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EXPLORING THE SPIRIT OF PLACE THROUGH GOOGLE MAPS AND TRIPADVISOR COMMENTS USING DISCOURSE ANALYSIS METHOD: THE EXAMPLE OF KILISTRA, KONYA

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ABSTRACT

Settlements have various distinguishing features in line with their natural, cultural, and physical formations, and this distinctiveness facilitates the creation of a sense of place. From the perspective of cultural heritage, it is argued that places have a spirit. According to the 2008 Quebec Declaration on the Preservation of the Spirit of Place, the spirit of place is contributed to by both tangible elements (buildings, sites, landscapes, routes, objects) and intangible elements (memories, stories, narratives, written documents, festivals, celebrations, ceremonies, traditional knowledge, values, texture, color, and smell, etc.). The Declaration emphasizes that the most effective way to conserve, understand, and pass on cultural heritage to future generations is to consider these elements as a whole.

The aim of this study is to reveal how visitors, who have short-term experiences in Kilistra, currently known as Gökyurt Village, describe the spirit of place in Kilistra. Gökyurt Village, located within the borders of Konya province, offers a unique spatial and historic stratification with its natural structure formed by volcanic tuff rocks, the ancient city of Kilistra, and traditional rural architecture. Moreover, Kilistra is a settlement where cultural tourism has not yet sufficiently developed, hence it lacks commodified images. This feature has been interpreted as the preservation of the place's original spirit, and therefore the village was chosen as the study area.

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The concept and components of the spirit of place defined in the Quebec Declaration constitute the conceptual dimension of this study. Accordingly, a depth analysis of meaning, a type of discourse analysis, was conducted based on the comments of visitors who experienced Kilistra. The comments were obtained from the Google Maps platform and Tripadvisor site, where visitors could share their views digitally. As of 01.06.2024, a total of 286 comments were obtained and used in the research: 268 from Google Maps and 18 from Tripadvisor. The depth analysis of meaning used three complementary analysis techniques: [1] metaphor and symbol analysis to determine what kind of emotional and symbolic meanings metaphors carry for visitors, [2] historical and cultural context analysis to identify cultural or local contexts and historical references, and [3] meaning and emotional context analysis to capture emotional expressions and the meanings underlying these expressions. It was determined that the comments contained positive, negative, or neutral expressions. Therefore, while scanning the comments for expressions that could be components of the spirit of place, all judgments regarding the presence, potential, and absence of the spirit of place were considered. The findings from the three analysis techniques were first grouped according to whether they were positive, negative, or neutral, and then further classified according to whether they emphasized tangible or intangible characteristics.

According to the research findings, when expressions are evaluated based on their positivity, negativity, or neutrality, comments such as Kilistra's nature, its similarity to Cappadocia, and its historical and religious significance were considered positive. Comments regarding the failure to evaluate the area's tourism potential and that the visit was a waste of time were considered negative, while expressions containing no judgment were considered neutral. It was observed that the comments of visitors who experienced Kilistra for a short period prominently highlighted the area's tangible features, while the intangible features were overlooked.

Looking at the scientific literature, there has been an increase in the number of studies on Kilistra in recent years. With the growing interest in Kilistra, it is predicted that studies related to the preservation of cultural heritage and tourism activities in the settlement will increase. This study can shed light on how the spirit of place is perceived by visitors before potential changes occur in the area with the increase in these actions, and it can contribute to the determination of policies in cultural heritage management and tourism management.

Keywords: Spirit of place, Discourse analysis, Google Maps, Tripadvisor, Kilistra