

TRADITIONAL PLATEAU RESIDENCES AND TOURISTIC VALUE IN NORTHEASTERN TURKEY (ARTVIN PROVINCE)

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Abstract: Eastern Black Sea region, in which Artvin province is located, is one of the areas where transhumance activities are most prevalent. Besides, the activities mentioned in this region have been performed for very long years and have become traditional. One of the indispensable characteristics of transhumance activities is plateau residences with their construction techniques and architectures unique to the region. Although plateau settlements are temporary settlements that are used seasonally, plateau residences are permanent. These residences which widely reflect the cultural and socio-economical structure of the region have been constructed in a plain and natural style probably due to temporary usage. In the research field where forest cover is dense, although wood is mostly used as residence construction material, stone usage is in forefront in some regions. On the other hand there are also many residences where both materials are used together. While wooden shingle usage was widespread before as roof cover, today sheet metal usage is common. Recently the ease of transportation to plateaus and the increase in economic levels of families caused structural change in plateau residences and number of concrete structures increased gradually. This situation which was also triggered by usage for recreation purpose, constitutes a danger threatening traditional transhumance activities as well as future of rural tourism potential of plateaus. Yet the sustainability of transhumance activities which have been continuing for centuries can only be achieved by preservation of traditional structure of plateau residences.

Key words: Turkey, traditional transhumance, Artvin, plateau residence, tourism.

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INTRODUCTION

Even though the term plateau is defined in different ways (Alagöz, 1993, 1), these definitions have much in common. We may refer to a few of these definitions as follows. Plateaus are settlements in the high parts of the mountains where animals are grazing in summers and where the houses are used for seasonal recreational activities. Plateau houses are administratively and economically connected to villages and they contribute to the village economy even though they are located outside the village boundaries (Doğanay & Orhan, 2016, 301-302). The term plateau mostly refers to a temporary place of

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settlement ascended in the warmer months of summer with the purpose of both engaging in a number of economic activities (especially livestock) as well as making use of country house, the change of air and relaxation (Emiroğlu, 1977, 17-18).

Accordingly, transhumance involves human's and animal's ascension of plateaus in summer and the hottest months, remaining there for a while and engaging in various economic activities. This is completely an activity carried out by the settled group of people. In other words, the animal husbandry in transhumance is practiced in the form of grazing pastures in summer and accommodation in barns in winters. Anatolia is one of the important areas in which transhumance has historically been maintained and turned into a traditional activity. The Eastern Black Sea region, where Artvin province is located at, is one of the busiest areas of transhumance activities in Anatolia (Zaman, 2007, 218). This region is rich in terms of natural and cultural heritage. The region is an important destination for tourists thanks to its special features (Somuncu, 2016, 253). For this reason, it is one of the aims of Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Culture and Tourism to develop the ecotourism in the region, especially the plateau tourism, in its 2023 tourism development strategical action plan (Alaeddinoğlu & Şemeret, 2016, 73).

In addition to plateau settlements in the research area, another temporary form of settlement, functionally integrated with plateaus, is the hamlet or barracks. The hamlets of the Eastern Black Region, which also includes the research area, are temporary settlements where migrant settler peasant families come twice a year in their passage from village to plateau and from plateau to village, where animals graze, hay and wood are secured for winter. These settlements are small agricultural settlements that reserve either only a couple of houses or several houses depending on the number of the settler families, which are mostly made from wood (Tunçel, 1996, 92). The term barrack is also widely used for the settlements in question in the region.

Barrack settlements in the research area have mostly lost their importance of the past and thereby their numbers are greatly decreased gradually over time. The main reason for the appearance of such a scene is the decline in population brought out by the intensely continued migration in the area after 1965. This large drop in permanent population in rural areas has led to a decline in the number of cattle and sheep forming basis both for the number of families heading to barracks or plateau and transhumance activities. As a result, there was no need for families to settle in barracks since the necessities that manifest barrack areas (need for pastures, the idea of preserving farmland in the village, etc) were no longer needed. Many families in the area either completely abandoned the transhumance activities or directly ascended to plateaus without deeming the migration to barracks necessary. In addition, the execution of these migrations by motor vehicles which previously took place on foot has been instrumental in weakening the transfer function of the barracks. A functional transformation took place in some of the plateau and barrack settlements in the area especially in the last 10-15 years. Settlements in question began to be used as a summer resort for recreational purposes in addition to animal husbandry activities (Grotzbach, 1984, 202; Doğanay & Coşkun, 2013, 4). It is predicted that the plateaus will be increasingly used for recreational purposes in the future (Somuncu et al., 2015, 100). They were transformed into settlements with the purpose of relaxing and being alone with nature especially for local people living outside the province. This functional change paved the way for the occurrence of transformation in rural housing located in settlements mentioned.

PURPOSE AND METHOD

Traditional rural dwellings carry the effect of geographical conditions and culture in which they were located with building materials, shape and the regulation manners of

various parts (Ungureanu & Lazuran, 2014, 131). Traditional rural dwellings of the research area have the qualities that truly reflect socio-cultural and economic features of the region. However, a significant portion of these dwellings was left to their own fate and became ruins due to the emigration in the region. Also, reinforced concrete structuring in rural areas has led reinforced concrete constructions to take the place of traditional rural dwellings. However, traditional rural dwellings, which come to the forefront with their natural and cultural structure and become favorite sites in terms of rural tourism in recent years, will be able to undertake important functions both in terms of touristic attraction and accommodation in the rural areas of Eastern Black Sea. We can find the examples of this case in different parts of the world (Quinteiro & Baleiro, 2015, 157). Revealing rural touristic potentials of dwellings mentioned and creating an awareness that will prevent reinforced concrete structuring in these areas were intended in this research. In addition, it was thought that the results obtained can be generalized and they can be applied in rural areas with similar characteristics.

A gradual and eclectic structure was followed in the study requiring to know the area with all its aspects and to conduct detailed research. "The methodology for identifying, evaluating, quantifying, mapping and integrated arrangement with tourism purpose is an essential component of a scientific approach to represent the basic elements landmark" (Ilies et al., 2009, 203). Literature review constituted the first phase of the study. During this process, the theoretical framework of the study was attempted to be constituted by examining studies related to our research area prepared both in local and general scale. Field observations were given emphasis in the second phase that allows access to first-hand information on the subject. In this phase, many permanent and temporary rural settlements in the area were visited and the attention was paid for keeping a large sampling. Interviews were conducted with the families of the region with the help of semi-structured interview forms and a photo archive related to rural dwellings were in these settlements in question. All the information and data obtained were analyzed and synthesized in the light of the principles of geographical ideas and thus, the present study was put forward.

LOCATION OF RESEARCH AREA

Artvin province, constituting the research area, is located on the border with Georgia in the Eastern Black Sea Region of Anatolian lands. While Georgian lands fall on the north and the Black Sea on the northwestern part of the provincial administrative area, the area is adjacent to Ardahan on the east, Erzurum on the south and Rize provinces on the west (Figure 1). Consisting of eight districts including the center, the province's total area is approximately 7.367 km².

MAJOR CHARACTERISTICS OF PLATEAU HOUSINGS IN ARTVIN PROVINCE

The World Heritage Convention have decided that "cultural assets have to meet the conditions of authenticity and have a sufficient protection and administration system to guarantee its maintenance in order to be deemed as a universal wonder" (World Heritage Conference, 2008). Traditional architecture has been also regarded as a quite significant part of the collective cultural heritage (Medica et al., 2010, 78). Many researchers noted that the authenticity is a key concept in cultural heritage tourism and especially for increasing the tourism potential of traditional rural housing (Ilies et al., 2009, 215; Medica et al., 2010, 84; Ismail et al., 2014, 42; Gavrilă-Paven, 2015, 112). In this context, it is of high significance to define the distinctive values and to analyze the tourism potential of the traditional dwellings that are planned to be opened for tourism.



Figure 1. Location map of the research area

Plateau settlements in Artvin province consisted of permanent residences deployed collective on meadows and pastures (Figure 1). The common feature of plateau housings, varying from one plateau to another, is that they are simpler than housing in villages both in terms of construction techniques and general appearance and sizes because of their use only for a limited time. Two different types of plateau housing, which can be clearly distinguished from each other, can be mentioned in the research area. The first and the most encountered group is *plateau housing in which wooden materials is extensively used*. The second group is *plateau housing built as a result of piling one stone on the top another* seen in plateaus near the border with Ardaahan province. Plateau houses, made of wood, are generally two-storied. Their ground floors are used as barns and the upper floors of these houses are ascended with the help of stairs again made of wood (Figure 2). The portion in upstairs consists of a room mostly used for inhabiting, relaxing and sleeping at night and another room, locally called *sütlik* (milk-room), where animal products, such as

milk, cheese and butter, etc., are made and stored (Figure 3). However, the number of room can sometimes be one and it is likely to come across with plateau houses with more than one room. In addition, there are also small balconies in the part leading to upstairs called *ayvan*. Toilets are added to the edge of *ayvan* in some plateau houses.



Figure 1. Plateau settlements in the field are deployed collectively in the Alpine meadows zone



Figure 2. The plateau houses made of wood, usually two floors

Figure 3. In some of the plateau houses in the field, used as an barns ground floors was built of stone

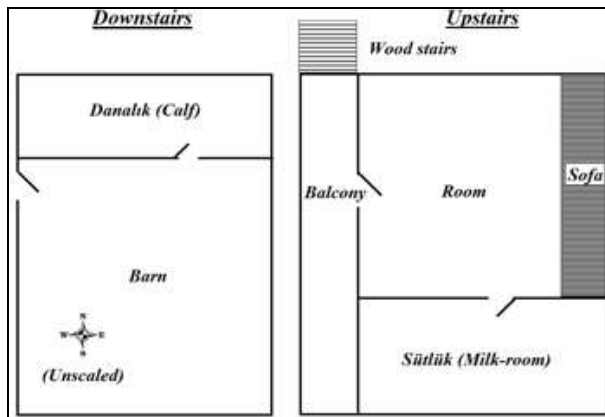


Figure 4. An example of a traditional plateau house plans in the research field

The lower part of the plateau house (barn) was built by stacking unprocessed logs of trees one on the top of the other and by intertwining the edges with grooves and notches. Thermal insulation was provided by plastering the gaps between these logs with a mixture of soil and manure from the interior. However, the plateau houses, whose bottom parts were built with stones up to a certain level, can also be encountered quite often (Figure 4). The upper floor of the plateau house was also built generally by the same method of stacking unprocessed logs of trees one on the top of the other and by intertwining the edges with grooves and notches. Either no windows were allocated or windows whose sizes would not exceed 20 cm were kept for receiving light in order to be preserved from the cold in these plateau houses in question. The roofs of traditional plateau houses are slanted in both sideways that are called *semer çatı* (*saddle roof*) (Tarkan, 1973, 89). Just as the outer surface of these roofs, whose skeleton part is made of wooden materials, was covered by timber called *hartama* (*shingles*), today the use of sheet metal has become quite common. The protection of roofs against the blowing wind was being ensured by placing heavy-stones sometimes on shingles or even sometimes on the sheet metal (Figure 5).



Figure 5. The roofs of plateau houses in the field are slanted in both sideways



Figure 6. A plateau house which basic building material is stone



Figure 7. The functional change in plateau and barrack settlements is felt itself as modernization in dwelling

While stoves are being used in some of the plateau houses, there are furnaces yet in some of them. These stoves, made of stone, and their chimneys are locally called *buhari*. Next plateau houses, there are barns in which especially small cattle stay at night built

either by surrounding with fences or stacking stones one on the top of another. The weight of stones rather than wood is felt in the construction of housing located quite far from the forest areas in the research area and especially in highlands over the Ardahan-Kars plateau near the border of Eastern Anatolia Region. Being a bit more advanced forms of houses built by stacked stones called *Pak* (Tandoğan, 1988, 105-108), these dwellings consisted of walls built as a result of stacking stones commonly found nearby one on the top of another using soil as mortar in between (Figure 5). The upper parts of beams, which crossed over these walls and built by thin logs, were often covered by sheet metals. However, the use of shingles can also be seen as the roof-covering material. The surface of these roofs, built slanting with on one or two side, were sometimes covered by tent canvas shielded with stones or soil both with the purpose of protecting against the wind and providing temperature insulation. These one-storey plateau houses, like in wooden homes, generally consist of a room also used as a kitchen and a *sütlük* (milk-room) and therefore, they have two compartments. Made about a meter above the floor on both sides of the room, divans are used as places of sitting during the day and of sleeping at night. Stoves are used in these dwellings where there are no furnaces. In addition, there are no windows in these plateau houses in question. Barns in these houses were constructed as adjacent to homes or only with a wall or even a door present. These parts, often emerge as a chamber of this dwelling, can also be considered as attachments.

POTENTIAL USES OF PLATEAU HOUSES FOR TOURISM

Branding is an important element in developing the tourism potential of a field. Branding has some processes like building a platform, providing competitive touristic products, protecting the natural environment and promoting tourism (Ungureau & Lazuran, 2014, 126-127). Creating a visual identity is an important step in establishing the foundation of branding. In this case, traditional rural housing forms the main element of visual identity. Situated in high mountainous areas depending on the purpose and function they serve, *plateaus* are areas with rich tourism potential in terms of both their natural beauty of environment and clean air and their socio-cultural features created by traditional lifestyle (Orhan, 2015, 295). Some studies have suggested that the existence of traditional rural housing can make a great contribute to rural tourism (Medica et al., 2010, 85; Mutlu Danacı & Atik, 72). In this context, various investments and works have been conducted in these areas in recent years in order to claim plateaus for tourism. The most suitable areas for plateau tourism in Turkey are the Black Sea Region, especially the mountainous parts of the Easter Black Sea Region (Zaman, 2010, 203). Plateaus in the research area also represent high potential value in this respect.

Plateau settlements in the research area are scattered in various parts of the mountainous areas in the field. The use of plateaus for tourism purpose is not yet widespread in the province where traditional transhumance is dominant. It is evident that several infrastructural services such as road, water, electricity and accommodation, are needed to be completed for any plateau to be used for tourism purpose in addition to keeping some of the touristic attractiveness at the forefront (Coşkun, 2010, 276). Accordingly, opening the plateaus in question for tourism depends on carrying out a number of investments and works. Barrack settlements in the area are more favorable than infrastructural facilities compared to plateaus. Indeed, while low-elevation facilitated the accessibility on the one hand, on the other, electrical energy can be used in a higher proportion in these settlements in question. In addition, while plateaus usually are located in Alpine meadow zone over the forest border, an important part of barracks is situated inside or on the edge of the forest. This provides scenery superiority to barrack settlements. Accordingly, it was considered that it would be easier to barrack settlements

with present conditions in the area to bring in to tourism and there were more tendencies in this direction, but the use of plateaus from this perspective would be widespread with incentives and investments to be made in the near future. The development of plateau tourism in the area primarily depends on the improvement of transportation and accommodation conditions. Significant advances were being made in the province in terms of access to the plateaus in recent years and almost no plateau settlements were left without roads. The functional change in plateau and barrack settlements in the area tending to use them for tourism purposes that slowly began to be realized (Koca, 1995, 282; Zaman, 2007, 323) naturally led to several changes in the physical appearances of these dwellings that make these settlements. This change, seen more obviously in barrack settlements, makes itself also felt relatively in plateaus. While some of plateau and barrack homes were repaired, some of them were rebuilt in this process (Figure 7). New houses were built more functional in the form of modern dwellings. Even though there were reinforced concrete structures among them that constituted visual inconsistency with traditional housing architecture, some of them were built of wood in accordance with these houses. It was seen that the number of rooms in these homes increased and some parts such as toilets, bathrooms and kitchens were added. In addition, there are generally no barns in the new design of the houses (Hayır & Tonguç, 2007, 163).

CONCLUSION AND EVALUATION

Protecting environmental values, determining and complying with the carrying capacity and sustainability principles are included in structures of nature-based tourism types. When it is implemented with the appropriate planning and investment, rural tourism can be one of the most effective ways of preserving the rural cultural landscapes and traditional dwellings (Medica et al., 2010, 79; Mutlu Danacı & Atik, 69). In fact, a study in Finland has revealed that it is the highly educated people who live in cities, hold the administrative positions and uses the rural houses for recreational purposes (Sievanen, et al., 2007, 223). Being a type of ecotourism, plateau tourism cannot possibly be isolated from these principles. One of the most important pillars of tourism is accommodation. The accommodation needs of tourists arriving at plateaus can be resolved most rationally by putting plateau homes at their disposal (Gültekin & Uçar, 2011, 665). However, there are also a number of studies that need to be conducted on bringing available plateau homes in to tourism within the framework of plateau tourism.

The most important issue to take into consideration is to make sure the accommodation facilities to possess features that would not disrupt the traditional and authentic air of the region and to be transformed into a structure that would generate more economic revenue to the families of the region. Within certain principles, improving the home boarding-housing can help achieve the desired outcomes. Many studies and practices reveal the possibility of achieving this aim (Avram & Zarrilli, 2012, 32). However, a study carried out in Spain has indicated that although the rural houses are appealing to tourists mainly because of their natural environment and the authentic characteristics of rural dwellings, there are also other factors which affect the tourist satisfaction, such as size of the building, type of the building, quality of the equipment and services and activities. Therefore, plateau houses should be reconstructed and conserved without destroying the original texture in such a way that can meet the expectations of the tourists. A proper model can be drawn for the sector by examining the present examples in Zigana, Hıdırnebi and Kayabaşı plateaus, which are plateau tourism centers in Turkey sponsored by state. In this context, located in plateaus and used by the local people for 3-4 months at most, plateau houses should be open for tourism with arrangements for hygiene and sanitation (Kızılırmak et al., 2015, 107). Thus, the local

people who own plateau homes can be encouraged either to accept tourists to their homes or to rent their homes to tourists in the period they do not use them.

The vitality that would be created by ensuring ease of access will further increase the existing accommodation needs in plateaus. The shortage of accommodation is really one of the main barriers against bringing plateaus in the research area in to tourism. This problem can be resolved by transforming some of the already abandoned plateau houses into home boarding-houses (Avram & Zarrilli, 2012, 33) or building accommodation facilities that will not contradict with the traditional architecture and appearance. Awareness of regional families and promotions will also have important contributions in terms of the development in question. But, the important point to be taken into consideration in this regard is to make sure that the mobility to be created by tourism does not lead to reinforced concrete by destroying the architectural identity of the plateaus peculiar to themselves. Because, it was identified that reinforced concrete buildings are spreading in a significant portion of the plateaus opened for tourism in the Eastern Black Sea Region (Bekdemir & Koca, 2003, 189). It is vitally important to make versatile and rational planning in order not to encounter with the problems mentioned by learning a lesson from similar negative examples before bringing plateaus in the area in to tourism (Gavrila-Paven, 2015, 114). Furthermore, while making changes in the region, the balance of using & preserving should be maintained by integrating non-governmental organisations and local people into the process as well as the relevant governmental institutions (Başibüyük et al., 2001, 47; Efe et al., 2012, 2012).

In conclusion, it would be beneficial to open houses that have been used as homes or abandoned for a long time in the region as accommodation facilities for the tourism sector with small adjustments order for tourism developing in the research area to provide benefits to the local people and ensuring their development within the concept of the long-term sustainable tourism over the region. Thus, areas with sensitive features in plateaus will be prevented from receiving damages in terms of ecosystems as well as the economic development of people living in the region will be ensured.

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