


Rize from the perspective of convention tourism: Review and evaluation

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Abstract

Rize is a city in the Black Sea region and has an important tourism potential with its natural beauties and history. It is thought that convention tourism can offer an effective solution to further increase this potential and to maintain tourism activities consistently throughout the year. This study aims to increase the attractiveness of the destination by evaluating the potential of Rize in the field of Convention tourism. In the first stage, the current situation of Rize was examined in detail by content analysis method, and based on the data obtained, city-specific deficiencies and improvement areas were identified. This research is a guide that aims to reveal Rize's potential for growth and development in the field of Convention tourism.

Keywords: Alternative tourism, Convention tourism, Content Analysis, Rize.

1. Introduction

The increasing interest in tourism every year causes especially developing countries to turn to different practices in order to increase their competitiveness and to get more share from tourism revenues. "Sea, sand, sun" tourism, which is referred to as "3S" in tourism, has now been replaced by "education, entertainment and environment", which is referred to as "3E", and tourists have turned to individual activities rather than mass tourism activities (Yeşiltaş et al., 2009:251). Especially education is among the prominent elements in tourism. While tourists show interest in education-based experiences, they also want to continue exploring cultural and historical richness, understanding local lifestyles and gaining new skills in the destinations they visit. In this context, it can be said that Convention tourism, which is among the alternative tourism types, responds to these demands of tourists.

In Turkey, a country with rich potential with its historical values and natural beauties, it is seen that tourism demand for alternative tourism types such as eco-tourism, convention tourism and hunting tourism is increasing in line with the changes in the world (Bilici and Işık, 2018:1). According to Turkey's tourism strategy 2023, spreading the tourism season throughout the year depends on the diversification of tourism, and one of the alternative tourism types that should be developed primarily in this context is convention tourism. Convention tourism, which accounts for 25% of the world's tourism revenues

(Yakut, 2019:2), is one of the factors that provide real growth for the world's largest economies. In fact, 60% of all hotel room bookings in the world are made by business tourists, while the convention industry provides more than 10 million jobs globally (Nyurenberger, Shchetinina and Kiselev, 2019:177).

According to TurkStat (Turkish Statistical Institute) and UNWTO (The United Nations World Tourism Organization) data, the rate of business tourists coming to Turkey in 2022 is 3.8 percent. While this rate was 12 percent in 2006, it started to decline after 2006. In convention tourism, which is considered as a separate type of business tourism (Gregoric et al., 2016:195), Turkey ranks 38th according to the ICCA (International Convention and Congress Association) 2021 report and there is no city from Turkey among the top 50 convention cities. According to the ICCA 2022 report, Turkey ranks 31st and 82 international congresses, conferences, etc. events were held in Turkey.

Convention tourism has a great importance in extending the tourism season, increasing tourism revenues and employment opportunities, and promoting the region and its facilities (Yozcu and İçöz, 2010:1). Aymankuy (1997) analyzed the effects of convention tourism under 3 headings. These are economic, social and cultural effects and other effects. Economic impacts are explained as the expenditures made by the participants, employment opportunities, and increase in government revenues through taxes. It is also known that the expenditures of Convention tourism participants, which have the largest share, are

three times higher than other tourists (Ayaz and Şamata, 2017:55). In addition, it has been stated that convention expenditures provide income in a total of 31 business lines, 2 of which are directly within the tourism sector (Accommodation and Food and Beverage), and accordingly create employment opportunities. Economic and social impacts, with the development of convention tourism, historical and cultural artifacts in that destination are protected, the people living in that destination have the opportunity to develop themselves by interacting with tourists, and most of the infrastructure and superstructure problems in that region are solved. Other effects are explained as the season extension effect of convention tourism, the formation of a positive image in case the participants leave satisfied, and the promotional activities of the region.

When the research on convention tourism is examined, Tideman (1982) Cost-benefit analysis of convention tourism; Akova and Baynazoğlu (2012) SWOT analysis of convention tourism in Turkey and related strategies; Silerova et al.(2013) The importance of convention tourism for regional development; Karakuş and Çoban (2018) Evaluation of stakeholders' expectations for convention tourism through the case of Nevşehir; Khoreva et al. (2019) Environmental and social responsibilities in congress and exhibition tourism; Pavlukovic and Cimbalevic (2020) Factors affecting the decision to attend a conference; Sikosek (2020) Examination of convention destination attractiveness through the Slovenian case; Bevanda V. and Bevanda N. (2022) the main determinants of congress attendees' satisfaction; Timor (2011) International Convention tourism in the world and in Turkey, Gregoric et al. (2016) Croatia, Ersun and Arslan (2009) Cappadocia, Eryılmaz (2011) Samsun, Koçan and Çorbacı (2012) Safranbolu, Bucih et al. (2015) comparative analysis of Belgrade and Prague cities in terms of convention destination, Özgenç et al. (2017) Bolu, Nyurenberger et al. (2019) in terms of the current situation and development potential of Russia in terms of Convention tourism.

In the literature review, it was seen that there are studies that address convention tourism from various angles. In this study, it is thought that examining Rize in the context of Convention tourism, which is one of the alternative tourism types of Rize, will be a road map for both the expansion of tourism to 12 months and the Convention tourism potential of Rize for policy makers, investors and operators. In this context, a detailed examination of Convention tourism and Rize's Convention tourism potential is included.

2. Conceptual Framework

Alternative Tourism

Alternative tourism is a form of directing tourism activities to areas of special interest by getting rid of certain patterns (Çelik, 2018:194). In other words, with the changes and developments in the world changing people's consumption habits and lifestyles, new types of tourism that have emerged in order to appeal to tourists in search of diversity are called alternative tourism (Eryılmaz, 2011:2). One of the main elements that attract tourists to a destination is touristic products and diversification, enrichment and interconnection of these touristic products are very important in terms of sustainability and competitiveness (Benur & Bramwell, 2015). Diversification of touristic products can be achieved through alternative tourism. The purpose of diversifying touristic products with alternative tourism is to create a balanced tourism demand by eliminating the seasonal dependence of tourism (Cesur, Özer and Çeken, 2021:1). Alternative tourism can be a good response to the change in touristic demand and the negative environmental impacts caused by mass tourism by diversifying tourism products while protecting nature and culture (Pektaş, 2018; Yıldız & Kalağan, 2008).

Although alternative tourism covers many forms of tourism, alternative tourism has been classified into various forms of tourism in scientific studies. For example, Öztürk and Yazıcıoğlu (2002) accepted alternative tourism types as congress, golf, sports, adventure, culture, eco, thermal and youth tourism, while Aytuğ et al. (2020) accepted health, thermal, highland, river, mountaineering, culture, cave, hunting, botany, bird watching, eco, rural, faith, agricultural, cruise, yacht and sailing tourism. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism (2023) defined alternative tourism types as 15 tourism types: health and thermal, winter, highland, cave, hunting, congress, golf, yacht, silk road, faith, air sports, mountaineering, river-rafting, underwater diving, bird watching.

The aim of alternative tourism is to develop different projects and eliminate the congestion in tourism (Alkan, 2011:327). Alternative tourism, which covers all touristic activities except mass tourism, is seen as promising in ensuring social, economic and natural sustainability. The main purpose of alternative tourism is to reduce the negative impacts on destinations without reducing the positive economic impacts (Pektaş, 2018:188-189).

Convention tourism, which is one of the alternative tourism types, has emerged in order to minimize the physical, economic, socio-cultural and environmental

negative effects of mass tourism and to add vitality to tourism during the slow seasons of touristic centers (Şener, 2005:25). Convention tourism is developing faster than other tourism types in creating alternative opportunities for various tourism potentials (Kerimoğlu, 2002:2). Convention tourism makes significant contributions to the economy, tourism and promotion of the region. Since it appeals to high income participants, it creates an important source of economic income in sectors such as accommodation, transportation, food and beverage. In addition, successful congress organizations contribute to increasing the recognition of the city and improving its image, while extending the tourism season and attracting more visitors to the region (Eryılmaz, 2011:1).

Convention tourism

Tideman (1982) defines the word congress as a meeting lasting at least 2 days, consisting of at least 20 participants, where one or more pre-announced topics are discussed. In order for it to be an international congress, at least fifty percent of the participants should not be citizens of that country. Convention tourism, on the other hand, is all of the accommodation, travel and tourism relations that arise from people meeting in a place other than where they live and work permanently, in areas and professions that require expertise, for the purpose of exchanging information (Alkan, 2011:334). Convention tourism emerged after World War II when the number of congresses increased significantly and started to be considered as a tourism activity (Timor, 2010:1). After the 1960s, convention tourism experienced a huge global growth, and in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with the acceleration of industrialization and the increase in trade, the need for businessmen and entrepreneurs to meet and come together increased the importance of convention tourism (Weber and Chon, 2002:3-4).

This large-scale and fast-growing type of tourism covers different types of meetings such as congresses, incentive trips, conferences, events (Bevanda V. and Bevanda N., 2022:1). The general name of these in the literature is M.I.C.E tourism. M.I.C.E tourism stands for Meetings, Incentives, Convention/Congress and Exhibitions (Şahin, Özata and Doğdubay, 2017: 24). Meetings within this scope can last from one day to a week, or even longer in some cases. Although they are mostly held in winter periods, they can also be organized throughout the year. With the number of participants ranging from 10 to 10,000 people, the number of overnight stays varies depending on the size and subject of the organization. Considering the high revenues provided by business tourism, destinations try to get more share from business tourism by

improving their transportation, accommodation and infrastructure facilities (Özdemir, 2007:66).

On the other hand, Mistilis and Dwyer (2000) stated the requirements of being a destination within the scope of M.I.C.E. tourism as follows:

- Transportation (International and domestic)
- Accommodation
- Food and beverage services
- Pre and post conference tour opportunities
- Purpose-built centers and hotels
- Professional organization services
- Social programs for delegates and participants
- Technical support for audiovisual services
- Exhibition facilities for products

As can be seen, there are certain physical facilities that a destination must provide in order to become a convention tourism destination. However, in addition to providing these physical facilities, the decision-making processes of convention participants are also very important. While Pavlukovic and Cimbaljevic (2020) explained the factors affecting the decision-making process of convention participants as destination image, cost and destination accessibility, educational and professional opportunities, interaction opportunities, location-related factors and conference-related factors, Witt et al. (1992) pointed out that there are 3 important factors in the decision-making process of convention participants. These factors are accessibility, attractiveness and diffusion. Accessibility is explained as the distance and the cost of this distance, the attractiveness of the conference location, climate, leisure and cultural activities, etc., while spillover is explained as the effect of factors such as the tendency of members in that region to attend annual conferences and income. Convention tourism participants not only contribute to the regional economy with the extra expenditures they make as their stay increases, but they are also very important in terms of coming back if they leave satisfied or being a positive reference for that destination (Yozcu and İçöz, 2010: 106-107).

Convention tourism is a lucrative segment of tourism that mostly provides tourists in the off-season and caters to demanding guests with high purchasing power. These guests need to be provided with all the necessary services to spend quality time in leisure as well as in business conditions (Gregoric et al., 2016:198). When organizing large-scale conventions, especially international congresses, the destination should have quality accommodation facilities, transportation facilities and touristic attractive features (Bucic et al., 2015:136). Convention tourism

generates higher revenues by extending the tourism season in cities and destinations and differentiating the touristic product (Akova and Baynazoğlu, 2012:1).

What makes the congress a tourism activity is that the people attending the congress spend their free time with nature trips, sports activities and activities (Özgenç et al., 2017:2). Rize province has natural beauties and cultural richness that can meet the demand for the best use of this leisure time. In this direction, the Convention tourism potential of Rize has been investigated in detail and suggestions have been made for the development of this potential.

Tourism Potential of Rize Province

The surface area of Rize province, located in the Eastern Black Sea, is 3.920 km, excluding lakes. The balanced temperatures in the province, which has a rainy climate in all seasons, provide an advantage in terms of tourism. There are 23 rivers with a length of more than 5 km within the borders of Rize. The longest stream, İyi stream, is 78.4 km long and the second longest stream, Fırtına stream, is 68 km long (Rize Provincial Directorate of Agriculture and Forestry, 2023). According to TurkStat data, the population of Rize in 2022 is 344,016. Rize is bordered by Bayburt and Erzurum in the south, Trabzon in the west and Artvin in the east (Aydınbaş, 2023:2). Rize's climate is quite stable. Temperatures are above 6 °C throughout the year, with 3 months above 20 °C and only 4 months below 10 °C (T.C. Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs, 2014). The stability of the climate also allows tourism activities to be carried out throughout the year.

The types of tourism activities carried out in Rize are described on the website of Rize Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism (2023) as thermal, plateau, nature and sports, trekking, mountaineering, river sports, bird watching, nature photography, cave, camping and caravan, congress, plant and animal observation, jeep safari, cycling and Heliski.

Table 1. Number of Domestic and Foreign Tourist Arrivals in Rize Province (2015- 2023)

Year	Domestic	Foreign	Total
2015	616.889	73.459	690.348
2016	602.814	76.059	678.059
2017	761.413	105.404	866.817
2018	855.323	121.171	976.494
2019	889.837	134.173	1.024.010
2020	72.473	6.240	78.713
2021	389.930	25.779	415.709
2022	1.132.559	134.928	1.267.487
2023 (January-September)	1.089.952	129.964	1.219.916

Source: Rize Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism

Table 1 shows the number of domestic and foreign tourists visiting Rize between 2015 and 2023. As can be seen, there is a steady increase in the number of tourists visiting Rize, except for the years when the

Covid-19 pandemic (Christoffe and Kallmuenzer, 2023:757), which deeply affected the tourism sector. This increase is a clear indicator of Rize's increasing potential as a tourist destination.

When evaluated in terms of alternative tourism types, it is seen that Rize province already covers most of the alternative tourism types and has potential in many of them.

Table 2. Alternative Tourism Types Realized in Rize

Alternative Tourism Type	Destination
Cave Tourism	Pileki Cave
Mountaineering	Kaçkar Mountain (3937 m), Verçenik Mountain (3711 m), Bulut Mountain (3562 m) and Altıparmak Mountain (3492 m)
Stream-Rafting	For rafting and canoeing; Fırtına stream, İkizdere (Good stream)
Plateau	Although there are many plateaus in Rize, the most known ones are; Ayder, Handüzü, Çağrankaya, Vaşa, Petran, Demirkapı (Homeze), Sivrikaya, Anzer, Ovit, Gölyayla, Sal, Pokut, Hazindağ, Samistal, Golezana, Palovit, Elevit, Amlakit, Çat, Verçenik, Hacivanak, Aşağı Kavron, Yukarı Kavron, Ambarlı, Kito, İkizdere
Culture	Rize castle, Zil castle, Arch bridges, Atatürk house museum, Rize museum
Air sports	Paragliding, Heliski
Botanik	There are 1552 seeded and 600 non-seeded plant species, 88 of which are endemic.
Bird and wildlife watching	Kaçkar Mountains are home to a wide variety of bird and butterfly species Although Rize is the home of the "Mountain Rooster", tourists prefer Rize especially for the "Mountain Rooster".
Thermal	Ayder Hot Spring Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation Center

Source: Rize Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2023; Rize Nature Tourism Master Plan (2014-2023); Rize Governorship, 2023; Rize Environmental Status Report, 2022; Yıldız et al., 2016.

As can be seen from the table, Rize is a suitable destination for alternative tourism types. In addition to these, there are 11 beaches in Rize (Rize environmental status report, 2022) and there are 169 works registered by the conservation board such as churches, bridges, mosques, civil architecture examples, castles (Bilici and Işık, 2018:14). At the same time, with the Green Road, also known as the Plateau Corridor project, which started to be built in Rize, tourists who want to visit the plateaus will be able to do so in a more comfortable and comfortable way thanks to this 2600 km road connecting the plateaus of Samsun, Ordu, Giresun, Gümüşhane, Bayburt, Trabzon, Rize, Artvin and Tokat provinces (Bodur, 2022: 71-72).

According to the information obtained, it is seen that Rize is a destination whose importance has started to be understood within the scope of alternative tourism, and in terms of Convention tourism, it can host national

congresses with its existing facilities. On the other hand, for international congresses, it is important to examine Rize province in terms of convention center in accordance with the standards, accommodation facilities that can meet the expectations of Convention tourism participants belonging to high income groups, and especially promotional planning activities, travel agencies, etc. details.

3. Method

Purpose and Importance

The aim of the study is to examine the Convention tourism potential in Rize province in detail and to draw a road map to eliminate the seasonality problem and therefore the problems related to tourism revenues by developing this potential. The ultimate goal is to bring Rize into tourism as a Convention tourism destination. The fact that Rize is a destination that has started to gain importance for many alternative tourism types, overlapping with the importance given to alternative tourism and convention tourism according to the Turkey Tourism Strategies 2023 report and aiming to provide a more stable structure of tourism in Rize supports the importance of the study.

Data Collection Method

The study was conducted through literature review, one of the qualitative research methods. The literature review method is a critical review of theories, findings and other research materials obtained from reference materials as a basis for developing a clear frame of mind from the formulation of the problem; Literature reviews include reviews, summaries and authors' thoughts on various literature sources (books, articles and information on websites) on the relevant topic (Prakoso et al., 2020). Passive analysis was used in the study, in other words, secondary data was used. Passive analysis is the analysis of data available on the internet for a specific purpose (Yıldırım & Şimsek, 2021). In the study, first of all, previous studies in the literature on Convention tourism, which is one of the alternative tourism types, were examined. In addition, information on the websites of Rize Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, Rize Provincial Directorate of National Education, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan University, Rize Municipality, Rize Governorship was scanned. In order to obtain information about the conference halls of the hotels, the websites of the relevant hotels were examined and information was obtained by contacting the hotels that do not have information on the relevant websites by phone.

4. Findings

Evaluation of Rize in terms of Convention tourism

In order for a province to receive the title of convention city in the international arena, it must have some criteria. These criteria are transportation, accommodation, convention hall and facilities, personnel quality, security, infrastructure, natural and cultural richness and ancillary services (Şener, 2005:43). In terms of these criteria, Rize province is examined in detail in the following section.

Accommodation Facilities

When Table 3 is analyzed, there are 20 accommodation facilities in Rize that have tourism management certificates. Of these, 3 are 5 stars, 1 is 4 stars, 8 are 3 stars, 3 are 2 stars, 1 is 1 star, 1 is a boutique hotel and 3 are chalets. Rize has a room capacity of 1126 rooms per night and a bed capacity of 2286 (Rize Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2023).

Table 3. Accommodation facilities with tourism management certificates in Rize province are as follows:

Name of Facility	Number of Rooms	Number of Beds
A1 (*****)	290	602
A2 (*****)	138	280
A3 (*****)	114	232
A4 (****)	88	176
A5 (***)	89	178
A6 (***)	25	50
A7 (***)	55	110
A8 (***)	42	86
A9 (***)	26	52
A10 (***)	25	50
A11 (***)	14	28
A12 (***)	53	106
A13 (**)	26	52
A14 (**)	26	52
A15	7	14
A16	60	120
A17	9	18
A18	14	28
A19 (**)	15	30
A20 (*)	10	22
Total	1126	2286

The "*" symbol represents the number of hotel stars.

Source: Elaborated by Authors

In 2022, 4 international congresses were held in Rize. The hotels used in these congresses were coded as A4 and A8 (Kongreuzmanı.com, 2023; Recep Tayyip Erdoğan University, 2023).

Table 4. Conference Halls

Name	Capacity
A1 (****)	Conference hall:568 Ballroom:500
A2 (****)	550
A3 (****)	400
Ismail Kahraman Cultural Center	Great Hall:587 Small Hall:210
Recep Tayyip Erdoğan University Conference Halls	Congress and Culture Center
	550
	Faculty of Agriculture
	299
	Faculty of Theology
	299
	Vocational School of Technical Sciences Conference Hall
	299
	Findıklı School of Applied Sciences
	299
	Ardeşen Tourism Faculty
	299
	Faculty of Education
	199
	Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences
	199
	Faculty of Engineering
	199
	Turgut Kiran Maritime Faculty
	199
	Vocational School of Social Sciences
	199
	Congress Culture Center Pocket Cinema Hall A
	85
	Congress Culture Center
	85
	Pocket Cinema Hall B

Source: Elaborated by Authors

According to Table 4, the hall with the highest capacity within the scope of Convention tourism in Rize is the İsmail Kahraman Cultural Center, which has a capacity of 587. According to Article 32 of the Regulation on the qualifications of tourism facilities (2019), the requirements for congress halls include "a divisible congress hall large enough to serve at least a thousand people". A congress hall that meets this definition does not exist in Rize.

Travel Agencies

There are 88 Class A travel agencies registered with TÜRSAB in Rize (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2023). Regarding the qualifications of travel agencies; Class A travel agencies are authorized in congress and meeting organizations according to the Law No. 1618 on Travel Agencies and Travel Agencies Association (Eryılmaz, 2011:10). The fact that there are 88 Class A travel agencies in Rize shows that there are sufficient number of travel agencies for congress and meeting organizations.

Transportation Facilities

Transportation to Rize is possible by land and air. The 542 km Black Sea Coast highway starting from Samsun and extending to Artvin is a fast and comfortable road connecting 6 provinces, 9 ports and 2 airports (Eryılmaz, 2011:9). The construction process of the new bus station, which will cover a total area of 12,500 square meters, with 12 large buses, 12 half buses, 6 service platforms and an open parking lot with a capacity of 55 vehicles, is ongoing in Alipaşa neighborhood in Rize (Birlik News Agency, 2023; Rize Municipality, 2023). Those who want to reach Rize by bus can choose one of the 31 bus companies with

representative offices in the province (Biletall, 2023). In air transportation, transportation opportunities have increased with Rize-Artvin airport, which opened on May 14, 2022 (General Directorate of Civil Aviation, 2023). There are direct flights from Rize-Artvin airport to Izmir, Istanbul and Ankara, and the first international flight was from Muscat, the capital of Oman (General Directorate of State Airports Authority, 2023). Alternatively, Trabzon airport is still used for transportation to Rize.

Staff Quality

Rize province has 1 university and 2 high schools in order to train trained personnel in the field of tourism. The Faculty of Tourism of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan University is located in Ardeşen district. Ekrem Orhon Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School in the center of Rize and Firtına Valley İrfan Tufan Karaoğlu Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School in Ardeşen district are tourism high schools providing education in the fields of Food and Beverage Services and Accommodation and Travel Services. Thanks to the university and high schools, the need for qualified tourism personnel in the province is largely met (Rize Provincial Directorate of National Education, 2023; Recep Tayyip Erdoğan University, 2023).

Security

Yılmaz and Güneyergün (2006) presented the provinces in Turkey where public order crimes are least common. According to this study, Rize province is the third province with the least public order crimes. According to TÜİK (2015), Rize ranks 5th in the security category and 3rd in the health category in the provincial life index ranking. As it is understood from

this, it is thought that there will not be a problem in terms of security in Rize.

SWOT Analysis of Rize Province for Convention Tourism

In the light of the data obtained above, a SWOT analysis for convention tourism was also carried out. While evaluating the strengths of Rize, it was also thought to reveal the development potential of the region in this field by revealing its weak points. However, taking into account factors such as infrastructure deficiencies or weaknesses in marketing strategies, it is analyzed how the region can develop in the field of Convention tourism.

Strengths:

- **Accommodation Capacity:** Rize has 20 accommodation facilities with tourism management certificates. The total 2286 bed capacity of these facilities is an important advantage to meet the accommodation needs of convention participants.
- **Congress Hall Capacity:** İsmail Kahraman Cultural Center is one of the largest congress halls in the region with a capacity of 587 people.
- **Transportation Facilities:** Transportation infrastructure such as the Black Sea Coast Highway and Rize-Artvin Airport provide easy and diverse transportation options to the city.

Weaknesses:

- **Insufficient Congress Hall Capacity:** There is a lack of large congress halls in accordance with the regulations for the qualifications of tourism facilities.
- **International Flight Diversity:** Rize-Artvin Airport has limited international flights. This may restrict the transportation of international participants.
- **Lack of an Adequately Sized Bus Station:** The unfinished bus station project in Rize may negatively affect the transportation of participants in large organizations.

Opportunities:

- **Tourism Education Institutions:** Recep Tayyip Erdoğan University and tourism high schools offer a great advantage in providing qualified tourism personnel.
- **Increased Air Transportation:** With the opening of Rize-Artvin Airport, the increase in direct flights to the city may increase the potential to attract international participants.
- **Natural and Cultural Riches:** Rize's natural beauties and cultural richness provide the opportunity to offer touristic activities to convention participants.

Threats:

- **Rival Convention Cities:** Other cities' development of Convention tourism infrastructure may reduce Rize's competitive advantage.
- **COVID-19 and Similar Pandemics:** Pandemics can reduce participation in convention tourism and disrupt organizations.
- **Infrastructure Issues:** Infrastructure deficiencies, such as the unfinished bus station project, may prevent comfortable transportation of convention participants.

Rize has a great potential for Convention tourism with its natural beauties and increasing tourism infrastructure. However, it should focus on infrastructure investments and marketing strategies to overcome the shortcomings and maintain its competitive advantage.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Convention tourism is not a type of tourism that develops spontaneously like other types of tourism. In order for convention tourism to develop in a destination, congress buildings should be built, existing buildings should be constantly renewed, the quality of accommodation facilities should be high, and transportation facilities should be developed. All these constitute the fixed costs of convention tourism (Karasu, 1990). In this context, it is only possible to provide the physical requirements for Rize to serve as a convention tourism destination by meeting these fixed costs.

The most important of these physical facilities are congress centers. There are enough congress centers for national congresses, but in order to host larger organizations such as congresses, symposiums, banquets and fairs, a congress and fair center that can serve at least 1000 people at the same time can be built. At the same time, such buildings can also serve the public in addition to the congress and fair organizations. With such a building, social events such as concerts, theater, etc. can be organized for the people of Rize.

In terms of accommodation facilities, since large-scale congresses require an average of 1000 rooms (Öztaş, 2019:60), it is not possible for Rize to meet this number with a single hotel. Although this number can be met with all of the hotels in the province, Rize needs an accommodation facility that can host large-scale convention participants, both because the locations of these hotels are not very close to each other and because there will be a very scattered distribution. It is predicted that this new hotel will be beneficial for the development of convention tourism in terms of both accommodation capacity and quality. On the other hand, it should be kept in mind that the existing

businesses should be examined in terms of their distance and proximity in the first stage and that the convention organizations can be carried out by distributing the participants to different businesses in the accommodation part of the convention organizations. Naturally, although there is a need for large accommodation facilities, such organizations can also be held in cities such as Rize, whose infrastructure is developing with good planning.

In order to become a destination in convention tourism, even if the physical requirements are met, there is a need for local and national specialized institutions and organizations to market this destination. The most important of these organizations are congress and visitor bureaus and travel agencies. Ersun and Arslan (2009) stated in their study that there are convention and visitor bureaus only in Istanbul, Antalya and Izmir in Turkey, but the establishment of an independent convention and visitor bureau has a very important place in the planning and execution of strategy determination, image creation and development, promotion and marketing activities, especially in destinations that have not yet become a Convention tourism destination and where the tourism industry is not concentrated in one region. In this direction, it is thought that a congress and visitor bureau should be established in order for Rize to become a convention tourism destination.

When analyzed in terms of travel agencies, it was concluded that there are 88 Class A travel agencies in Rize. Although it is thought to be sufficient in terms of number, there is no information that any of these agencies have done a study on Convention tourism or have an expertise. Accordingly, it is thought that the agencies' orientation towards working in the field of Convention tourism, especially participating in national and international fairs and presenting Rize as a convention destination will be effective in increasing the recognition of the region and creating demand for the region.

It has been concluded that there is no problem in transportation by road and airway in terms of transportation facilities of Rize. However, it is thought that adding domestic and international flights in addition to Izmir, Istanbul and Ankara flights will provide convenience in terms of transportation and increase the preferability of Rize.

When examined by the quality of personnel, it is understood that there is no deficiency in finding qualified personnel in both the tourism sector and convention tourism with the tourism faculties and tourism high schools in Rize. However, it is very important for businesses to work with graduates of these schools in personnel selection, to cooperate with Recep Tayyip Erdoğan University for uneducated

existing personnel, to provide training on both tourism and convention tourism, and for tourism businesses that will work in convention tourism to have qualified personnel with this knowledge in their businesses to ensure service quality.

Since 64% of the congresses in our country are national congresses (Eryılmaz, 2011:12), it is thought that it would be right to focus on national congresses as a priority considering the existing opportunities in Rize.

In the website of Rize Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, a very short information is given about convention tourism in alternative tourism types, but it is thought that it would be effective to provide information about congress location, accommodation for convention participants, transportation, etc. It would be useful for public institutions and organizations to include information on such data in more detail on their web pages in order to create an infrastructure for institutions, organizations and organizations planning to hold congresses in the province.

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