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Evaluating the Destination Attractions from the Point of Experts' View: An Application in Eskişehir

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Abstract

Tourists decide to travel based on the internal forces, but their decisions about destination choice are affected by the attractions of the destinations. In other words, destinations draw the visitors with their attractions. It is important for the destination managements to understand why tourists prefer to visit a destination. Therefore, the aim of this study is to identify relative importance of attraction criteria for Eskişehir, one of the most important destination centers located in the Central Anatolia Region in Turkey. With this aim the survey was conducted with tourism destination experts employed in universities, hotels, tourism agencies and public sector, and attraction criteria were prioritized in terms of their relative importance via Analytic Hierarchy Process, one of the mostly used Multi Criteria Decision Making (MCDM) approach. The results indicate that man-made attractions (touristic purpose) are the most important criteria. According to the importance level other criteria are listed as; natural attraction, superstructure and non-touristic purpose man-made attractions respectively. Although natural attraction and superstructure take in the second and third rank out of four, they have really similar weights. Apart from this, "parks, gardens and picnic areas" and "museum and galleries" were found as the two most important sub-criteria, respectively. Theoretical and practical implications and future research suggestions are also discussed.

Key words: *destination, attractions, multi criteria decision making, analytic hierarchy process, pull factors, eskişehir.*

Introduction

The intense competition in all industries shows itself in the tourism field as well. This competitive structure directs the destination managements striving to become more attractive in the target markets. The issue of motivation plays the key role on tourists' travelling behaviors and destination choice decisions. So it is important to be aware of the concepts of motivation for tourism demand side in order to make their destinations more attractive. However, tourists' trav-

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eling motivations are not a narrow scope that can be explained by a simple function so this issue regarded as a challenge for the tourism suppliers. In that tourists make their decisions whether to travel or not and where they travel with different motivation factors (Correia et al., 2007: p.76).

Although there are some different motivation approaches enhanced in order to explain the tourist motivations, attractions are one of the basic motivations in individuals' decisions to travel and especially in decisions about where they travel (Coltman, 1989: p. 58; Goeldner et al., 2000: p. 216; Kusen, 2010: p. 413). Attraction is one of the most important component and tourism product for the tourism system and destinations (Swarbrooke, 1995: p. 3; Formica & Uysal, 2006: p.418; Zhou et al., 2015: p. 74). Even in the definition of destination, the concept of attraction is highlighted as well. Yeşiltaş (2014) defined destination as "a geographical place where local residents and tourists remain together and attractions (touristic resources) being clustered". If a place has no attractions, there is no need for the other required component of being destination because that place can not be regarded as destination for both conceptually and from the perspective of tourists (Coltman, 1989; Swarbrooke, 1995; Goeldner et al., 2000; Kusen, 2010: p. 412). Basicly, there will be no tourism activity in such a place. In other words, any region without attractions will not be visited by tourists and thereby cannot be accepted as tourism destination.

Attractions play an essential role in tourists' destination choice decisions. Therefore, attractions are also the significant indicator of the type of tourist that destination appeals to (Özdemir, 2014). Furthermore, destinations offer such an experiential product and attractions in the destinations shape the visitors' experiences and it makes the issue vital. It is obvious that the attraction issue is important for the tourism and it is unnecessary to discuss the need of managing the attractions for the destination success. Some destinations having rich natural and historical resources cannot benefit from its potential due to mismanagement and failed consequently. On the other hand, some destinations which lack natural and historical resources show successful performance in terms of tourism through arranging activities and with developing authentic and creative man-made attractions (Özdemir, 2014: p. 7). In order to make destinations more attractive, existing attractions should be managed assimilating the sustainable approach. In this context, the existing attractions of the destination should be protected; improved and new attractions have to be added on to their tourism inventory.

Attractions can not be accepted as out-of-date issue in the tourism literature. The reality is that attraction has given the inspiration for tourists (even the postmodern tourists) traveling throughout the history. So as to develop healthier strategies for making the destinations more attractive and strengthening the destination competitive advantages, attractions should be taken into consideration in depth. Destination management organizations should be aware of which attractions have stronger impact on tourists' destination choice decisions and destination strategies should be developed in the light of this information. Although the attractions are the primary source of destinations, it is stated that attractions have not got the adequate attention from the researchers and industry practitioners (Kusen, 2010). Studies addressing this issue were more superficial than other issues investigated in the tourism literature (Leiper, 1990: p. 368). In this study, the concept of destination attraction is examined in depth to enrich studies in this field. Also, the existing studies related with the attractions examined the issue from the perspective of tourists through the survey method. This study makes it possible to consider issue from different perspectives by taking expert opinions. The aim of this study is to prioritize attractions in terms of relative importance and determine the most important factors for tourists' decision to visit Eskişehir from the point of experts' view. Additionally, it is understood that either natural or man-made attractions are more important factors for visiting Eskişehir. In other words, it is possible to examine Eskişehir appeals to the visitors for the sake of either its natural or man-made attractions.

Literature Review

Travel Motivation

Different researchers reveal a number of approaches for explaining tourist motivations. Despite different approaches being developed to explain tourist motivations, the most accepted one is push-pull theory (Cook et al., 2010: p. 34). The Push-pull theory is based on explaining motivations underlying tourist behaviors by instinctually and simply.

Push factors, namely internal factors, explain the sources of individuals' traveling desire and pull factors, namely external factors, explain destination choice and where to travel (Pizam & Mansfeld, 1999: pp. 8-9; Hsu et al., 2009: p. 290; Cook et al., 2010: p. 34). The decision of individuals to travel or not is affected by internal forces or push factors that comprise escape, rest and relaxation, adventure, prestige, health and social interaction elements. In addition to these, some studies indicated the impact of different motivations like food, treatment etc. on tourists' traveling decisions (Ryan, 1997; Quan & Wang, 2004). With the changes on motivation concepts in time, it is understood that the issue has a dynamic characteristic rather than static so it is necessary to make studies in terms of enlighting which internal factors have an impact on tourists' traveling decisions on an ongoing basis.

Push factors have an impact on tourists' traveling decisions but destinations cannot create pushing motivations for tourists. Destinations can only offer attractions consistent with tourists' push factors. In other words, pull factors can be controlled and/or managed by destinations. Essentially, attractions divided into two as natural and artificial/man-made attractions despite different classifications have been made related to these concepts (Van Raaij, 1986; Coltman, 1989: p.59). Goeldner et al., (2000: p. 217) divide the attractions into five; entertainment, activities, recreational activities, natural and cultural attractions. The classification of attractions and the purpose of tourists' travel could be different but this difference cannot change the truth that attractions are indispensable components of the tourism system.

There were studies in the tourism literature based on the push-pull theory since 1990s. In these studies, push and pull factors are considered together and the relationship between those are investigated (Yuan & McDonald, 1990; Uysal & Jurowski, 1994; Baloğlu & Uysal, 1996; Jang & Cai, 2002; Klenosky, 2002; Kim et al., 2007; Prayag & Ryan, 2011). Although extensive results have been obtained from those studies, results are restricted with respect to the purpose of this study. Klenosky (2002), examined the relationship between push and pull factors via means-end method and found that while students' make destination choice in their spring break holidays, they are affected mostly by the natural attractions of the destinations. In addition, Prayag and Ryan (2011) conducting a survey to the international tourists traveling Mauritus, examined the relationship between push and pull factors by means of component analysis and revealed that nationality was core determinant for motivations.

Apart from the studies examining the relationship between push-pull factors, there are also some multidimensional studies addressing the relationship between different concepts. Correia et al. (2007), analyzed the relationship between push-pull factors and the general perception of the destinations. Research based on Portuguese tourist sample visiting exotic destinations presented the most important attraction elements as natural. Hsu et al. (2009) researched the importance of visitors' traveling motivations in selecting destinations located in Taiwan and found that the most important external factors were personal safety, destination image, environmental safety and quality and destination image, respectively. Demir (2010) examined the Dalyan's specific pull factors (attractiveness factors) influencing the tour-

ists' destination choice and obtained the result of most important attractions as recreational attractions, socio-cultural values, historical and natural attractions and facilities, respectively. Asadi and Daryaei (2011) conducted a research to evaluate the most important attractions for Iranian tourists visiting Malaysia, and found out that education was the most important pull factor. According to the relative importance tourism resources such as natural and cultural attractions, festival and facilities fall into the last places (12, 13 and 14 places out of 22 attributes). Evren and Kozak (2012), conducted a research for the purpose of determining the effects of pull factors on the day visitors' destination choice of Eskisehir and the importance of attractions listed according to their importance as "recreational parks and excursion areas", "local government and Yılmaz Büyükerşen (the mayor of the city)", "entertainment, education and shopping", "natural, historical and cultural values", respectively. Kutvan and Kutvan (2013), measured the destination attractions within the concept of tourism planning in their study but they tested the applicability of new survey method rather than determining touristic tendencies. Research results asserted the applicability of this new approach and if it is improved, it will increase the precise and accuracy of the touristic planning and investments. Çetinsöz and Artuğer (2014), analyzed the attractions with regard to the tourists' destination choice of Antalya and revealed hygiene and security, and natural beauties as the most important factors. Zhou et al. (2015) aimed at sorting motivation components determined in terms of destination competitiveness for West Virginia according to importance level from the viewpoint of destination managers and pointed out adventure and nature based activities and hospitality of local residents as the most important factors providing competitive advantage for West Virginia.

In tourism area, a number of studies stressing evaluation, determination and selection concepts are widespread. Moutinho and Curry (1994) focused spreadsheet models and AHP that can be applied to site location analysis and selection in tourism. Chen (2006) constructs a three-level evaluation structure and applies AHP to support a decision in convention site selection in Taiwan. Hsu et al. (2009) propose four level AHP model and use fuzzy set theory and TOPSIS to evaluate the preferences of tourists for destinations in Taiwan. Lee and King (2010) analyze Taiwan's hot springs destinations competitiveness by means of AHP approach. Wickramasinghe and Takano (2010) combine SWOT and AHP for tourism revival strategic marketing planning in Sri Lanka. Fan et al. (2013) applied AHP in order to evaluate tourism safety in China. Emir and Saraçli (2014) apply AHP for determining the thermal hotel location in Turkey. Stamenković and Vujičić (2014) use AHP with the purpose of tourist valorization of the eight most attractive Roman-Catholic sacred objects in Novi Sad, Petrovaradin and Sremska Kamenica. Aksoz, Özel and Kozak (2015) use AHP to determine primary convention hotel selection criteria of convention planners. Zhou et al. (2015) apply hybrid AHP to evaluate West Virginia's resource-based tourism competitiveness and investigate the utility of AHP in destination competitiveness evaluation.

Methodology

Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP)

Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP), developed by T.L.Saaty, is designed to cope with both rational and intuitive domains to select the best alternative evaluated with respect to several criteria and sub-criteria (if there are any). In order to develop overall priorities for ranking alternatives, the decision maker carries out pairwise comparison judgments. AHP methodol-

ogy can be used for making decisions where choice, prioritization and forecasting are needed (Bhushan & Rai, 2004: p. 15). Rankings produced by AHP are arbitrary (Dyer, 1990). AHP considers subjective and objective opinions of decision makers in decision process and provide them to aggregate quantitative and qualitative factors (Saaty, 1990: p.20).

According to the AHP all factors that have an impact on final decision are ordered in a tree hierarchy and weights are assigned. The aim of AHP is to weigh criteria and indicators by pairwise comparisons (Zhou et al. 2015: p. 72). By using AHP, we can decouple problem into sub-problems by evaluating subjectively the manner that is transformed into numerical values and ranked on a numerical scale (Bhushan & Rai, 2004: p. 15). AHP is used to derive ratio scales from discrete and continuous paired comparisons in multilevel hierarchical structures. These comparisons can be taken from actual measurements or from a fundamental scale that reflect relative strength of preferences and feelings. AHP approach provides a means to improve consistency. Parts of AHP hierarchy are related together and changing of one criterion has an impact on others (Güner & Yücel, 2007: p. 74).

Hierarchy of a decision problem consists of three steps named by goal, criteria and alternatives. Purpose of this structure is to judge the importance of elements in a given level with regard to some or all of the elements in adjacent level.

Phases of AHP can be summarized as follows (Bhushan & Rai, 2004: p. 15):

a) Problem is defined and decoupled into hierarchy of goal, criteria, sub-criteria and alternatives which show relationship between components at each level. Sample hierarchical structure is shown in Figure 1. At each level of comparison decision maker consider contribution of lower level components to upper level one. This is the key phase of methodology.

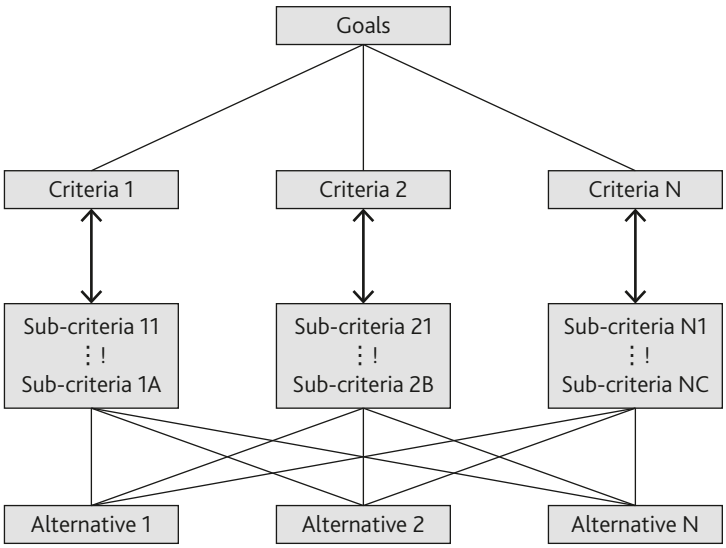

Figure 1. Sample hierarchical structure

b) Data are collected from experts or decision makers that can be analyzed as pairwise comparison on fundamental scale showed in Table 1. Paired comparison judgments are made according to pairs of homogeneous elements. This scale represents intensities of judgments.

Table 1. Fundamental Scale

Intensity of importance	Definition	Explanation
1	Equal importance	Two activities contribute equally to the objective
2	Weak	
3	Moderate importance	Experience and judgment slightly favor one activity over another
4	Moderate plus	
5	Strong importance	Experience and judgment strongly favor one activity over another
6	Strong plus	
7	Very strong or demonstrated importance	An activity is favored very strongly over another; its dominance demonstrated in practice
8	Very, very strong	
9	Extreme importance	The evidence favoring one activity over another is of the highest possible order of affirmation
Reciprocals of above	If activity i has one of the above nonzero numbers assigned to it when compared with activity j, the j has the reciprocal value when compared with i	
Rationales	Ratios arising from the scale	If consistency were to be forced by obtaining n numerical values to span the matrix

Source: T. Saaty, & L. G. Vargas, 2012, p. 6.

c) Pairwise comparison matrix is constructed and organized into square matrix. These matrices are positive and reciprocal ($a_{ij} = 1/a_{ji}$). Each element in upper level is used to compare with lower level ones with regard to it (Saaty, 2008).
d) Local and global weights of each criteria and sub-criteria are calculated, and the principal right eigenvector and largest eigenvalue are obtained. By using discrete paired comparisons ratio scales are derived in form of normalized right eigenvectors.
e) Consistency of matrix is evaluated by means of consistency ratio (CR). Consistency ratio is derived by comparing the consistency index (CI) with the appropriate one of the following set of numbers each of which is average random consistency index (RI), showed in Table 2, obtained by sample of randomly generated reciprocal matrices. Consistency index of a matrix of comparisons is CI= (λ_{max}- n)/(n-1) where λ_{max} is the maximum eigenvalue of paired comparison judgement matrix. Saaty suggest that the CR value must be lower than 0.1.

Table 2. Average random consistency index (RI)

N	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Random consistency index (R.I.)	0	0	0.52	0.89	1.11	1.25	1.35	1.4	1.45	1.49

Source: T. Saaty, & L. G. Vargas, 2012, p. 6.

f) In order to obtain local weights of each criteria rating of each alternative is multiplied by weights of sub-criteria and then aggregated. Multiplying these local weights by criteria weights global ratings of alternatives are acquired.

Destination attractions' evaluation is a type of multi criteria decision making process where decision makers' choice plays important role in final decision. So AHP, classical multi criteria decision making tool, is appropriate for this study.

Data Collection

A survey evaluating tourism destination attractions was designed and conducted. The survey was applied between September 3, 2015 and December 8, 2015 in order to determine the weights of attraction criteria and sub-criteria for Eskişehir. Eskişehir is located in the northwest of the Central Anatolia, in Turkey and over the years, the city has become a livable and lively college town with amenities and cultural activities (Yolal et al. 2009). Eskişehir is an important industrial and transport center. It also has a high domestic tourism potential with its cultural and historical resources, socio-cultural values, entertainment facilities, easy acces-

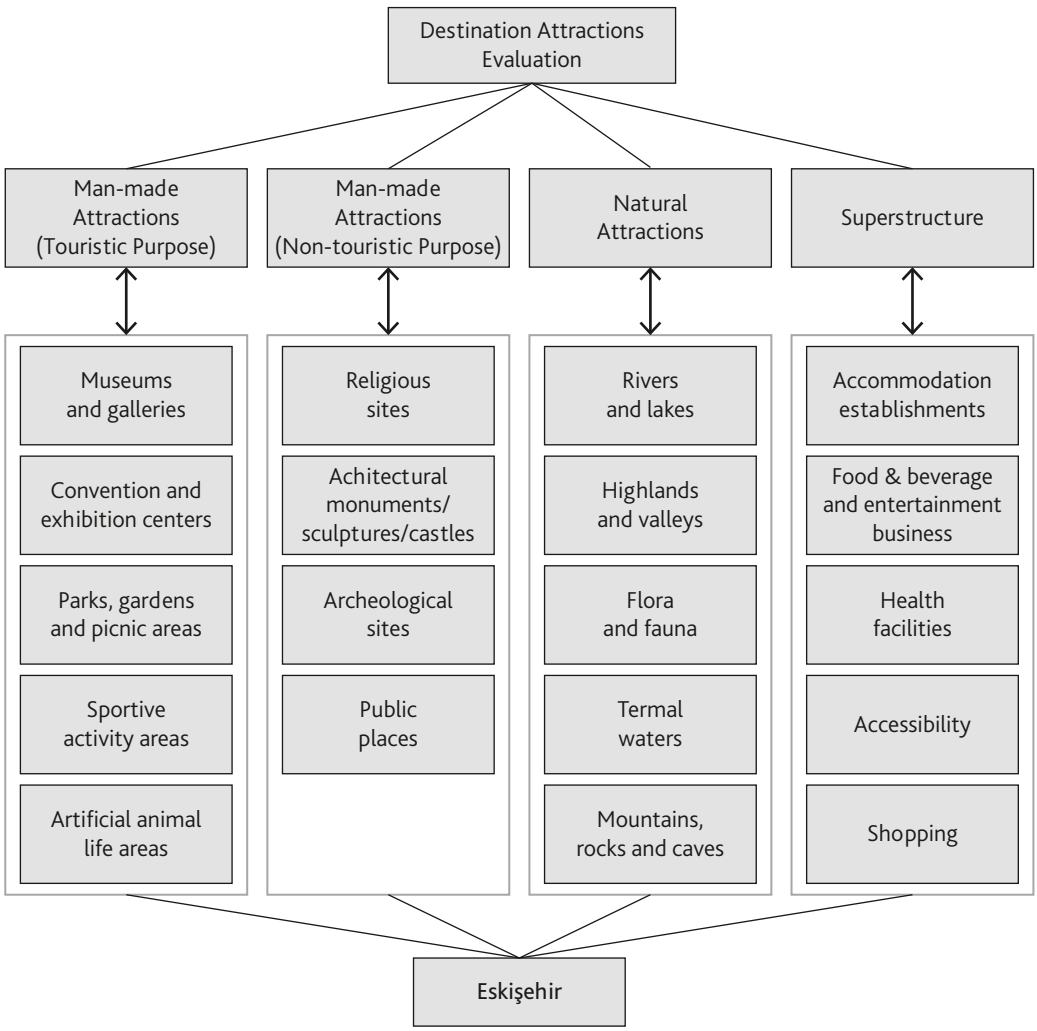

Figure 2. Hierarchical structure for destination attractions

sibility etc. Hierarchical structure for destination attractions is given in Figure 2. According to the hierarchy four main criteria and nineteen sub-criteria are included in survey. While defining the criteria and subcriteria, first of all, researchers made an in-depth literature review in order to develop the draft of scale. Most of the criteria were adapted from Gearing et al. (1974), Swarbrooke (1995), Godfrey and Clark (2003), Ritchie et al. (2003), Eskişehir Tourism Master Plan (2011), Üsküdar et al.'s (2014) studies. Then, in order to ensure the content validity consulted to the experts' opinion (especially academicians' from tourism field). After these procedures have been completed, data collection process started. Respondents were selected from tourism destination experts operating in universities, hotels, travel agencies and public sector (provincial directorate of cultural and tourism). Respondents were asked to compare the four main criteria with respect to goal, determining destination attractiveness, and all sub-criteria within each main criteria on a pair-wise basis to determine their relative importance. Also, some demographic information towards respondents was collected. As a result, 28 completed surveys (7 for each sector) were collected and analyzed via Super Decisions Software. Weights of the criteria and sub-criteria were acquired from the survey by counting the geometric mean of the scores showing relative importance and then entering as input values in matrix format. The consistency ratio that is lower than 0.1 is considered acceptable for comparisons.

Empirical Results

Demographic variables (gender, age, experience level, education and institution) of the study are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Demographic variables of the study

Demographic Variables		Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Female	12	42.86
	Male	16	57.14
Age	18-30	1	3.57
	31-40	14	50
	41-50	7	25
	51-60	4	14.29
	61+	2	7.14
Experience in the tourism	1-3	3	10.71
	4-6	4	14.29
	7-9	2	7.14
	10-12	3	10.71
	13-15	4	14.29
	15+	12	42.86
Education	Bachelor's degree	18	64.29
	Post-graduate	3	10.71
	Doctorate	7	25
Institution	University (academicians)	6	21.43
	Public sector	8	28.57
	Private Sector (travel agencies and hotels)	14	50

Source: own study

According to the results of AHP weights of criteria and sub-criteria are given in Table 4. For all comparisons including criteria and sub-criteria, consistency ratios are under the 0.1 threshold level so comparisons made were consistent. Among the four attraction criteria, man-made attractions (touristic purpose) criterion was found to be the most important with a weight of 0.41197. As opposed to these man-made attractions (non-touristic purpose) criterion was found the least important with the weight of 0.16060. Weights of the other two criteria, namely natural attractions and superstructure, were found as 0.21662 and 0.2108, respectively. The most important sub-criteria under each criteria are represented with bold fonts. With regard to man-made attractions (touristic purpose), criteria weights of the sub-criteria are found as: 0.32753 for museum and galleries; 0.09418 for convention and exhibition centers; 0.34869 for parks, gardens and picnic areas; 0.15377 for activities and 0.07584 for artificial animal life areas. In terms of man-made attractions (non-touristic purpose), criteria weights of the sub-criteria are obtained as: 0.10786 for religious sites; 0.34973 for architectural monuments/sculptures/castles; 0.44698 for archeological sites and 0.09544 for public spaces. In terms of natural attractions criteria weights of the sub-criteria are found as: 0.19154 for rivers and lakes; 0.12464 for highlands and valley; 0.11366 for flora and fauna; 0.38273 for thermal waters; 0.18743 for mountains, rocks and caves. Lastly, with regard to superstructure criteria weights of the sub-criteria are obtained as: 0.23295 for accommodation establishments; 0.26482 for food&beverage and entertainment business; 0.14033 for health facilities; 0.27604 for accessibility and 0.08587 for shopping. According to the global weights of sub-criteria parks, gardens and picnic areas is the most important with a weight of 0.143649. On the contrary public space is the least important sub-criteria with a weight of 0.015328.

Table 4. Weights of the criteria and sub-criteria

Criteria	Global Weights	Sub-criteria	Local Weights	Global Weights	Rank
Man-made attractions (touristic purpose)	0.41197	Museum and galleries	0,32753	0.134932	2
		Convention and exhibition centers	0,09418	0.038799	12
		Parks, gardens and picnic areas	**0.34869**	0.143649	1
		Activity areas	0.15377	0.063348	5
		Artificial animal life areas	0.07584	0.031243	13
Man-made attractions (non-touristic purpose)	0.16060	Religious sites	0.10786	0.017322	18
		Architectural monuments / sculptures / castles	0.34973	0.056166	7
		Archeological sites	**0.44698**	0.071784	4
		Public places	0.09544	0.015327	19
Natural attractions	0.21662	Rivers and lakes	0.19154	0.041491	10
		Highlands and valley	0.12464	0.026999	15
		Flora and fauna	0.11366	0.024621	16
		Thermal waters	**0.38273**	0.082906	3
		Mountains, rocks and caves	0.18743	0.040601	11
Superstructure	0.21080	Accommodation establishments	0.23295	0.0491058	9
		Food & beverage and entertainment business	0.26482	0.055824	8
		Health facilities	0.14033	0.029581	14
		Accessibility	**0.27604**	0.058189	6
		Shopping	0.08587	0.018101	17

Source: own study

Conclusions and Discussions

According to the judgements of tourism experts; the man-made attractions (touristic purpose) of Eskişehir are the most forgoing criterion appealing tourists among four main criteria. "Parks, gardens and picnic areas" and "museums and galleries", accepted under the man-made attractions (touristic purpose), are the most two important sub-criteria among the all attractions defined for this study. There are many theme parks such as Kent Park; Science, Art and Culture Park; Waterfall Park etc. and gardens projects and also some authentic museums (Modern Glass Art Museum, Aviation Museum, Wax Museum, Modern Art Museum etc.) are the mostly visited attractions. As it has often been taking place in the media, Eskişehir is a model for the other destinations. Moreover, "activity areas" under the man-made attractions (touristic purpose) factor, is one of the most important sub-criteria. This can be interpreted as; Eskişehir is good at arranging sportive activities, festivals, fairs etc. and managing their activity areas in terms of drawing the tourists' attention. Apart from these, it is understood that "archeological site" under the man-made attractions (non-touristic purpose) factor is the fourth most important attraction among all the subcriteria. This result is an expected one because Eskişehir has a high potential for cultural tourism and the archeological sites are the fundamental component of such tourism activity. "Thermal waters" sub-criteria under the natural attractions factors, is judged as one of the most important attractions from the perspective of experts. Eskişehir is well known with its rich thermal resources. Although destination managements emphazised that the thermal potential of the city has not been understood and adopted yet. Fortunately, there are some ongoing thermal projects (hotels, health facilities etc.) in order to awaken the potential in the near future.

The results of this research are different from the results of Correia et. al. (2007) and Çetinsöz and Artuğer's (2014) studies. According to their research the most important attraction was the natural attractions. Also, they focused on the resort and exotic destinations. However, Eskişehir has the cultural tourism potential. The result of this study is also different from the result of Hsu et al.'s (2009) study. Hsu et. al. (2009) discussed the attraction issue with more intangible aspects of it and the analysis revealed that these nonphysical components are the most important ones. In this study, the more tangible factors were adopted. The results of this study are consistent with the result of Evren and Kozak's (2012) study which is another research focused on the attractions of Eskişehir. Theme parks and gardens are the most important attraction criteria for appealing tourist to Eskişehir according to both studies' results. This indicates that visitors and tourism professionals have similar attitudes towards to the attractions of Eskişehir. It is pleasing that tourism professionals are aware of the Eskişehir's attractions which mostly affect visitors' decisions. In other words, professionals recognize the destination fairly well and understand the visitors' behavior in a way.

If it is needed to interpret the finding from a wider perspective, it can be claimed that Eskişehir actually has no rich natural resources but the destination is strong enough to succumb this disadvantage by the courtesy of its management. As Özdemir (2014) stated there are some destinations lacking natural resources that could gain attractiveness. In other words, it is possible for a destination to become attractive by creating man-made attractions although it has no adequate natural attractions. It is understood that Eskişehir is an example fitting to this description.

Destination managements have to rule the destinations in a sustainable manner. In this context, natural resources should be protected and improved. They have to strive to make the destinations attractive by managing the resources through the long-term approaches. If a des-

tination has no rich natural resources, it will not become desperate for being an attractive destination. Such destinations only became attractive through designing and developing man-made attractions. Especially, theme parks can be a good way for urban destinations to draw tourists as this study's results revealed.

There will be some study inspiring from this research and analyzing more criteria related with attractions (both concrete and discrete components). Also, same scale can be implemented for the destinations having similar geographic features and by this way, it is possible to make a healthier comparison between these studies. Probably, those studies will have a great contribution to the literature.

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