



Ecotourism in Turkey from Past to Present and the Scientific Awareness

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Abstract

The phenomenon of eco-tourism was first described by Ceballas-Lascurian in 1987 as travels made to appreciate, enjoy and making studies on landscape, flora and fauna as well as past and present cultural values in areas where human's destructing effects are relatively low. In short, ecotourism is basically an activity that aims to protect the natural environment. Turkey has a remarkable nature tourism potential because of its geographical richness and natural resources. Ecotourism which was included in the Eighth Development Plan covering the years of 2001 - 2005, in which policies on the development of the winter, health, yacht, congress tourism, ecotourism, making investments while preserving and developing the historical and natural environment were determined, has gained importance in Turkey. In this study, the research focused on determining the natural and cultural resources of Turkey and using them as alternative resources for the development of ecotourism were examined. In this context, the study has attempted to provide a basement for identifying the ecotourism awareness over the years and the sustainable development of ecotourism.

Keywords: Ecotourism, Awareness, Natural resources, Cultural resources, Landscape.

Türkiye'de Geçmişten Günümüze Ekoturizm ve Bilimsel Farkındalığı

Öz

Ekoturizm olgusu ilk olarak 1987 yılında Ceballas-Lascurian tarafından, insanın olumsuz etkilerinin nispeten az olduğu alanlara manzara, bitki örtüsü ve hayvanların yanı sıra geçmişte ve günümüzde halen bulunan kültürel kaynak değerlerine hayranlık duymak, hoşlanmak ve özel bir çalışma yapmak için yapılan seyahatler olarak tanımlanmıştır. Kısaca ekoturizm temelde doğal çevreyi korumayı amaçlayan aktivitelerdir. Türkiye sahip olduğu zengin coğrafya ve doğal kaynaklar nedeniyle doğa turizmi türleri açısından önemli potansiyele sahiptir. Ülkemizde kış, sağlık, yat, kongre turizmi, ekoturizm, vb. turizm türlerinin gelişmesine; yatırımların doğal, tarihsel ve doğal çevreyi koruyucu ve geliştirici şekilde gerçekleşmesine yönelik politikaların belirlendiği 2001 - 2005 yıllarını içine alan Sekizinci Kalkınma Planı'nda yer alan ekoturizm giderek önem kazanmaya başlanmıştır. Bu çalışmada Türkiye'nin peyzaj öğeleri içerisinde yer alan doğal ve kültürel kaynakların ekoturizm pazarı açısından alternatif olarak değerlendirilmesi ve ekoturizme kazandırılması kapsamında yapılan çalışmalar incelenmiştir. Bu kapsamda yıllara göre ekoturizm farkındalığının belirlenmesi ve ekoturizmin sürdürülebilir gelişimi ile ilgili temel oluşturulmaya çalışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ekoturizm, Farkındalık, Doğal kaynaklar, Kültürel kaynaklar, Peyzaj.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the major sectors in the world and its sustainability mainly depends on the development and protection of tourism resources. Today, tourism sector has become more environmentally-conscious as a result of rising environmental awareness and efforts for the protection of the environment. Besides, environmental problems have raised awareness among tourists. For the development and sustainability of tourism, stakeholders should consider this change. Because of the destructive effects of mass tourism, new tourism types have emerged. These new types of tourism are called as alternative tourism including ecotourism, nature tourism. Ecotourism is a relatively new term. After the determination of “criteria for a sustainable earth and environment” of the Rio Earth Summit which was held in 1992, these criteria were applied to tourism industry. While benefiting from the resources without destroying the local culture is the main point of this understanding. Ecotourism term have come into prominence and a common definition was accepted during the “World Ecotourism Summit” which was held in Quebec City of Canada, on May of 2002, with the attendance of 1.100 delegates from 133 countries. Ecotourism is; “An approach or attitude that ensures the sustainability of earth’s natural sources while supporting the financial development of local communities and overseeing their cultural and social integrity”. The principles which were accepted by countries are as follows:

- Development of ecotourism policies and planning,
- Developing principles for ecotourism,
- Development, marketing and promotion of ecotourism products;
- The pros and cons (both financial and emotional) of ecotourism.

Ecotourism and sustainable tourism in Turkey were first put on the agenda with the 8th Five-Year Development Plan (2001-2005). Natural assets of Turkey are the main tourist attractions for the country. Thus, it can be said that the nature and the natural environment are the main attractions that effects people’s travel plans and these are also the irreplaceable assets of tourism industry (Usta, 2001). Turkey has a rich and diverse potential for tourism with its natural and cultural resources. Turkey can accommodate different types of tourists thanks to its historical and cultural diversity, different climate characteristics and the possibility of performing various tourism types (Arslan, 2003; Aslan, 2005; Demir and Çevirgen 2006; Akşit 2007).

The main aim of this study is to examine the scientific studies on ecotourism in Turkey by year and region. Also, the scientific awareness in Turkey attempted to present.

MATERIAL and METHOD

498 scientific studies on ecotourism which was published in Turkish language between 1991 and 2017 in Turkey were reviewed. Different types of data were collected. In light of these informations, ecotourism concept and the current situation of scientific awareness on ecotourism were examined.”.

FINDINGS

Scientific Studies on Ecotourism by Region

Turkey has a rich cultural heritage, flora and fauna, geological formations, rivers and lakes. For this reason a large number of studies were conducted in geographical regions of Turkey. Figure 1 shows the distribution of scientific studies conducted about ecotourism between 1991 and 2017 by region.

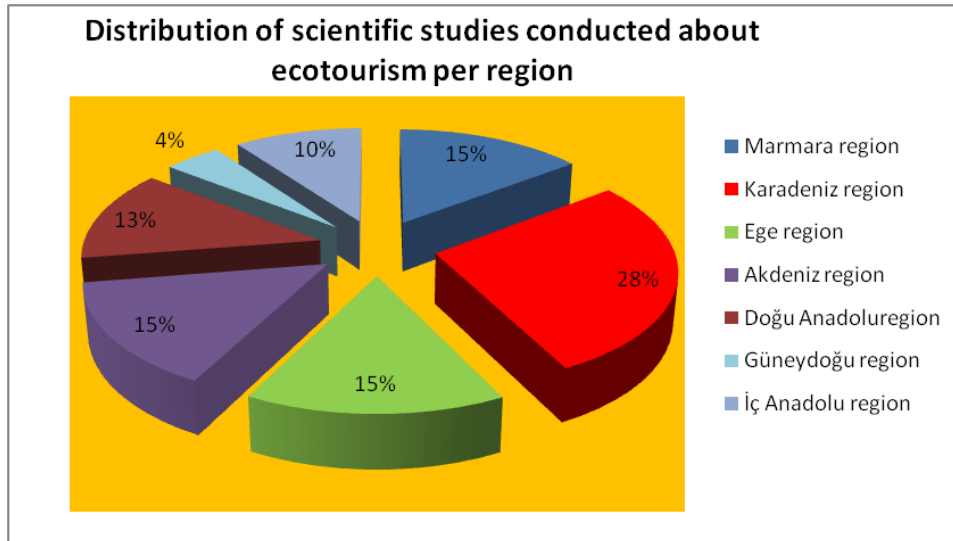


Figure 1. Distribution of Scientific Studies Conducted on Ecotourism per Region (%).

As seen in Figure 1; Black Sea Region (28%) is leading in terms of published scientific studies. The region's rich ecotourism potential such as valleys, caves, canyons, rivers, historical resources, birds and biodiversity increases the number of studies. Mediterranean Region (80 scientific articles), Marmara Region (79 scientific articles) and Aegean Region (81 scientific articles) have similar rates (15%). Southeastern Anatolia Region (4%) have the smallest rate after Eastern Anatolia Region (13%) and Central Anatolia Region (10%).

Ecotourism Studies Conducted in Turkey per City

When the studies conducted in cities between 1991 and 2017 were evaluated, it was seen that significant progress has been made in Balıkesir (Aegean Region) and in Bartın (Black Sea Region) (See Figure 2).

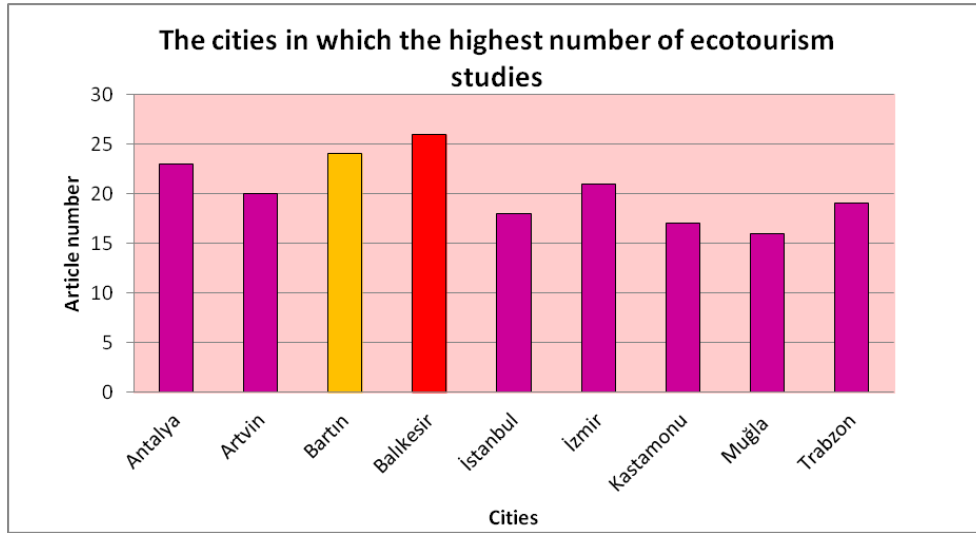


Figure 2. Distribution of Ecotourism Studies per cities

Figure 2 shows the cities with highest number of scientific studies. Balıkesir is leading with 26 scientific articles while Kastamonu follows with 17 articles. Therefore, it can be said that scientific awareness is high in these two cities.. Figure 3 shows some medium scaled ecotourism studies per cities. Aydın with 13 scientific studies, Rize with 12 scientific studies, Konya with 9 scientific studies and Elazığ with 7 scientific studies are among these cities.

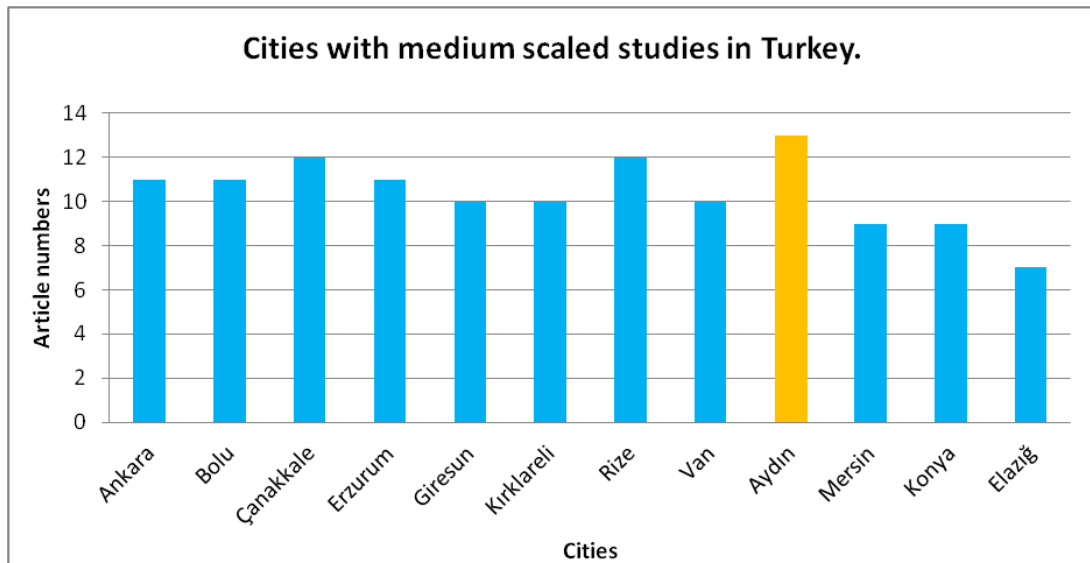


Figure 3. Medium Scaled Ecotourism Studies per Cities in Turkey.

Table 1 shows the cities where limited number of studies on ecotourism are conducted.. In Düzce, Karabük, Sakarya, Samsun, Kars (6 scientific articles in each city), Adıyaman (5 scientific articles), Uşak, Zonguldak, Çorum and Ardahan (2 scientific studies in each city) there are limited number of scientific studies on ecotourism.

Table 1. Cities where the limited number of ecotourism studies are conducted

Cities	The number of studies	Cities	The number of studies	Cities	The number of studies
Afyon	3	Erzincan	3	Malatya	3
Adana	2	Edirne	3	Manisa	3
Adıyaman	5	Gaziantep	3	Sakarya	6
Ardahan	2	Gümüşhane	3	Samsun	6
Amasya	2	Kütahya	3	Siirt	2
Bayburt	4	Kahramanmaraş	5	Şanlıurfa	2
Burdur	3	Karaman	3	Sivas	4
Çorum	2	Kars	6	Sinop	3
Çankırı	4	Kayseri	3	Tekirdağ	3
Diyarbakır	3	Karabük	6	Uşak	2
Denizli	4	Mardin	3	Zonguldak	2
Düzce	6				

Table 2 shows the least number of studies on ecotourism by cities. In Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia Regions there are only a few studies on ecotourism. Besides, when the cities of Bilecik, Eskişehir and Osmaniye are considered it is seen that there is only one study conducted in each city. However, no research is found in Batman, Hakkari and Adapazarı.

Table 2. The least number of ecotourism studies by City

City	The number of studies	City	The number of studies
Ağrı	1	Kilis	1
Aksaray	1	Muş	1
Bitlis	1	Osmaniye	1
Bingöl	1	Şanlıurfa	1
Bilecik	1	Şırnak	1
Eskişehir	1	Tunceli	1
Iğdır	1	Yozgat	1
Kırşehir	1	Yalova	1
Kırkkale	1		

Number of Authors on Ecotourism Studies Conducted in Turkey

Figure 4 shows the number of authors conduct studies on ecotourism. When the studies in Turkey conducted between 1991 and 2017 examined, it is seen that at least two authors (43%) work together for a paper. However, 1% of the papers are prepared by five researchers (Figure 4).

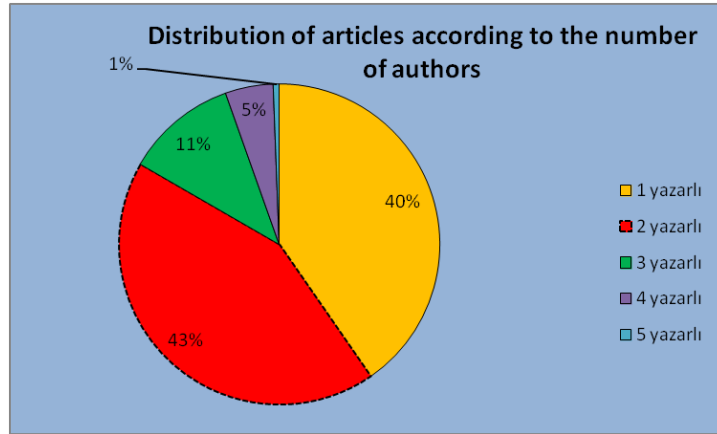


Figure 4. Number of Authors Studying on Ecotourism papers

Studies per Year

Ecotourism has gained importance since 1990s. Ecotourism awareness has increased gradually in Turkey. Ecotourism awareness have started to rise by 8th five-year development plan. Except the years 2012, 2013 and 2014, the number of studies have increased. Especially in 2015 (59 scientific articles) and in 2016 (86 scientific articles) the number of articles showed a great increase.

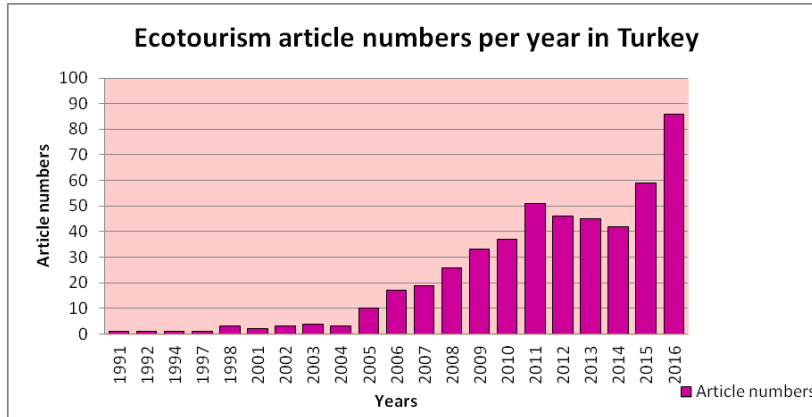


Figure 5. Distribution of Papers by Years.

Theses Registered by the Council of Higher Education (YÖK)

Data obtained from the website of the Council of Higher Education were analyzed and theses by departments, by year and by the type of theses were determined.

Distribution of the Theses by Departments Registered by the Council of Higher Education (YÖK)

When the ecotourism studies are examined, it is seen that most of the theses are conducted at the Department of Landscape Architecture (33%) followed by Department of Tourism Management (22%) and the Department of Geography (18%). The departments with the least rate (1%) are the Public Administration, Sociology, Marine Science, Business Administration, Urban and Regional Planning (See Figure 6).

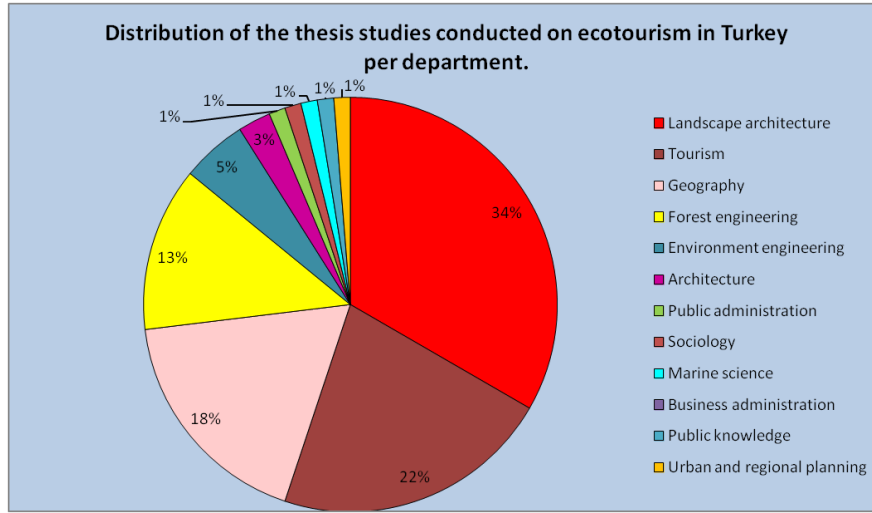


Figure 6. Distribution of The Theses on Ecotourism per Department

Distribution of the Theses Registered by the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) per Year

When the number of the theses registered at the Council of Higher Education by year is examined, it is seen that there is a significant increase on ecotourism theses in 2014 (14 thesis studies) when compared to the previous years.

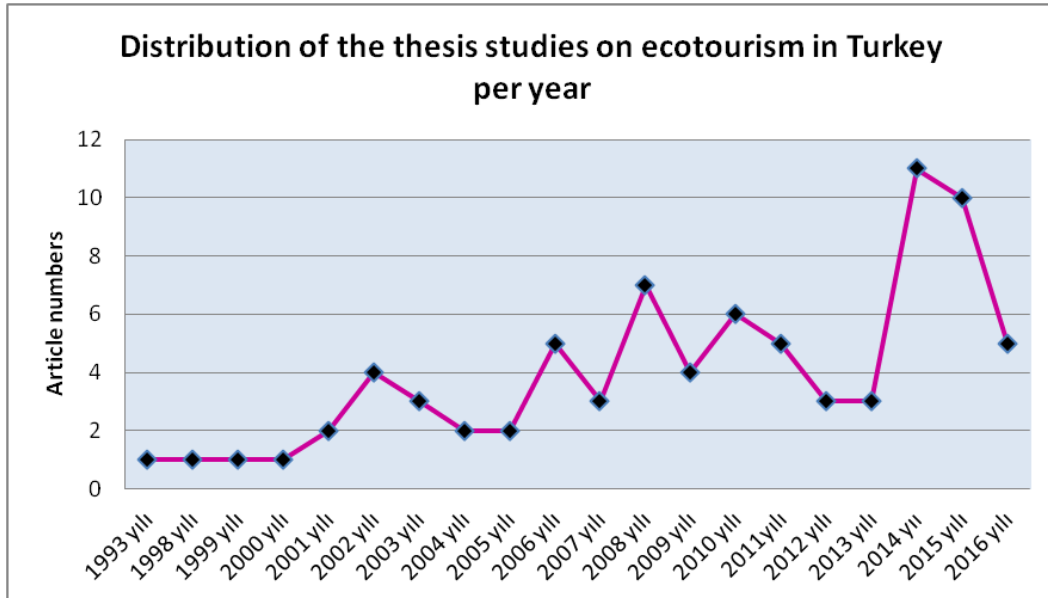


Figure 7. Distribution of the Theses on Ecotourism by Years.

Doctorate of philosophy and Postgraduate Theses Registered by the Council of Higher Education (YÖK)

When Figure 8 is examined it is seen that most of the ecotourism theses are postgraduate theses (81%) while 19% are PhD theses (See Figure 8). Data also shows

that the main themes of the theses focus on sustainable tourism, environmental planning, flora and fauna, biodiversity.

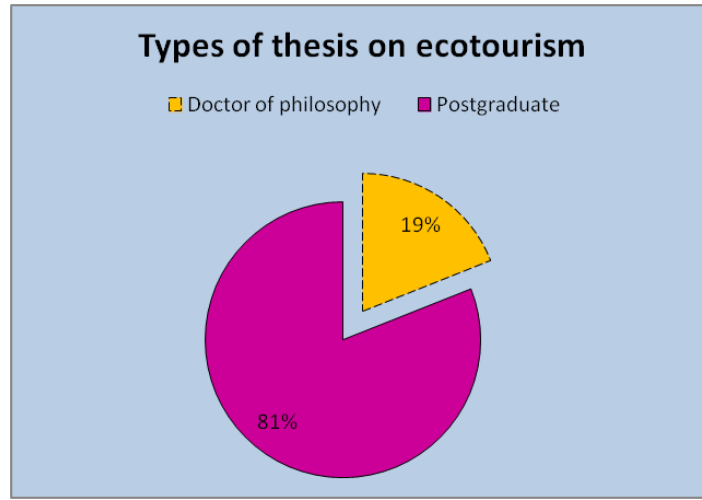


Figure 8. Types of Theses on Ecotourism

Table 3. Distribution of Ecotourism Studies Registered by the Council of Higher Education per City

Region or City	Number of Theses	Region or City	Number of Theses
Turkey in general	10	Ayancık-Sinop	1
Eastern Black Sea Region	4	Konya	1
Thrace	3	Erzurum-Olur	1
İzmir	5	Aksaray Ihlara	1
Balıkesir	3	Muğla	1
Erzurum	4	Hakkari	1
Antalya	6	Gaziantep	1
Artvin	4	Çanakkale	1
Bolu	4	Trabzon	1
Düzce	2	Hatay	1
Kapadokya- Nevşehir	1	Northern Saroz	1
Kırklareli	3	Karadağ	1
Afyonkarahisar	2	Tekirdağ	1
Niğde	2	Marmara Region	1
Konya	2	Isparta	1
Kayseri	2	Kaçkar-Rize	1
Kastamonu	1	Edirne	1
Bartın	1	Trabzon	1
K.Maraş	1	Aydın	1
Muğla	1	Çakıt region- Adana	1

When the ecotourism theses carried out by regions and cities are analyzed, it is seen that Eastern Black Sea and Thrace Regions have the highest scores. These analyzes show that number of scientific papers on ecotourism have been increasing in Turkey.

CONCLUSIONS

Ecotourism is a developing phenomenon in Turkey. As people are getting more interested in visiting new places and desiring to have new experiences, trips to natural areas and the number of ecotourists have been increasing. This study shows that scientific awareness towards sustainability, sustainable development and ecotourism has gained more importance that the number of qualified ecotourism studies in Turkey have increased in recent years. Areas having high ecotourism potential were designated as ecotourism areas in 2023 Tourism Strategy of Turkey by The Ministry of Culture and Tourism and some efforts were initiated in order to preserve these areas and achieve the sustainability of tourism. There are efforts to preserve natural beauties, develop cultural awareness, protect resources from possible destruction and give more importance on the carrying capacity in the fragile areas. Unconscious tourists and unplanned ecotourism activities will damage the biodiversity and spoil the natural and cultural resources. Besides noncontrolled ecotourism activities have negative effects on the nature, natural life, local people and local/national economy. These negative effects can be listed as follows (Erdoğan and Yağcı, 2011);

- Environmental degradation,
- Possible negative social and cultural effects,
- New job opportunities for local people that have very low effect on their financial well-being,
- Seasonal jobs affects the traditional lifestyles and production methods of the local people . Destruction or marginalization of local economy with intense ecotourism activities and transformation into a seasonal economy as the local people focuses on being workers, making handcrafts, selling local products etc.

When the scientific studies on ecotourism are analyzed by year, it is seen that the highest number of studies were conducted in 2016. Therefore, it can be concluded that the academic incentive grant given by the Council of Higher Education in 2015-2016 period, made a significant contribution to scientific studies. Ecotourism studies mostly focused on sustainable usage of the resources, overuse of the resources, decreasing the amount of waste, preserving the biodiversity, supporting local economies and local communities, environmental education, collaboration among tourism stakeholders, and increasing public awareness.

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