

Rural Tourism and Vernacular Architecture: An Example from Elmalı, Antalya

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Abstract

In rural tourism, people want to experience the vernacular architectural structure, culture, and environment of that neighborhood settled in rural landscape far from the city. This means that it is not possible to mention a rural cultural landscape without the rural landscape, vernacular architecture, and cultural life in that place. Rural tourism brings total protection along with the recovery of the rural economy. It is essential in rural tourism to use the vernacular architecture in order to respond to the tourism needs. Within this context, the Elmalı District, which is a living cultural landscape area with a rich historical background, as in many rural localities in Anatolia, was reviewed in terms of used or unused vernacular architectural elements, rural cultural landscape of which might serve to tourism. For instance, the houses most of which are still in use by the villagers may respond to the lodging needs of the tourists, and the syrup buildings, which are likewise in use, and molasses-making and grape harvest will be an interesting, different cultural experience for tourists. The study also evaluates the village institutes, mills, and bee hive structures in terms of their potential of being used for tourism purpose.

Keywords: Rural tourism, vernacular architecture, Elmalı, Antalya, Turkey.

Introduction

Rural tourism is a favorite and alternative tourism type in recent years regarding to sustainability and expressing different cultures and cultural heritage. Sustainable life styles such as agricultural in rural setting would help to conserve vernacular cultures, support rural economy and most importantly provide alternative sources of income such as rural tourism for the livelihood of local people.

One of the ways for the conservation of rural cultural landscape and vernacular architecture is the protection of the natural and cultural values together to rural tourism for a vibrant economy. Here tourism product is based on the location of rural settings, character of vernacular landscapes, local lifestyles and vernacular architecture created through interaction between local people and natural environment. Rural tourism has been regarded as main pillars of sustainable development in rural areas and an alternative for sustainable tourism.

Elmalı has a significant potential for rural tourism as an alternative region on the contrary of mass tourism developments and setting along coastal Antalya. Vernacular architecture in Elmalı is unique on account of its climatic characteristics, special the architectural elements of traditional life and land use patterns. For example, Vineyard houses and living of the ceremonies, picking of the grapes, and preparing of the special syrup as a called “pekmez” in the early autumn days. There is great potential for rural tourism in the region that tourists can lodge at vineyard houses, or sighting as a museum the vernacular millers and vernacular bee hive structures. Rural tourism can be a solution for the sustainable rural economic and traditional lifestyle for Elmalı and model for other regions in Antalya. Vibrant economy can provide to conservation of the vernacular architecture together with other cultural and natural heritage in the locality and support local population for long term sustainable development in the region.

The concepts of sustainable tourism and knowing and experiencing other cultures have been favorite in tourism especially for the last 10 years.

According to the researches carried out by the World Tourism Organization, estimations have been suggested that the consumers would head towards the culture tourism against the sea tourism in the 21st century (Soykan, 2003). A number of people, within scope of rural tourism, prefer to be together with people in their cultural landscape, and try to live contenting themselves with what nature has given us (Köfteoğlu, 1999), instead of comfortable and massive 5 star hotels among natural beauties. In rural tourism, which is a type of tourism in which destruction of natural and cultural properties, which are the reasons of arrival for the tourists, cannot be mentioned, maintenance of being local and the vernacular architecture constituted by the local culture is a must. A way of maintaining the rural cultural landscapes and vernacular architecture is to keep the economy vibrant through tourism.

The study emphasizes the importance of vernacular architecture in rural tourism and reviews in summary the tourism potential of the rural landscapes of Elmalı, a location with a rich and unique historical background where rural lifestyle almost exactly goes on. In addition, examples of vernacular architecture such as the vineyard house, mill, syrup house, and bee hive structure, located in the rural landscapes of the Elmalı District, some of which are not in use any more, were reviewed and suggestions were given in terms of their contribution to rural tourism, and evaluations were made.

Material and Method

The Elmalı District in the Province of Antalya was selected as the study field. Elmalı is located in the Mediterranean Region, on the west of the Taurus Mountains and the Gulf of Antalya, in the middle section of the Teke Peninsula, at 29° 50'- 30° 11' eastern longitudes and 36° 31'- 36° 54' northern latitudes. The district has been an important center of population throughout history, due to being positioned on the trade routes that connect Anatolia with the Mediterranean, having multiple water sources and fertile soil (Figure 1).

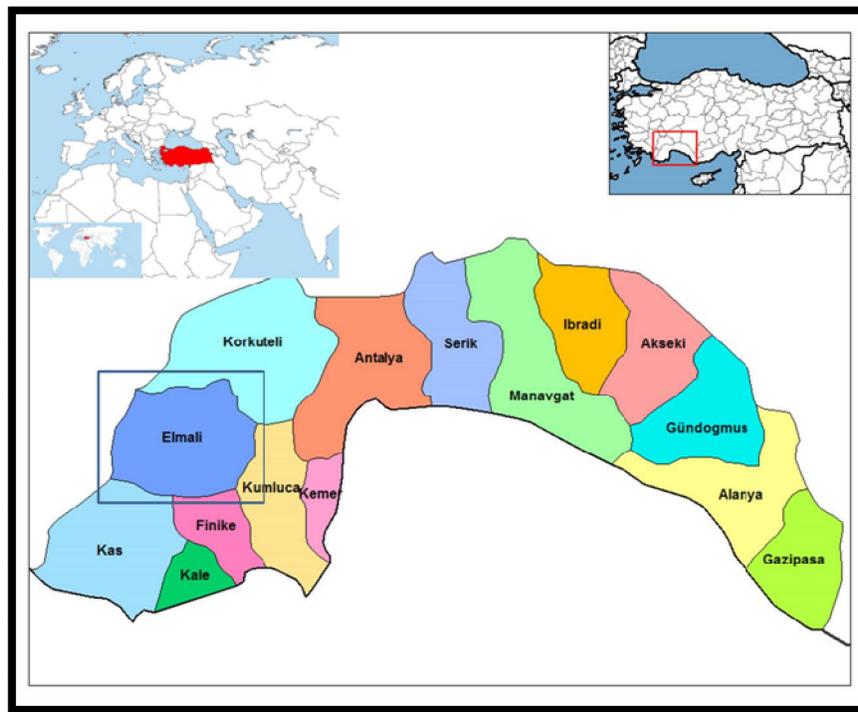


Figure 1: The General Location of the Elmalı District

The Elmalı District was governed by the Lycians, Persians, Romans, Byzantines, Seljukians, the TekeSeigniory, and the Ottomans since its establishment in 9th century B.C. The Elmalı District has an important tourism potential with its natural and cultural wealth, but the tourism potential of the region cannot be sufficiently turned to good account for the access to the region is more difficult than the other locations on the seaside.

As the existing tourism activity, domestic and foreign tourist groups visit Elmalı during the day-time on some days of the week. In the Elmalı District, there are accommodation facilities that consist of a few hotels and hostels with a total bed capacity of 100-150 beds.

In addition, since the district has a plateau's climate character and summers are cool, the district is preferred for temporary accommodation in summer by the summerhouse vacationists from locations such as Finike, Kale, and Kumluca.

The Elmalı District accommodates many vernacular architectural elements that are not used any more, such as the village institute, mill, and bee hive structure, along with the vernacular architectural housing units and syrup houses that are within the rural cultural landscapes and are still in use (Figure 2). In this study, these unused vernacular architectural elements in the Elmalı District were analyzed and evaluated in terms of their contribution to rural tourism.

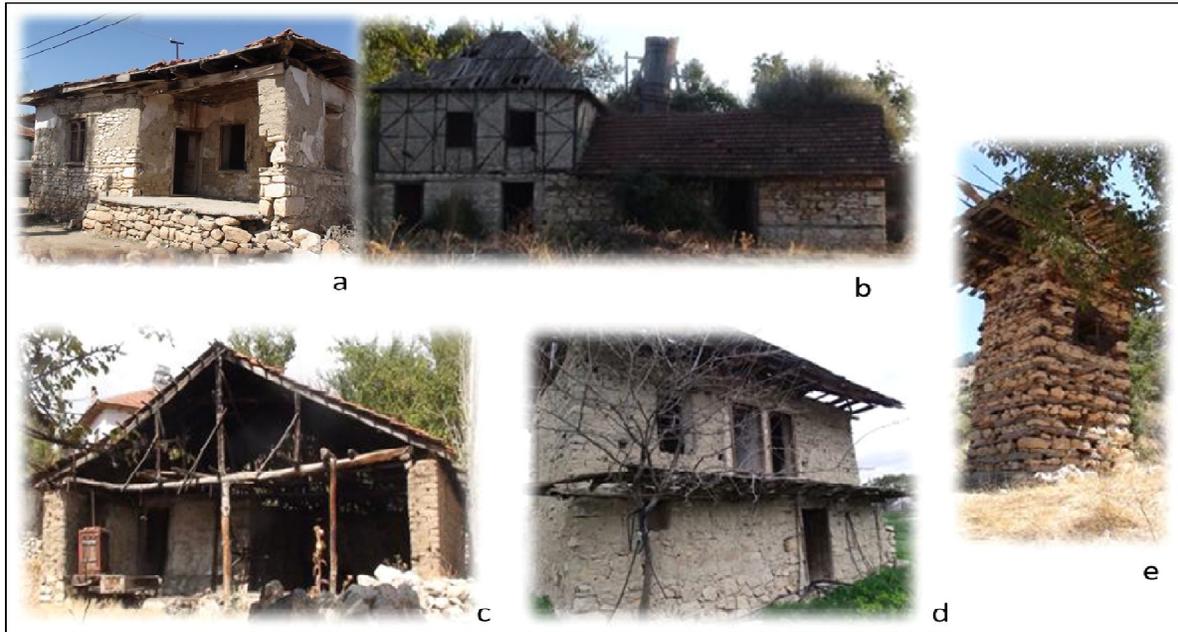


Figure 2: The Selected Vernacular Architectural; Village Institute (A), Mill (B), Syrup House (C), Vineyard House (D), Bee Hive Structure (E) (Original 2011)

Rural Tourism and Elmalı's Vernacular Architecture

Tourism enables everyone to discover the natural and cultural resources of a region and therefore contributes to the economical growth of an area. However, an important problem for the investors, planners, and designers responsible for developing the tourism industry is the means by which tourists can be attracted to particular regions and experience vernacular cultures while preserving the cultural and natural values. "Vernacular" is used to describe characteristics that are native to a particular region. Jukka Jokilehto has emphasized the worldwide importance of preserving the vernacular and ethnicity, intangible traits of heritage (Heath, 2009).

As a type of tourism made in rural areas, in rural tourism, an approach of maintenance is also in question, since the existing vernacular structures are used for the fulfilment of touristic needs. The vernacular housing units are used as is for the visitors who prefer to experience that culture. Beside houses, it is possible to have the vernacular architectural elements of the rural cultural landscape, which are abandoned and not in use any more, to serve to tourism, and thus both to put these structures into use and to make new ones with the same construction technique and materials, and to provide permanence. For in the absence of this vernacular architecture and rural landscape, it is not possible to mention making rural tourism.

In majority of the villages in the rural areas of Elmalı, the vernacular architectural texture is mainly protected. Vernacular housing units are still in use. Especially in far mountain villages like Yapraklı, rural lifestyle still goes on. Vernacular houses are suitable for being used for rural tourism and people volunteer for this matter. Some of them are leased to the vacationists who come from the seaside area, thanks to its climatic advantages in summer. Syrup houses are buildings used as a common place in order to make molasses out of grapes or mulberries in rural areas, generally closed at three sides and open at one side. Syrup houses are located at easily accessible points in village centres in the locality of Elmalı, open for the common use of all the villagers, and have a large garden surrounded with walls.

Syrup houses are still in use, and they are used for making molasses in the vine harvest season. These are very interesting vernacular architectural structures for tourists who desire to experience this cultural ritual.

As in other rural areas of Anatolia, there are village institutes in the Elmalı District, which have lost their functions and are not used any more. These vernacular architectural structures can be used for meeting, dining, or show purposes with a simple restoration. These places can be where the tourists socialize with the villagers.

Water mills, which include a mill and mechanisms by which agricultural products such as wheat and corn are ground and turned into flour and where grinding process is carried out, were included in the study with the change of technology. Mills, which are made of stone, are not suitable for being used for many various functions due to the machinery inside them. But it is possible that the mills are used as a village museum, a place where the goods and materials of the locality are exhibited.

“*Seren*” with its local name is a tower type structure built with stone and wooden beams, covered on bee hives, which are hollow wood blocks, for the purpose of providing the bees to make honey and also protecting them from external impacts and damages in the locality of Elmalı. The *serens* in the region are estimated to have been inspired from the column type graves in Lycia (Özgen 2008). The beams here are made of natural cedar (*CedrusLibani*) tree with very durable timber. They are found in the plateau, generally at recreation spots with spring water. It is possible to protect bee *serens* and turn them into a symbol of the plateau festivals.

Discussion and Conclusion

When the vernacular architectural structures especially reviewed in this study are evaluated in terms of their contribution to rural tourism, these vernacular architectural elements seem to be capable of making an important contribution to rural tourism.

Improvement and promotion of rural tourism is a tool that will contribute to protection of cultural landscapes as a whole. For the Elmalı Region has a significant potential of rural tourism, as an alternative to seaside tourism dominant in Antalya, with its climate characteristics, traditional lifestyle, and architectural elements. Here, vernacular houses responding to the need of accommodation, unused village institute being restored as meeting, workshop, and sales places, picking of the grapes with the festivals during the vine harvest and exhibition of molasses making process in syrup houses, using mills as a village museum, bee hive *serens* becoming the symbol of the organized plateau festivals were suggested as some alternatives for rural tourism.

Protecting not only the structure, but also the lifestyle, and keeping the economy vibrant by suggesting alternative income sources apart from agriculture, such as rural tourism, are prominent issues in the maintenance and sustainability of rural cultural landscapes and vernacular architecture. In our country, the “National Rural Development Strategy” was issued by the Prime Ministry State Planning Organization for the purpose of development and sustainability of the business and life conditions of the rural society, based on the evaluation of the local potential and sources, and protection of the natural and cultural assets.

In this paper, the aim is to decrease the developmental differences by increasing the income level and life quality in rural areas, developing the physical infrastructure facilities of the rural area in particular, increasing the quality of life, and protecting and developing the rural environment in order to ensure its sustainable use, based on rural development and sustainable usage of natural sources in rural areas.

A way to keep the economy vibrant in rural areas is the rural tourism that is based on natural and especially cultural values. The Elmalı Region has a significant tourism potential with its climate characteristics, particularly its traditional lifestyle and architectural elements, as an alternative to the seaside tourism that has been conventional in Antalya, which should be considered.

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