

# Aknehir Summer Sport Games as the Products of Alternative Sports Tourism

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## ABSTRACT

This study introduces “Aknehir Summer Sports Games” as a product of sports tourism and determines the requirement to consider these games, which are local sports organizations, within the concept of alternative sports tourism. This is a descriptive study. Screening and unstructured interview methods were used for data collection. Changes in the consumption demands of humans have recently led tourism sector to vary their products. After 1990s, it was observed that people want to spend their free time in a different way apart from sunbathing and swimming in the sea, which are called as classical tourism. The demand of tourists with high education and income level to explore different cultures and to participate in cultural and sportive activities required emergence and marketing of these kinds of products, which are called as alternative tourism. In addition to well-known sports tourism, which begin to gain prominence in tourism sector, planning local sports organizations called “alternative sports tourism”, which are conducted for recreative aims and presentation of these local sports organizations as a product will diversify sports tourism and strengthen its potential.

**Keywords:** *Aknehir Summer Sport Games, Tourism, Sports Tourism, Alternative Sports Tourism.*

## INTRODUCTION

Tourism continues to be a steadily growing sector in world’s economy. Many developing countries consider tourism as an alternative source for development. Governments, bureaucrats, academicians and working environments impose tourism as a driving force for growth and as a source for foreign exchange and employment that will revive local economy (Sreekumar and Parayil 2002). The main reason for the inclusion of tourism in national and local development can be summarized by the declaration of OECD: “Tourism helps poor countries accelerate their development. Attracting tourist to a country is easier than selling high-tech products in world’s market” (Kertsen, 1997).

From the beginning of 1980s, along with the foreign expansion and liberalization policies implemented in Turkey, tourism has become an issue to be given importance as well as goods and services trade, and investments in this area have been supported by the state. Investment incentives and financial support to the sector as per “Tourism Promotion Law” dated 1982, may have an important effect in the development of tourism (Bahar, 2006). Turkey, which achieved to be among the first ten countries in international tourism market in terms of both tourism incomes and number of inbound tourist, ranked the 20th in the world in terms of the number of inbound tourist in the year 2000, and ranked the 7th in 2009. In terms of tourism incomes, Turkey ranked the 14th in the world in 2000, while it ranked the 9th in 2009. Tourism is tried to be developed through cooperation between state, private sector and voluntary organizations (Öztürk, 2010). According to recent data, actual tourism income is considered to be over 25 billion dollars (www.kultur.gov.tr). An increase in this share can be possible by diversification of products. Creating product diversity may result in attraction to products, and supporting these products with others will contribute to the

development of tourism.

“Aknehir Summer Sports Games” is annually held in Aknehir Village of Samandağ District, Hatay Province, which has a rich tourism potential in Turkey. The games are conducted by the participation of individuals from every age group in various sports branches. Accepting this local sports organization as “alternative sports tourism” may lead to attaching importance to different local sports organizations in terms of tourism and marketing these products.

As a theoretical basis, this study primarily defines the concepts of tourism, alternative tourism, sports, sports tourism and alternative sports tourism, and then introduces “Aknehir Summer Sports Games”, a local sports organization, as a product of alternative sports tourism.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Tourism and Alternative Tourism**

World Trade Organization (WTO 2005) stresses that tourism is a group of activities involving a peoples' leaving the environment they live for a certain period of time, and travelling and spending money as the principal aim (Jennings, 2007:9). Most studies on tourism in literature agree on the fact that a person has to go far from the place he/she lives in and travel to another place for at least one night in order to be regarded as tourist (Weaver and Oppermann 2000). In our age, many people temporarily travel to different countries and regions away from the places they live for the aims of sightseeing, resting, having fun, knowing different cultures and socializing. These activities constitute tourism events. Tourism can be defined as the activities involving the travel of people to different places for various reasons with their free will, their staying in these places for at least one night and benefiting from the offered goods and services, on condition that they don't settle or receive economic income. In tourism sector, the goods and services leading people to travel, as well as the travel itself, the target place of travel, an area in the target place or the combination of these areas are called as tourism products (Küçükaltan and Yıldız, 2009).

The changes in the consumption systems of people in mass tourism movement and the product diversification studies in tourism sector have resulted in a transformation from sun, sea and sand triangle, which are called as classical tourism products, to the products requiring individual and special interest. People began to prefer holidays suitable for their area of interest by dividing their vacation time into two or more parts, thanks to the speed and comfort in transportation vehicles instead of spending their free time lying under the sun. The reasons for this change include the satisfaction level from classical tourism products, the demand for exploring different cultures, diminishing distances between countries, the increase in educational and income level, the increase in the third age tourist potential, who solved their economic problems in general tourism movement, and the demand to participate in cultural and sportive activities. Tourism investors began to direct their investment in line with these changes in demands in order to have a role in the market. This emerging tourism movement is called as “alternative tourism” as it is considered as an alternative to mass tourism (Kılıç and Kurnaz, 2010)

### **Sports, Sports Tourism and Alternative Sports Tourism**

Article one of International Olympic Treaty states that sports is a human rights for all individuals and every individual has the opportunity to get involved in sports according to their own needs ([www.olimpic.org](http://www.olimpic.org).)

Haywood et al. defined the basic elements of sports as follows: it should involve physical or psycho-motor skills, it should involve a competition within the framework of determined rules and it should have a traditional sustainability (Haywood et al. 1995) Sports is a phenomena that enables the social solidarity and integration and better acquaintance of people and different cultures. It can be stated that tourism serves to these aims.

From the beginning of 1990s, both tourism industry and sports tourism increasingly draw attention in academic circles. Travelling or watching sports are not new things. Even though the concept of sports tourism is used to define these types of travels, in the last decade, it became more common. Many developed countries with many achievements in sports have recently developed sports tourism strategies. By the end of 1990s, the number of studies on sports tourism has began to increase (Gibson, 2006).

Academic congresses on sports tourism began to be held in Turkey. The first one of these congresses in the activity program of Federation of Sports for Everyone, “1<sup>st</sup> International Sports for Everyone and Sports Tourism Congress” was held in 2009, and the second one “2<sup>nd</sup> International Sports for Everyone and Sports Tourism Congress” was held in 2012. In addition, one of the joint working area of General Directorate of Youth and Sports, and Ministry

of Culture and Tourism is expanding the effect are of sports in tourism and therefore creating value on behalf of both institutions and state economy. To that end, "Common Mind Workshop" was conducted in Istanbul on April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

Sports tourism is one of the rapidly developing sectors of travelling and tourism industry. By the year 2011, the income from travelling and tourism is expected to be over 10% of universal gross national product. The economy of world cities and regions, and even the economy of countries increasingly depend on sports supporters (Ensani, 2009). Sports tourism is the events and relationships emerging from the participation of people interested in sports, individuals, groups or teams actively engaged in sports and their managers and spectators in tourism (Report of Common Mind Platform, 2009). According to Hinch and Higham, sports tourism involves sports-based journey from the resident area for a temporary time and sports, here, is characterized with its nature requiring distinctive rules and competition which aims physical engagement (Gibson, 2007). Aforementioned sports tourism definitions mainly involve major sports organizations such as Olympic Games, World Cups, Tennis Tournaments or Formula Races. Apart from these organizations, the travel arrangements in order to watch or participate in sports organizations, which are locally conducted with the participation of people mostly living in that region in their free time and which reflect the culture of that region can be defined as "alternative sports tourism" and the local sports organizations conducted with that aim can be defined as "alternative sports tourism products".

### **Aknehir Summer Sports Games as Alternative Sports Tourism Product**

Action Plan for 2013 of Tourism Strategy of Turkey for 2023, which was prepared by the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, aims to use natural, cultural, historical and geological values of Turkey in a protection-usage balance, and to increase the share that Turkey receives from tourism through developing tourism alternatives, and also envisages important steps towards the diversification of tourism products. Health tourism and thermal tourism, winter tourism, golf tourism, eco tourism, tableland tourism, sea tourism, congress and exposition tourism are ranked as the primary tourism types. Regional and local studies on alternative products are planned to be held to introduce and market these values (Action Plan for 2013 of Tourism Strategy of Turkey for 2023, 2007). Alternative tourism is based on being aware of and protecting the environment and meeting cultures. Thanks to this movement, tourists can mingle with local residents, who therefore get important incomes. Sports tourism products can be diversified by local sports organizations that can be called as alternative sports tourism and that aims to make use of people's free time. "Aknehir Summer Sports Games", which is a promising organization to be included in sports tourism, is conducted in Hatay Province. Hatay Province is the bridge of Turkey to Middle East, and the bridge of Middle East to Mediterranean Sea, and is a rising star for tourism thanks to its history for thousands of years from B.C.s, and colorful cultural heritage due to its position as a cradle of many civilizations. Even though "destination" image in tourism is affected from individuals, institutions and laws, the environment, water, flora and fauna, cultural environment, which are the physical and social environment of "destination", are crucially important for "destination" image to be created or that have emerged (Trauer and Ryan, 2005). Within this context, the presence of mostly visited and attractive places of Hatay Province like St. Simon Abbey on the slopes of Simon Mountain and Ziyaret El-Arabi are the indicators of important location of this region in terms of tourism. In addition to these features, Aknehir Summer Sports Games are conducted in this region, which may make this region more attractive in terms of sports tourism.

Aknehir is a village on the banks of Orontes River in Samandağ District of Hatay Province. According to the census conducted in 2000, 2720 people live in Aknehir village. It has 650 households and the literacy rate is 75%. Recently, the number of people working in different jobs in foreign countries especially like Saudi Arabia, Germany, Libya and Kuwait has increased. Foreign exchange introduced to the village have changed the life style of people. The village has many groceries, a butcher's shop, two patisseries, a restaurant and ten coffee houses. Harbiye, whose ancient name is "Daphne" (a region also known as "Defne" in Turkish Language) is located in 7 km distance from Aknehir and has great importance for the history of sports. In his compiled Olympic Book Koryürek (2003) stated that the right to conduct 90' Olympics was given to Antakya region via a document for 360 years in 260 AD. Some historians claim that sports celebrations conducted in once called "Daphne" region (near Aknehir) near Antakya was the successor of the organization conducted in Olympia and there was a grand stadium in "Daphne" region even in 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC (Koryürek Eds, 2003). Unveiling this information will increase touristic attraction of the region. The driving force of tourism is the historical and cultural richness of a place. The conduction of sports summer games as a cultural phenomena, which is involved in the history of Aknehir, should be realized, and whether all society participate in these games due to its historical backgrounds should be examined.

The authors of this article joined to the opening of 33<sup>rd</sup> Aknehir Summer Sports Games, which was conducted by Aknehir Youth and Sports Club (<http://aknehirsporkulubu.com/>) on July 16<sup>th</sup>, 2012, information was obtained through interviews with organization committee: the games that youths called Olympics were conducted as amateur tournaments in their free time in different branches like football, swimming, shot put, high jump, 100 m sprint, 5000

m sprint, wrestling, volleyball, tug of war, javelin, table tennis and chess. Young people who brought mattresses for high jump and used smooth and appropriate sticks for pole jump used an old cannonball for shot out and an appropriate flow of Orontes River for swimming. Natural tribune on the banks Orontes River and an area with sand basis were used as game area and since this area have recently been rented to be used as quarry by Provincial Special Administration, young people had difficulties in finding a suitable place, they smoothed a field for games and continued this tradition with great self devotion. After great flood of Orontes River in 1998 and 2000, gardens were filled with sand, which therefore contributed to the inclusion of beach volley and beach football to the games. All these games were organized with the committees established by young people and all costs were covered by voluntary villagers who contributed to meeting equipment needs. The games receive participant from surrounding villages and nearby city centers. Aknehir Summer Sports Games are organized at nights for a month from July to August on annual basis. Every year, program involves competitions and games distinctive to the region like balance on bicycle, as well as well-known sports branches like tug of war, beach volley, beach football, chess, table tennis, backgammon, shot put, and sprints in women, junior, young and middle aged category. Active participant number is approximately 600 people every year and participation is limited in some highly demanded categories. Young people put every effort from refereeing, to preparation of field and fixture on voluntary basis. The biggest aim of these young people, who reinforce solidarity, sympathy, winning and defeat through these games, is to gain a sports complex to their villages who love sports and games. The presence of approximately 30 graduates from Physical Education and Sports High School can be interpreted as the evidence that these games increase the interest to sports. These individuals come to this region in summer season and voluntarily serve in every stage of games. The value of this kind of organization in terms of sports tourism is very clear. Its difference form well-known sports tourism products is that it reflects a local sports culture and is organized in free times. As some authors state, sports and tourism are both cultural forms. Standeven and De Knop (1999) suggested that sports is the cultural motion of a physical activity and tourism is the cultural experience of a place. However, while defining these two cultural experiences as two sets, they are actually interdependent even though they seem as two different sources. When these two sources are combined, the easiness that people can reach their nearby environment is remarked (Bull, 2005). Local sports organizations within sports tourism are golden opportunities to create a society where individuals can express their cultural identities and raise a cultural nature that represent various local cultures. With the self-management structure of Aknehir Summer Sports Games, the organizers can participate in games as sportsmen, referee or manager and gain experience. These games make important contributions to the creation of sports culture.

Sport is a phenomenon that ensures social solidarity and integration and provides the opportunity to get to know different cultures better. Villagers participating in Aknehir summer sports games do sports in their free time. According to generally accepted view and the concepts closely related with sports and sports tourism, free time is the period of time that individuals spare for themselves apart from their necessary works to maintain their lives. This period of time indicates different things that individuals prefer with their free will and get as habits; however, they are about their own needs since they reflect their happiness, relief and self-enrichment. Sports is accepted as voluntary activities that offer opportunities for healing the situation of individuals and enable them to gain spiritual experiences (Gibson, 2006)

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Even though sports tourism had many privileged dimensions throughout 20<sup>th</sup> century, it demonstrated a development that can be remarkable social, economic and cultural phenomena (Weed and Bull, 2009). The diversification of sports products in sports tourism may cause changes in the behavior of tourists participating in tourism movement. The presentation of alternative sports products with their social, economic and cultural dimensions within this context and shaping investments in this direction will create a different dimension in sports tourism.

How many tourists would have come to other countries if they had the richness that Hatay Province has? Hatay is a virgin area and there are a lot of things to be done in this issue. The use of "Aknehir Summer Sports Games" organized in order to make use of free times at local level within tourism policies of Hatay Province as alternative sports tourism products may be attractive for tourists. Due to the characteristics of Hatay Province and the inclusion of "Samandağ Tourism City" in the first ten tourism cities of Turkey proposed by Action Plan for 2013 of Tourism Strategy of Turkey for 2023, it is clear that this has a high potential in terms of tourism. Creating product diversity within tourism and supporting them with other products in addition to their own attractiveness will contribute to the development of tourism. The evaluation of local sports organizations in the region as alternative sports tourism products will increase the attraction of the region and contribute to both tourism and sports tourism. It can be concluded that "Aknehir Summer Sports Games" organized within the context of Samandağ Tourism City is a sportive product with alternative sports tourism value conducted its natural environment.

According to Tourism Strategy of Turkey for 2023, alternative tourism based products will be examined in domestic tourism market, studies regarding increasing capacity will be conducted on regional and local basis, these values will be introduced and marketed (Action Plan for 2013 of Tourism Strategy of Turkey for 2023, 2007). Sports tourism based on alternative sports can be developed in this region by ensuring the integration of region-specific different types of tourism. Considering "Aknehir Summer Sports Games", as "alternative sports tourism" may help different local sports organizations to be accepted as "alternative sports tourism". "Aknehir Summer Sports Games", is a local sports organization held by the participation of people from every age category to different sports branches in games annually lasting for one month in Aknehir Village of Samandağ District of Hatay, Turkey, which has a rich tourism potential.

In conclusion, this study suggests that "Aknehir Summer Sports Games" should be considered as a sports tourism product within the scope of alternative tourism and due the participation of all villagers in these games, "Aknehir Summer Sports Games" organization, which has traditional characteristics and a history of 33 years, should be used as alternative tourism product through cooperation between the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Sports for Everyone Federation and regional administrative of the province. The sports history of the region should be examined and its historical artifacts should be revealed. This region, having rich cultural and natural values, should be made a brand in sports tourism and an attractive place for tourists. Tourists increasingly demand to be more active, healthy and aware of sports during their holidays and stay in environmentally friendly places (Bramwell, 1994). Attracting these kinds of tourists to this region will contribute to revealing social and cultural values of the region and help its economic development through sports tourism.

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