

AN INNOVATIVE CULTURE ROUTE PROPOSAL IN DESTINATION MANAGEMENT OF CAPPADOCIA REGION

Proposta de Rota Cultural Inovadora na Gestão de Destino da
Região da Capadócia

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ABSTRACT

Cappadocia Region, which has a rich and authentic motif in its historical and cultural context, hosts thousands of visitors every year. This mystical destination, which allows tourism activities throughout the year with its values, is very attractive in terms of geomorphology, belief, culture, archaeology and other alternative tourism types. In terms of introducing the existing and/or unearthed cultural values of this region, which currently hosts countless tourists, and at the same time gaining an innovative and different perspective to cultural tourism, research has been carried out on the proposal of an integrated or new route covering the Gölağaç district of Aksaray, which is thought to be relatively overshadowed. In the light of the information obtained from the answers given to three open-ended questions directed to the participants about including Gölağaç in cultural tourism routes and/or developing an innovative route; it has been observed that there is a common opinion that the awareness and recognition levels of destinations with high cultural and heritage attractiveness can be increased through tourism. As well as being a remedial way for over tourism; this research, which serves the purposes of increasing destination loyalty by increasing factors of attractiveness, updating and developing innovative cultural routes and tourism activities, and keeping other heritage elements alive in the region, is considered to be a collective study focusing on many disciplines such as archeology, history, art and tourism.

KEYWORDS

Tourism; Destination Management; Culture Route; World Heritage; Cappadocia.

RESUMO

A Região da Capadócia, que tem em seu contexto histórico e cultural rico e autêntico, motivações para visitação, recebe milhares de visitantes a cada ano. Este destino com seus valores místicos permite atividades turísticas ao longo do ano, é muito atraente em termos de geomorfologia, crenças, cultura, arqueologia, entre outras ofertas de turismo alternativo. Em termos de introdução aos valores culturais ali existentes e/ou desenterrados nesta região, que atualmente recebe inúmeros turistas e, ao mesmo tempo, ganha uma perspectiva inovadora e diferente do turismo cultural, foi realizada uma pesquisa sobre a proposta de uma rota integrada ou nova que abrange o distrito de Aksaray Gölağaç, que se pensa estar relativamente ofuscado. À luz das informações obtidas das respostas dadas a três perguntas abertas dirigidas aos participantes sobre a inclusão do Gölağaç em rotas de turismo cultural e/ou o desenvolvimento

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de uma rota inovadora, observou-se existir uma opinião comum de que os níveis de conscientização e reconhecimento de destinos com alta atratividade cultural e patrimonial pode ser ampliados através do turismo. Além de ser uma forma de remédio para o turismo excessivo; esta pesquisa, que serve aos propósitos de aumentar a fidelidade do destino através do aumento dos fatores de atratividade, atualizando e desenvolvendo rotas culturais e atividades turísticas inovadoras, e mantendo outros elementos patrimoniais vivos na região, é considerada um estudo coletivo com foco em muitas disciplinas, tais como arqueologia, história, arte e turismo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Turismo; Gestão de Destinos, Rota da Cultura, Patrimônio Mundial, Capadócia.

INTRODUCTION

Cultural heritage, which is a normal and original output of the cultural process, is a whole of wealth that makes sense not only for the local geography the societies are in but for the whole world humanity (Öksüz Kuşçuoğlu & Taş, 2017; Günden, 2021) together with the material and spiritual elements that reflect the lifestyles and societies' values (Avcı & Memişoğlu, 2016). On the other hand, the cultural heritage elements are considered as a common resource of the society, and in this context, the elements reflecting the cultures are also seen as witnesses representing the times they belong to (Köroğlu et al., 2018). Therefore, it can be said that the geographies rich in heritage elements have important destinations and routes in the context of cultural tourism. So, impulses such as learning, knowing, seeing and experiencing the values such as life styles, customs and traditions, beliefs and rituals, original habits of other civilizations apart from their own culture are the trends that serve cultural tourism (Usta, 2001).

In countries with rich diversity in terms of cultural heritage elements, in line with tourism-oriented activities, forming of cultural heritage-oriented travel routes will enable the awareness and promotion of cultures and ultimately the heritage elements (Halaç & Benzer, 2019). Anatolia, a peninsula at the southwestern tip of the Asian continent, is seen as a unique geography in terms of both its cultural diversity and heritage richness. Anatolian lands, which contain many cultural layers, have gained a valuable place in world tourism with unique values. As a matter of fact, the protection and survival of these values bring about the same importance. Because the preservation of natural and cultural heritage, which is a phenomenon that conveys the common past to the individuals of a society, strengthens the feelings of solidarity and unity, and ensures the correct establishment of the future with the whole of values accumulated throughout history (Ahunbay, 1999; Güneş & Alagöz, 2018), is also seen as a vital factor for

cultural tourism (Numanoğlu et al., 2014). So, Aslan and Ardemagni (2006) have also emphasized that cultural heritage is unique and unchangeable, adding meaning and contribution to the values of societies. As cultural heritage, which is seen as a phenomenon representing the identity of civilizations, is a tool for developing policies for peace and mutual understanding by revealing the diversity of individuals and ultimately a source of economic development, it should be protected and sustainable at the same time. In this context, it is thought that cultural routes to be developed in line with the necessary strategies and action plans without harming the original texture of cultural destinations and the promotion of authentic and ethnic elements will bring spiritual gains along with material acquisitions.

Within the study; the topics that stand out in destination management such as current focal points of cultural tourism, keeping the cultural heritage alive, introducing other heritage elements in the close vicinity to individuals who have already visited destinations with high attractiveness, bringing the relevant region in tourism, offering different route options to individuals visiting the Cappadocia Region more than once, and keeping the intention of re-visiting dynamic are discussed. On the other hand, the integration of ethnic regions which have been able to preserve their naturalness into cultural routes has been emphasized as an alternative to destinations that have been used more as a showcase material over time and therefore that might lose their authentic spirit.

The aim of this study is to contribute to the development of cultural tourism and to establish an interactive connection with the active routes in the vicinity of Gülağaç region, which is rich in cultural and natural heritage resources. In addition, the protection of the natural and cultural environment in the region, the preparation of a ground for ecotourism activities and the realization of investments in this direction emphasize the importance of the research. Considering that all cultural and natural elements that have existed on earth are the common heritage of humanity; it can also be said that the study bears a responsibility that serves the world heritage.

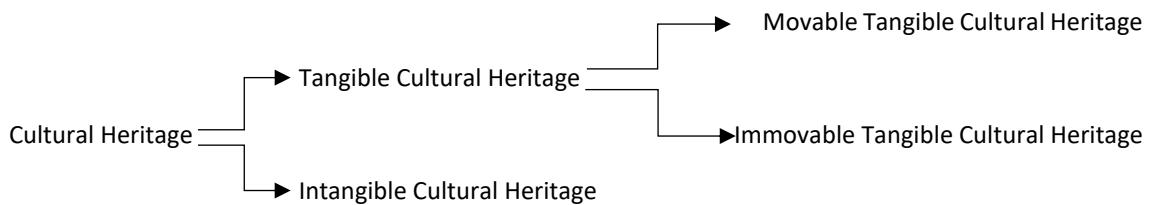
Within the scope of the research, the case study research (Yin, 2009), which focuses on the investigation of real life, a situation in the current context or environment, has been used. In this context, face-to-face interviews were conducted with 24 participants using the snowball sampling method.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The concept of culture, which includes the specific actions and values of the society, has been expressed as a way of life in its simplest and most concise definition (Hebdige, 2004). Coming from differences in societies; there are a number of features that reveal cultural norms, values, structures and patterns. It is emphasized that the value mentioned here consists of rules, attitudes and feelings accepted by individuals belonging to a culture (Hofstede, 1982) and that these elements have an important place in consumer behavior.

With the 1970s, the phenomenon of cultural heritage and protection of cultural heritage began to be evaluated within the lifestyles of societies. In 1980 and the following years, societies developed their perspectives in the context of protection and restoration for all material and spiritual values. Along with the subject of protection, the concept of sustainability was accepted for the first time in terms of social, environmental and economic aspects (Güner, 2015). Cultural heritage in contracts, documents or laws and directives used at the national level by UNESCO and other international institutions that have a say in the field has been accepted in two categories as "Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage" and has gained a general acceptance in the international arena as seen in Figure 1 (Ahmad, 2006):

Figure 1. Cultural Heritage Categories



While tangible cultural heritage consists of works that contain all kinds of material structures and goods made by human hands, preserved and considered as important to be transferred to future generations (Can, 2009); intangible cultural heritage, on the other hand, consists of spiritual values, beliefs, traditions and rituals, verbal and lyrical elements belonging to a society (Ahmad, 2006; Anmaç, 2013). Tangible cultural heritage, which consists of tangible and meaningful elements that carry the information about the historical past to the present, is classified in two categories as movable and immovable cultural assets (Yeşilbursa, 2011).

The concept of the route, which has become functional day by day in the promotion of cultural and natural heritage and is still being studied by relatively international organizations, is defined as <cultural route>. A cultural route can be defined as a regional or national scale transportation corridor that has been created and actually used in a certain period of history, that carries

cultural and/or natural heritage elements on it and gains its importance thanks to this heritage, and that can be developed for purposes such as rural development and tourism development (Çekül, 2015; Putrick & Perinotto, 2022). The idea of cultural routes as a new concept or category does not conflict or overlap with other types of cultural assets [monuments, cities, cultural landscapes, industrial heritage, etc.] that can be found within the scope of a route. Route is a system that will increase the importance of all these assets (ICOMOS, 2008). The most basic components on the cultural routes can be summarized as tangible and intangible cultural heritage elements and natural formations. When looking at the subject from a more comprehensive perspective, the headings that vary depending on the main theme and function of the cultural route can be classified as follows (Çekül, 2015);

- **Historic Cities:** Urban areas that stand out with their traditional urban textures and unique urban identities,
- **Rural Settlements:** Villages and towns, which are the production centers of the rural region and represent traditional life,
- **Traditional Life:** Geographic-specific life elements such as food, music, belief, language, handicrafts,
- **Ancient Settlements:** Archaeological sites that can be perceived as a city, sanctuary, etc.
- **Singular Historical Buildings:** Single buildings such as churches, castles, bridges, mills, industrial buildings in rural areas or in the city,
- **Natural Environment:** Natural formations such as valleys, canyons, summits, shores, lakes,
- **Wildlife:** Special flora and fauna areas.

In line with the ancient settlements, which have an important place in the components of cultural routes, archaeological sites can also be included in the routes that are the subject with an innovative perspective. This innovative approach, realized under the name of various activities and practices, is seen as a valuable vision in terms of both diversifying tourism and keeping cultural history alive. In this direction, experimental archeology studies are a narrative method that increases its importance day by day and are the center of attention within the scope of cultural tourism. Experimental archeology, developing after the 1960s in order to interpret and make sense of the archaeological data obtained from scientific excavations and

research studies (Duru, 2014) and to bring a visible dimension to the experiences of cultures, aims to give concrete answers to the questions raised based on the traces of the past (Renfrew & Bahn, 2013; Türkoğlu, 2019). In this context, it is thought that the animation of the data obtained from the researches through similar conditions is a factor that ensures the correct interpretation of the information. Experimental archeology, developed to experience any phenomenon or event related to the past by testing, applying, reproducing and/or constructing (Mathieu, 2002), should be carried out in accordance with the understanding of the period it reflects (Duru, 2014). In his work *Archeology by Experiment*; John Coles (1973), who is seen as a pioneer for the field, mentions that the concept of experimental archeology covers “all experiments used to clarify a subject in the field of archeology”. The doctrinal and semantic dimensions of history can be presented to individuals with experimental archeology applications, which not only aim to shed light on the mystery of the past, but also allow the establishment of self-consciousness regarding the protection of cultural heritage (Andreotti, 1993). As an example, in archaeoparks containing archaeological findings, where there are collective experimental and educational animations; the lifestyles of past cultures can be exhibited in their natural environments that are assumed to be relatively organic rather than a static display area in museums (Eres & Özdoğan, 2016; Keskin & Tanaç Zeren, 2018).

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GÜLAĞAÇ AND ITS TOURISM POTENTIAL

Within the provincial borders of Aksaray, Gülağaç is located in the central part of the Central Anatolia Region, between the borders of Niğde and Nevşehir provinces in the east, Güzelyurt in the south and Aksaray center in the west. It is stated that it is important to evaluate the existing heritage elements of Gülağaç, which is thought to have an important tourism potential with its natural beauties and rich cultural history, and to bring them into tourism (Europa Danışmanlık, 2020). Gülağaç's location, in the middle of Anatolia and at an important crossroads of the historical Silk Road, emphasizes the historical importance of the region more, and the presence of underground cities, ruins and churches in the region also strengthens the tourism potential. On the other hand, there are bird watching opportunities in the pond within the borders of the region (Aytüre, 2013).

In the light of the archaeological findings and information carried out within the borders of Gülağaç, the archaeological findings obtained from the excavations carried out in the villages of Gölpinar, Demirci and Saratlı as well as Kızılkaya (Aşıklı Höyük) and Çatalsu (Güvercinkaya)

Mound) villages show that the history of Gülağaç dates back to the year 10.000, BC., and that settled human communities have existed since the year 8.000, BC. (Çaylı & Demirtaş, 2016; Europa Danışmanlık, 2020). It is stated that Saratlı and St. Mercurius Underground Cities in Gülağaç, whose rich historical and cultural structure is supported by scientific research, host visitors to an increasing extent but it is thought that sufficient saturation has not been reached (Kılıç & Kılıç, 2021). At the same time, Aşıklı Höyük Experimental Houses and Güvercinkayası Experimental Houses located within the borders of Gülağaç are other important centers that open their doors to cultural tourists. These cultural spots not only take their visitors thousands of years from today, but also reveal the diversity of life, nutrition and culture in that period in a concrete way.

Gülağaç region is seen as a destination with a low socio-economic development level and experiencing development problems within its borders (Europa Danışmanlık, 2020). On the other hand, although it has an important tourism potential with its natural, cultural and historical values as discussed in detail, it is seen as an important and even serious problem that these gains cannot be put into action with a sustainable tourism planning or integration and are left to disappear over time. Considering the cultural routes up to the Ihlara Valley of the tourists who are currently visiting the Cappadocia Region, it is thought that the inclusion of the mentioned important historical points in the routes related to an innovative tourism understanding will first provide positive returns in the national context and finally in the universal context.

CULTURAL TOURISM RANGE IN CAPPADOCIA

Cappadocia Region, which has hosted many civilizations with its historical and cultural values, is seen as one of the destinations that increase Turkey's share in world tourism within the context of faith, culture and landform tourism (Arslan & Şıkoğlu, 2017; Tosun, Dedeoğlu, Çalışkan, & Karakuş, 2021). Göreme National Park and Cappadocia, accepted as universal values due to its heritage elements and included in the Unesco World Heritage List in 1985, along with Zelve, Mustafapaşa and Açıksaray Ruins, Ürgüp, Çavuşin, Dark Castle Church, El Nazar Church, Gülşehir St. Jean Church, Nevşehir, Hacıbektaş Veli Museum, Atatürk House, Kaymaklı, Derinkuyu and Özkonak represent the main cultural and belief centers and receive a significant number of visitors every year in this context (Şamiloğlu & Serin Karacaer, 2011; Karakuş, Onat, & Güneren, 2020). The fact that Cappadocia, which has a high level of attractiveness in terms of geology and

geomorphology, is suitable and open to tourism activities in four seasons is seen as one of the advantageous elements of the region.

When the tour information on the web pages about Cappadocia is examined, it has been observed that the region tours are categorized as "red, green and blue". The details of the tours categorized in this context are given below:

- **Red Tour:** Uçhisar Castle, Göreme Open Air Museum, Love Valley, Avanos and Pottery Making, Ürgüp Üç Güzeller (3 Fairy Chimneys), Paşabağı Valley, Devrent Valley, Carpet Weaving Workshop.
- **Green Tour:** Göreme Panorama/Landscape Point, Stone Workshop, Kaymaklı and Derinkuyu Underground Cities, Ihlara Valley, Yaprakhisar Town, Belisırma Village, Selime Monastery, Güvercinlik Valley, Onyx Workshops, Narlıgöl Crater Lake.
- **Blue Tour:** Mustafapaşa Town, Keşlik Monastery, Soğanlı Valley, Şahinefendi, Taşkınpaşa Madrasa, Sobessos Ancient City, Ortahisar Castle, Kaymaklı Underground City.

AN INNOVATIVE PERSPECTIVE TO THE CULTURAL TOURISM

With the rapid development of communication and transportation possibilities, the rapid spread of information and the strong interaction of the media have created an urge to see other experiences and habits in the world in place. Individuals' curiosity about material and spiritual phenomena that have lived and/or continue to live outside of their own culture and values, and their access to these facts have enabled cultural tourism to gain momentum and thus the number of cultural tourists to increase day by day (Günden, 2021).

Today, with the rapid developments in technology-based communication and transportation vehicles, people's tendency to see, recognize and learn different cultures on site has increased and this ordinary flow has given birth to cultural tourism (Nuryanti, 1996). Cultural tourism, which is developing as one of the alternative tourism types, increases its importance day by day with the changing travel reasons and needs. The desire of individuals to visit unique, different and ethnic places has led to an increase in trips to cultural areas and regions. Today, cultural tourism has increased its importance and preference in the sector as cultural tourists tend to explore culturally and to recognize, learn and experience the identity of the geography they are in during their travels (Wang et al., 2006).

The phenomenon of culture is a discipline that serves both thousands of years of history and today's current conditions. With the archeology studies, the mystical texture of history is getting brighter day by day; new strategy and route studies are carried out for the heritage elements that have come to light and/or the elements that are already waiting and overshadowed. Considering that more and more innovative thinking and planning studies are needed in the current tourism field; it is thought that any innovative approach that includes cultural assets that will shed light on the cultural histories of societies will first provide regional, then national, and finally universal benefits.

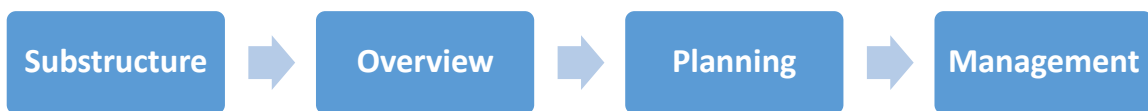
AN INNOVATIVE CULTURE ROUTE FOR THE CAPPADOCIA REGION

Within the scope of this study, the integration of the heritage elements in the Gülağaç district, which is approximately 20 km away from the Ihlara Valley, which is on the route under the name of green tour, with the relevant cultural route as a visit center has been examined and predicted. Thus, it has been aimed to introduce the archaeological experimental houses and underground cities, as well as other heritage elements in this region to the cultural tourists visiting the region, and to present an innovative perspective on the sustainability of cultural heritage assets with the value awareness obtained. With this and similar route proposals, it is thought that a solution to the current over-tourism problems, new routes to cultural tourism and an awareness about the preservation and survival of heritage assets can be brought to life and thus the field conditions can be improved.

Method - In line with the aforementioned reasons, the aim of the research is to include the Gülağaç district of Aksaray province, which is located in the Cappadocia Region and hosts rich heritage elements, to the existing cultural routes and/or to analyze the creation of a new route. For this purpose, 'Gülağaç region has a rich cultural and natural heritage that supports the inclusion of an already existing and frequently used active route, and integrating these innovative routes into national cultural routes. The creation of new cultural routes contributes to the sustainable development of the region through cultural tourism', statement constitutes the hypothesis of the study. By considering the cultural routes planning guide of the Foundation for the Protection and Promotion of Environment and Cultural Heritage (ÇEKÜL, 2015), the sustainable tourism criteria of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC, 2022) and the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe (CoE, 2022), to support this hypothesis; in line with the opinions and suggestions of three academicians who are experts

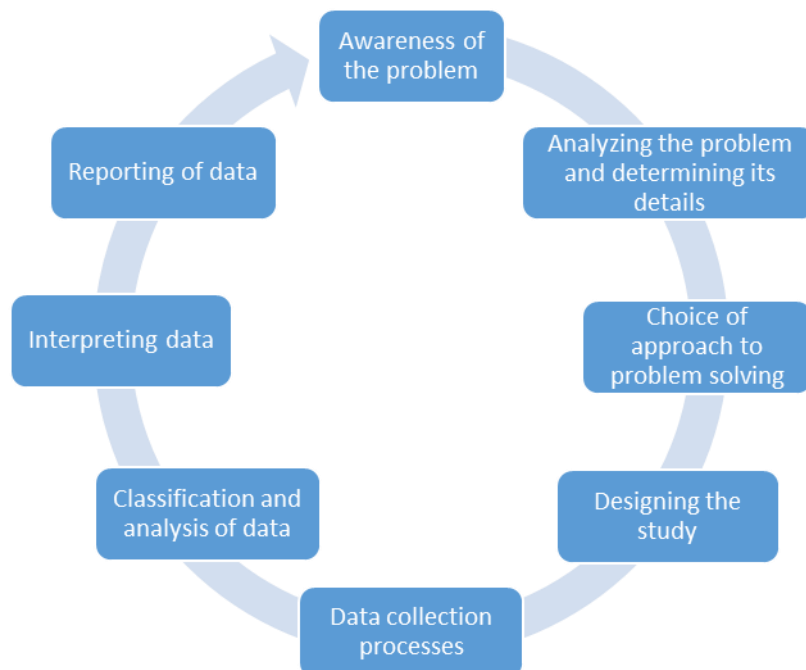
in their fields, three open-ended interview questions supported by the literature were prepared in order to elaborate the relevant proposal and to form a basis. In addition, Çekül's 'Cultural Route Planning Model' was discussed. This model comes true by following the steps of *substructure* - consisting of process preparation and existing equipment, *overview* - including research and evaluation stages, *planning* - focusing on regional route setup, and *management* - including the realization and promotion processes. However, the content of the subject model may vary depending on the dimensions of the researched area or theme, the density of heritage elements and local dynamics (Çekül, 2015).

Figure 2. Cultural Route Planning Model Application Process (Çekül, 2015)



Cresswell (2002) states that a positivist or single point of view can lead scientists to misconception in the explanation of any phenomenon, but more specific measurements can be made with multiple perspectives. On the other hand, in line with the positivist understanding, human is defined as a meaningful whole consisting of certain parts. It is assumed that a clear knowledge of the whole can be obtained by examining these parts (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

Figure 3. Qualitative Research Process



Source: Cresswell (2002) and Baltacı (2019).

Qualitative research approach, which is also described as *field research* in the literature (Baltacı, 2017) because it examines a subject or situation in depth in a certain social environment, is expressed as a method that inquires about the problem it examines, interprets and tries to understand the form of the problem in its natural environment (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Klenke, 2016). One of the aims of qualitative research is to solve certain problems and facilitate the recognition of new problem situations (Mallat, 2007). This cycle, which is also visually indicated in the Figure 3, continues throughout the research process.

This study has been advanced in the direction of case study research, which is one of the qualitative research methods. The concept of purpose is of great importance in conducting a case study. In a qualitative case study designed to reveal a unique and original situation, the situation needs to be described. Thus, revealing an in-depth understanding of the situation is expressed as a distinctive feature of an effective qualitative case study. In order to achieve this, it is emphasized that the researcher must classify many types of data, from interviews to observations, from documents to visual and auditory data (Cresswell, 2013). On the other hand, case studies usually end with the results of the researcher's general meaning from the situation. This situation, which is called 'inferences' by Stake (1995), is described as building 'models' or 'explanations' by Yin (2009). In case study research, data collection can be comprehensive and data collection tools such as observation, interview, documents, audio-visual materials can be used (Cresswell, 2013).

In this direction, an in-depth data collection method with snowball sampling method was used within the scope of the research. The participants in the sample consisted of individuals working in the Cappadocia Region and performing the professions of archeology, professional tourist guiding, academic, travel agency, museology, tourism management. The snowball sampling method starts with the selection of a participant subject who is deemed suitable for the process review and management qualifications within the scope of a research and continues with the referral of that individual to another individual who has knowledge of the subject, after data is obtained from the first contacted individual. With a metaphoric characterization, the sample limits are enlarged with the snowball effect. When sufficient data saturation is achieved, the process is terminated. This sampling method is seen as an effective way to reach individuals with the necessary qualifications in research (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005; Yolal, 2016). The data of the

face-to-face interviews with 24 participants between 01.03.2022 and 12.03.2022 about the questions below were classified as written documents:

1. What are your comments about the existing cultural routes in the Cappadocia Region. Do you think that other heritage elements of the region are adequately promoted?
2. What are your thoughts on the proposal to include the Aksaray province Gülağaç district, which hosts many heritage elements, especially the experimental houses of the Aşıklıhöyük and Güvercinkayası Excavations, and the Saratlı and Saint Mercurius Underground Cities, into the Cappadocia tour routes where the Ihlara Valley tour is located?
3. Is there anything else you would like to add on the subject?

In the context of predicting the raw data by examining the research topic, all data within this research, in which the qualitative data method, which aims to reach a holistic conclusion by completing an analytical process, was adopted, was subjected to descriptive analysis. On the other hand, with descriptive analysis, the opinions of the participants can be revealed in the most obvious and transparent way; different and original opinions of different participants in response to the same question can be given openly. Although this method is described as complex and difficult, it is also emphasized that it provides a collective research opportunity by obtaining hard-to-reach data (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). Occupational/social status groups and numbering codes were given to the participants and based on these definitions, their opinions were classified.

Then, the descriptive themes obtained from the answers given by the participants were classified in Table 2 under the categories of *substructure*, *overview*, *planning* and *management* in the Cultural Route Planning Model. The obtained expressions of the participants were classified under each category, which was taken as a reference from the headings in the Cultural Route Planning Model, as a result of the content analysis. For the reliability of the data, Miles and Huberman's (1994) 'Consensus and Disagreement Formula' ($[\text{Agreement percentage} = \frac{\text{Number of codes coded and agreed upon}}{\text{Number of codes with consensus} + \text{Number of codes without consensus}}] \times 100$) was used. With this method, which is also called inter-rater reliability, analyzes were carried out separately, and the obtained themes were classified under conceptual categories. In the ongoing process, the opinions of three experts in the field of tourism and cultural heritage were sought and the determined themes were asked to be matched under the

categories of substructure, overview, planning and management. Consensus was fully achieved in 52 of the 57 themes obtained from the statements of the participants, and disagreement was observed in 5 of them. In qualitative studies, reliability is accepted when the consistency between the researcher's evaluations is 90% or more (Saban, 2008). Accordingly, the reliability of the study was calculated as $((52 / (52+5) \times 100) 91,22\%$ according to the relevant formula and the research was accepted as reliable.

FINDINGS

Information on the occupation and/or social status of the participants included in the study is listed in the table below.

Table 1. Occupational/Social Status Information of the Participants

P	Occupation/Social Status	P	Occupation/Social Status
P1	Archaeologist, Academician	P13	Travel Agency Manager / Keeper (Aksaray)
P2	Archaeologist	P14	Tourism Specialist, Academician
P3	Archaeologist	P15	Tourism Specialist, Academician
P4	Art Historian	P16	Resident Individual (Gülağaç)
P5	Cultural Heritage Specialist	P17	Resident Individual (Gülağaç)
P6	Tourist Guide	P18	Resident Individual (Gülağaç)
P7	Tourist Guide	P19	Domestic Tourist
P8	Tourist Guide	P20	Domestic Tourist
P9	Tourist Guide	P21	Foreign Tourist
P10	Tourist Guide	P22	Foreign Tourist, Archaeologist
P11	Tourism Manager / Keeper	P23	Domestic Tourist (Adıyaman)
P12	Travel Agency Manager/Keeper (Nevşehir)	P24	Tourism Manager / Keeper (Adıyaman)

Before the interview, the participants included in the research were given brief and explanatory information about the experimental houses and underground cities in the Gülağaç district of Aksaray province. As the origin participant of the study, the archaeologist and academician (P1) who has worked in excavation research operating within the borders of Gülağaç was determined. As a result of the usual flow of the snowball sampling method, the data obtained from a participant who is a tourism manager/keeper in Adıyaman (P24) and another participant who has participated in the Nemrut Tour (P23) led by this participant were also included in the study.

As a result of the interview with the individual coded P1, who is an archaeologist/academician and has worked in a scientific excavation research operating within the borders of Gölağaç; it has been learned that the cultural heritage elements of Gölağaç are overshadowed by other tourism centers in the region, but the historical and archaeological texture here can contribute heavily to the cultural tourism activities of the region and the world. On the other hand, emphasizing that Gölağaç contains authentic elements both in terms of architecture and local life and that this situation can be the center of attention for cultural tourists, the participant also stated that the supports of tourism and travel agencies and public authorities are important in this sense. It has been observed that there are similar echoes as a result of the interviews with the archaeologist and art historian participants working in the region, along with the participant's line of guidance.

“Although Cappadocia is a very rich region in terms of history and culture, many tourists generally visit places that are known and recognized by everyone. However, there are many more centers that will attract the attention of these people and contribute historically. I think the task of promoting and showing these places is incumbent on the tourism authorities. If it is possible to reach the Ihlara Valley, I think that these important places in the vicinity should be included in cultural tours” (P2, Archaeologist).

“I know the Gölağaç region well, as I am in charge of the excavations here. Also, I am not a stranger to the tourism industry. If we are going to talk about cultural tourism, Gölağaç is a very valuable and important place in this sense with its values. In particular, archaeological experimental houses that take today's people on a journey beyond thousands of years are places that not only cultural tourists but also all world citizens should visit with a high perception and consciousness...” (P3, Archaeologist)

“For thousands of years, people have settled in the Cappadocia Region and have left countless cultural and artistic values to our day. It is our duty to protect these values, to keep them alive and to transfer them to the future. For this reason, important centers such as Gölağaç should be protected and promoted with a holistic approach without discrimination” (P4, Art Historian)

When the data obtained from the research questions directed to the tourist guides working in the Cappadocia Region are examined; they have stated that the visitors coming to the region evaluate the region visit within the scope of their short-term holiday planning, so time management is important.

“...guests coming to the region mostly plan their weekend vacation or short-term travel. When this is the case, visitors want to see and experience the most familiar places. Naturally, it may be necessary to manage time well here, so we offer them routes in various categories. Then they choose the appropriate one according to their own preferences. For this reason, we may not be able to present every route to them” (P7, Tourist Guide).

"...Cappadocia is not a place to be visited in a short time. It is a destination with countless cultural and natural beauties. Our guests often express this when they come here. However, since their planning from the very beginning is limited, they keep what they cannot do or see for the possibility of re-visit. One of the important issues here is the possibility of tourists visiting the region again... Therefore, the biggest task here is incumbent on the stakeholders of the region, together with us. Cappadocia is really a place worth visiting not once but many times. Unfortunately, I cannot say that we have achieved this momentum" (P9, Tourist Guide).

"...I know Gölağaç and its values. It is truly one of the most important places to be seen in the region. I do not think that even many citizens living in the region have seen or known about this place before the tourists. However, qualified cultural tourists also want to see untouched and not-so-known places, so to speak. Gölağaç is actually such a route. It would certainly be very beneficial for the region if the agencies made an arrangement in this sense" (P8, Tourist Guide).

In line with the information obtained from the participant coded P9, who performs the task of tourist guide at the national level, the participant coded P24 was reached to get information about the Nemrut Tours carried out in the Kahta district of Adıyaman, which is stated to be an exemplary destination for the focus of the study. As a result of the interview with the participant, it has been learned that the tour route including the destinations of Arsemia, Selçuk Bridge, Old Kahta Castle, Cendere Bridge and Karakuş Hill is actively preferred within the scope of Nemrut Tours.

"We carry out our Nemrut Tours by including other important historical places in the surrounding region. Of course, we do not have such an obligation for our guests who only want to do the Nemrut Tour, but those who come here generally want to see other historical places. We used to offer this to those who came to see Nemrut, but now; thanks to social media and the internet, they come by hearing or seeing the names of these places and requesting to visit them. Our region and Anatolia have a very rich heritage. Our duty and purpose are to protect these precious places which are not very well known by introducing them first to our own people and then to all citizens of the world. Cappadocia Region is also a very important place in terms of cultural tourism. All the values of this region should be introduced and toured" (P24, Tourism Manager / Keeper).

When the statements of the participant coded P23, who was reached through the guidance and suggestions of the participant coded P24 and who had experienced the Nemrut Tour, were examined, it has been determined that she is pleased with the visit to other cultural destinations in the close vicinity with Nemrut and it is also remarkable that she has described this experience as 'satisfied'.

"Nemrut is a magnificent and fascinating place, as many people know. I honestly didn't know about the other places around. By choosing the long tour program, we had the chance to see and learn about these beautiful places. Everyone who comes to Nemrut should visit Arsemia, Selçuk Bridge, Old Kahta Castle, Cendere Bridge and Karakuş Hill. In this way, we have experienced a more

saturated and quality trip. Of course, travel arrangements should be made in this way in other touristic places. Because only in this way, we can have the chance to visit and learn about places that have never been seen or heard of” (P23, Domestic Tourist).

As a result of interviews with local individuals who were born and reside in Gülağaç and have a high level of cultural knowledge about the region; it has been concluded that the Gülağaç is not sufficiently known but it hosts numerous elements in the cultural and touristic context. From this point of view, it can be said that the local people in the region have awareness of the elements they have. The statements of Gülağaç residents that they expect support as well as being open to the recognition, learning and visit of some of their assets that are still alive have been interpreted as their being familiar with the tourism activities in the Cappadocia Region.

“The history of Gülağaç dates back thousands of years. Both male and female locals living in the villages participate in the excavations carried out here every year as workers. Thus, the historical past of the region dating back thousands of years is known by everyone. As local people, we would love to protect and preserve these valuable assets that we have” (P17, Resident Individual/Gülağaç)

“... there is no one who does not know how precious this geography we live in is. But unfortunately, tourists coming to the Cappadocia Region often come only to visit Ihlara. I think that tourism professionals and authorities should promote this region as well” (P16, Resident Individual/Gülağaç).

“...I have been working as a worker in an excavation here for about fifteen years. There are too many people in the village who work in excavations like me. For this reason, those living in Gülağaç are not strangers to excavations. Tourists who come to Ihlara, Salt Lake should also see these lands” (P18, Resident Individual/Gülağaç).

As a result of the interviews made with a travel agency manager coded P13 operating within the borders of Aksaray Province and the domestic tourists he directed; it has been emphasized that the tourism potential in Gülağaç is not sufficiently known and/or overshadowed by travel agencies. As a result of the comments of another travel agency manager from Nevşehir, domestic and foreign tourists who have visited the destinations in Gülağaç, the subject of this study; the approaches that this region has an untouched texture and that it is a cultural center worth seeing have been included.

“...in fact, I was surprised that Gülağaç, which I visited by chance, is a very unknown place. I think there are many more unknown but special places in our country. Unfortunately, people are always looking for the most familiar and labeled (popular) places. However, it is very clear that this district has a unique texture, some things still remain very natural here. On the other hand, it is a good thing that this naturalness continues” (P19, Domestic Tourist).

"... this is a place that has really managed to preserve its naturalness. Because people haven't discovered this place yet. Tourist density is always in places such as Göreme, Ürgüp, Avanos and Ihlara. I think tourists find these places more attractive. In my opinion, Gölağaç stays in the shadow of these places. Anyone who is interested in history and cultural heritage should definitely visit this region, but I still do not think that most tourists will come to visit this place" (P20, Domestic Tourist).

"...actually, I have visited the area because I am an archaeologist. How would I be aware of such a beautiful cultural area if I weren't doing this job, if there weren't someone who brought me here or if I didn't want to research and see it myself?" (P22, Foreign Tourist/Archaeologist).

"...as I am from Aksaray on my mother's side, I know Gölağaç and the archaeological excavations there. Since I am a travel agency manager and have some interest, I have visited the archaeological sites there and I have been very impressed with the animated (experimental) houses. I think every tourist who goes there is impressed by these houses. Think about that you are going on a journey to thousands of years ago and you are witnessing the life back then! This is something really worth experiencing" (P12, Travel Agency Manager/Nevşehir).

The comments and opinions of academicians and field experts who have made significant contributions to the tourism discipline with their studies have been included in the research findings, with the thought of an important share in the focus. In this context, interviews were held with academicians and experts in the fields of cultural heritage and tourism. In the data obtained; it has been emphasized that the Cappadocia Region, which includes Gölağaç, has a great place in world tourism but the evaluation strategies and planning of this place are insufficient in general. Although there are issues highlighted by scientific research in this context; science and field experts have stated that it is important to move the process out of the theoretical framework and on to the application steps. Tourism and travel agency managers/keepers are also aware of the development paths in this process; however, it has been thought that they take care of the supply/demand situations in the sector during the implementation phase.

"...We know that there are countless places in the Cappadocia Region that are not yet known or their value has not been noticed. However, we can say that the market in the sector is determined by the demands of the tourists. Anyone who has the opportunity to come here only once naturally wants to see the most known and famous places. Of course, the quality of the tourist coming here is also very important in this case" (P11, Tourism Manager/Keeper).

"... we, as science experts, are able to present current situation analyzes with academic research in the tourism discipline. In this way, we can address current problems and solutions and offer suggestions. However, the important criterion here is the implementation of the strategies and plans put forward... Therefore, without breaking the improvement and development chain of which we are a part; it seems possible to preserve the cultural heritage and indirectly contribute positively

to the development of the local and then the country with the fulfillment of the responsibility of each stakeholder” (P14 and P15; Tourism Specialists, Academicians)

“...I don't find it right to appraise cultural heritage elements according to touristic product potential. All cultural assets should be protected and kept alive with the same approach. While developing existing and new cultural routes; damages to heritage assets as a result of intensive visits should also be taken into account. This approach can also be achieved with high perception and consciousness. Therefore, a protectionist and sustainable approach should be taken to cultural elements rather than consumption-oriented” (P5, Cultural Heritage Specialist)

Table 2. Categorical Classification of Themes Obtained from Participant Statements

	Substructure	Overview	Planning	Management
P1	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
P2	✓		✓✓✓	✓✓✓
P3	✓✓✓	✓✓		✓✓✓
P4				✓✓✓
P5		✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
P6	✓✓✓			✓✓✓
P7			✓✓✓	
P8	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓
P9			✓✓✓	✓✓✓
P10		✓✓✓		✓✓✓
P11	✓✓✓		✓✓✓	
P12	✓✓✓	✓✓✓		
P13			✓✓✓	✓✓✓
P14		✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
P15	✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
P16				✓✓✓
P17	✓✓✓		✓✓	✓✓✓
P18	✓✓✓			✓✓✓
P19	✓✓✓	✓✓✓		
P20	✓✓✓			
P21	✓✓✓		✓✓✓	✓✓✓
P22		✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
P23	✓✓✓	✓✓✓		✓✓✓
P24				✓✓✓

*Each ✓ refers to 1 field expert's match.

When the data in Table 2 are examined, it is seen that the themes are mainly concentrated in the *management* category. A balanced course is observed in the *substructure*, *overview* and *planning* categories. On the other hand, when the expressions evaluated in the *overview*

category, which includes research and evaluation processes, are examined; it is determined that the participants here are mostly individuals who are involved in research and development studies and also emphasize planning.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

When studies on historical and culturally rich geographies are examined, it is thought that one of the most basic problems is that local individuals do not know the area they live in and the past it addresses, do not know and / or value its natural and cultural characteristics. On the other hand; it is the duty and responsibility of resident individuals primarily, and of all humanity ultimately with the universal approach of <world heritage> to preserve cultural regions and tangible / intangible heritage assets with a sustainable approach without assigning a commercial role.

As a result of the obtained data, it has been clearly seen that Cappadocia Region has a very rich cultural heritage in terms of both historical and archaeological accumulation. With its different geographical structure, its mystical attraction elements make the region more attractive in the context of visiting, and in this way, it hosts thousands of visitors every year (Dedeoğlu et al., 2021; Karakuş, 2019). In addition to being an alternative to coastal tourism and an important route of cultural tourism, the fact that it is a destination open to tourism activities throughout the year increases the attractiveness of the region.

The most visited places in the Cappadocia Region, which includes Nevşehir, Kırşehir, Niğde, Aksaray and Kayseri provinces, are Uçhisar, Avanos, Göreme, Ürgüp, Derinkuyu, Kaymaklı and Ihlara. One of the destinations that hosts important heritage elements for cultural tourism and increases its importance and preferability among alternative tourism types is Gülağaç district within the borders of Aksaray province. The cultural, historical, archaeological and touristic importance of Gülağaç destination has been mentioned in this study, which has been carried out with the idea that Gülağaç, which is approximately 20 km away from Ihlara Valley, which is visited within the scope of Cappadocia Region tours, can be included in the visiting routes of tourists who have already come to the Cappadocia Region.

On the other hand, as a result of interviews involving field experts in related disciplines, it has been determined that the search for authenticity of cultural tourists have accelerated. So;

authentic elements which have lost their ethnic spirit and turned into a showcase or ornament over time have pushed the cultural tourist to seek and/or visit other natural and pure authentic attractions. In addition, it is of great importance to develop different innovative cultural routes in the context of increasing the destination loyalty of individuals who have visited the region at least once. Developing a reason for re-visit and keeping the interest and curiosity to the destination dynamic with an innovative travel approach are seen as important steps in the direction of tourism strategies and planning.

Thanks to the *substructure, overview, planning* and *management* processes included in the Cultural Route Planning Model; attention will be drawn to numerous heritage elements in the world that have not yet received sufficient value. Each process in this model was handled as a category, and the data obtained from participant statements were thematized and classified under appropriate categories. When the statements in the management group, which covers the realization and promotion process, are examined; it has been determined that cultural destinations need promotion and announcement actions. It has been observed that the majority of the participants in the research sample emphasize the managerial deficiencies, requirements and innovations. This clearly reveals the existence of the problem that serves the main purpose of a case study analysis.

When the studies carried out within the scope of over tourism problems that may occur in preferred destinations in certain periods (Eren & Bozkurt, 2020) are examined, it has been seen that trying to balance the distribution of visitors by promoting alternative destinations is among the recommended methods. Cappadocia Region is among the destinations where over tourism can be seen in terms of its heritage elements. So; natural and cultural formations, which are located in the region and welcome countless visitors especially in the context of faith tourism every year, such as iconographic murals, fairy chimneys, valleys, etc. can be exposed to the wearing effects of over tourism. With the introduction and tour of the places close to the relatively more known and demanded destinations, the accumulation of visitors at certain points will be prevented and the integration of other heritage and attractive elements into the cultural route of the region may be ensured.

Culture tourists are individuals who travel for the purpose of getting to know many cultures that are foreign to them and who aim to see, experience, learn and visit cultural values of different nations on site. These individuals carry out cultural tourism activities by watching, seeing and experiencing alternatives such as archaeological sites and museums, architectural structures, art

galleries, local music dances and entertainments, religious rituals, food cultures, and theater performances in the geographies they visit (Richards, 2001). In cultural tourism, which is a tourism alternative based on learning and experiencing the characters and cultural values of the local people in the visited region, phenomena such as interaction, participation and learning are accepted as travel motifs for individuals (Lynch et al., 2011). In the light of the aforementioned information, it is understood that the global trend of cultural tourism has increased and for this reason, studies on developing new cultural routes and/or expanding existing routes have gained importance (Bekci, 2022).

Underground cities and archaeological experimental houses in Gölağaç enable the development of an innovative approach to cultural tourism in the Cappadocia Region. And alternative experiences such as quad safari, jeep safari, balloon, horse riding, jet/gondola, valley walking (trekking), photo shooting tours that serve the tourism diversity in the region are among the elements developed and/or improved for tourism dynamics over the years. As Şeker and Unur (2022) have stated, these experience products in a destination can increase the satisfaction of visitors and their tendency to revisit. In this context, it is suggested that including of Gölağaç destination in the tour routes where the Ihlara Valley is located or a new cultural route should be developed, on the grounds that it will contribute positively to the tourism of the region and that the cultural heritage elements will be preserved. As mentioned in the findings obtained from the participants, the rich cultural accumulation of the region will be appreciated by introducing valuable destinations that are not very well known but need awareness, primarily to field experts, then to local and finally to foreign visitors.

In the literature, it is observed that researches on the development of new cultural routes and / or the promotion of authentic destinations in the focus of sustainable tourism are becoming more frequent. From the studies carried out in this context; constructing the cultural heritage with a route in bringing small settlements to tourism (Halaç & Benzer, 2019), designing a new route by considering cultural tourism as a tool of local development (Gül & Yılmaz, 2020), using cultural routes as a new approach in the context of the protection of cultural landscape values (Görmüş, 2017), the role of infrastructure systems in the creation of cultural landscapes and cultural routes, and the sustainable development of inner regions (Campolo et al., 2016), transforming historical routes into cultural routes in line with the conservation approach (Öztürk et al., 2020), connecting destinations through sustainable cultural routes (Pattanaro & Pistocchi, 2016), researching important cultural routes on the role of cultural route planning in the

preservation of cultural heritage (Karataş, 2011), examining the impact and competitiveness of European cultural routes on SMEs innovation (Khovanova-Rubicondo, 2011) can be cited among exemplary and original studies. Along with this study, it is seen that the common purpose of most of the other researches in the literature is to protect and keep the cultural heritage alive and at the same time to increase its use as a tool for tourism activities. Therefore, it is thought that every work and action carried out in this context in the world will serve the world heritage in the light of a holistic purpose.

To conclude; it has been argued that the current potentials of destinations that have been relatively overshadowed and have geographies rich in cultural heritage can be propounded with this and similar scientific studies. In this context, the importance of qualified researches in the implementation of management, strategy and action plans for bringing cultural destinations in tourism is increasing day by day. On the other hand; although the preservation, survival and sustainability of cultural heritage have been handled on a regional basis, it is considered as an undeniable fact that every cultural property that has existed on earth is a <world heritage>. The limitation of this study is that this in-depth field study covers the Gülağaç district, which is located within the borders of the Cappadocia Region, which is a valuable destination in historical, cultural, natural and geomorphological terms. For this reason, this research has been presented in the literature with the awareness and responsibility that each work done in this sense is a service of humanity to the world cultural heritage.

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