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# CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED AND EMERGING OPPORTUNITIES OF SMALL-SCALE ACCOMMODATION BUSINESSES OPERATING IN PROTECTED AREAS: THE CASE OF ANTALYA- KALEİÇİ

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### ABSTRACT

This study reveals the challenges experienced by small-scale businesses operating within a protected area in Turkey and identifies the opportunities emerging in this context. The research setting was the historical district of Antalya-Kaleiçi, an officially designated conservation area. Data were collected through semi-structured, face-to-face interviews conducted between 9 and 16 January 2026 with participants selected through purposive sampling. The data were analyzed using descriptive analysis. The findings indicate that the primary challenges faced by accommodation businesses in Antalya-Kaleiçi were noise, bureaucratic barriers, environmental pollution, and infrastructure and superstructure deficiencies. On the other hand, the key opportunities were being intertwined with history and culture, having a central location, and responding to consumers' changing expectations and preferences. The guests' preferences were reportedly shaped by the area's historical and cultural attractions, and various complementary attractions. Finally, bureaucratic constraints, economic conditions, and macro-environmental factors were identified as potential threats that may adversely affect future tourism activities. In light of these findings, it appears critical to establish a single responsible public authority and implement a unified regulatory framework to enable effective and sustainable management of activities in Antalya Kaleiçi.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Due to their cultural heritage assets, protected historic areas are highly attractive to tourists. However, their attractiveness simultaneously makes their structure fragile (Bucurescu, 2015). Historic areas are distinctive spaces that integrate local ways of life transmitted from the past to the present, cultural values, and authentic architectural characteristics (Yang et al., 2004). However, their interaction with tourism often triggers rapid transformation. More specifically, tourist congestion, exceeding carrying capacity, physical deterioration, environmental pollution, traffic, and infrastructure pressure may damage both the residents' quality of life and visitors' experiences (Buckley, 2012). Moreover, poorly managed tourism activities can undermine the area's authenticity in the long term and threaten the sustainability of its cultural heritage. Therefore, while tourism development in conservation areas can be economically beneficial, it can simultaneously exert pressure on the very values that require protection (Tien et al, 2021).

For small-scale enterprises operating in historic districts, there may be both significant opportunities and multidimensional challenges. On the one hand, increasing visitor demand provides entrepreneurial opportunities in accommodation, food and beverage, and souvenir sectors. The growth of these initiatives can support local employment and increase household incomes (Navarrete-Hernandez et al., 2024). On the other hand, a rapid expansion of tourism frequently results in rising rents and living costs, intensified competition, the commercialization of physical spaces, and alterations to original architectural forms (Bucurescu, 2015; Wang et al., 2025). In addition, mandatory compliance with conservation regulations, bureaucratic procedures, and a lack of expertise and financial resources may restrict the operational capacities of small businesses (Yang & Wall, 2022). Small-scale enterprises therefore must strive to balance the pursuit of economic benefits with the obligation to preserve authenticity, comply with regulatory frameworks, and cope with increasing economic cost pressures.

Establishing a sustainable tourism structure in protected areas requires the consideration of effective governance mechanisms, stakeholder collaboration, visitor management, and the active involvement of local communities. Tensions between authenticity and commercialization can be mitigated through comprehensive planning and holistic policy approaches; otherwise, cultural erosion, environmental degradation, and socio-economic inequalities may intensify (Zhang et al., 2015).

The present study focuses on Kaleiçi, a historic area in Antalya city in southern Turkey. Owing to its historical texture, dense tourist mobility, and complex stakeholder structure, Kaleiçi provides a prominent case for observing how these tensions are experienced in a touristic urban conservation area. A review of the limited number of studies conducted specifically on Kaleiçi (Demirel, 2018; Mansuroğlu et al., 2021; Topsakal et al., 2018; Uslu, 2018) indicates that prior research has primarily focused on themes such as innovation tendencies, visitor perceptions, carrying capacity issues, and local residents' evaluations. However, few studies have comprehensively addressed both the challenges and opportunities faced by small-scale enterprises in such a conservation area.

Accordingly, the present study examines the experiences of small-scale businesses through the case of Antalya-Kaleiçi, thereby contributing to the literature and offering practical implications for balancing conservation and development. The conceptual framework and relevant studies are presented in the following literature section. Information regarding the research setting, scope, sample, and data collection process is provided in the methodology section. The results of the data analysis are detailed in the findings section, and the study concludes with a discussion and recommendations.

## **LITERATURE**

A historic district refers to a protected cultural and historical area in which distinctive local, cultural, social, and economic characteristics inherited from the past can be observed (Yang et al., 2004). Such areas, because they are often highly attractive to tourists, are also highly vulnerable to radical transformations driven by tourism development and high visitor concentrations. A number of issues may create problems for both tourists and local residents. These include physical deterioration and damage to historical and cultural monuments due to exceeding the area's carrying capacity, traffic and parking problems, pollution, overconsumption of resources, unplanned infrastructure and superstructure development, and the gradual loss of authenticity (Bucurescu, 2015). When an area with significant cultural heritage begins to develop touristically, local communities generally welcome the emerging economic opportunities. However, inadequate or poorly structured management practices may hinder long-term tourism sustainability and jeopardize the area's intrinsic value (Navarrete-Hernandez et al., 2024).

In such areas, businesses and entrepreneurs often perceive profit opportunities and therefore invest in providing tourism services. As attractiveness, facilities (e.g., accommodation and food-and-beverage establishments), and activities increase, new visitors are drawn to the destination, leading to a continuous rise in demand. Infrastructure and superstructure development also contribute directly and indirectly to other sectors, thereby increasing local employment and household income (Navarrete-Hernandez et al., 2024). However, rapid tourism growth may complicate the sustainable preservation of these areas. Intensified activity frequently leads to the transformation of traditional architecture and streets, while property owners and entrepreneurs may increasingly convert residential properties for commercial uses, such as guesthouses, restaurants, and shops. In turn, this expansion of tourism enterprises, shopping facilities, and related services almost inevitably leads to rising living and rental costs (Wang et al., 2025).

Another potential issue concerns the regulations for conserving the area's cultural heritage, which may make it harder to sustain commercial activities and limit economic development opportunities. However, with effective management and marketing strategies, tourism activities can still be successfully conducted in such areas. Indeed, the preservation of historical and cultural sites may actually make the destination more attractive, thereby promoting its long-term socio-economic development (Wang & Bramwell, 2012). Conversely, conservation policies and practices may not be fully internalized by local communities unless there is an economic rationale. Therefore, when implementing conservation measures, it is crucial to

demonstrate their tangible economic benefits to local residents. Once an area's historical characteristics are damaged or lost, it may be extremely difficult to restore or replace them (Timothy, 2007). As Zhang et al. (2015) show, conflicts may arise in these areas regarding resource use, commercialization versus authenticity preservation, individual interests versus cooperation, and issues related to cultural values, human rights, and world heritage.

Decisions made by policymakers in such areas may complicate management and control when they conflict with the economic and socio-cultural interests of businesses and local communities (Yang & Wall, 2022). Insufficient legal frameworks, lack of expertise, inconsistencies in operational practices, coordination deficiencies among stakeholders (public authorities, private sector, and local residents), absence of long-term planning, and inadequate technical regulations may render tourism planning and management increasingly complex (Yang & Wall, 2022). Pintossi et al. (2023) identify several key challenges encountered in these areas, including a lack of awareness regarding the uniqueness and cultural value of places; limited capacity to adapt historic buildings to contemporary uses while complying with existing regulations; insufficient financial resources to support renovation; and inadequate planning knowledge necessary for effective conservation strategies.

To preserve a historic area's uniqueness and authenticity, it is vital to acknowledge the role of materials, structures (e.g., wall and roof types, construction details), surroundings, urban spaces, buildings, plots, streets, and the overall urban fabric (Kropf, 1996). Authenticity concerns whether an object or place can be verified or validated as original, genuine, and trustworthy (Cohen, 2007). Tourists who visit historic sites primarily for entertainment purposes often perceive these spaces as esthetic attractions and tend to show relatively limited concern for authenticity or conservation. In contrast, visitors who are more deeply interested in cultural and spiritual values are more sensitive to degrees of authenticity and are more inclined to support preservation efforts (Xu et al., 2022).

Commercialization of an area as a tourist destination can have both positive and negative effects. For example, post-modern consumption patterns may both contribute to eroding existing social and moral values, yet also strengthen local cultures and foster a sense of pride among local communities (Xu et al., 2022). Within a sustainability framework, it is essential to consider the following five dimensions: population, peace, prosperity, pollution, and protection. Regarding population, increased tourism activity in historic areas often leads to population growth, which may accelerate the depletion of resources and the degradation or loss of cultural values. Regarding peace, tourism can stimulate economic gains, and strengthen social and environmental values; however, war, terrorism, and instability can severely disrupt tourism, which in turn damages historic destinations. Regarding prosperity, tourism development may raise local welfare levels, yet uncontrolled and unlawful activities can intensify degradation, thereby paradoxically accelerating the destruction of historic environments. Regarding pollution, tourism growth may increase air, water, soil, and environmental pollution, as well as noise and traffic-related disturbances. Finally, intensified tourism activity can make preservation more difficult, while insufficient control mechanisms may lead to irreversible damage or loss (Buckley, 2012).

Liang et al. (2022) argue that it is important to develop strategic plans and approaches for fostering tourism growth in historic areas, particularly through effective governance mechanisms and the active involvement of local communities in preservation processes. Similarly, Mateoc-Sîrb et al. (2022), focusing on highly authentic areas, report that tourism initiatives in protected sites often encounter challenges related to infrastructure development, stakeholder collaboration, and visitor management. Tien et al. (2021) show that while tourism development significantly contributes to economic growth and employment, careful planning and management are essential to prevent environmental degradation and cultural erosion.

Only a few studies have specifically addressed tourism-related issues in Antalya-Kaleiçi specifically. Topsakal et al. (2018), who investigated innovation in Kaleiçi's small- and medium-sized tourism enterprises, found that these businesses pursued innovation to enhance service quality, increase customer satisfaction, reduce costs, gain a competitive advantage, and enter new markets. Reported barriers to innovation included financial constraints, national economic conditions, political uncertainty, and bureaucracy. Uslu (2018) reported that tourists visiting the area were primarily motivated by historical and entertainment purposes, while noise, inappropriate behavior of intoxicated individuals, waste management issues, and pricing were identified as major sources of dissatisfaction. Political conditions were also highlighted as a significant factor directly influencing tourism and the destination. Mansuroğlu et al. (2021) concluded that opening a protected area like Kaleiçi to intensive tourism may create carrying-capacity problems, lead to the deterioration of historical assets, and gradually diminish attraction elements. Finally, Demirel (2018), who examined local residents' perceptions of cultural tourism, found that natural and historical attractions were regarded as Kaleiçi's most important assets while the most prominent concerns were deficiencies in cleanliness, safety, and infrastructure. Another key finding was that preserving and improving cultural and historical structures would help sustain Kaleiçi's future as a tourism destination.

Taken together, the findings reported in previous Kaleiçi studies closely mirror many of the challenges and opportunities identified in the broader international literature on historic districts and protected tourism areas. Issues such as bureaucratic constraints, infrastructure deficiencies, environmental pressures, carrying-capacity concerns, authenticity preservation, and the tension between conservation and economic development have been widely discussed in heritage tourism research. However, most previous studies have focused either on tourists, residents, or specific management issues, providing only a partial understanding of how these dynamics affect tourism businesses operating within protected areas. In particular, limited attention has been paid to the perspectives of small-scale accommodation enterprises, despite their central role in balancing commercial viability with conservation requirements. Therefore, Kaleiçi represents not only a local case but also an appropriate context through which broader sustainability challenges faced by tourism businesses in protected heritage destinations can be examined.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Area**

Kaleiçi is the historic urban core of the city of Antalya in southern Turkey. Despite having

suffered substantial physical deterioration over time, it remains a distinctive settlement area enclosed by inner and outer fortification walls in a horseshoe shape. This fortification system is the outcome of a multilayered historical process, which bears traces of the Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, Seljuk, and Ottoman periods. Within these walls—comprising approximately 80 bastions—stand nearly 3,000 houses characterized by tiled roofs and traditional architectural features. These dwellings are regarded not only as reflections of Antalya’s architectural heritage but also as significant cultural elements embodying the region’s social life, traditions, and everyday practices (Antalya Valiliği, 2026).

Owing to its unique historical fabric, Kaleiçi and Antalya’s neighboring inner harbor were officially designated as a protected conservation site in 1972 by Turkey’s High Council of Immovable Antiquities and Monuments. Following subsequent restoration initiatives, the Antalya–Kaleiçi Complex was awarded the Golden Apple Tourism Award by the International Federation of Travel Journalists and Writers (FIJET) in 1984. Today, Kaleiçi has evolved into one of Antalya’s primary tourism hubs, hosting numerous accommodation, food and beverage, and entertainment establishments (Antalya Valiliği, 2026).

Historically, Antalya was one of Anatolia’s principal Mediterranean gateways, with ancient sources indicating the existence of a pirate harbor named Korykos in the current location of Kaleiçi marina, predating the establishment of the city of Attaleia. Benefiting from the surrounding cliffs, the site provides a naturally protected harbor and has been settled continuously since the 2nd century BCE. The ancient city was safeguarded by thick defensive walls extending both landward and seaward, which were repaired and reinforced across successive historical periods and, as noted above, have partially survived to the present day. Prominent remnants include structures like Hıdırlık Tower, Hadrian’s Gate, and the Clock Tower. Kaleiçi’s street pattern is characterized by narrow sloping lanes extending upward from the harbor, while its urban fabric includes significant historical landmarks, such as Yivli Minaret, madrasahs, and mosques. Its settlement pattern includes both organically developed and grid-planned sections, while its residential buildings are typically two- or three-story courtyard houses with projecting bay windows. Their ground floors are generally allocated to service and daily functional spaces, whereas the upper floors are organized around a central hall serving as the main living area. This architectural configuration is one of the outstanding principal elements reflecting both the physical continuity and the cultural identity of Kaleiçi (Antalya Valiliği, 2026).

### **Research Scope, Sample, and Data Collection**

This study was designed within a qualitative research framework, while its scope covers small-scale accommodation businesses operating in Kaleiçi. The number of accommodation establishments in Kaleiçi is reported to be approximately 200 (Antalyaturkeyhotels, 2026). Participants were selected through purposive sampling, which is commonly used in qualitative research, because it enables the researcher to reach participants with expertise in the research field and who can provide the most relevant and information-rich responses (Creswell & Poth, 2016). More specifically, criterion-based purposive sampling was employed. Participants were required to meet predetermined criteria, including operating a small-scale accommodation

business within Kaleiçi, actively participating in managerial or ownership-related decision-making processes, and possessing sufficient knowledge regarding the operational conditions of the business and its surrounding environment. These criteria were established to ensure that participants could provide detailed and experience-based evaluations regarding the challenges and opportunities associated with operating accommodation establishments within the protected heritage area.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The questions for the interview forms were formulated in line with the research objectives and previous studies in the literature (Mansuroğlu et al., 2021; Topsakal et al., 2018). The interviews, which were conducted face to face between 9 and 16 January 2026 (Table 1). During the data collection process, interview transcripts and field notes were reviewed continuously. After the sixth interview, recurring patterns and similar viewpoints began to emerge across participants. Following the eighth interview, no substantially new themes, categories, or perspectives were identified. Therefore, it was concluded that thematic saturation had been achieved, indicating that additional interviews were unlikely to generate meaningful new insights relevant to the research objectives (Guest et al., 2006). The conclusion that the obtained responses are sufficient to adequately address the interview questions can be considered an indicator that data saturation has been achieved. In addition, reaching a judgment that no new themes or codes are likely to emerge constitutes another important indicator of data saturation (Guest et al., 2006). The development of themes and coding was conducted with reference to findings from previous studies. However, the process was not restricted solely to pre-established codes (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). During data collection, notes were taken, and subsequently, all responses were systematically evaluated to generate themes and codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Prior to data collection, the study received ethical approval from the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Isparta University of Applied Sciences with decision no. 14, issued at meeting no. 219, dated 09.10.2025.

**Table 1. Participants' demographic characteristics**

	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Position/Department</b>
P1	Female	Single	39	College	Operations Manager
P2	Male	Married	38	University	Manager
P3	Male	Single	33	University	Front Office Manager
P4	Female	Single	36	University	Manager
P5	Male	Married	38	University	Manager
P6	Male	Married	51	High School	Manager
P7	Male	Married	42	University	Manager
P8	Female	Single	40	University	Manager

Prior to the interviews, efforts were made to contact potential participants. In line with the purpose of the study, appointments were requested from individuals who were considered most capable of providing meaningful and relevant insights. The interviews were conducted individually and face-to-face, and participants' subjective views were recorded in detail on the interview forms without any form of guidance or intervention by the researcher. The analysis of the collected data was carried out using descriptive analysis. The descriptive analysis followed a systematic multi-stage procedure. First, all interview forms and field notes were reviewed repeatedly to achieve familiarity with the data. Second, meaningful statements related

to the research objectives were identified and coded. Third, similar codes were grouped into broader categories based on conceptual similarities. Subsequently, these categories were organized under overarching themes reflecting the main dimensions of the research questions. Throughout the analysis process, both predetermined concepts derived from the literature and themes emerging directly from the participants’ statements were considered. Finally, the findings were interpreted and supported through direct quotations in order to preserve the original meanings expressed by the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). To enhance the objectivity of the process, the obtained findings, together with the interview forms, were also submitted for review by an independent researcher. The coding structure, thematic classifications, and interpretations were compared and discussed between the researchers and the independent reviewer until consensus was reached. Any discrepancies were resolved through repeated examination of the original data. In addition, the participants’ statements are presented in detail in the following section to support the findings. Given these steps, it can be argued that the criteria of reliability and validity were adequately addressed (Arslan, 2022).

**Table 2. Interview questions**

1	What challenges do you face as a business? Particularly in relation to your operational area, please explain the difficulties you encounter in operational, managerial, and marketing aspects.
2	Considering these challenges, do they have any impact on your guests? In the context of the services you provide, what kinds of challenges might affect guest satisfaction?
3	In terms of your operational area, what factors influence your guests’ preference for your business? Which characteristics of this area attract guests to your establishment?
4	What advantages does operating in this area provide to your business? Are there any additional benefits offered by public institutions and organizations? Please explain.
5	What opportunities do you anticipate this area will offer your business in the future? Based on your projections, what advantages might emerge compared to other accommodation businesses? Please elaborate.
6	What potential threats do you foresee in the future? Which situations do you consider as threats? Please explain.

## FINDINGS

### A) Challenges

Participants were asked to identify factors that hinder or complicate their business activities. Based on the responses obtained, these challenges were categorized under four main themes: “noise”, “bureaucratic barriers”, “environmental pollution”, and “infrastructure and superstructure problems”.

#### A1) Noise

The majority of participants stated that noise pollution directly leads to guest complaints. Due to the high concentration of entertainment-oriented venues in the area, excessive noise levels—particularly during late-night hours—were reported to reduce visitors’ sleep quality. One participant described this issue as follows:

*Different operating hours are granted to bars. Some close at midnight, some at 1 a.m., and those with indoor spaces may continue until 3 or 4 a.m. Since there is no proper sound*

*insulation in the buildings, there is excessive noise. This situation disturbs our customers. (P3, male, single, 33, university, front office manager)*

The participants also mentioned noise caused by individuals and motor vehicles:

*...negative comments and complaints arise due to the noise made by people who consume excessive alcohol on the streets. In 2017, motorcycle entry was banned; however, motorcycles still pass through in an extremely noisy manner. This disturbs tourists. (P6, male, married, 51, high school, manager)*

The findings indicate that noise pollution is perceived as one of the most important operational challenges in Kaleiçi. Participants associated noise primarily with entertainment venues, street activities, and motorcycle traffic. According to the participants, excessive noise negatively affects visitor comfort and leads to customer complaints.

### **A2) Bureaucratic Barriers**

Because Kaleiçi has protected status, businesses are regulated by multiple authorities. Participants indicated that the demands of different public institutions may sometimes contradict one another, thereby complicating operational processes. One participant described this as follows:

*...since this is a conservation area, the requirements of the fire department and the municipality are not accepted by other institutions. It is very difficult to reach an agreement with public authorities and overcome bureaucratic barriers. Institutions contradict each other. Because their regulations and directives differ, we experience serious difficulties. We cannot renovate or repair. We cannot even change a window or a door. We are unable to make even the smallest modification. (P1, female, single, 39, college, operations manager)*

Regarding possible solutions, another participant suggested the establishment of a centralized administrative mechanism:

*...businesses cannot reach the relevant authorities without intermediaries. Although local administrators make efforts, there should be a single office specifically established for this area. Likewise, there should be a common regulation jointly issued by different institutions regarding this site. (P6, male, married, 51, high school, manager)*

Participants emphasized that different public institutions often impose conflicting requirements, creating difficulties in business operations. These bureaucratic barriers were perceived as limiting businesses' ability to carry out renovations, repairs, and other operational activities. Several participants also highlighted the need for greater coordination among authorities.

### **A3) Environmental Pollution**

Environmental pollution emerged as another frequently mentioned issue. In particular, deficiencies in waste collection processes were reported to negatively influence visitor satisfaction in both visual and olfactory terms. Participants emphasized that the problem of smells becomes more evident during the summer months due to higher temperatures:

*...garbage collection needs to be more frequent. Especially in summer, there is an intense smell due to the heat. (P4, female, single, 36, university, manager)*

*...there are serious problems regarding waste. There are no properly designated collection areas. Businesses are also not careful. The use of containers is irregular. (P8, female, single, 40, university, manager)*

Environmental pollution was mainly associated with waste management problems and unpleasant odors, particularly during the summer season. Participants noted deficiencies in waste collection practices and the lack of designated disposal areas. These issues were perceived as negatively affecting the overall visitor experience.

#### **A4) Infrastructure and Superstructure Problems**

Physical intervention limitations in protected areas make it difficult to resolve infrastructure and superstructure deficiencies. Participants highlighted a number of issues, including low water pressure, unstable internet and electricity services, inadequate transportation and lack of parking spaces, and the absence of directional signage. These are exemplified by the following statements:

*...there are infrastructure problems specific to Kaleiçi. There is low water pressure. We also experience issues related to internet infrastructure and electricity. (P2, male, married, 38, university, manager)*

*...transportation-related problems occur frequently. Parking shortages are severe. The absence of maps showing the locations of accommodation facilities, the lack or insufficiency of direction signs, and restrictions on physical modifications to buildings all create difficulties. (P6, male, married, 51, high school, manager)*

*...even insulation becomes a problem. Since we operate within the jurisdiction of the conservation board in a first-degree protected site, we cannot make the type of arrangements we desire. (P3, male, single, 33, university, front office manager)*

Participants identified several infrastructure-related problems, including low water pressure, internet and electricity disruptions, transportation difficulties, and parking shortages. They also stated that conservation regulations limit their ability to improve physical facilities. According to the participants, these issues create operational difficulties and may negatively influence visitor satisfaction.

#### **B) Opportunities**

Participants were asked to evaluate the opportunities provided by Kaleiçi. Their responses mainly clustered around three themes: “being intertwined with history and culture”, “central location”, and “changing expectations and preferences”.

##### **B1) Being Intertwined with History and Culture**

All participants emphasized that operating within Kaleiçi’s historical and cultural environment gave them a significant competitive advantage. Its rich cultural heritage and protected status are the primary attraction of the area, as seen in the following statements:

...since it is a historical and cultural area, we are able to receive more reservations. (P3, male, single, 33, university, front office manager)

...the historical and architectural texture positively influences [tourists'] preference decisions. (P4, female, single, 36, university, manager)

All participants emphasized the importance of Kaleiçi's historical and cultural character. The heritage environment was perceived as a key attraction that increases visitor interest and supports accommodation demand. Participants consistently regarded this feature as one of the destination's strongest advantages.

## **B2) Central Location**

Another commonly emphasized opportunity concerns the area's central location, with participants regarded its accessibility and proximity to various urban amenities as a major strength. They also highlighted other important advantages, such as historical and cultural attractions, ease of transportation, closeness to beaches, availability of diverse activities, and proximity to shopping centers:

...its central location, proximity to the airport, and the overall recognition of the area provide advantages. (P2, male, married, 38, university, manager)

...since Kaleiçi is located in the center of Antalya, it is close to every facility. Guests can easily access beaches, transportation, shopping centers—virtually everything they might need. (P7, male, married, 42, university, manager)

Participants frequently highlighted Kaleiçi's central location as an important advantage. Easy access to transportation facilities, beaches, shopping areas, and other urban services was considered beneficial for visitors. Accessibility was therefore viewed as one of the destination's major strengths.

## **B3) Changing Expectations and Preferences**

Six respondents explicitly indicated that shifts in tourist expectations and consumption patterns represent an important opportunity. In particular, the transformation of travel preferences following the COVID-19 pandemic and the increasing influence of technology on daily life were perceived as factors that reshape demand in favor of smaller and more personalized accommodation options, as seen in the following statements:

...because the businesses operating in this area are generally small-scale, they tend to be preferred more frequently. (P1, female, single, 39, college, operations manager)

...especially after COVID-19, there have been noticeable changes in tourists' preferences. People increasingly prefer smaller-scale organizations rather than all-inclusive systems. (P7, male, married, 42, university, manager)

Several participants indicated that changing tourist preferences create opportunities for small-scale accommodation businesses. In particular, increasing interest in personalized experiences and smaller establishments was viewed positively. Participants associated these changes with shifts in travel behavior following the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **C) Factors Influencing Guests' Preferences**

Participants were asked to identify the factors that influence guests' accommodation preferences. An evaluation of their responses indicates that the most prominent determinants are historical and cultural attractions. In addition to these core elements, the presence of entertainment venues, proximity to beaches, and the central location of the area were also emphasized. Finally, ease of transportation, proximity to the airport, and closeness to other commercial establishments were additional influential factors.

#### **C1) Historical and Cultural Attractions**

Historical and cultural appeal emerged as the primary reason for guests' preference for the area. All participants consistently identified these elements as the most influential factor in visitor decision-making:

*...being close to activities and events together with its historical character and central location...* (P2, male, married, 38, university, manager)

*...history and culture are our greatest attraction. We host many visitors from different markets who wish to experience cultural values.* (P7, male, married, 42, university, manager)

Historical and cultural attractions emerged as the most important factor influencing guest preferences. Participants consistently identified Kaleiçi's heritage character as the primary reason visitors choose the area. These findings suggest that cultural appeal plays a central role in destination choice.

#### **C2) Other Attractions**

Beyond Kaleiçi's historical and cultural appeal, participants also indicated that various complementary attractions shape guest preferences. The availability of entertainment venues, proximity to beaches, and the central positioning of the area were frequently mentioned. In addition, practical considerations, such as transportation convenience, nearness to the airport, and accessibility to other businesses were also perceived as influential:

*...guests prefer us because of our proximity to the city center, ease of transportation, closeness to beaches, the airport, and entertainment venues.* (P4, female, single, 36, university, manager)

*...affordable prices, location (history, culture, central position, and accessibility to various facilities), proximity to the sea, and convenient transportation...* (P5, male, married, 38, university, manager)

Participants also identified several complementary factors influencing guest preferences. Entertainment opportunities, proximity to beaches, accessibility, and transportation convenience were frequently mentioned. These findings indicate that visitors consider multiple destination attributes when selecting accommodation.

### **D) Future Threats**

#### **D1) Policies of Public Institutions and Authorities**

With the exception of one participant, there was a shared concern regarding the policies implemented by public institutions and governmental authorities. The most frequently

emphasized issue was inconsistency and contradictions among institutional regulations, which significantly complicates business operations within the area:

*...the policies followed by different public institutions constitute one of the greatest threats. Each authority forces us to comply with different practices.* (P5, male, married, 38, university, manager)

Another prominent concern was that the district could in future be partially or entirely closed to tourism activities due to stricter preservation measures:

*...the biggest threat in the coming years would be the closure of this area to tourism activities. Since it is a protected zone, much stricter rules may be imposed or it may even be completely closed.* (P4, female, single, 36, university, manager)

Most participants viewed public policies and institutional practices as an important future challenge. In particular, inconsistencies among different authorities were perceived as creating uncertainty for businesses. Some participants also expressed concerns regarding possible future restrictions on tourism activities.

## **D2) Economic Conditions**

Three participants explicitly indicated that one of the most significant future threats is economic conditions. Rising operational costs and rental expenses were perceived as factors that could eventually force businesses to cease operations. Moreover, participants expressed concern that increasing prices may alter guest preferences and reduce competitiveness:

*...increasing rents and economic conditions may lead to the closure of businesses in the future.* (P8, female, single, 40, university, manager)

*...another concern is that quality is gradually declining due to economic conditions. If this situation continues, we may be forced to reduce quality in order to lower costs. In such a case, the quality of guests is also likely to decline.* (P2, male, married, 38, university, manager)

Economic conditions were identified as another important concern for the future. Participants emphasized rising operational costs and increasing rental expenses. They also suggested that prolonged economic difficulties could negatively affect business sustainability and service quality.

## **D3) Macro-Environmental Factors**

Participants also identified a range of macro-environmental factors as potential future threats. Although opinions varied in scope, there was a common emphasis on uncertainties like wars, pandemics, and political instability. These external dynamics were viewed as largely uncontrollable yet highly influential on tourism demand and regional safety perceptions. The following statements illustrate this:

*...I believe that wars and pandemics will increase further in the coming years.* (P3, male, single, 33, university, front office manager)

*...security threats arising from any form of instability will be the greatest future risk.* (P5, male, married, 38, university, manager)

Participants identified wars, pandemics, and political instability as potential future threats. Although these factors are beyond the control of individual businesses, they were perceived as having a substantial influence on tourism demand. Consequently, external uncertainties were viewed as an important risk for the future of tourism activities in the area.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

This study aimed to reveal the challenges experienced, and the opportunities emerging for small-scale enterprises operating in a protected urban area in southern Turkey, namely Antalya's historic Kaleiçi district. The findings indicate that Kaleiçi's accommodation businesses encounter significant difficulties arising from noise, bureaucratic barriers, environmental pollution, and infrastructure and superstructure problems. It appears unlikely that these enterprises can overcome such structural challenges individually. On the other hand, participants also identified various contextual characteristics that create notable business opportunities for them. These opportunities primarily stem from being intertwined with history and culture, having a central location, and the diversification of consumer preferences. All three factors were reported to have positive impacts on business operations. In particular, the coexistence of historical and cultural heritage alongside additional attraction elements in and around the area was one of the most influential determinants of guest preferences. However, potential future policy changes, economic fluctuations, and macro-environmental factors may pose serious risks that could ultimately result in the termination of business activities.

This study contributes to the literature by advancing a more integrative understanding of the challenges faced by small-scale tourism enterprises in protected heritage areas. Specifically, it demonstrates that these challenges cannot be reduced to physical or environmental constraints alone but are also shaped by managerial complexities and structural conditions embedded in governance systems. By revealing the interconnections between environmental pressures, infrastructural limitations, and institutional fragmentation, the study moves beyond fragmented approaches in the literature and offers a multi-dimensional analytical perspective. In doing so, it underscores the necessity of addressing tourism development in protected areas through holistic and system-oriented frameworks that account for the simultaneous interaction of physical, environmental, administrative, and structural factors.

## **Theoretical Implications**

The findings of this study indicate that the experiences of small-scale tourism enterprises operating in protected areas cannot be explained solely through economic or managerial dimensions. Rather, elements like authenticity, governance structures, and visitor behavior also decisively shape operational realities. The finding that noise, environmental pollution, and infrastructural inadequacies directly affect business performance aligns with those of Uslu (2018). This suggests that carrying capacity and sustainable destination management are critical areas requiring careful consideration (Mansuroğlu et al., 2021). The results further indicate that a preservation framework focusing exclusively on the protection of physical heritage may remain incomplete unless it also addresses the social environment, visitor profiles, and everyday life dynamics (Buckley, 2012). In addition, these environmental pressures can be interpreted through the lens of tourism carrying capacity, suggesting that Kaleiçi may be experiencing

levels of visitation and nightlife intensity that exceed its physical and social thresholds. When carrying capacity is surpassed, both resident quality of life and visitor experience deteriorate, creating sustainability risks for the destination. Therefore, noise and congestion should be treated as operational issues as well as indicators of limits to sustainable tourism development in heritage settings (Kostopoulou & Kyritsis, 2006).

Bureaucratic barriers and contradictions among institutional regulations were identified by participants as one of the most significant challenges. The involvement of multiple authorities in the governance of protected areas often produces fragmented and incompatible administrative structures (Yang & Wall, 2022). This suggests that although multi-stakeholder governance models are theoretically advocated, their practical implementation may fall short due to lack of coordination. The misalignment between public policies and local business practices may have adverse consequences for both economic sustainability and cultural heritage preservation (Liang et al., 2022). The present findings are similar to those of Topsakal et al. (2018), who identified bureaucratic barriers as obstacles for enterprises in such areas. This fragmentation of authority also reflects broader governance challenges in protected urban heritage areas, where multi-level and multi-actor governance structures often lead to coordination failures rather than collaborative efficiency. From a governance perspective, the coexistence of municipal, cultural heritage, and tourism authorities creates overlapping jurisdictions that weaken policy coherence and reduce implementation effectiveness. This finding reinforces the argument that sustainable management of heritage destinations requires regulatory plurality alongside institutional integration and clear coordination mechanisms among governing bodies (Islam et al., 2018; Ramukumba, 2025).

Nearly all participants regarded the historical and cultural texture as their primary competitive advantage, which confirms the determining role of authenticity and locality in shaping tourism demand (Xu et al., 2022). Moreover, it underscores the extent to which heritage-based destination attractiveness influences visitor choices. The identification of central location and shifting tourist expectations as opportunities further reflects the increasing importance of the experience economy and niche tourism approaches in protected areas (Wang & Bramwell, 2012). These opportunity structures can also be understood within the framework of the experience economy, where tourism demand is increasingly shaped by immersive, emotional, and authentic experiences rather than standardized service delivery (Subramaniam et al., 2018). Within this context, Kaleiçi's historical atmosphere and cultural embeddedness function as experiential assets that enable small-scale enterprises to stage memorable and personalized tourist experiences. This positions local businesses not merely as service providers but as co-creators of cultural and experiential value within the destination.

The concentration of perceived future threats around public policies, economic conditions, and macro-environmental dynamics supports the notion that the tourism system in protected heritage destinations is inherently fragile and vulnerable. The participants' emphasis on wars, pandemics, and political instability as major risks reveals that destinations are shaped not only by local dynamics but also by global developments (Barkauskas et al., 2015). In this regard, the study contributes to the literature by illustrating the multi-layered risk perceptions of small-scale enterprises and reaffirming the importance of considering uncertainty, resilience, and

adaptive capacity in tourism studies.

### **Practical Implications**

From a practical standpoint, the findings indicate that noise and environmental pollution are the most urgent areas requiring intervention in Kaleiçi. Indeed, a previous study in the same area found that noise generated by late-night entertainment activities directly affects service quality and visitor satisfaction in accommodation businesses (Demirel, 2018). This highlights the need for local authorities to adopt more holistic policies concerning licensing hours, inspection mechanisms, and sound insulation standards. Beyond these operational measures, it is also essential to consider the regulatory and governance dimensions of such issues, as ineffective coordination among responsible authorities may limit the success of intervention efforts. Similarly, strengthening waste management and cleaning services—particularly during peak seasons—are essential for sustaining a positive destination image (Buckley, 2012). This suggests that environmental management in protected areas should be addressed through integrated and system-wide approaches rather than isolated interventions. Specifically, standardizing nightlife operating hours, implementing regular sound level monitoring, and enforcing mandatory acoustic insulation requirements for entertainment venues would provide concrete regulatory mechanisms to mitigate noise-related problems.

The evidence related to bureaucratic barriers clearly points to the importance of establishing coordinated administrative units in protected areas. The obligation for enterprises to comply with multiple institutional requirements and conflicting regulations negatively affects both investment decisions and daily operations (Topsakal et al., 2018). Developing a shared regulatory framework and standardizing practices among public authorities would significantly contribute to both business sustainability and effective heritage conservation (Yang & Wall, 2022). In this context, strengthening inter-institutional coordination and clarifying roles and responsibilities among governing bodies emerge as critical priorities for improving administrative efficiency and reducing structural barriers faced by small-scale enterprises. Establishing a single coordinating authority or a “single-window” governance mechanism for Kaleiçi would reduce regulatory fragmentation and improve coordination among public institutions.

Infrastructure and superstructure deficiencies were also identified as factors directly influencing tourists’ destination experience. Problems related to water pressure, electricity supply, internet connectivity, and directional signage reduce visitor satisfaction and weaken the competitive strength of businesses (Demirel, 2018). Therefore, it is essential to design flexible restoration and improvement models that simultaneously respect preservation regulations while addressing contemporary needs. Such an approach would enable the protection of historical texture while improving service quality. Interdisciplinary collaboration among architects, urban planners, and tourism stakeholders is particularly crucial in this process (Mateoc-Sîrb et al., 2022). At the same time, these infrastructural challenges should be recognized as not merely technical deficiencies but also as outcomes of planning and governance limitations, requiring long-term strategic coordination among relevant institutions. In addition, installing clear directional signage throughout the district and developing a long-term infrastructure modernization plan

compatible with heritage conservation requirements would significantly enhance visitor experience and operational efficiency.

On the opportunity side, the historical environment, central location, and changing tourist expectations offer strong advantages for destination marketing strategies in Kaleiçi. Small-scale enterprises can transform their boutique service orientation, personalized experiences, and culturally embedded offerings into sustainable competitive advantages. The post-pandemic increase in demand for authentic and localized experiences indicates a shift away from standardized mass tourism models toward more intimate and culturally grounded alternatives (McKercher & Ho, 2006). In this context, collaborative promotional strategies between local governments and sector representatives are strongly recommended. Moreover, leveraging these opportunities effectively requires not only marketing initiatives but also supportive governance structures and policy frameworks that enable small-scale enterprises to sustain and scale their experiential offerings in a competitive environment. Effectively leveraging these opportunities requires coordinated destination marketing strategies supported by local authorities and private stakeholders, ensuring that small-scale enterprises can sustainably benefit from the growing demand for authentic and experience-based tourism.

Overall, the findings suggest that addressing the challenges in Kaleiçi requires an integrated and action-oriented governance approach rather than isolated interventions. A coordinated policy framework that combines regulatory standardization, infrastructure investment, environmental management, and stakeholder collaboration is essential for ensuring the sustainable operation of small-scale tourism enterprises in protected heritage areas.

### **Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

This study has several limitations. First, being conducted solely within Antalya-Kaleiçi limits the generalizability of the findings to other destinations or tourism contexts. Variations in cultural, managerial, and socio-economic conditions across destinations may restrict broader extrapolation. Second, the sampling structure and qualitative data collection method also constitute limitations, as the participant group represents only a specific stakeholder segment and may not fully reflect the perspectives of all relevant actors. Future research could benefit from employing larger and more diverse samples as well as quantitative or mixed-method designs to statistically test the observed relationships more robustly. Including a wider range of stakeholders, such as tourism students, academics, industry professionals, policymakers, tourists, and local residents, would provide a more holistic analytical perspective. Particularly in studies concerning historic areas, incorporating both visitor and community viewpoints would enable richer multidimensional insights and strengthen the practical applicability of research outcomes.

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#### **Etik kurul beyan notu:**

Araştırma sürecinin planlanması, veri toplama, analiz, yorumlama ve raporlama dâhil olmak üzere tüm aşamalarında bilimsel araştırma ve yayın etiği ilkelerine titizlikle uyulmuştur. Çalışmada akademik dürüstlük, şeffaflık, tarafsızlık ve bilimsel güvenilirlik esas alınmış; intihal, veri manipülasyonu, uydurma veri kullanımı ve benzeri herhangi bir etik ihlale kesinlikle yer verilmemiştir. Ayrıca kullanılan tüm kaynaklara akademik atıf kurallarına uygun biçimde yer verilmiştir.

#### **Araştırmacıların katkı oranı beyanı**

1. yazar %100 oranında katkı sağlamıştır.

#### **Çıkar çatışması beyanı**

Bu çalışmada herhangi bir potansiyel çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.