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Sustainable tourism development: The case of Pretty Village

Sirince (Pretty Village) is a beautiful village located about 5 miles from Ephesus which has an interesting history. It is also the venue of famous novel *Matomena Homata*, (Bloody Earth) by Dido Satiriyu. In her novel Satiriyu describes the village as a corner of the paradise on earth which is situated on the top of a lush green hill overlooking Ephesus plain stretching all the way to the turquoise Aegean Sea (Satiriyu, 1970).

The history of Sirince goes back to the early years of Ephesus (Second Century B.C.) although most of the historical monuments and houses date back only 200 years (Ozzengi, 2000). Greek farmers engaged in olive, peach, and grape farming inhabited the village prior to 1924. Right after the Greek-Turkish war of 1919-1922 Turkish farmers from Kavala and Tesseloniki regions of Greece exchanged the entire population of Sirince. Current agriculture mainly consists of production of fruits and vegetables. There is also limited wine making capacity for tourist purposes. Two vineyards have tasting and retail sales stores in the village. In addition to these businesses the local population also involved with wine making in a limited way. It is important to note that originally the village was named as Cirkince (ugly village) because the residents, in order to preserve their way of life, did not want more people to move in the village as immigrants or as tourists, and the name helped them to maintain their culture and identity. Its current name dates back to 1928 when the Governor of Izmir (the major city thirty miles away) visited this beautiful village asked the villagers to change its name to Sirince (Pretty Village) (Soykan, 2001).

In 1981 and 1982 Ministry of Culture and Tourism conducted extensive research in Sirince. This research covered a variety of topics and yielded an inventory of houses and churches for preservation and introduction of tourism (Kultur ve Turizm Bakanligi, 1983). In 1984 the village was declared as historical preservation area and in 1997 it was added to the nature preservation agenda of the Turkish government. According to these decisions the new construction and development in the village has to observe the strict governmental rules of preservation.

The importance of Sirince comes from its proximity to Ephesus and Kusadasi that are visited by several million foreign and domestic tourists every year. It is well connected to Selcuk (Ephesus) by a relatively narrow but good highway. The transportation is provided by local businesses and operates quite well. The village designated a parking lot for busses and cars. Tourism contributes to the local economy through bed and breakfast facilities mainly operated as

second income for residents, gift shops and restaurants. Almost every resident is involved some kind of economic activity be it selling needle works or local products like fruits and wine. The village has a good electricity and water system. The women are actively involved in marketing of local gift items like scarves, table cloths and bed covers with unique designs. They usually sell their products in front of their houses. Over 90 percent of the population is literate and there is a grammar school in the village.

One of the main problems of development of tourism in Sirince is the decreasing local population. In 1935 its population was 1288. In 1950 1019, in 1980 839 and finally in 2000 the population decreased to 640 almost 50 percent in spite of various tourist amenities have been added. Several bed and breakfast businesses were set up and many stores were opened for tourist business. The remaining population is becoming rather older and creating urgent need for medical services. As a result of this decreasing population many seasonal farm workers come to the village to assist in the harvesting of figs, olives, and especially peaches (Soykan, 2001). A preliminary research conducted by Ozzengi, gives marriage as a one of the most important factors for moving out from the village (Ozzengi, 2000).

The objective of this case is to focus on the phenomenon of depopulation of tourist areas, like Sirince, trying to sustain their economy and culture through tourism development. It is interesting to note that a similar situation exists in Cumalikizik, the oldest Ottoman village, near Bursa (Oren et.al., 2001). One of the often-mentioned objectives of tourism development is to create jobs and contribute to welfare of small tourist communities. In cases of Sirince and Cumalikizik the communities are faced with the continued depletion of the original population base, especially young residents. Some recent studies involving resident attitudes towards tourism development in nearby tourist destinations emphasize the potential of income generation as a positive impact of tourism development (Cavus & Tanrisevdi, 2003). The case of Sirince clearly negates this and creates a problem for further research.

The research on location in Summer 2002 revealed a number of factors that must be considered in tourism development in preserved areas. The first factor relates to the conflicts between residents and outsiders in developing tourist facilities. Restoration of existing houses for bed and breakfast business by outside investors causes considerable irritation between local groups and investors. The second issue deals with better living conditions outside the village that attract young people to work nearby larger tourist destinations. In most cases they never come back. So far no research has been conducted to remedy this situation. It is important to look at the former residents that left the village and survey them in order better understand this critical problem. The third and most important issue is related to the restriction of new investments in better housing, education, health services and other amenities. Finally, the marketing must also be more creative and better targeted in order to eliminate seasonality that affects most of the coastal tourist destinations. Sirince received over 25,000 tourists in 2002 which represented approximately 10 percent increase for the past ten years. 35 percent of tourist is foreign basically from France, Germany, and England. Only 15 percent of tourist uses the overnight accommodations (Selcuk Turizm Mudurlugu, 2002).

In conclusion, Sirince opens an interesting case for researchers on sustainability of tourism development in small historical destinations close to larger cities and resorts. It also provides a good opportunity in conducting research in conflict resolution, sustainability, tourism planning, out-migration, resident attitudes and development of rural and nature tourism.

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