

# From Happy Country to Happy City: The Case of Bhutan for Sinop Tourism<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This study aims to determine to Sinop tourism development from the perspective of non-marketing approach, based on the example of Bhutan. The efforts of Bhutan and Sinop to create a tourism brand from the perspective of happiness provide an opportunity to compare these two destinations and see the pros and cons. Within the scope of the study, the positive and negative aspects of Bhutan tourism strategies were discussed, and which applications should be used in terms of Sinop tourism development and which applications should be avoided. In this context, the importance of developing proposals restricting tourist movements to Sinop under certain conditions was emphasized. The efforts of Bhutan and Sinop to create a tourism brand from the perspective of happiness provide an opportunity to compare these two destinations and see the pros and cons.

## Introduction

Sinop is considered as one of the important destinations for tourism with its cultural and natural beauties. Especially its natural beauties come to the forefront as an issue that increases its preferability. The results of the “Daily Visitor/Tourist Satisfaction Survey” conducted in 2019 by the local authorities also show that visitors who prefer Sinop primarily aim for natural beauties. For this reason, it can be said that ensuring the sustainability of Sinop tourism depends on the preservation of existing attractions. In this

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context, taking measures, determining strategies and realizing tourism within the framework of a model are seen as a necessity in order to sustain Sinop tourism. This study offers suggestions from the perspective of demarketing, based on the example of Bhutan, for the development of Sinop tourism.

### **Demarketing**

When the concept of marketing is mentioned, the idea of making as much sales as possible by reaching all consumers with an aggressive sales technique is widely mentioned. Sometimes it is desirable to reduce or restrict the sale and use of goods and services. The concept of demarketing, which was first introduced to the literature by Kotler and Levy in 1971 with an article, is defined as “the set of activities aimed at reducing the desire to buy, temporarily or permanently removing a general customer mass or a certain group of customers from demanding” (Altınay ve Sert, 2012: 70). Demarketing is an approach that can be applied in different ways. Demarketing can be used to reduce demand when a limited product is produced, or to focus on customers that it can serve better, to create a perception of scarcity (Memiş, 2017: 772) or to prevent the sale of a harmful product. In general terms, the concept of demarketing includes obtaining maximum benefit from the sale of goods and services by using resources efficiently. When the concept of non-marketing within the tourism industry is considered on a destination basis, the issue of carrying capacity comes to the fore. Destinations may impose restrictions on tourist entry to protect their resources. Sometimes, they can take advantage of various tax and bureaucratic obstacles to prevent the carrying capacity from being exceeded. Carrying capacity is not only seen as a concept that includes the number of visitors, but also social, psychological and economic carrying capacity is important for destinations as well as environmental carrying capacity (Bayram and Erkol Bayram, 2016: 26). The concept of demarketing can also be seen as an approach that will prevent the environmental, social, psychological or economic carrying capacity from being exceeded. In this context, the demarketing approach can be used in order to get rid of the tolerance level of the local people, tourist satisfaction or economic dependency. At this point, more studies and practical applications are required to determine the effectiveness and impact of demarketing tools on tourism patterns, physical environment and economic environment (Beeton ve Benfield, 2002: 512).

### **Bhutan Tourism Policy**

In the case of Bhutan, which is considered as an example of Sinop tourism, some activities for demarketing have taken place, but over time, there has

been a tendency towards mass tourism. Although there is a gradual move away from demarketing activities, examining the Bhutan example has been seen as a contributing subject to Sinop tourism. Bhutan is a small landlocked Himalayan Buddhist kingdom, with a total land area of 38,394 square kilometers, located between two giant and populous nations, China to the north and India to the south. It is considered one of the most outstanding travel destinations in the World, as there was no tourist activity in Bhutan until it opened its doors to the outside World for the coronation of the fourth King in 1974 (Bhutan National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). The first tourism activity started with 287 tourists visiting Bhutan in 1974. The only existing international airport was opened in 1983. (Bhutan Tourism Council, 2021). Due to Bhutan's unique culture and pristine environment, and the uncertainty of protecting it from tourism's undesirable effects, the country's leaders have over the years been careful not to become too dependent on tourism. Therefore, the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGOB) has not approved the tourism policies and guidelines currently implemented in the country to prevent mass tourism (Nyaupane and Timothy, 2010).

Bhutan has earned a tremendous reputation in international markets as the happiest nation in the world. This is because Bhutan follows the unique development philosophy known as Gross National Happiness (GNP) rather than Gross Domestic Product (GDP). However, with this, a great expectation has arisen for tourists who have heard of the GNP. The concept of GNP is built on four key items that give the happiness of individual citizens a higher priority than the material wealth of the country alone. Bhutan Tourism Council now uses GNP in its marketing strategies by developing a destination brand slogan around the GNH philosophy: "Happiness is a place" with the slogan aiming to become a unique tourism destination (Bhutan Tourism Council, 2021). With this effective slogan, Bhutan is trying to dispel the perception that Bhutan is expensive to reach and entry is made only with an authorized visa and is also tightly controlled as a tourism destination. The basis of tourism policy is based on the overall development philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNI) and aims to promote sustainable tourism that meets the needs of current visitors and destinations while increasing and providing opportunities for the future. Bhutan strives to provide cautious tourism development that is within its socio-cultural and environmental carrying capacity. Fees such as the Minimum Daily Package Fee (MGP) and the Sustainable Development Fee are charged to tourists visiting the country in accordance with the Bhutan Tourism Tax Law 2020 (Bhutan Tourism Council, 2021). National policies implemented in Bhutanese tourism have been shaped by the active participation of the public. In this way, the fact that

the people have a say in tourism development will prevent the social carrying capacity and, accordingly, the psychological carrying capacity from being exceeded. Bhutan, which has a tourism understanding beyond sustainable mass tourism, has succeeded in developing tourism by preserving its natural and cultural tourism resources (Song, 2019: 9). Teoh (2013) reports in the study that Bhutan's unique 'controlled tourism' model is based on the principles of Gross National Happiness (GNH) and states that Gross National Happiness includes indicators of protection of the natural environment, promotion and development of culture, good governance, sustainable and equitable socio-economic development. According to Khamrang (2013), the community-based approach supported by the development philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH) remains important for the success of the tourism industry in the country. The effective and understanding planning policy of tourism, the principle of "high value low volume", has made the country one of the most successful countries in the world in the tourism sector.

After 2019, and especially with the increase in the popularity of the destination, the low impact started to give way to the high impact and "guests and pilgrims turned into tourists", so the change in the tourist profile started to change the shape of the industry not only in terms of numbers but also in terms of behavior. The fact that the tourist profile that respects the destination, local people and local culture is replaced by the standard mass tourist has started to make Bhutan a luxury destination. With the increasing number of visitors, problems such as traffic, security problems, decrease in service quality, income smuggling, illegal tourism facilities, environmental pollution, unguided tours, unethical practices have begun to come to the fore (A Deep Dive into Tourism in Bhutan, 2019:2; Dhradhul, 2019:7).

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Considering the Bhutan example, the early periods contain positive examples for tourism development, but the events experienced in recent years contain the points that destinations should pay attention to. When considered at the scale of Sinop, an approach that is compatible with the carrying capacity expressed in the Bhutan example and that embraces the local culture should be adopted for tourism development period and the protection of natural and cultural riches. A plan for Sinop tourism should be determined with visitor restrictions in some regions and a general demarketing approach in order to protect natural resources. For the development of Sinop tourism, together with the "high value low impact" philosophy in the example of Bhutan, the number of tourists should be limited and

high economic, social and environmental gains should be obtained from tourism movements. A general demarketing strategy is suggested for the development of Sinop tourism. Within the framework of this strategy, it is possible to achieve high value through issues such as entrance fees for certain areas in the city, accommodation and travel taxes to be collected from visitors, and visa application. However, at this point, issues such as finding solutions to problems such as landscaping, cleaning, traffic, restoring and protecting cultural structures in accordance with their originality, increasing the quality of service, highlighting the local people and local culture, increasing the satisfaction by increasing the tourist experience should be carried out. The demarketing strategy, which will try to be implemented before these issues are realized, may adversely affect the tourism movements in the destination rather than giving the expected effect.

The happy city slogan may not have much meaning on its own. In a happy city, the happiness of not only those who live but also those who work and earn from tourism is important. The happiness of tourism employees, as the segment that provides the most interaction with tourists, creates the perception of tourists. Then happiness is realized not only in local people but also in all stakeholders. As in the case of Bhutan, GNH should be developed for Sinop as well. In this regard, issues such as developing policies for employees, improving working conditions, and providing trainings emerge as a necessity.

As a result, the advantages and disadvantages of tourism planning, which aims the economic development in Bhutan together with ecological elements, constitute an important example for Sinop. The example of Bhutan, a niche non-seaside destination, would be more fortunate to be taken as a model for Sinop tourism, as it has more tourism diversity than Bhutan, as its ecological, historical and local population allows. With the correct and effective construction of these issues, Sinop tourism will have the potential to gain as much as Bhutan's gains from the tourism sector. However, these potential demarketing applications can be turned into gains by applying at least in the designated areas of the destination. At this stage, in which areas restrictions will be made for the development of Sinop tourism, and on which issues taxation systems will be built, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, academics, tourism entrepreneurs, local people and all other stakeholders should participate and approve.

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