

Ecotourism in North Cyprus: Fostering Traditional Architecture in Accommodation Buildings for Sustainable Tourism

By Prof. Dr. Zihni Turkan^{1*}, Dr. Miray Dizem Yılmaz²

Abstract

Tourism, which is defined as the exchange of culture in its general aspect, is categorised based on its intended purposes. Ecotourism has been introduced and become worldwide popular in the last quarter century with familiarising and experiencing local cultures through travels to the naturally and ecologically unspoilt parts of countries. Accommodation buildings that are significant elements of tourism activities are vital in ecotourism practices and sustainability due to the provision of cultural exchange for their visitors. Cyprus is an important tourism centre with its significant location in the world, cultural heritage with rich historical background and advantages from the Mediterranean climate. With the advantage of being an island, Cyprus still maintains the traditional living culture and ecological spaces, both of which create a huge demand for ecotourism. The residential buildings constructed and restored with traditional architectural characteristics are used as accommodation buildings at the ecotourism villages of North Cyprus. With architectural characteristics, authentic features and their service approach with local products, such buildings have vital role in sustainable ecotourism through introduction and promotion of traditional cultural richness to their visitors. Our research explains the definitions of tourism and ecotourism and their types by presenting our research on the tourism and ecotourism activities in North Cyprus. Then as the main dimension of our study, the accommodation buildings with traditional architectural characteristics were selected from the North Cyprus ecotourism villages as examples, and their common architectural characteristics were presented which were identified through a detailed field study. The findings and assessment on the architectural details about lodging structures were concluded the role and significance of lodging structures for ecotourism.

Keywords: Tourism, Ecotourism, North Cyprus, Accommodation, Architecture.

1. Introduction

Tourism is commonly defined as travelling for holiday, recreational and entertainment purposes and also temporary accommodation at the place of visit (Yörük, 2003). Tourism is performed with different social, cultural, sport and special interest purposes. Special interest tourism covers hunting, golf, thermal, culture, congress, yacht, sea, mountain and winter, youth and ecotourism.

As an important component among tourism-related activities, lodging structures offer their visitors a *place of safety* while provide some needs like comfort, recreation, dining also amusement. They are classified like hotels, motels, *resort*, *bed & breakfast*, *mountain resort*, *thermal service areas*

¹Near East University Faculty of Architecture, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5266-5192>

²Düzce University Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6542-1653>

*Corresponding Author.

that provide services depending on their purposes (Kozak et.al., 2014). Ecotourism was first introduced in 1980s and has become a crucial tourism that ensure cultural exchange between several nations. Ecotourism is also known as the travels to natural and ecologically unspoiled places (Özhan, 2007). They are different from the accommodation buildings used for alternative forms of tourism and they are boutique hotels in with the native and cultural features of their area. They are facilities with environmental impact free, natural and cultural properties, their own landscape design, sustainable and local building design, renewable energy sources where local community is part of their operation and development (Hakim and Nakagoshi, 2014). Ecotourism accommodation buildings have major role in the promotion of traditional lifestyle and local cultural properties for their visitors.

Cyprus has become one of the tourism destinations in the world with its important position in Mediterranean, climate and cultural heritage back from the civilisations in the island. Cyprus used to connect out of countries through sea and perform maritime commerce. the motion of individuals from other nations had started during the British administration period (1878-1960) with British administration and military officers (Turkan, 2008). The International Nicosia Airport had become an important transfer point in the Middle East while connecting the island with the world via air when the Republic of Cyprus established in 1960. Following the island's separation into north and south in 1974, the maritime transport has been performed via Famagusta and Kyrenia sea ports in the North Cyprus. Considering that the Ercan State Airport debuted in 1976, the connections with the world started and improved. In parallel with the tourism that become active in 1980s, resorts were built and put into service (Bıçak and Turkan, 2018). Since 2000, many accommodation buildings were constructed in northern and eastern coastal areas due to the developing North Cyprus tourism. The majority are high rise, luxurious modern buildings with many bed capacity (Ölçer, 2011; Emekli, 2003). The community in North Cyprus stay connected with rural life and traditional living culture since North Cyprus is a small island country with very good transportation facilities. Sustainable traditional life created positive and suitable conditions for North Cyprus ecotourism where ecotourism activities started in Bağlıköy, Büyükkonuk and Dipkarpaz villages by 2005. The old houses constructed by traditional architectural features were renovated and converted to accommodation structures. Moreover, every year eco-days are planned where people present local lifestyle and local cultural assets, sell home-made food and beverages, promote traditional island life and culture.

The demand for ecotourism activities has increased in the world as well as in North Cyprus. In order to meet increasing accommodation demand, old residential buildings in the ecotourism villages, which have traditional architectural properties were restored into accommodation buildings, furnished with unique and authentic island elements and introduced to ecotourism. Also, additional spaces and new accommodation buildings with local architectural characteristics are constructed to eliminate spatial deficiencies. The contribution and significance of traditional architectural accommodation buildings in North Cyprus were selected as our research subject since the introduction and maintenance of local cultural island values can only be possible through such buildings.

Ecotourism, which has gained a vital position among tourism activities since XXI. century, has become the first choice of local and foreign visitors in North Cyprus. Hence, the architectural characteristics of ecotourism accommodation buildings have major role for ecotourism. Within the content of ecotourism sustainability in North Cyprus, the purpose of this study is to describe the architectural features of conventional lodging structures. that were restored in ecotourism villages and integrated into tourism as boutique hotels through field studies, and based on our assessments to reflect the contribution and significance of architectural characteristics in the promotion and maintenance of local cultural values to the visitors.

North Cyprus is a popular tourism target because of its location, very rich cultural inheritance from different historical periods and Mediterranean climate. Additionally, ecotourism in the North Cyprus tourism sector is important since traditional lifestyle still exist in rural areas that are interwoven with urban lifestyle of island and natural surroundings. There are new accommodation buildings in ecotourism villages in addition to the existing traditional buildings that were restored into accommodation buildings. It is important that accommodation buildings to bear original local architectural features as they are important components of ecotourism by promoting and preserving traditional lifestyle and local richness. Although there are some studies on the ecotourism in North Cyprus, the absence of an elaborated research on the contribution and significance of traditional architectural accommodation buildings makes our study more crucial. Moreover, the study findings would serve as a guidance for the new ecotourism accommodation buildings.

Particularly the idea of tourism, which is the foundation for our study, varieties of tourism, concept and properties of ecotourism, tourism and ecotourism in North Cyprus, architectural characteristics of traditional accommodation buildings in the ecotourism villages and significance and contribution of traditional architecture in accommodation buildings to the sustainable ecotourism as identified through our assessment are the limitations of our study.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Tourism and Ecotourism

Tourism is defined as travels outside the permanent residence, workplace and spaces where people fulfil their existing needs, and relationships and the whole events arising from temporary accommodation (Kozak et.al, 2000). Tourism has become modern after “the Industrial Revolution” and developed with the influence of worldwide population increase, less working hours after the Industrial Revolution, more free time, improvement of education and cultural levels. While tourism is one of the sectors that showed the fastest growth and development, it a prominent service sector of today’s era rather than telecommunication and information. Tourism refers to the movement of individuals for different reasons and it may be performed by social, cultural, sport and activities of particular interest. Special locations and places are preferred for various reasons and grouped by interests. Based on such interests, the types of tourism are as follows: hunting tourism, belief tourism, golf tourism, thermal tourism, culture tourism, congress tourism, yacht tourism, sea tourism, mountain and winter tourism, youth tourism and ecotourism. Accommodation in tourism covers a number of facilities like resorts,

hotels, hostels, motels, bed and breakfast, camping etc. where people meet their temporary shelter, nutrition, recreational and relaxation needs at the most commercially suitable place outside their personal households during their travels that they make for various reasons (Usta, 2014).

Ecotourism or ecological tourism is described as the travels to places or regions where natural and ecological features are not intervened. As an increasingly popular type of tourism, ecotourism occurs since people are curious or interested in unique culture and local communities preserving the nature while interacting with environment (Özhan, 2007).

Ecotourism activities are active holidays that tourists prefer to stay at simple accommodation spaces in touch with nature, good standard room and most importantly unspoiled and clean nature rather than seeking after sand, sea and sun. The term of ecotourism was used first time by Hector Ceballos-Lascurain in 1983. According to Ceballos-Lascurain, ecotourism means the visits to unspoiled or unpolluted natural places with the least impact on environment, and the tourism process with cultural influence and specific purposes such as observing, assessing and experiencing scenery, rural life and wild life. Incorporating local communities is the key component of ecotourism in the process so that socio-economic benefits are ensured (Boo, 1993).

Unlike the accommodation buildings used in other types of tourism, ecotourism accommodation buildings are boutique buildings that comply with their own natural surrounding and provide good quality services that are mainly family businesses. In 1994, the term of ecolodge was first used at the I. International Forum on Ecological Accommodation and Sectoral Seminar held on Virgin Islands, USA. As an output of international conference in Costa Rica in 1995, a document called “The First International Ecolodge Guidelines” was published, which provided the original global definition for ecolodge accommodations. Based on this description, the first ecolodge facility should have the following (Wood, 2002; Demir and Çevirgen, 2006):

- Protects native and cultural elements of its environment.
- During construction manifests negligible impact on the environment.
- Cultural and physical traits blend with the architectural style and surrounding colours and scenery.
- Uses alternative means to provide long term water support and minimize water consumption.
- Ensures active management of solid waste and wastewater through establishing systems.
- Contributes to sustainable local developments with research programs.
- Excels in cooperation with local population.
- Provides programs on local natural and cultural surroundings for employees as well as visitors.
- Meets energy needs in combination with passive designs and sustainable modern equipment.

In addition to their landscape design and gardens, ecolodge buildings minimize the environmental impact within the framework of cultural and natural values, apply design sustainably and employ green technologies, include local society in the evolution and

application of ecotourism structures and provide culture and environment training in harmony with their visitors (Hakim and Nakagoshi, 2014).

2.2. Tourism and Ecotourism in North Cyprus

As an island in Mediterranean, Cyprus established with its foreign and trade relations via sea. Kyrenia and Larnaca ports were the first points organised for sea transportation. The movement of people from other countries had started during the British administration period (1878-1960) with British administration and military officers (Turkan, 2008). The sea transportation started with the British administration strengthened the relations of Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities with their motherlands Turkey and Greece and extended the tourism activities (Anonymous, K. K. Müze dostları derneği yayını, 2009). After the 1974 as divided island north and south, the maritime transport has been performed via Famagusta and Kyrenia sea ports in the North Cyprus. Cyprus improved its relations with other countries and established new cooperation following the airline transportation (Gazioglu, 2000). As the Ercan State Airport was established in 1976, the relationships with the world started and improved. In 1970s, Famagusta became the main holiday region in the island with many tourism facilities while Kyrenia followed as the second with its fast pace in tourism sector. By 1970s, mostly holiday resorts were constructed as accommodation buildings for tourism in North Cyprus (Uygur, Göral, Bozkurt, 2015). After 1990s, the tourism has improved when North Cyprus tourism companies established connections in Europe. Since 2000, high-rise large scale accommodation buildings with high bed capacity have appeared on north and east coast of North Cyprus and such facilities introduced very common hotel models that are far from serving to culture tourism of island (Ziffer, 1989). There are 80 hotels with different stars, 3 holiday villages, 25 touristic bungalows, 2 apart hotels, 10 boutique hotels, 5 touristic houses, 26 touristic hostels and 2 regional houses in the North Cyprus according to the information received Tourism Authority of T.R.N.C.

Cyprus is a tiny island with little developed industry, and output is primarily relied on both farming and animal husbandry. The short distances between settlements and easy access allowed people to stay close with rural life and ensured sustainability for traditional life. Such characteristics made North Cyprus suitable for ecotourism. For the revitalisation of tourism, Büyükkonuk (Komi Kebir) village in the district of İskele that was founded back in Bronze Age was selected as a pilot ecotourism village (Figure 1). Conferences and trainings were organized for the village people, who earn their living with agriculture and animal husbandry. Later on, the ecotourism in North Cyprus was expanded to Bağlıköy (Ambelikou) and Dipkarpaz (Rizokarpaso) villages and developed respectively. The main sources of income in Bağlıköy (Figure 2) in Lefke district and Dipkarpaz (Figure 3) in İskele district are agriculture and animal husbandry. Both villages where traditional island lifestyle still exists are isolated from the urban city life away from Nicosia. As part of ecotourism activities, the existing traditional houses were renovated and converted to accommodation structures. Ecotourism days are organised every year in ecotourism villages where the sale of regional foods, drinks, handmade goods, and folk dance and rural life events are performed so that traditional lifestyle and cultural aspects of Cyprus are maintained and promoted (Menteş, 2015). The diversity of North Cyprus flora and fauna also support the ecotourism development attracting many visitors to the island. In terms

of special interest tourism, tours are organized in certain seasons for sea turtle, Cyprus orchid observations. Wild donkeys that lives in Karpaz Protected Area support the tourism activities in Dipkarpaz region (Ilseven, Hıdırer and Tümer, 2006).

Although Yeşilyurt (Pendaya), Kumyalı (Kumyalik) and Yeşilırmak (Limnidi) villages are not covered under our research, there are two accommodation buildings constructed as an extension to existing buildings in Yeşilyurt and Kumyalı that each has one; and two new accommodation buildings constructed in reinforced concrete structure exist in Yeşilırmak. The majority of ecotourism accommodation buildings in North Cyprus are boutique hotels that used to be traditional old housing units. The new buildings were designed with local architectural characteristics through traditional materials and forms; and they were also furnished with authentic accessories to be compatible with ecotourism.



Figure 1. Biyükkonuk (Komi Kebir) village

(<https://www.gundemkibris.com/sinema/baglikoyde-3-eko-gun-pazar-gunu-duzenlenecek-b107572.html>)



Figure 2. Bağlıköy (Ambelikou) village



Figure 3. Dipkarpaz (Rizokarpaso) village

(Author - 2020)

(<https://www.havadiskibris.com/onlar-hariziyor-biz-oduyoruz/>)

3. Methodology

Literature review was conducted for conceptual aspects and qualitative research method was used for the related accommodation buildings based on field study. Firstly, an elaborated literature review was performed for the concepts of tourism and ecotourism through books, journals, articles and theses and the necessary information were compiled accordingly.

Then, a number of interviews were held with authorities, association members and owners/operators of accommodation buildings to collect information about the history, conversion process and status of traditional accommodation building examples selected from Bağlıköy (Ambelikou), Büyükkonuk (Komi Kebir) and Dipkarpaz (Rizokarpaso) ecovillages in North Cyprus, and the related documentation were gathered. Within the scope of research, a total number of eleven accommodation buildings (Tourism Authority of T.R.N.C), two of which are in Bağlıköy, three in Büyükkonuk and six in Dipkarpaz village, were analyzed in detail. The buildings in Bağlıköy are boutique hotels, which were restored and converted from the existing traditional houses. Two accommodation buildings in Büyükkonuk were constructed with local architectural features through using traditional construction materials and system while another is built in local rural architecture with stone material as an extension to the available house. With regard to the accommodation buildings in Dipkarpaz, three of them were restored from the existing old housing units in the village and the other three are new buildings that were constructed in traditional architectural characteristics with reinforced concrete carcass structure. In terms of the architectural characteristics of accommodation buildings, their location, number of floors, construction systems, construction materials, layout plans, roof structures, façade organisation, indoor organisation and furnishing, and sketches were identified through on-site detailed field study plan. Our field study was supplemented with outdoor and indoor building photos showing the existing situation. Our findings on the architectural characteristics of accommodation buildings were compared.

The contribution and importance of these accommodation buildings on ecotourism were emphasized based on such common traditional architectural characteristics.

4. Architectural Characteristics of Accommodation Buildings in Northern Cyprus

Following the field study and on-site detailed evaluation and assessments, the common architectural characteristics of accommodation buildings, which were constructed in traditional architectural approach and restored for tourism purposes, are as follows:

Location and Number of Floors: Traditional accommodation buildings in ecotourism villages are mainly located on streets integrated with the traditional village lifestyle and nature. They are low rise with courtyards that most of them are single floor buildings. Courtyards facilitate the outdoor functions during the traditional island life (Figure 4, 5).



Figure 4. Ambelikou Guest House
(Author - 2020)



Figure 5. Karpaz Arch House
(Author - 2020)

Construction Materials and Technique: They are mainly masonry buildings constructed with traditional construction materials like stone, adobe and wood. Stone and adobe are used on walls, arches, door-window frames where as railings, ceiling carrier systems, shading components, and door-window frames are made of wood (Figure 6, 7).



Figure 6. Galifés Guest House
(Author - 2020)



Figure 7. Karpaç Arch House
(Author - 2020)

Layout Plan: The related accommodation buildings are designed almost as rectangular in parallel with traditional lifestyle. Different functions are separated, and they have simple indoor organisation (Figure 8).

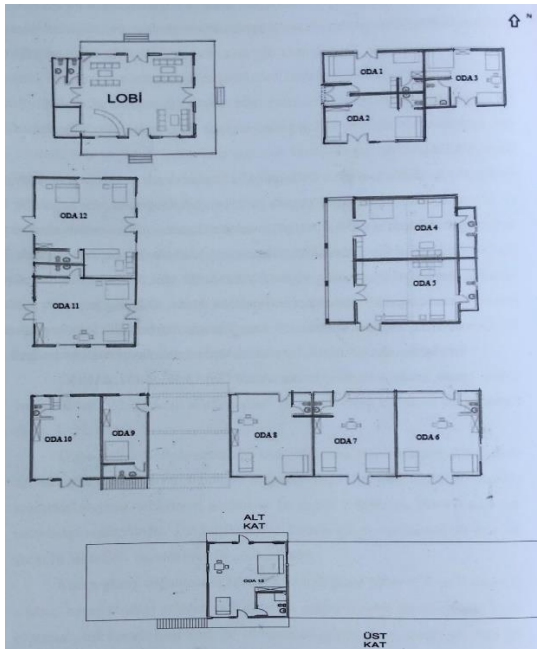


Figure 8. Karpaç Arc House Plan (Author - 2020)

Roof system: Brick covered, slightly inclined wooden roof structures and flat roofs were used in accordance with the hot and arid summers and mild winters with low precipitation of Mediterranean climate (Figure 9, 10).



Figure 9. Galifes Guest House
(Author - 2020)



Figure 10. Ambelikou Guest House
(Author - 2020)

Façade: They have simple façade in general with rectangular wooden door and windows. Flat, half circle and pointed arches built with stones add momentum to the façades (Figure 11, 12).



Figure 11. Galifes Guest House
(Author - 2020)



Figure 12. Revaklı Ev Guest House
(Author - 2020)

Floor and Ceiling: At the time of restoration, ceramic material is used on the floors while woven straw mat on rectangle/circle wooden beams with traditional construction techniques is applied on ceilings (Figure 13, 14)



Figure 13. Revaklı Ev Guest House
(Author - 2020)



Figure 14. Galifés Guest House
(Author - 2020)

Furnishing: The traditional accommodation buildings are furnished with island's unique and authentic elements. There are authentic wooden, iron and brass beds, engraved wooden crates, wooden armchairs and tables in the bedrooms. Rooms also have rugs and handcrafted curtains. Authentic armchairs and couches, coffee table, sideboard, showcase and shelves which made wooden are used in reception and sitting areas of common spaces. Wooden tables with turned legs and woven chairs, both of which are still used in the traditional island life, were placed in dining areas (Figure 15, 16).



Figure 15. Ay Phodios Guest House
(Author - 2020)



Figure 16. Ay Phodios Guest House
(Author - 2020)

5. Evaluation and Conclusion

Ecotourism, which has recently reached popularity around the world as well as North Cyprus, has become significant with the historic and unique living culture of island and created an active tourism potential for the increasing demand in local and foreign tourism. Hence, there is a constant increase in the need for accommodation buildings that can be used for ecotourism purposes.

Most of the accommodation buildings in the ecotourism villages of North Cyprus are mainly the old yet restored houses where they now serve for ecotourism with their layout,

plan organization, materials, construction systems, styles and fittings as original examples of traditional Cyprus architecture. The new accommodation buildings or extensions are designed in rural architectural characteristics with traditional materials and forms so that they would be compatible for ecotourism. While the physical planning of accommodation buildings ensures learning and living the local cultural values of Cyprus, the environmental features in rural areas provide many unique living culture experiences for their visitors.

Accommodation buildings in ecotourism villages that were built with traditional architectural characteristics and restored for tourism purposes are located on the streets where traditional villages houses still exist within the natural environment allowing the visitors to fully experience the original natural richness and traditional living culture of island.

On the other hand, the visitors get the opportunity to learn about the local construction materials and techniques since the accommodation buildings were constructed by local construction techniques with stones, adobe and wooden materials. Such materials also provide structural comforts with their isolation properties.

Rather than one single piece, they are designed in sections, which customize different life functions and allow to have low rise buildings. This feature provides self-contained living for visitors integrated with nature like the rural life due to different functions connected through courtyard.

Flat roof or slightly inclined, tile covered roof systems bring local architectural characteristics on the roofs fitting with Mediterranean climate and emphasize traditional building identity.

Rectangular, wooden rolling door and windows on unplastered stone or plastered white and simple façade represent the island's traditional architecture, and terraces and balconies merge indoors and outdoors fit to Mediterranean climate. Arched porticos along the building bring movement to façades and promote the traditional Cypriot semi-open outdoor space use to visitors.

The indoor finishes with traditional local materials and construction techniques exhibit the island's traditional indoor organisation.

The original Cyprus authentic furnishings used in bedroom and shared spaces promote the traditional elements and local cultural objects.

Our research findings and assessments concluded that the buildings in North Cyprus ecotourism villages that were restored and converted to accommodation buildings have the island's original traditional architectural characteristics with their location, number of floors, material and construction techniques, building organisation, roof systems, façade, indoor properties and furnishing. Therefore, the contribution of accommodation buildings as an important component for ecotourism towards the promotion and sustainability of conventional island lifestyle and local cultural values in North Cyprus ecotourism villages with their original local architectural properties and authentic furnishing is vital respectively. We believe that the development and sustainability of ecotourism in North Cyprus can be possible with accommodation buildings that have ecotourism compatible architectural characteristics; thus we hope that this study would guide and serve as a reference for future studies regarding ecotourism in North Cyprus.

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