



Investigation of visitor characteristics within the scope of park management planning studies: Uşak-Ulubey Canyon Nature Park example

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Abstract: Today, with the change of consumption preferences, tourism concept has also changed. Previously, while the demand was mostly for sea, sand and sun containing tourism activities, and now people prefer to go to natural and unspoiled places and spend cultural time with the local people. This trend has increased the interest in ecotourism and nature tourism. In this context, the Ulubey Canyon Nature Park, located within the boundaries of the Ulubey District of Uşak, is one of the most remarkable areas in recent times due to its natural characteristics. The Canyon is the world's second largest canyon after the Grand Canyon, which is also found within the Arizona State borders of the United States. The nature park is 119 ha and is 30 km away from Uşak-Ulubey highway. The source values of the area are horizontal layered natural rock formations, canyon valleys, forest and river ecosystem and thermal water resources. Recently, it is being discuss whether the area will be declared as a national park due to its natural characteristics. One of the key factors for the sustainable management of Ulubey Canyon Nature Park and protected areas is the visitors who use these areas. For this reason, in this study, the effects of visitor characteristics, preferences and perceptions on the planning of protected areas and sustainable management were investigated. Literature analysis, questionnaire-interview and field observations were used as data collection methods. The factor analysis method was used to determine the factors affecting visitor perceptions and chi-square (χ^2) test to explore the associations between the variables. According to the results of the study, the natural park is highly demanded due to its natural characteristics and landscape structure. In general, visitors come from the Aegean region. Familiar recommendations are highly effective in the choice of the area and visits are usually held together with family members. Associating the socio-demographic characteristics, preferences and perceptions of visitors with each other gives the decision makers important clues that can be used to protect the park and manage it effectively. In the plans to be made in the study area and other protected areas, ecological, biological, geological, etc. As well as user features, will contribute to the development of behavioral patterns that will best understand the perception and understanding of the wider area. A management approach that will be developed in these frameworks will also help to protect the resource value of the area and transfer it to future generations.

Keywords: Protected areas, Visitor characteristics, Visitor management, Ulubey Canyon Nature Park, Uşak