

CYCLING TOURISM POTENTIAL IN TÜRKIYE THE CASE OF TÜRKIYE TOURISM PROMOTION AND DEVELOPMENT AGENCY TGA AND EUROVELO & CYCLING TOURISM CONFERENCE 2023

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Received 05 May 2023; Revised 15 May 2023; Accepted 18 May 2023

ABSTRACT

Cycling tourism has gained significant popularity worldwide in recent years. People prefer cycling tourism to have a more active holiday experience in tourist destinations. Cycling tourism not only provides travelers with enjoyable physical activity, but also makes a significant contribution to local economies. Therefore, many countries are developing policies to support cycling tourism and making investments in this area.

Türkiye is a country with high potential for cycling tourism. The country's natural beauty, rich historical and cultural heritage provides an ideal environment for cycling tourism. Bicycle paths and routes in Türkiye provide an attractive travel experience for both domestic and foreign tourists. In addition, the Türkiye Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (TGA) is implementing projects that support cycling tourism. These international projects not only contribute to the tourism sector but also provide a significant contribution to local economies.

In this case article, we will discuss the potential of cycling tourism in Türkiye and the efforts made in this field. Additionally, we will examine the benefits of cycling tourism, its impact on the tourism sector and the local economy, and the opportunities that Türkiye can provide in this area.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the popularity of cycling tourism has been on the rise (Bakogiannis et al., 2020; Brscic, Lovrecic & Sugar, 2021; Chen & Lee, 2017; Duran et al., 2018). Many destinations have started to develop cycling tourism as a tourist product (Maggi et al., 2021). This is because people have a desire to

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engage in activities that will help them relax, and cycling can lead to both mental and physical relaxation.

Muiruri Njoroge et al. (2017) have noted that sports tourism is being developed in some destinations to create diversity, reduce seasonality, and develop new tourist areas. Developing sports tourism through organized events benefits the destination, and one of the most important benefits is the participation of the local population (Clark & Misener, 2015). In addition, it is important to organize such events based on the characteristics of the destination to ensure their longevity (Buning & Gibson, 2016).

Researchers have expressed a common view that cycling tourism provides economic benefits to local communities (ECF 2013; Neun & Haubold 2016; Schlemmer, 2019; Weed, et al., 2014). In order for the development of cycling tourism in destinations to reach a satisfactory level of positive impact on the destination, it is necessary to have detailed planning based on the needs of participants (Malucelli et al., 2015). The attractiveness of cycling routes is dependent on existing facilities such as food and beverage establishments, local gastronomy, historical villages, and beautiful scenery. After such planning and projects are carried out, there is a need for global promotion of the destinations (Chen & Lee 2017). In a study commissioned by the European Parliament (2012) and conducted by the European Cyclists' Federation (ECF), it is estimated that the EuroVelo network will generate 7 billion euros in direct revenue each year and enable more than 60 cycling rides. In Norway, the level of cycling increased by 11% in 2020 compared to 2018. In general, there has been a rising trend in cycling and specifically in cycling tourism in 2021. EuroVelo, the largest bicycle network in Europe, has seen a 5% increase in user numbers for 2021 compared to 2019 (Ciascai, Dezsi & Rus, 2022).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cycling Tourism

In recent years, people have been experiencing physical activity and sports in a different way. They are moving towards a more unique and lifestyle-focused way of living, such as cycling and mountain biking (Gilchrist & Wheaton, 2017). These activities have gained momentum not only for health-related reasons, but also as a way to increase the economic impact of cycling tourism (Hjalager, 2015; MacDermid, 2016). The degree to which a destination relies on tourism is determined by continually directing tourist developments towards long-term and economic positioning and marketing of tourist areas (Claveria & Poluzzi, 2017). However, the destination concept needs to be dynamic and supported by an unlimited approach that promotes tourists' cross-sectoral experiences in defining a tourist destination (Rodriguez-Giron & Vanneste, 2018; Schlemmer, 2019).

Cycling tourism can be a form of sports tourism. There are numerous cycling events based on active participation, including mountain biking and triathlons. For example, the Vatternrundan, a 300 km race in Sweden, attracts the interest of 23,000 cyclists every year (Vatternrundan, 2018). In addition, cycling

races like Tour de France attract many special interest tourists as spectators, and also attract cycling tourists who want to actively exist by cycling on the same routes as the real competitors (Lamont & McKay, 2012).

Cycling tourism is not just a rural tourism phenomenon. The use of bicycles as part of urban tourism offerings is a significant development across Europe (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010). As an indication of this, there has been an increase in bicycle sharing schemes in many European cities. New business models and technologies have contributed to success, as seen in destinations like Paris, which attract both locals and tourists. Interesting places and activities targeting cycling tourists have become widespread. For example, in Berlin, various guided tours for tourists have been developed for over a decade (Nilsson, 2007). Cycling itself has become a tourist activity. Therefore, there are several categories of cycling tourists. The dominant category in the literature is suitable cycling tourists who consider cycling an important reason for travel. Sports tourists prefer long-distance journeys or multiple trips and are more likely to visit rural areas (Nilsson, 2019). Another less visible category could be called holiday cyclists, for whom cycling is part of the vacation experience but not the main focus (McKibbin, 2015). These are more ordinary tourists or day trippers who use bicycles in a less specialized way than cycling tourist enthusiasts. The continued interest in cycling tourism has convinced destination marketers, regional governments, and other related industries to think about tourism strategies (Lee, 2014). Collaboration, strategy, and development are key features of tourism destinations.

The pilot destination for cycling transportation in Türkiye is Sakarya. 30 kilometers of usable bicycle paths have been built in Sakarya. Sakarya was chosen as the pilot province because bicycles can be used for transportation integrated with public transportation. In addition, an area called "Bicycle Island" has been created to raise awareness about bicycles, and a special area has been established for bicycle activities (Sakarya Metropolitan Municipality, 2023). The first city in Türkiye to join EuroVelo is Izmir. The application to the European Cycling Route Network (EuroVelo) was approved for Izmir, and a 491 km bicycle network route was planned, which includes 42 extensions of the existing 5,888 km Mediterranean Route starting from Dikili and ending in Selcuk. When the planned route was completed, it was officially added by the ECF in 2019. Being a member of EuroVelo will also contribute to the regional economy of Izmir. This development offers an opportunity for the development of bicycle infrastructure and the proliferation of bicycle use in the Izmir region (Izmir Metropolitan Municipality, 2023). The longest bicycle path in Türkiye (41 km) is in Manisa. This path, which extends from the west to the east of the city, was designed according to European Union standards (Manisa Metropolitan Municipality, 2023). More than 30 cycling festivals are organized in Türkiye.

Türkiye Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (TGA)

The Türkiye Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (TGA), established on July 15, 2019, continues its efforts to make Türkiye a brand and attraction center in both domestic and international tourism markets, to discover,

develop and promote tangible and intangible natural, cultural, biological and human-made heritage, and to increase Türkiye's tourism capacity and the share of tourism investments in the country's economy, as well as the quality of service, through short, medium and long-term communication/marketing activities. The agency will carry out all promotion/marketing/communication activities related to reaching Türkiye's tourism goals in line with the tourism strategy and policies determined by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Türkiye, promoting and marketing existing tourism opportunities worldwide, and discovering, developing and gaining potential tourism opportunities. TGA has contributed to the creation of many cycling routes in Türkiye. Various cycling routes have been created in destinations such as Cappadocia, Phrygian Valley, West Black Sea, Bartın, Lycian Way, Yenice Forests, Hittite Way, Lake Van Surroundings, Gulf of Gökova, and Taurus Mountains.

The "Bicycle-Friendly Accommodation Facility" certificate was created by the TGA through strong planning, in order to increase alternative tourism branches and to ensure Türkiye's potential in outdoor sports tourism is reached as part of the 2023 Tourism Strategy. The certificate attests to the provision of various conveniences and special menus for the maintenance of bicycles for tourists who prefer to use them during their vacations.

Cycle Summit, one of the important events of cycling tourism, was held virtually under the sponsorship of Cycle Summit Türkiye. Although it was online, the summit, which received great interest, was sponsored by the Türkiye Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (TGA) for the first time and they gave a presentation at a video conference listened to by dozens of tour operators. At the fair where more than 50 tour operators participated, TGA also held one-on-one meetings with bicycle expert tour operators from Germany, Switzerland, and Italy.

In the context of sustainable tourism, the "Communiqué on Granting Bicycle Friendly Accommodation Facility Certificates to Accommodation Facilities with Tourism Enterprise Certificates" was published in the "Resmi Gazete" and entered into force, in order to regulate the principles and procedures for granting cycling friendly accommodation facility certificates to accommodation facilities.

Accordingly, accommodation facilities that:

- Provide a secure parking area for bicycles
- Have a bike wash and repair area
- Employ staff who have knowledge of the routes in the area
- Offer special nutrition menus for cyclists
- Have a 24-h laundry area for cyclists and basic maintenance/repair tools
- will be eligible to receive the certificate if they fulfill these requirements.

T.C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı ile Türkiye Turizm Tanıtım ve Geliştirme Ajansı (TGA), alternatif turizm alanlarındaki çalışmalarını kapsamında

Türkiye’deki dağ ve yol bisikleti rotalarını yabancı turistlere tanıtmak amacıyla Türkiye’nin dört bir yanından rotaların yer aldığı “gocyclingturkiye.com” internet sitesini geçtiğimiz aylarda yayına açmıştı (TGA, 2023).

According to the Product Marketing Director of the Türkiye Tourism Promotion and Development Agency, Ceylan Şensoy, who is leading the efforts of Türkiye in the field of cycling tourism and contributing to the projects, cycling tourism is included as a separate topic in the agency's agenda and strategic plan and has never been dropped from the ministry's agenda. Şensoy stated that development projects are being carried out throughout Türkiye with the goal of becoming a bicycle-friendly destination, and the TGA is providing visibility and marketing support for these projects.

Finally, İzmir, which attracts attention with its magnificent ancient cities, unique natural landscapes, and countless bicycle routes, will host the EuroVelo & Cycling Tourism Conference, which brings together all stakeholders in the cycling tourism industry, from 11-13 October 2023. Industry professionals who will participate in the conference will stay in facilities that have the "Bike Friendly Hotel" certificate. (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Bicycle-Friendly Accommodation Facility Logo.

EuroVelo & Cycling Tourism Conference 2023

The EuroVelo project, one of the most important projects of the European Cyclists' Federation (ECF), aims to promote and coordinate the creation, support, and operation of a sustainable Trans-European Transportation Network throughout the entire European continent. EuroVelo covers 16 long-distance bicycle routes planned for over 70,000 kilometers in Europe, of which 45,000 kilometers have been completed, continuing to bring prestige to the countries it passes through.

It is stated that EuroVelo's cycling tourism network generates approximately 7 billion euros in gross revenue annually, with 14.5 million accommodation-based bicycle tours, 6.4 billion euros, 46 million daily tours, and 700 million euros. Following the application process carried out by the İzmir Metropolitan Municipality in 2016, ECF approved the approximately 500 km

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Izmir bicycle route as an extension of EuroVelo 8 Mediterranean route at its meeting on October 12, 2019.

Since 2012, the EuroVelo & Cycling Tourism Conference has been held every two years in different countries, and due to increasing interest and participation, it will be held annually from 2023 onwards. Izmir, the first city of EuroVelo in Türkiye, will host the conference in 2023. The conference, organized by the Izmir Metropolitan Municipality and local stakeholders in collaboration with the European Cyclists' Federation (ECF), the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Türkiye, and the Türkiye Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (TGA), will also be included in the EuroVelo 8 Mediterranean route. The EuroVelo 8 Mediterranean Bicycle Route starts in the Andalusia region of Spain and connects the Mediterranean coasts of France, Italy, the Adriatic region, and the Balkan Peninsula with places such as Dikili, Bergama, Aliğa, Foça, Izmir center, Balıklıova, Alaçatı, Sığacık, and the ancient city of Selçuk Ephesus in Türkiye as part of the EuroVelo 8 route. **(Figure 2).**

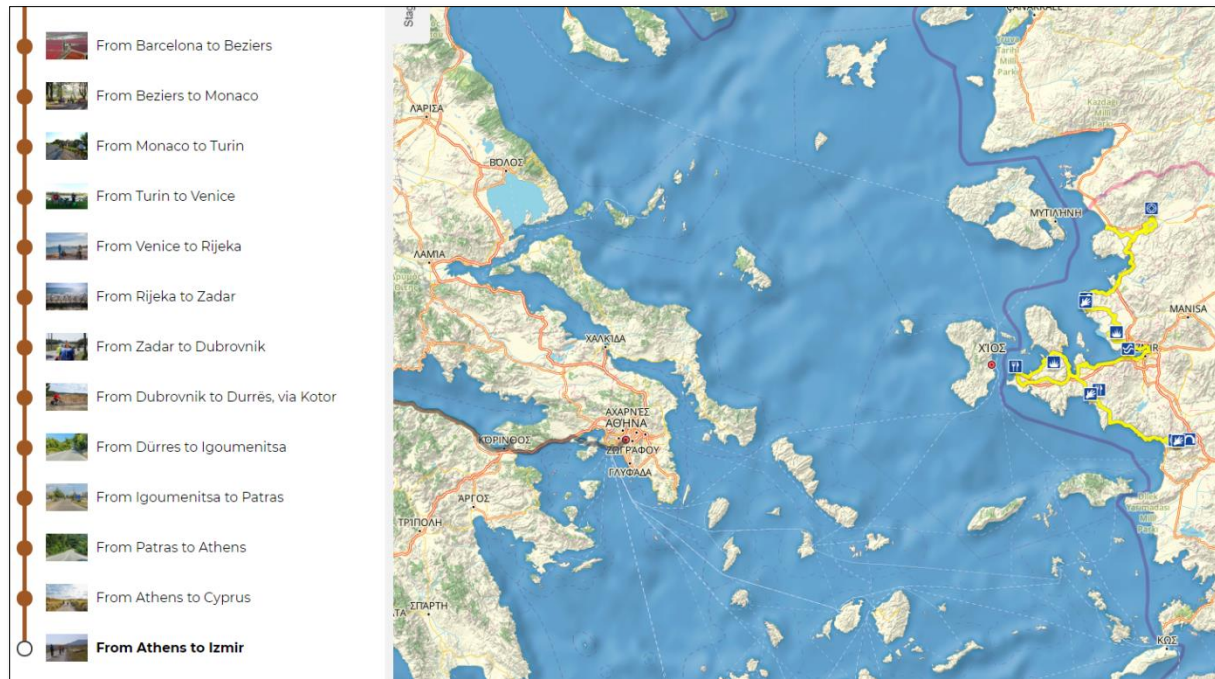


Figure 2. EuroVelo 8 Route.

The EuroVelo & Cycling Tourism Conference stands out as one of the most important gatherings in the world of cycling tourism. The conference provides an excellent platform for sharing information on bicycle networks and tourism and offers participants the opportunity to keep up with the latest developments in the industry, exchange ideas, and establish new connections. Focused on the development and future of sustainable cycling tourism, the conference brings together all stakeholders in the world cycling tourism sector. These stakeholders include cycling tourism experts, universities and academic

circles, tourism officials, public servants, user representatives, tour operators, mass transit companies, and accommodation companies.

The 2023 EuroVelo & Cycling Tourism Conference will be held under the theme "A New Perspective on Heritage: Cycling." This conference will provide a platform for dialogue and information sharing on the future of cycling tourism for participants from all over the world. At the same time, an interesting program will be offered on experiencing, preserving, and developing heritage on "two wheels".

The EuroVelo & Cycling Tourism Conference is one of the most important meetings in the world for cycling tourism. The conference provides an excellent platform for sharing information about bicycle networks and tourism and offers participants the opportunity to keep up with the latest developments in the sector, exchange ideas, and establish new connections. Focused on the development and future of sustainable cycling tourism, the conference brings together all stakeholders in the world cycling tourism sector, including cycling tourism experts, universities and academic circles, tourism officials, public officials, user representatives, tour operators, public transport companies, and accommodation companies.

The conference program includes a series of sessions, workshops, and social events that provide information on cycling network and tourism, promote good practices in cycling tourism, and encourage knowledge-sharing among stakeholders. The conference is of great importance in increasing awareness of bicycle culture and tourism in Türkiye and is directly related to the country's sustainable tourism goals. Professionals from different parts of the world attending the conference will have the opportunity to experience some of the routes included in the EuroVelo 8 Mediterranean route during their time in Izmir. They will explore the historical and gastronomic values of Izmir and its surroundings through tours organized during the conference. EuroVelo is a leading transportation network that connects 17 different long-distance bicycle routes and links the entire European continent.

Izmir, known as the pearl of the Aegean in Türkiye, with its magnificent beaches and natural parks, meets the Mediterranean Sea at the end of the Karaburun Peninsula, where the picture-perfect Sarpıncık Lighthouse is located. The Izmir section of EuroVelo 8 connects the ports of Dikili and Çeşme through the islands of Lesbos and Chios, passing through 18 districts of Izmir province. The route is based on the connection of historical sites, ancient settlements, and natural and cultural heritage. The route is 495 kilometers long and is surrounded by two very important ancient cities, Pergamon to the north and Ephesus to the south (ECF, 2023).

Managed by the ECF, this network is a preferred choice for tourists and locals who want to travel by bicycle and includes routes that support ecological and sustainable living criteria. EuroVelo routes not only contribute to developing cycling tourism in the cities they pass through but also contribute to bicycle infrastructure, cycling transportation, and cycling culture.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Cycling tourism is a popular travel style for those who love to be in nature, want to maintain a healthy lifestyle, and seek an active holiday. Türkiye has a high potential for cycling tourism, and the Türkiye Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (TGA) is making important efforts in this area. Cycling tourism provides economic and social benefits to the destination. Cycling tourists support the local economy by using services such as accommodation, food and beverage, shopping, and tour guides in the regions they travel to. Additionally, cycling tourism contributes to the preservation of the destination's natural and cultural values. In recent years, cycling tourism activities in Türkiye have gained significant momentum. In addition to the efforts to include Türkiye in the EuroVelo routes, the TGA's projects supporting cycling tourism have also gained great interest.

EuroVelo is a project developed by the European Cyclists' Federation (ECF) to create sustainable cycling tourism. Today, there are 17 long routes in Europe with a total length of approximately 90,000 km. EuroVelo routes not only promote cycling tourism in the cities they pass through, but also help develop bicycle infrastructure, cycling transportation, and cycling culture. In Europe, approximately 60 million bicycle trips are made each year, and cycling tourism generates a huge economy of 63 billion euros annually. Worldwide, cycling tourism competes with cruise tourism. The European Cyclists' Federation has announced that cycling provides a benefit of 150 billion euros in the global economy.

The inclusion of a city in the EuroVelo Cycle Tourism Network can provide significant contributions to the local and national economy. Cycling tourists coming to the country via EuroVelo routes can create a sustainable economy for many sectors by visiting local accommodation options, restaurants, and historical-cultural sites. The EuroVelo Cycle Tourism Network provides support not only for tourism but also for infrastructure and communication for urban cycling transportation development.

EuroVelo routes are designed to promote sustainable cycling tourism in Europe. Therefore, a city wishing to join the EuroVelo Cycle Tourism Network must meet certain conditions. These conditions are classified into three categories: "infrastructure, services, and promotion" (ECF, 2023).

Infrastructure is one of the most important factors for EuroVelo routes. The continuity of the route should not be disrupted, and suitable infrastructure for cycling traffic must be created. Therefore, routes are expected to pass through low-traffic density roads as far away from motor vehicles as possible. In addition, appropriate paths should be selected to ensure that the entire route can be used with hybrid (trekking) bicycles. It is recommended to avoid long-term climbs and steep slopes. Instead, routes where cycling tourists can enjoy cycling should be identified.

To provide convenience to cycling tourists along EuroVelo routes, it is necessary to mark the routes. These markings should be clear and distinct so that

cyclists can follow the route. In addition, it is recommended that the route passes through natural and cultural heritage areas known as POIs (Points of Interest). This way, cycling tourists can enjoy both nature and cultural heritage.

Finally, the route should provide easy access for cycling tourists. Therefore, public transportation options such as trains and subways should be offered along the routes. This provides cycling tourists with the opportunity to easily complete their routes and reach the desired destinations. All of these conditions are necessary for cities that want to be included in the EuroVelo Cycle Tourism Network. A city that meets these conditions can contribute significantly to both the local and national economy by being included in EuroVelo routes.

Türkiye has a high potential for cycling tourism. Activities such as developing cycling routes, diversifying and popularizing cycling tourism, and encouraging local people to use cycling will provide significant contributions to our country. In this regard, steps can be taken such as infrastructure studies for further development of cycling tourism, marking and regular maintenance of cycling routes, increasing accommodation and dining opportunities. In addition, promotion activities related to cycling tourism are also important.

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