Salda Nature Park does not exceed the physical carrying capacity during the week, but partially exceeds it on weekends. Furthermore, it was suggested that a more effective service could be provided to visitors by strengthening the infrastructure in the area, as well as improving the number and qualifications of the existing personnel (Özmekik & Göktaş, 2023).

Method

This research aims to determine the destination image of Lake Salda from the perspective of domestic tourists and locals. In other words, the research was conducted to answer the question of how the image of the destination is from the perspective of individuals visiting Lake Salda. In a study conducted on the question “What is qualitative research?”, this research design is defined “as an iterative process in which improved understanding to the scientific community is achieved by making new significant distinctions resulting from getting closer to the phenomenon studied.” (Aspers & Corte, 2019: 155). Through this method, researchers endeavor to discover and reveal the information hidden in the collected data (Özdemir, 2010). In this context, the qualitative research method was utilized in this exploratory study.

It is known that one of the ways of obtaining data in qualitative research is the interview technique and that this technique can differ among itself. One of these, the semi-structured interview, is a primary research tool in qualitative studies, allowing researchers to obtain in-depth information from interviewees while maintaining a strong focus on the research objectives. Therefore, semi-structured interviews have more potential than other types of interviews and are also beneficial in terms of being flexible and adaptable (Ruslin et al., 2022). Hence, a semi-structured interview technique was preferred as a data acquisition tool in the study. Before starting the interview process, researchers

should meticulously prepare an interview form that is appropriate for the research design and includes questions that will enable the interviewees to provide detailed information about the subject (Akman Dömbekci & Erişen, 2022). In this context, the interview form was developed by the authors by reviewing the relevant literature in line with the scope of the research. In addition, expert evaluation was utilized in the process of creating the interview form (Tutar, 2022). This application aims to evaluate the appropriateness of the questions and to ensure that the language used is understandable. The interview form consists of two parts. In the first section, questions such as “What are your first impressions of Lake Salda?”, “Are there any construction or degradation problems that you notice in and around the lake?”, “Are the measures taken to conserve the lake effective in terms of sustainability?”, “What are your positive/negative ideas and opinions about the lake?”, “What are the things that could be a threat to the lake?” and “Is there a difference between the lake when you first saw it and its current state?” were asked to understand the experiences of individuals in the destination and to determine the destination image of Lake Salda. The second part includes questions about the descriptive characteristics of individuals.

Guarte & Barrios (2006) state that the purposive sampling technique can yield reliable results in research by minimizing bias, even in heterogeneous populations. In this context, individuals who participated in the research were selected using the purposive sampling technique. In addition, to provide detailed information and different perspectives on the subject, both tourists and locals were chosen as the study group. It was ensured that the people included in the research were people who had visited Lake Salda at least twice in their lives. This application was made with the idea that participants have more in-depth experiences with the lake and can provide more reliable and consistent data by observing changes over time. In this context, interviews were conducted with a total of 30 people, equally divided into two groups. The interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants to prevent any data loss. The audio recordings were transcribed by creating different documents for each participant. The documents were grouped as tourists and locals and were named as P1, P2, P3... P15 for domestic tourists and P16, P17, P18... P30 for locals.

The research data were analyzed by performing a reflexive thematic analysis (TA) process (Braun & Clarke, 2019). As highlighted by Creswell & Creswell (2018), the reflexive TA process was carried out using qualitative data analysis software, which offers several benefits to researchers. In this context, the documents were first transferred to MaxQDA 2024 Pro software. Then, before coding, the documents were read separately and notes were taken. This application aimed to gain familiarity with the data, which is the initial stage of thematic analysis (Naeem et al., 2023). In this study, the data were pre-coded inductively by the second and third authors. In this way, the initial codes were created. Then, the same authors made the final coding of the data. In the coding process, the documents were re-examined to create a new code, and this application aimed to prevent data loss. Later, all authors examined the codes with consensus, grouped the codes that could be evaluated semantically under one category (sub-theme), and identified themes in the same way. After the themes are named, they are presented as a map in Figure 1. After the analysis findings were evaluated as a whole, it was also examined whether the findings differed according to locals and tourists. Peer debriefing was used in the reflexive TA process, presentation and evaluation of the findings (Janesick, 2015; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Peer debriefing was carried out by two academics. The selection of these academics was influenced by the fact that one of them had research on Lake Salda and the other was an expert in qualitative research methods. In this way, it was aimed to evaluate the research in terms of content and methodology. In line with the evaluations of the academics, revisions were made to the names of the themes so that

they could better reflect their content. In addition, the explanations of the themes were also made in more detail. Finally, during the explanations, participant statements were provided as direct quotes.

Findings

In this chapter, the descriptive information of the individuals who participated in the research is shared, followed by the analysis findings in light of the data obtained from these individuals.

Descriptive Findings

The research was conducted with 30 participants and the participants were classified into two different groups. The first group represented the local population consisting of 15 people residing in Burdur. Five of the participants in this group were female and ten were male, and their ages ranged from 38 to 68. The second group represented domestic tourists. The other 15 people in this group resided in different cities outside Burdur. Five of the tourists were male and ten were female, and their ages ranged from 39 to 74. When the participants were evaluated as a whole, it could be said that the gender distribution was balanced. Additionally, the average age of all participants was 55, and the participants' occupations varied. In addition, all individuals participating in the study had visited Lake Salda at least twice in their lifetime. Most participants (n=23) last visited Lake Salda in 2024. Other than that, the last visits vary, with five people in 2023 and one person each in 2022 and 2017.

Thematic Analysis

The thematic analysis findings are presented under this chapter. The data obtained from the participants were explained through various themes and sub-themes. The findings of the analysis are presented as a whole in Figure 1.

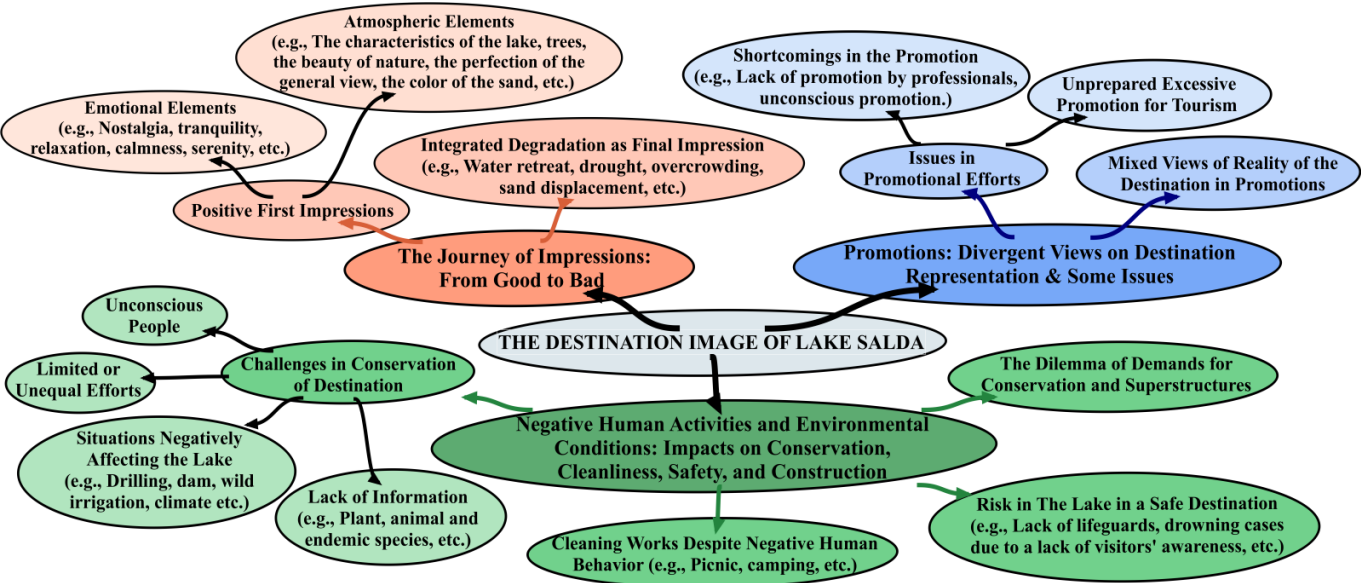


Figure 1. Thematic Map

Thematic analysis findings are shown in Figure 1 as a map. According to Figure 1, the destination image of Lake Salda is grouped under three main themes. The main themes are named as "The Journey of Impressions: From Good to Bad", "Promotions: Divergent Views on Destination Representation & Some Issues", "Negative Human Activities and Environmental Conditions: Impacts on Conservation, Cleanliness, Safety, and Construction". As shown on the map, each main theme is expressed through sub-themes that explain it in greater detail. These sub-themes were

formed through the coding of participants' statements and the subsequent grouping of similar codes. The three main themes that were identified have been explained sequentially.

Theme 1: The Journey of Impressions: From Good to Bad

Theme 1 examines the first and final impressions of individuals visiting Lake Salda, focusing on how these initially positive perceptions shifted to negative ones over time. Impressions according to the theme are explained through two sub-themes. The sub-theme “Positive First Impressions” reflects the visitors’ first impressions of the lake, while also emphasizing that these impressions are positive. It was found that individuals' first impressions are positive due to experiences shaped by atmospheric and emotional elements. Participants made various statements about the atmospheric elements of the lake (the characteristics of the lake, trees, the beauty of nature, the perfection of the general view, the color of the sand, etc.). For instance, one participant stated, “The sand is so fine and white... it feels more like the sea than a lake. Whenever we have guests, we take them there right away. Our lake is Türkiye’s Maldives; it’s stunning.” (P24). Another participant remarked, “It’s such a beautiful place, like paradise. I love the color of the water; it’s so bright and vibrant.” (P6), highlighting the atmospheric elements. According to the other sub-theme, the participants stated that they experienced some positive emotions (nostalgia, tranquility, relaxation, calmness, serenity, etc.) when they saw the lake. In this context, one of the participants explained the situation with the sentences “Peace, silence, serenity, family memories for me... Lake Salda is a family reunion, memories for me.” (P22). Similarly, another participant emphasized various positive emotional states with the expression “The lake is the cleanest, deepest lake in Türkiye. Tranquil, serene, calm...” (P28).

The sub-theme “Integrated Degradation as Final Impression” explains the final impressions of Lake Salda and its surroundings. It was found that the final impressions of individuals were towards various degradation (water retreat, drought, overcrowding, sand displacement, etc.), therefore the theme was named with the emphasis of “Integrated Degradation”. It can be said that their final impressions were generally negative. One participant emphasized the pollution with the words, “There is a huge and sad difference. It is getting dirty and deteriorating, its turquoise color is gradually disappearing.” (P30), while another participant emphasized the crowdedness of the environment and the negative changes in the natural elements of the lake with the words, “When I first went, it was more pristine. The surroundings were cleaner and untouched. What bothered me the most in 2023 was that it was very crowded... We couldn't even find a place to park our car. The crowd bothered me. The white appearance of the sand was worn and grayed due to pollution. The view of the lake is always beautiful...” (P22). However, it is striking that the participant thought that the beauty of the landscape had not been lost.

Theme 2: Promotions: Divergent Views on Destination Representation & Some Issues

Theme 2 explains the promotion strategies for Lake Salda. More specifically, it examines the different thoughts on the promotion of the lake from the visitors’ perspective and some problems that exist in the promotion processes. The theme consists of two sub-themes. One of the sub-themes points to a contradiction. In this context, the theme in question is named “Mixed Views of Reality of the Destination in Promotions”. While some participants (n=16) think that Lake Salda is portrayed differently in the promotions, others (n=14) emphasize that the promotions for the destination are realistic. According to the coding, participants who thought that Lake Salda was portrayed differently in the promotions said that the destination was exaggerated, only certain aspects or features were promoted, it was shown as more attractive/different than it was, or the damage in the area was hidden. For example, one participant

said, “They show the color because the old structure has degraded. They do not show the degradation and destruction at all.” (P8). This statement contributes to the theme. Similarly, another participant said, “The lake in advertisements and promotions is more beautiful... Still, most of the visitors like it very much, and those who come are satisfied.” (P12). This explains that the lake is depicted as more than it actually is, but visitors are still satisfied. Regardless, it was found that there were some problems in the promotion of Lake Salda. In this context, the relevant situation can be explained with another sub-theme, “Issues in Promotional Efforts”. When the sub-theme is examined, it is seen that the most frequently emphasized problem is excessive promotion. In addition, it has been determined that excessive promotion is carried out without sufficient preparation for tourism activities in the destination. This situation can be seen on the thematic map (Fig. 1) as Unprepared Excessive Promotion for Tourism. In this context, one participant explained this situation with the words “They promoted the lake enough, but the lake could not handle the people coming in terms of capacity... So many people came to the lake that they looted the markets. Those who took advantage of this increased the prices.” (P26), similarly, another participant explained this situation with the words “It was advertised all of a sudden. Millions of people came here. Thousands of cars came within hours, but there was not enough infrastructure for that many people... Before advertising, it is necessary to prepare the area and increase the infrastructure. Although there was enough infrastructure for a few thousand people, 1.5 million people came.” (P24). However, some deficiencies in promotion were also emphasized. The thoughts on this issue are that touristic promotion for Lake Salda is carried out unconsciously or that the promotion is not carried out by knowledgeable (professional) people.

Theme 3: Negative Human Activities and Environmental Conditions: Impacts on Conservation, Cleanliness, Safety, and Construction

Theme 3 explains how people evaluate environmental conditions and how these conditions have changed due to some negative behaviors or demands of people. In its most basic form, this theme consists of four sub-themes: conservation, security, construction and cleanliness of the destination.

Participants consider that the practices implemented to conserve the destination are generally insufficient. In this context, the first sub-theme that emerged was named “Challenges in Conservation of Destination”. This sub-theme explains that there are some challenges (limited or unequal conservation efforts, situations that negatively affect lake water, lack of information, presence of unconscious people, etc.) in the practices carried out to transfer the destination to future generations. For example, P21's statement, “The lake has receded significantly compared to the past. The areas that now appear as islands were once submerged. It is important to conserve not only the lake's surroundings but also the tributaries that feed it. Simply conserving the lake is not enough.”, points to the existence of limited practices for the preservation of the destination. In addition to the statement of one of the participants, “Village on the Salda side has been taken under conservation, but the other sides of the lake, The Kayadibi side, with the white sand has not been taken under conservation.” (P10), supports the view that the destination is not equally conservation. Another difficulty frequently expressed by the participants is related to the situations that cause the lake water level to decrease. In this context, the participants express the current climate conditions, wild irrigation, dams or drilling as obstacles to the conservation of the destination. P26 summarizes this situation as follows: “When the dam was built, the feeding sources dried up. As a result, the incoming water stopped. There is also irrigation through drilling. It's difficult to feed the lake, hopefully, it will remain for future generations. It's also dependent on climate

conditions...” Furthermore, the majority of the participants pointed out the lack of information regarding the plant, animal, or endemic species in the destination. The participants' statements such as “There was a sign years ago. It was too small for anyone to read. It was mentioned at one point, we know because we are the business owners.” (P29), or “According to what I researched on the internet, there are very small fish. According to what we heard from divers, there are very big fish.” (P1), emphasize this deficiency. Finally, another challenge to the conservation of the destination within the scope of this sub-theme is the presence of unconscious individuals in the destination. According to the participants, this situation is summarized as “People who go to wash wool and ruin the sand... People who are sick use the sand and harm it and pollute the lake” (P24), or “When we went last year, although it was forbidden to walk on the white sand, they would set up tents and enter the lake.” (P2).

Participants evaluated the cleanliness of the destination and cleaning efforts. In the coding made according to the information obtained from the participants, positive expressions (f=17) regarding the current situation are more frequent than negative expressions (f=13). Positive and negative expressions were examined together, considering that there is a problem in the current situation. As a result of the examinations, it was found that picnic or camping activities at the destination caused pollution. For example, participants' statements such as “The places where people have picnics are dirty.” (P23), “It is dirtier than before because tent camping is allowed.” (P7), or “Those who go leave their garbage. Those who go on picnics leave their litter.” (P8), highlight this situation. Together with all these, the sub-theme was named “Cleaning Works Despite Negative Human Behavior”. This sub-theme reveals that the cleaning efforts carried out in the destination are generally considered sufficient, but people's negative behaviors towards the environment continue quite intensely. For instance, P12's statements draw attention; “The inside of the lake is clean, but the visitors leave it dirty. The authorities are doing enough work. The source of the pollution is people who come and do not take their garbage.”

According to the examination conducted on whether the destination is safe or not, the majority of the participants (n=21) think that Lake Salda is a safe place as a destination. Although the destination is generally considered safe, the comments of the participants who think that there are safety problems, including the participants who agree with this opinion, are mostly about the lake itself not being safe. This is explained by the sub-theme “Risk in the Lake in a Safe Destination”. Participants emphasized the lack of lifeguards on the one hand, and on the other hand, the fact that visitors think of the lake as the sea or do not obey the prohibitions, in this context, they emphasized that there are drowning cases in the destination every year. One participant touched on the existing deficiencies with the words, “There are no safety measures in the lake. The ground is risky for swimmers and security personnel are not enough.” (P30), while another participant said, “Those who drowned enter the lake thinking that it is like the sea without knowing the characteristics of the lake. Foreigners cross the boundary and enter the dangerous area, this is not like the sea.” (P27), in an explanation regarding the behavior of visitors.

Within the scope of the main theme, the participants also made various evaluations regarding the touristic superstructure (such as food and beverage establishments, accommodation facilities, etc.) of the destination. According to the evaluations, while some participants (n=7) found the existing touristic superstructure sufficient, most participants stated that the touristic superstructure in the destination was insufficient. This results in an increase in the number of day trippers in the destination. The participants summarized the situation as follows: “Before, foreign tourists used to come and spend time here because there were businesses that served alcohol. Then, when the

road from the lake to Antalya was changed, foreign tourists stopped coming because there was a shorter and smoother road to Antalya. Tour buses started to pass through that road and the number of customers and businesses here decreased. There is no place for tourists to stay here, so people started to come for the day.” (P1), or “The lake makes a little economic contribution to Yeşilova, people come and go for the day. There should be more accommodation businesses. People go to other places to stay.” (P9). Although it is stated that there is insufficient touristic superstructure in the destination, the participants also think that the construction harms nature. In this context, some individuals stated that the destination is a conserved area and supported this by stating that the construction in the region has been prevented and/or stopped. Therefore, this situation can be explained with the sub-theme “The Dilemma of Demands for Conservation and Superstructures”. The theme draws attention to the lack of superstructure on the one hand, and on the other hand, expresses the dilemma that construction will harm the destination. For instance, P21’s statements such as “There are not enough facilities, but there shouldn’t be. There should be enough to meet basic needs. Salda’s natural state should be conserved... Don’t eat there, don’t swim in the lake. Lake Salda is a place that should only be visited to watch. It is a place that should not be opened to tourism, it should remain natural. Opening new places will cause degradation. Let it remain in its most natural state; even this state is too much.” illuminate this theme.

The themes identified in the study were analyzed and compared based on their distribution over the groups (locals and tourists). The document-based analysis is visualized in Figure 2 using a relationship map. While making comparisons between groups, some themes were visualized in a way that included their sub-themes. This approach was preferred to make comparisons within existing themes more comprehensive and to determine semantic differences more clearly. In addition, sub-themes were circled to show which thematic heading they were under. In the figure, the connections of locals (blue) and tourists (red) to the themes were separated using different colors. The connections in each theme are thicker as the relationship increases. However, this situation only represents the densities specific to the relevant theme. In other words, the connection thickness within a theme is not evaluated by comparing it with the connection of another theme.

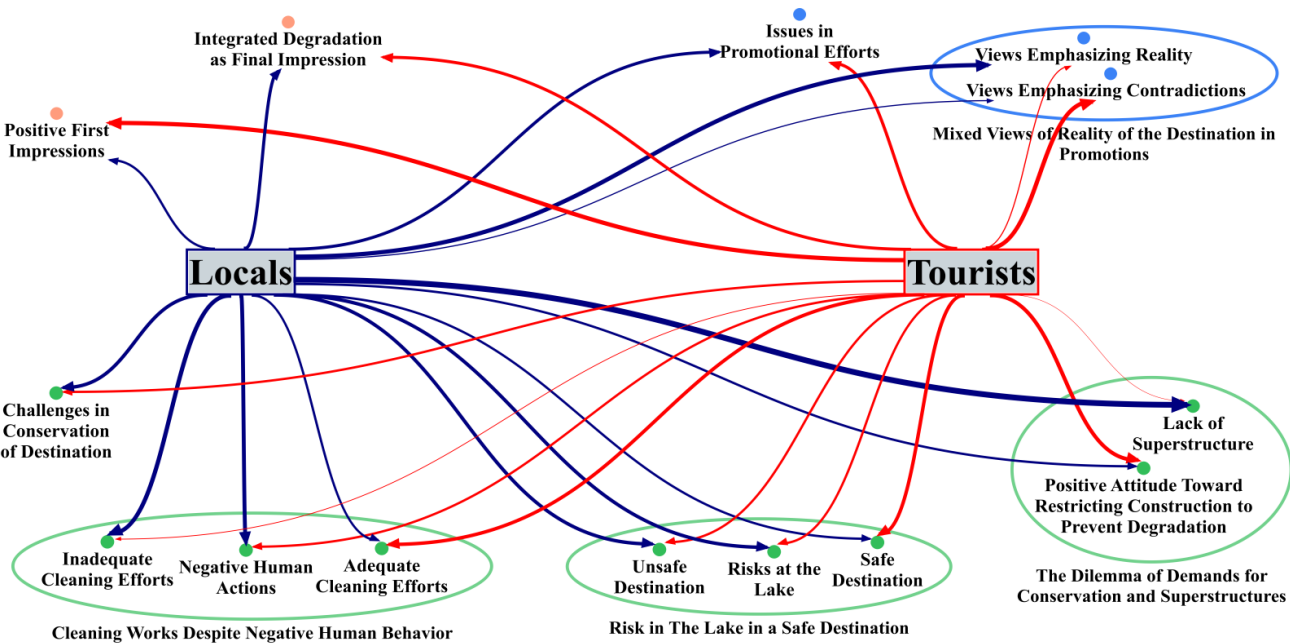


Figure 2. Mapping Relationships between Participant Groups and Themes

According to the comparison between the groups in Figure 2, it is seen that the density of positive first impressions was higher among tourists compared to the locals. However, there is no significant difference between the last impressions of both groups. Another difference seen according to the figure 2 is related to how the destination appears in promotions. In this context, while tourists think that the destination is different than the promotions compared to the locals, locals think that the promotions are realistic compared to the tourists. Similarly, tourists see the cleaning efforts done in the destination as more adequate compared to the locals. In this context, it can be stated that tourists find the destination cleaner compared to the locals. In addition, when the security status of the destination is examined, it is understood that tourists see the destination as safer than the locals. Tourists, compared to the locals, are seen to have a more positive attitude towards the control of construction due to the concern that it may degrade the destination. Finally, when all the connections are examined, it is seen that the most obvious difference in the relationships between each theme is the lack of superstructure. In this context, it is a striking finding that the locals are more likely to think that the superstructure is inadequate than the tourists. There is no significant difference in the other elements.

Improvement Topics Highlighted by Participants

Participants made various suggestions for the development of Lake Salda. These suggestions are among the steps that should be taken as a priority for the sustainable development of the destination. Among the measures recommended to be taken in the first stage are planned construction, awareness-raising activities, conservation practices (conservation of lake water, prevention of sand transportation, no swimming in the lake, no pollution of the environment, etc.) and meticulous implementation of the measures taken emerge as the most important priorities. While locals in particular voice these measures, they also draw attention to the existence of controlled construction. For example, some participants' thoughts on this issue "Conscious construction should be allowed, provided that some things are not exaggerated. The lake looks pristine. All over the world, construction is being built around lakes, but first infrastructure needs to be built here. How long can everything be forbidden? As long as the infrastructure is solid and the people are aware, the lake will not be harmed. We are the ones who will conserve this place. Long-term investments need to be made by conserving nature and planning for 100-200 years from now..." (P16), or "It is a very beautiful place, its virginity should not be spoiled. The law is not what will conserve the lake. Citizens and those living there should be conscious. Those who come to the lake should not pollute it and leave. It should be forbidden to go within 500 meters of the lake and have picnics, but I am against construction bans. Nevertheless, the region must remain untouched. It should not be opened to too much trade." (P17), particularly drawing attention to awareness-raising efforts and planned construction. Similarly, tourists mention that caution should be exercised during the implementation phase of the measures taken. For example, P15 said, "While taking sufficient measures, one should also be sensitive to the environment and the lake. After these measures are taken, emphasis should be placed on their implementation." P11 said, "More care should be taken. While trying to conserve one place, other places should not be harmed.". Finally, the participants' suggestions, such as "Resources for the lake should be transferred, underground water should be provided. Precautions should be taken against withdrawal due to excessive heat. Instead of using the surrounding boreholes for irrigation, they should be used for the lake." (P19), "Underground irrigation should be banned." (P4), or "Construction should not be allowed around the lake. The extraction of lake water and sand should be prohibited, and fines should be increased." (P5), are noteworthy suggestions regarding the sustainability of lake water.

Conclusion

This research was conducted to determine the image of the destination of Lake Salda from the perspective of domestic tourists and locals. In this research, which adopted a qualitative research design, data were obtained through the interview technique. The data was interpreted through reflexive TA. In addition, the perceptions of locals and domestic tourists towards the destination were compared in the context of themes.

According to the reflexive TA results (Fig. 1), the destination image of Lake Salda was evaluated within the scope of three main themes. According to the themes, it was concluded that the first impressions of individuals about Lake Salda were positive due to the influence of atmospheric and/or emotional elements, but their final impressions were negative due to the multifaceted degradations in the destination. It is thought that this situation is because the participants visited the destination at least twice and were able to notice the degradation that occurred over time more clearly. Nevertheless, it can be said that Lake Salda is still valuable in terms of natural beauty. This result is in line with the results of a study that found that the most negative impression of Lake Salda is about environmental pollution and nature degradation, and that the lake is a destination that should be visited because of elements such as the view of the lake, the color of the lake water or peaceful experiences (Yazıcıoğlu et al., 2020). When comparing the impressions of tourists and locals, it was found that positive impressions were more frequent among tourists, whereas negative perceptions were more prevalent among locals. It is thought that this result may be because tourists have a temporary experience in the places they visit, and therefore they focus more on positive aspects of the destination. On the other hand, locals can experience the natural and cultural elements of the region as part of their daily lives. Therefore, they can observe the negative changes in these elements more clearly. In a study, it can be seen that tourists who have visited Lake Salda before have almost no remarks about the degradation of the environment in the destination (Temurçin & Tozkoparan, 2020).

Another main theme identified in the research expresses the participants' diverse views on the reality of lake promotion and some of the issues present in the promotion process in general. In this context, generally, while the locals consider Lake Salda as it is in the promotions, tourists consider that this destination is different from what it is in the promotions because of exaggeration, hiding the negative aspects, highlighting certain features, etc. It is thought that this situation may be due to the different perceptions and expectations of tourists and locals. Frequent exposure of tourists to promotional content may increase their expectations and cause them to feel a discrepancy between their experiences and what is promised. On the other hand, it can be inferred that locals already know the destination. Additionally, locals may assume that promotions are a strategy specifically aimed at attracting tourists, and therefore may be less critical of the content of the promotions. In addition, visitors draw attention to the excessiveness of the promotions for Lake Salda. The study concluded that the destination was excessively promoted without adequate facilities and infrastructure for touristic activities. This result is parallel to a study in the literature (İnanır & Ongun, 2019). On the other hand, although the lack of infrastructure is considered a common problem, it partially differs from some studies that highlighted the lack of promotion (Temurçin et al., 2019; Temurçin & Tozkoparan, 2020). It is thought that this may differ due to the contexts that the studies focus on. Kasaroğlu (2021) emphasized that the promotion of Lake Salda in the national print media has continued to increase over the years, and that visits to the lake have increased with the influence of promotion and social media.

The last theme identified as a result of the research explains how participants evaluate environmental conditions

and how these conditions are affected by some negative behaviors or demands of people. Participants evaluated the conservation, security, cleanliness and construction of the destination within the scope of this theme. This study concluded that there are some challenges in the conservation of destination. In this context, limited or unequal conservation efforts in the destination, practices that negatively affect lake water (dams, wild irrigation, drilling, etc.), lack of information about plants, animals and endemic species in the destination, and the presence of unconscious people were emphasized. These factors do not significantly differ between the perceptions of tourists and locals. It is seen that there are similar evaluations in the literature. For instance, Ongun & Örnek (2024) stated that placing informative signs about plant and animal genetic resources around Lake Salda will enable visitors to get to know nature, which will play a positive role in conserving the ecosystem and promoting sustainable tourism. Ceylan & Bulut (2020) concluded in their research that conservation practices and inspections in Lake Salda have increased, and awareness-raising signs and environmental regulations have been partially implemented. In this context, it can be said that conservation practices are still not perceived as sufficient today. In addition, as a result of this research, the participants suggested that there should be some conserving practices (conserving the lake water and sand, not swimming in the lake, not polluting the environment) and that the measures taken should be implemented meticulously. In a study, it is stated that the planning regarding Lake Salda should be holistic and the implementations should be carried out meticulously (Temurçin & Tozkoparan, 2020). In this context, it is recommended to increase conservation efforts for the sustainability of the destination. At this point, it is thought that attention should be paid especially to the sustainability of the lake water. As suggested by Davraz and Aksever (2023), drilling practices should be taken under control and importance should be given to the spring waters that feed the lake. In addition, it is recommended that locals be included in the practices to be carried out to ensure both the continuity of the destination and its development in terms of tourism because without the support of the locals, the tourism development of the destination cannot be expected to be sustainable (Acuner et al., 2021). When the destination was evaluated in terms of cleanliness, it was concluded that there were cleaning efforts, but the environment was polluted due to the unconscious behavior of individuals. Tourists evaluated the cleaning efforts in the area more positively than locals. According to Temurçin & Tozkoparan (2020), the majority of tourists find the businesses in the district inadequate in terms of cleanliness and hygiene, but they think that the Maldives part of Lake Salda is environmentally clean. In this context, it is thought that this result may be because tourists generally experience the main touristic areas. Similarly, it was concluded that tourists find the destination safer than locals. This difference is thought to be due to the frequency of drowning cases in the lake. In addition, the main conclusion on safety is that the destination is environmentally safe. People believe that the lake resembles the sea, and their lack of awareness in this regard leads to drowning incidents.

When the sub-themes of challenges in conservation work, cleanliness and security were evaluated together in the study, it was concluded that there was a common emphasis on human behavior. In this context, it can be concluded that the negative behavior and unconsciousness of individuals visiting Lake Salda is an important factor that can negatively affect the sustainability and image of the destination. It is recommended that precautions and awareness-raising activities be increased regarding behaviors that may cause these effects. Kanıgür et al. (2023) also drew attention to the need to take measures against anthropogenic impacts for the sustainability of the area. Therefore, awareness-raising activities are important. These efforts can contribute to the awakening of social consciousness with the support of social media.

It was concluded that the tourism superstructures (accommodation, food and beverage business, etc.) in Lake Salda are insufficient. This result is supported by some studies in the literature (İnanır & Ogun, 2019; Temurçin et al., 2019; Temurçin & Tozkoparan, 2020; Yazıcıoğlu et al., 2020). Although it is considered insufficient, it was also emphasized by the participants that the construction will harm the sustainability of the destination. Interestingly, tourists are more likely to believe this view than locals. This situation can be interpreted as the locals desiring to get a greater percentage of tourism revenues. Participants emphasized the need for planned construction. Therefore, it is recommended that efforts and controls be increased for alternative accommodation facilities that give importance to sustainability by making valid and acceptable plans for the destination.

Finally, the main conclusion of this study is that Lake Salda has a positive destination image with its natural beauties and safe environmental perception, but the problems experienced in the conservation and promotion processes of the area, the deficiencies in the infrastructure and superstructure in the destination, and the unconscious behavior of individuals are factors that negatively affect this image. Future studies can examine the sustainability of the destination in more detail, determine strategies for awareness-raising practices, and focus on the current status of alternative accommodation opportunities in the area. This study contributes to the destination image literature specifically for Lake Salda. A limitation is that the study was conducted from the perspective of locals and domestic tourists. Examining the also perspectives of foreign tourists and employees working in touristic businesses can eliminate this limitation. In addition, the measurement of destination image can be done by adopting a quantitative research method.

Declaration

All authors of the article contributed equally to the article process. The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare. The ethics committee permission required for the collection of the data used in this study was obtained from Siirt University Ethics Committee with the date 19/10/2024 and decision/number 7761.

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Ek 1. Etik Kurul İzni**Evrak Tarih ve Sayısı: 19.10.2024-7761**

T.C.
SİİRT ÜNİVERSİTESİ REKTÖRLÜĞÜ
ETİK KURULU KARARLARI



Oturum Tarihi
15.10.2024

Oturum Saati
15:00

Oturum Sayısı
946

Üniversitemiz Etik Kurulu 15.10.2024 tarihinde saat 15:00'da Etik Kurul Başkanı Prof. Dr. Fadıl AYGAN başkanlığında, aşağıda imzaları bulunan üyelerin katılımıyla toplanarak gündemdeki konuları görüşmüş ve aşağıdaki kararları almıştır.

ETİK KURUL KARARI

Siirt üniversitesi Etik Kurulunun aşağıdaki görüşü tavsiye niteliğinde olup üniversitemizle ilgili etik ilkelerinin belirlenmesi ve değerlendirilmesi amacını taşımaktadır.

ETİK İNCELEME KONUSU

Araştırmacının Adı Soyadı : Yağmur CAN GABERLİ
Değerlendirilecek Araştırmacının Adı: " Evaluation of Lake Salda"
başlıklı araştırmanın etik olarak uygunluğu.

Söz konusu araştırmada, Etik Kurulun görevi kapsamında değerlendirilen husus, araştırma etiğiyle ilgilidir.

Araştırma etiği bakımından yürütülecek olan programın katılımcıların yararına olması ve onları herhangi bir zarara uğratma riski taşımaması gerekmektedir. Araştırma etiği bakımından ikinci olarak, rıza unsurunun gözetildiğine dair bilgi olmalıdır.

SONUÇ

Sonuç olarak, Sosyal Bilimlerdeki araştırmaların yayın etiği, insan katılımına dayalı olanların da araştırma etiği bakımından etik gereklere uygun olması gerekmektedir. Katılımcıların zarara uğratılmaması temel ilkedir. Rızalarının olması halinde toplanan verilerin isim verilmeden raporlaştırılmasında araştırma etiği bakımından bir sakınca bulunmamaktadır.

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Bu belge 5070 sayılı Elektronik İmza Kanununun 5. Maddesi gereğince güvenli elektronik imza ile imzalanmıştır.