

## **Developing Protection-Use-Strategies Based on Sustainability in Protected Areas: Suuçtu Nature Park Case\***

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### **Abstract**

*This study aims to evaluate the current conservation and use status in a nature park and to develop planning strategies that will provide sustainable use of protected areas for the future. Suuçtu Nature Park in Bursa Province Mustafakemalpaşa district was chosen as the study area. The method of the study consisted of three stages. In the first stage, the current situation was revealed by conducting fieldwork, observations, and interviews. In the second stage, SWOT analysis was carried out to determine the recreational opportunities offered by the area and to evaluate the potential of the study area. It has been determined by SWOT analysis that Suuçtu Nature Park is a strong character due to its unspoiled natural and cultural values, ideal climate characteristics, geological structure and high visual landscape value. In the third stage, conservation and tourism strategies for the future were developed with the TOWS matrix. As a result of the study, by considering the protection and usage conditions of the area, land use strategies have been developed in line with ecological-based tourism and recreation uses in the protected areas.*

**Keywords:** *Conservation, Use, Protected Areas, Tourism, Recreation.*

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\* This study is not included in the study group that requires TR Index ethics committee approval.

## 1. Introduction

In today's world, where globalization and technology are advancing rapidly, individuals under intense stress need to explore nature in their free time/leisure and holidays. Nature parks have become the most remarkable areas of recent times with their unique variety of flora and fauna and offering outdoor recreation. Along with the opportunity to see many natural wonders in a single area, nature parks have turned into touristic attraction centers (Koday, Kaymaz & Kaya, 2018).

In addition, there are accommodation and recreation facilities in nature parks, which are allowed to be built on the condition that certain legal criteria are followed. In this context, its use is long-term and the number of users is increasing (Doğanay & Zaman, 2013; Sezer, 2015).

Today, ecosystem services of protected areas provide recreational and touristic services as well as providing services such as reducing the negative effects of climate change, providing an important opportunity for the creation of biodiversity, protecting plant and animal populations, contributing to scientific research, and education. In this context, nature parks are defined as "natural parts that have vegetation and wildlife features and are suitable for the recreation and entertainment of the public in the integrity of the landscape" (Milli Parklar Kanunu, 1983). Nature parks are areas that ensure sustainable use of natural resources by protecting, managing, developing, and restoring large landscapes as well as improving the recreational opportunities of countries and encouraging tourism development, especially in structurally weak areas. And also natural parks provide provide opportunities for many activities like environmental education, special activities for children and young people, recreation, physical exercise, meeting with nature and landscape, exploring cultures, etc. (Zencirkıran et al., 2017; Kaya & Gümüş, 2018). These areas are the most preferred places for helping to conserve nature and maintaining nature-compatible lifestyles, creating a model for sustainable land use and doing activities such as recreation and tourism (Kuvan, 2012; Atmış et al., 2020).

The increase in visitor potential in protected areas such as national parks, nature parks, and protected areas destroys their natural environment and damage cultural heritage (Özdemir, 2017). It is a priority to determine the purpose and protection-use strategies for the planning and management of protected areas whose natural structure is under threat and visually depreciated due to the constantly increasing and intensifying use (Surat, Surat & Özdemir, 2014).

This study aims to develop planning strategies that will ensure sustainable use for the future by evaluating the current protection and use status of Suuçtu Nature Park with its natural geological formations, forest existence at meters high, clean air and rich tourism opportunities it offers in four seasons in Mustafakemalpaşa District of Bursa province. With the study, a SWOT analysis was carried out to determine the recreational opportunities offered by the area and to reveal the strengths and weaknesses in the evaluation of the potential of the study area. Subsequently, with the TOWS matrix, it is aimed to develop conservation and tourism strategies for the future.

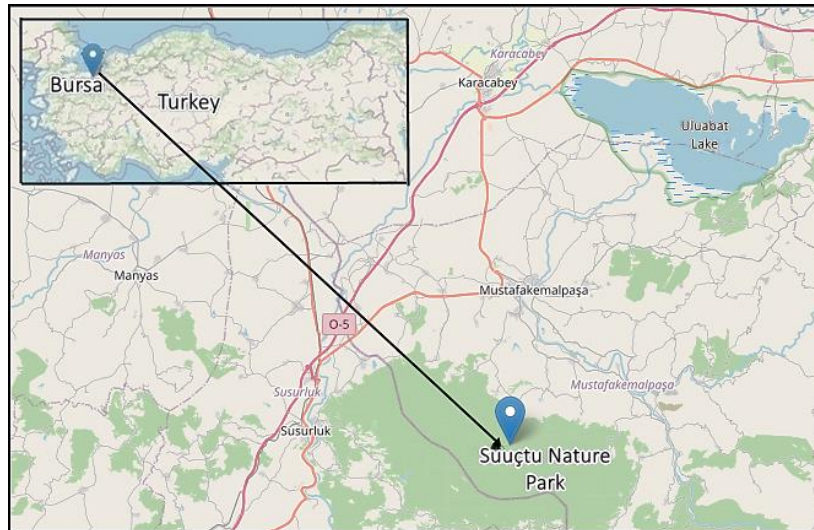
## 2. Material and Methods

The material and methods of the study is explained in the following headings.

### 2.1 Material

The main material of the study is Suuçtu Nature Park in Mustafakemalpaşa district in Bursa. Literature information about the area, on-site observation, and photographs are the other materials of the study.

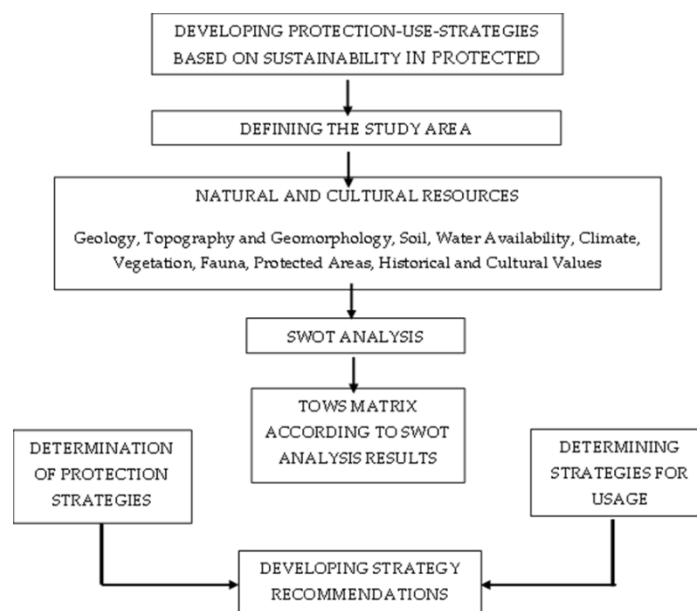
Mustafakemalpaşa district, which is 90 km away from Bursa province, is one of the important districts of Bursa with its rich natural and cultural structure and is also the 138th largest district of Turkey (URL-1) (Figure 1). With its rich natural resource values, Suuçtu Nature Park is one of the places with important tourism and recreational potential in the Mustafakemalpaşa district. Suuçtu was registered as a Nature Park in 2011 by canceling the Status of the Recreation Area.



**Figure 1.** Location of study area

## 2.2 Methods

In the first stage of the study, Information is collected in the field of literature, natural and cultural data of the area are listed with on-site photographs, Information about the current state of tourism and recreational use are given. In the second stage of the study, all data were compiled and Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats for the area were evaluated by the SWOT analysis method. SWOT analysis offers holistic approaches based on sustainability with multiple factors in line with different decision contexts. With this evaluation, besides the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the current situation of Suuçtu Nature Park, its transportation status, relations with its environment, protection-use relationship and tourism uses have been determined. In the third stage, Future-oriented tourism planning and conservation strategies have been developed by creating a TOWS matrix with SWOT analysis results. After the current analysis of the area with SWOT analysis the TOWS matrix, which is the stage where strategic proposals for conservation and tourism activities are developed, has been implemented. Strategies have been put forward opportunities that support strengths (S-O), opportunities to strengthen weaknesses (W-O), strengths reduce vulnerability to external threats (S-T) and developing weaknesses that are vulnerable to external threats (W-T) with TOWS matrix (Aydın Türk, 2006; Pirselimoğlu & Demirel, 2012; Kamer Aksoy, 2015, Pirselimoğlu & Seyidoğlu, 2020).



**Figure 2.** Flow chart of the method

### 3. Results

Suuçtu Nature Park is located within the borders of Mustafa Kemalpaşa district in Bursa province. Suuçtu Nature Park is 17 km from Mustafakemalpaşa District center, 93 km from Bursa city center, and 93 km from Balıkesir city center. Suuçtu Nature Park is located on Karadere. The altitude of Suuçtu Waterfall is 464 meters (Bursa ili Tabiat Turizmi Uygulama Eylem Planı, 2016).

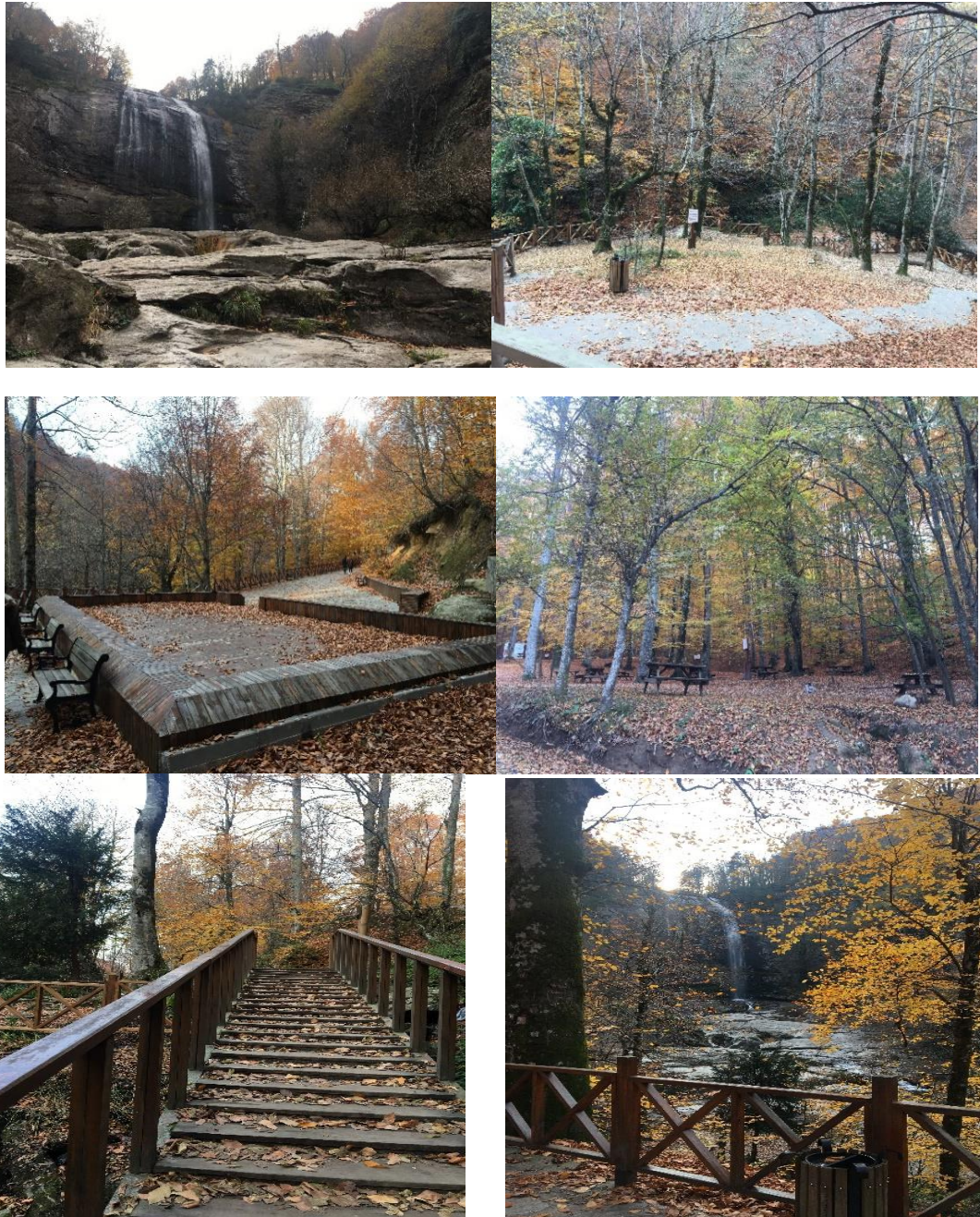
The total area of the nature park is 43 ha, and the nature park and its immediate surroundings are 1st degrees natural protected areas. The area has a Development Plan, and conservation study continues within the scope of the Plan provisions. The Nature Park was first registered as a recreation area in 1980. It was declared as a "Nature Park" in 2011. Suuçtu Waterfall Natural Protected Area has been registered as a "Natural Protected Natural Protected Area" in 2020.

Suuçtu waterfall was formed by the collapse of the fault line under the Karadere stream. Along with the waterfall flowing over granite metamorphic rocks, there are 3 naturally formed small waterfalls on the stream. The region has important formations in terms of magmatic, tectonic, geomorphological, and hydrogeological (Bursa ili Tabiat Turizmi Uygulama Eylem Planı, 2016).

Mustafa Kemalpaşa district consists of 79,633ha forest area. Around the Suuçtu Nature Park, there is a forest area of approximately 41.90 ha. Most of the forests consist of deciduous trees in the study area. There are 101 species and subspecies taxa belonging to 50 families in the Suuçtu Nature Park and its surroundings which are dominated by beech forests. As a result of the studies carried out around Suuçtu Nature Park, as living life and wild animal existence; dwarf bat, hare, forest mouse, Anatolian squirrel, wolf, wild cat, marten, badger, weasel, brown bear, red fox, roe deer, wild boar, etc. And invertebrate animals. In addition, the area is used by birds as a breeding and wintering area. The area is dominated by the Mediterranean climate. It has a temperate and humid climate character (Bursa ili Tabiat Turizmi Uygulama Eylem Planı, 2016).

According to the 2019 census, the population of the Mustafakemalpaşa district is 101,119 (Bursa İl Kültür ve Turizm Müdürlüğü, 2022). In addition to activities such as agriculture, animal husbandry, forestry in and around the area, economic income is obtained from tourists and daily visitors coming to the Nature Park. The economy of the district, shaped by the geographical location of the region, is based on agriculture and animal husbandry. There are 1 organized industrial zone, 4 food industry establishments, 7 flour factories, 2 feed factories, 27 milk, and dairy products enterprises in the Mustafakemalpaşa district. In addition, marble and stone quarries in Söğütalan and Devecikonağı regions also contribute to the economy of the district (Çelik, Küçük & Akman, 2018).

Because the district has had important settlements since ancient times, there are places with important historical and touristic potential such as Miletopolis ruins, Dorak Treasures region, Kestelek Ruins, Lala Şahin Tomb, Hamzabey Mosque and tomb, Şeyhmüftü Mosque and Tomb (Bursa İl Kültür ve Turizm Müdürlüğü,2022). Daily use is available in Suuçtu Nature Park. Accommodation facilities are located in the town center. Also, the general use of the Nature Park is picnic, hiking, nature photography.



**Figure 3.** Suuçtu Nature Park

**Table 1.** SWOT analysis of recreational and touristic use of Suuçtu Nature Park

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intact and outstanding natural resources; Presence of water (Suuçtu Waterfall, Karadere) ecosystem integrity, flora and fauna richness,</li> <li>• To continue and protected Intact natural structure</li> <li>• Natural vegetation consisting of beech, oak, and larch species has a wealth of potential,</li> <li>• The topographic structure of the area have suitable features for ecological-based tourism activities and allow many tourism activities,</li> <li>• Enable daily use and various recreational opportunities (Picnic, hiking, photography, etc.)</li> <li>• Proximity to major settlements,</li> <li>• Possibility of visitors in all seasons,</li> <li>• Have a clean air,</li> <li>• The presence of service units in the Nature Park (cafe, Wc, etc.),</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing rural-urban migration and the rural population tends to decline,</li> <li>• Inadequacy of guards in the area,</li> <li>• Insufficient equipment due to intensive use of the picnic area,</li> <li>• The majority of visitors are not aware of the biodiversity of the area and use the area unconsciously,</li> <li>• While wheelchair access is partially available in the nature park, the equipment is not suitable for disabled individuals. In addition, there is no application for the visually impaired in the area,</li> <li>• Experiencing vehicle traffic density in the area,</li> <li>• Lack of parking,</li> <li>• Inadequacy of service units in recreation areas and lack of infrastructure facilities,</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The area has a Nature Park protection status,</li> <li>• Registration of the area as a Natural Protected Nature Protection Area,</li> <li>• High visual landscape values.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inadequacy of planning studies for ecologically based tourism,</li> <li>• Although the immediate surroundings of the region are known by people, the lack of marketing activities throughout the country and Lack of promotion and advertising for potential tourism visitors,</li> <li>• The buildings in the area (Wc, prayer room, etc.) are not compatible with the natural landscape, disrupting the integrity of the area,</li> <li>• Inadequate cleanliness and hygiene touristic places and tourism-oriented enterprises,</li> <li>• Lack of health services in the area and near the area</li> <li>• Insufficient qualifications and capacities of tourism-oriented enterprises.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p>	<p><b>Threat</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expansion of the borders of the nature park by the Ministry,</li> <li>• Accessibility to the area ((providing easy access to the region by private vehicle, public vehicles),</li> <li>• Existence of natural tourism values near the nature park (Tümbüldek Hot Springs, Kösehoroz Waterfall),</li> <li>• Presence of places with important historical and touristic potential such as Miletropolis ruins, Dorak Treasures region, Kestelek Ruins, Lala Şahin Tomb, Hamzabey Mosque and tomb, Şeyhmüftü Mosque and Tomb in Mustafakemalpaşa district,</li> <li>• The Nature Park and its surroundings have tourism values that can serve different tourism activities (trekking, photography, mountaineering, highland, nature, faith, thermal culture tourism, etc.),</li> <li>• The fact that there is a social facility that allows different recreational activities near the Nature Park,</li> <li>• The benefits of ecologically based tourism activities in the economic development of local people,</li> <li>• The fact that economic income is obtained from tourists and daily visitors coming to the Nature Park,</li> <li>• Today, the increasing interest in ecological-based tourism activities,</li> <li>• The continuation of activities such as agriculture, animal husbandry, and forestry in and around the area,</li> <li>• Accessibility of the area will increase with the new ring road Project which is under construction and besides will be Access the area by bicycle path,</li> <li>• Increasing the quality of life of local people who directly benefit from economic gain,</li> <li>• Nearby settlements preserve the traditional structure.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unconscious use of water resources,</li> <li>• Natural wealth is under threat due to the high number of visitors,</li> <li>• Intensive use of the area during weekend holidays and resulting pollution, disruptions,</li> <li>• Inadequate evaluation of natural and cultural features for recreational and tourism purposes,</li> <li>• The development problem of the local people is due to the insufficient support of ecologically based tourism activities,</li> <li>• Weakness of the touristic image of the city,</li> <li>• The local people do not have enough information about the importance of preserving historical and natural beauty,</li> <li>• Inadequate development of ecological-based tourism awareness among local people,</li> <li>• Insufficient quality and number of personnel in the area.</li> </ul>

**Table 2.** TOWS Matrix

	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>S-O strategies:</b> Strategies to identify opportunities that support strengths	<b>W-O strategies:</b> Strategies to identify opportunities to strengthen weaknesses
<b>Threats</b>	<b>S-T strategies:</b> Strategies identified using strengths to reduce vulnerability to external threats	<b>W-T strategies:</b> Protection-based strategies that will prevent weaknesses that are sensitive to external threats

**Table 3.** TOWS matrix of recreational and touristic use of Suuçtu Nature Park

**Protection Strategies**

S-O Strategies	W-O Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Today Intact Natural Resources must continue to be Protected,</li> <li>• Structures such as Wc and masjid existing in the area should be rearranged by ensuring harmony with nature so as not to harm the natural structure,</li> <li>• Evaluating the ecological sensitivity of the area appropriate activity areas should be determined for various activities done unconsciously in the area,</li> <li>• To ensure the correct use of the area, information should be provided with brochures showing the types of recreation and tourism and the regions where they are made in the nature park.</li> </ul> <p><b>Strategy: A balance of protection and use should be ensured.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making zoning in line with the uses in sensitive areas for the sustainable use of the area,</li> <li>• The use of the area should be limited according to the carrying capacity,</li> <li>• Providing information about the number of visitors along the roads leading to the area,</li> <li>• The number of vehicles should be limited to reduce soil compaction and vegetation loss,</li> <li>• To prevent pollution due to intensive use of space, recreational activities should be provided in alternative parts of the area.</li> </ul> <p><b>Strategy: It should be ensured that visitors take advantage of the opportunities in the area without harming the resources and the ecological process.</b></p>
S- T Strategies	W-T Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visitors should be informed about the natural and cultural resource values of the area at the information centers,</li> <li>• Visitors should be informed about the rules to be followed (not throwing garbage, not making a fire, etc.) at the entrance,</li> <li>• The use of fire within the area should be restricted. Deterrent penalties should be applied to the negative attitudes and behaviors of visitors in matters such as lighting fires in unauthorized areas.</li> </ul> <p><b>Strategy: Negative behavior of visitors should be improved, correct use should be encouraged.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Zoning the area in order not to damage the existing flora and fauna in the environment and the natural structure of the area and determination of uses according to zones,</li> <li>• Motor vehicles should be kept away from green areas,</li> </ul> <p><b>Strategy: Protection of natural values and sustainable development should be ensured.</b></p>
Usage Strategies	
S-O Strategies	W-O Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• From the entrance, information boards should be placed in different parts of the area, explaining the importance of nature parks and the area, and containing information on flora and fauna, compatible with the natural structure,</li> <li>• Ecological-based tourism activities should be diversified by determining alternative tourism opportunities such as trekking, cycling, camping, taking nature photos, rock climbing, watching landscapes for the area and its surroundings,</li> <li>• It should ensure that the promotion of tourism activities in the area is increased and local people should be informed about the diversity of ecological-based tourism activities,</li> <li>• Festivals should be organized with the products obtained as a result of agricultural activities and forestry Activities,</li> <li>• The tradition of presenting traditional culture as a tourism product should be kept alive and economic contribution should be provided to the local people.</li> </ul> <p><b>Strategy: Diversifying ecological-based tourism activities by adopting the principle of Conservation-Use.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foreign and domestic promotional activities should be increased,</li> <li>• Facilities and businesses that are compatible with nature should be built which are compatible with the climatic conditions and geographical structure of the province, based on ecologically tourism types and at an international standard,</li> <li>• A parking area should be planned for the nature park,</li> <li>• The reinforcement elements that are insufficient in the area should be rearranged by the traditional and natural texture with the renovation works,</li> <li>• Reinforcement elements suitable for physically disabled individuals should be designed in the area, and visual marking stones, etc., should be applied for visually disabled individuals.</li> </ul> <p><b>Strategy: Functional and permanent solutions for infrastructure and pavement should be made.</b></p>

S- T Strategies	W-T Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It should be ensured that human activities are carried out in quality and quantity that will not harm the natural structure,</li> <li>• The use of water resources should be re-evaluated.</li> <li>• A structure should be developed to market local products,</li> <li>• Ecological-based tourism planning should be made that will not harm the natural and cultural environment and produce economic benefits with the current potential of the district,</li> <li>• Natural and cultural resource values in the immediate surroundings of the nature park should be evaluated with a holistic Approach.</li> </ul> <p><b>Strategy: Development of Ecological Based Tourism with Holistic Planning with natural landscape values.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It should be acted with the principle of protection while using it,</li> <li>• A sustainable tourism plan should be made for Suuçtu Nature Park and its surroundings,</li> <li>• Entry and exit to the area should be limited when visitors are busy,</li> <li>• Increasing the number of staff and experts and providing the necessary training,</li> <li>• Arrangements should be made to enable disabled people to travel around the area more easily,</li> <li>• Tourism activities to be carried out without planning in the nature park may face the risk of deteriorating the natural structure of the area,</li> <li>• In Suuçtu Nature Park, it should be ensured that the natural resources are protected and sustainable, which will reduce the intensity of use, the queue of vehicle traffic caused by the heavy tourist flow and the related pollution, and at the same time, natural riches will be discovered, creating employment for the local people, increasing their economic welfare.</li> </ul> <p><b>Strategy: Alternative Ecological Based Tourism Route Planning.</b></p>

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

Countries should consider that the protection of their natural and cultural assets is a common world future and common goal (Kurdoğlu, 2007). For this reason, the protection of natural areas in our country and the world is an important issue. As a result of the unplanned presentation of these areas to people without taking the necessary precautions, many negativities are encountered. For this reason, tourism and recreation activities that are not well planned and not in a certain order negatively affect the natural and cultural resources of nature parks, especially flora and fauna (Aksu et al., 2017).

Mansuroğlu and Dağ (2020) emphasized the importance of planning and managing tourism and recreation activities in terms of ensuring long-term sustainability in protected areas (Mansuroğlu et al., 2021). State that preserving the characteristics of recreation and tourism areas in protected areas will also increase tourism revenues from these areas.

In integrated land use and planning policies, it should be ensured that tourist activities do not exceed the carrying capacity of resources (Mbaiwa, 2003). The ecological sensitivity structure of the area or region is an issue that should be considered in the planning of activities to be held in areas with high ecological sensitivity (Düzgüneş & Demirel, 2016). Considering the eco-sustainability and ecological threshold in tourism areas, if the impact of tourists and local people on the environment together exceeds the carrying capacity, the environmental structure, function, and stability may deteriorate (Jiang, 2009). In addition, Shi et al. (2015) emphasized in their study that local tourism resources should be investigated and the ecotourism carrying capacity should be calculated. They stated that the balance of the relationship between the concept of protection-use and tourism development constitutes an important basis for the planning of tourism and recreation areas. In addition, Barreto and Drummond (2017) emphasized the importance of strategic planning approaches widely in their proposals for management plans developed for protected areas.

Sustainability results are achieved by addressing the management of the field with broader human-oriented approaches in line with the strategies in practical applications (Weaver & Lawton, 2017).

Conservation-based studies need social science information about visitors to protected areas and natural sciences about species and ecosystems (Buckley, Zhong & Ma, 2017). Suuçtu Nature Park has a very high



visual landscape value with its natural beauties, different geological structure, and water resources that contain different colors in four seasons. Being close to settlements with high industrialization and population density based on agriculture, such as Mustafakemalpaşa and Karacabey, and having transportation opportunities, is an important factor for daily visitors and tourists to prefer the Nature Park (Çevre ve Şehircilik Bakanlığı, 2018). Local and foreign tourists from all over the world show great interest in the nature park, which is preferred as a sightseeing area and picnic place. The most important resource value of the area is the presence of 1 large and 2 small waterfalls. In the Nature Park In line with tourism and recreational uses, there are facilities such as entrance unit picnic areas, a viewing terrace positioned on a concrete floor, pathways that allow walking in nature, roads and stairs made of concrete and wooden floors and besides this, there are seating units, picnic tables, service unit, garbage cans, fountains, WC, prayer room.

Suuçtu Nature Park shows a strong character due to its unspoiled natural and cultural values, ideal climate characteristics, geological structure, and high visual landscape value. At the same time, being a protected area supports the sustainability of this strong structure. In addition, the nature park environment has an important potential in terms of ecological-based tourism and recreational features, and the accessibility of the area is an important opportunity for the area. The fact that touristic and recreational activities are important sources of income for the local people and that the local people have a high probability of development come to the fore. It has supported the awakening of awareness among the people who earn an income economically, to protect the natural, cultural and social values of the area.

However, the intense tourism and recreational demand and the high density of people and vehicles in the area on certain days cause the area to be used unconsciously. In addition, it is caused that some infrastructure services and equipment have been inadequate. While this situation is a weakness for the field, Pollution and deterioration brought about by the usage related to this situation also become an important threat for the area. Inadequate use of natural and cultural resources due to the lack of understanding of ecologically based tourism is also an important threat to the area.

In addition to these, there is a garbage problem in the area due to the inadequacy of the equipment and the unconscious intensive use of the area. There is no ramp etc. equipment suitable for the use of disabled people in the area. Due to the lack of a correct planning system in the area, roadside areas are used as parking lots and picnic areas. At the same time, the interior of the forest is used as a picnic area.

The assessment of Suuçtu Nature Park was made with the TOWS matrix, which was evaluated together with the data obtained by the SWOT analysis created based on the current resource values of the area. With this evaluation, protection-utilization strategies have been put forward for the sustainable use of the future by ensuring the best evaluation of the current protection and use potential.

Strategies developed for the area in line with the conservation criteria; A balance of protection and use should be ensured, it should be ensured that visitors take advantage of the opportunities in the area without harming the resources and the ecological process, negative behavior of visitors should be improved, correct use should be encouraged and protection of natural values and sustainable development should be ensured.

Strategies developed in line with the usage criteria for the area; Diversifying ecological-based tourism activities by adopting the principle of conservation-use, functional and permanent solutions for infrastructure and pavement should be made, development of ecological based tourism with holistic planning with natural landscape values, alternative ecological based tourism route planning.

In the context of the determined strategies, alternative land uses should be developed by improving the existing land uses with ecological-based tourism planning approaches in line with the principle of protection-utilization on the area starting from the Mustafa Kemalpaşa district center and reaching the Suuçtu Nature Park. The recreational and tourism potential of the area should be further strengthened with holistic and ecologically based planning approaches.

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