

# Significance of Firtına Stream Basin and Kaçkar Mountains National Park in Sustainable Tourism

**Mehmet ZAMAN**  
Ataturk University  
Department of Geography,  
25240 Erzurum / Turkey  
mzaman@atauni.edu.tr

**Abstract:** Firtına Basin and Kaçkar Mountains National Park are located in the Eastern Black Sea part of the Eastern Black Sea Region. Administratively, the whole Firtına Basin, and a great part of Kaçkar Mountains National Park (83.7 %) area located within Çamlıhemşin, Rize, and the rest of the area (16.3 %) falls within the boundaries of Yusufeli, Artvin and İspir, Erzurum. Firtına Basin and Kaçkar Mountains National Park, a large part of which is in the basin of the related valley, are one of the most important natural places of Turkey and are known at an international level owing to their wild life, vegetation richness and geomorphological formations they have. On account of these characteristics, the related area has been counted in 200 ecological areas that must be preserved by WWF (World Wild Fund For Nature). In addition, centuries - long high pasture activities in the area and archaeological works add historical and folkloric value to the basin. Therefore, they remain one of the important areas in *Sustainable Tourism*. They have a potential for such natural recreational activities as mountain tourism, high pasture tourism, thermal tourism, cultural tourism, botanical tourism, rafting, heliksi, camping, photography, mountain cycling, jeep safari, trekking, fishhook, paragliding and observation of birds and wild life. Utilization of the related area with respect to sustainable tourism potential will greatly contribute to the economic development of the region. The reason is that sustainable tourism remains a kind of tourism which protects local, natural, cultural and structural sources, develops life quality of the people around, provides a high – quality service for the tourists, increases environmental quality of sites and fosters economic development.

**Key Words:** Kaçkar Mountains National Park, Firtına Basin, Sustainable Tourism

## Introduction

In the context of prospective sustainability, sources continue to be utilized on the one hand while it becomes necessary to protect the same sources so that future generations may make use of them. The reason for this is that the process of technological and socio-economic developments and changes in our century will continue in the same way in the future. Therefore, it has been an obligation to follow a planned method while making natural and human sources available to use (Atabay, 1998:2). In addition, sustainability is a kind of behaviour that is constantly renewed. The objective of such behaviour is to protect the sources in terms of sustainability. This is significant not only with respect to economy but human life.

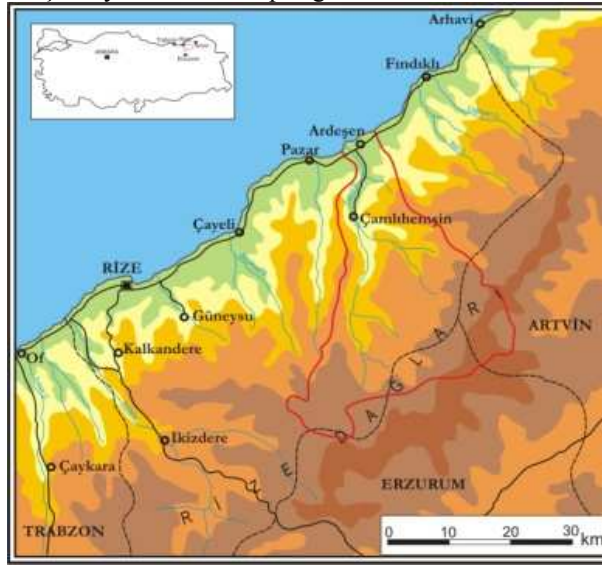
Accordingly, sustainable tourism can be defined as an activity which adorns natural, cultural and social sources in the long run and protects them, and which supports economy moderately (Scharpf, 1998:18). Such terms as Responsible Tourism, Soft Tourism, Eco-Tourism and Alternative Tourism bear similar meanings with Sustainable Tourism. They are examined within in the scope of Sustainable Tourism.

## Geographical Characteristics of the Area

Firtına Stream Basin is made up of a land (2000-2200 m.) incised deeply with rivers and high mountainous fields where glaciations/ glaciations is effective. Among forms of glaciations are actual glacial, glacial lakes, glacial basins, moraine sets and synclinal folds (Erinç, 1949: 243-245; 1971: 258-260). A semi-oceanic and semi-continental climate is seen in this region. There exists a thick forest thanks to suitable precipitation and temperature. The forest is visible till 2200 metres and from that metre upward, there are subalpine and alpine meadows.

The Kaçkar Mountains National Park (Figure 1) remains the fifth with respect to size among the 36 national parks in Turkey with its space of 5150 hectares. It was gained the status of tourism centre in 1991 and of national park in 1994 with its such characteristics as geological and geomorphological qualities, existence of traditional transhumance, richness of vegetation and wild life, and natural landscape. Located in the area, Ayder

High Pasture is a place was announced to be the first touristic centre in the Eastern Black Sea Region in 1987 under name of 'Rize-Çamlıhemşin-Ayder Thermal Spring Touristic Centre'.



**Figure 1.** Location Map of Fırtına Stream and Kaçkar Mountains National Park.

There are one town (Çamlıhemşin), 27 villages, 41 high-pastures and 18 hamlets in Fırtına Stream Basin.

## Facilities of Sustainable Tourism and Their Utilization

Such recreational activities as high-pasture tourism, mountain tourism, thermal tourism, cultural tourism, rural tourism (agriculture and farm tourism), wild life and bird watching (ornito-tourism), hunting tourism, botanical tourism, river tourism (sportive hand line fishing, canoe and rafting), congress tourism, rafting, heliski, camping and caravan tourism, photography (photo safari), mountain cycling, paragliding, horse riding, film and documentary production, scientific research and training camps (Zaman, 2007, s. – 2008: s.).

High pasture tourism is without doubt one of the mostly-demanded of those mentioned above and has been the most popular form of alternative tourism. The reason is that high pastures with their natural beauty, cold and clear waters, fresh air, ethnological, cultural and other attractive characteristics draw attention. The high pasture in the basin are suitable for such activities as stopover, rest, observation of nature and culture, trips, photography, observing and participating in traditional high pasture life, tasting local food, and taking place in cultural activities. With these characteristics, the related area offers sustainable tourism facilities and draws the attention of both local and foreign tourists (Photo 1). Among the important high pastures with transportation and accommodation facilities are Ayder, Yukarı Kavron, Elevit, Başyayla, Çiçekliyayla, Tirovit, Palovit, Amlakit, Apivanak, Pokut and Sal (Zaman, 2007: 200-2008:17-26).



**Photograph 1.** Such Social and cultural activities as high pasture festivals and bullfights are organized in Fırtına Stream Basin and Kaçkar Mountains National Park.

Another important kind of alternative tourism is mountain tourism on the mountains with high peaks located in the south part of the basin. There are such summits as that of Mount Kaçkar (3932 m.) and of Mount Verçenik. The touristic potential of the park in mountain tourism includes tracking and hiking, peak and glacial climbing, mountain skiing and alpinism (Photo 2-Somuncu, 1986:1 - 1988: 30-31).

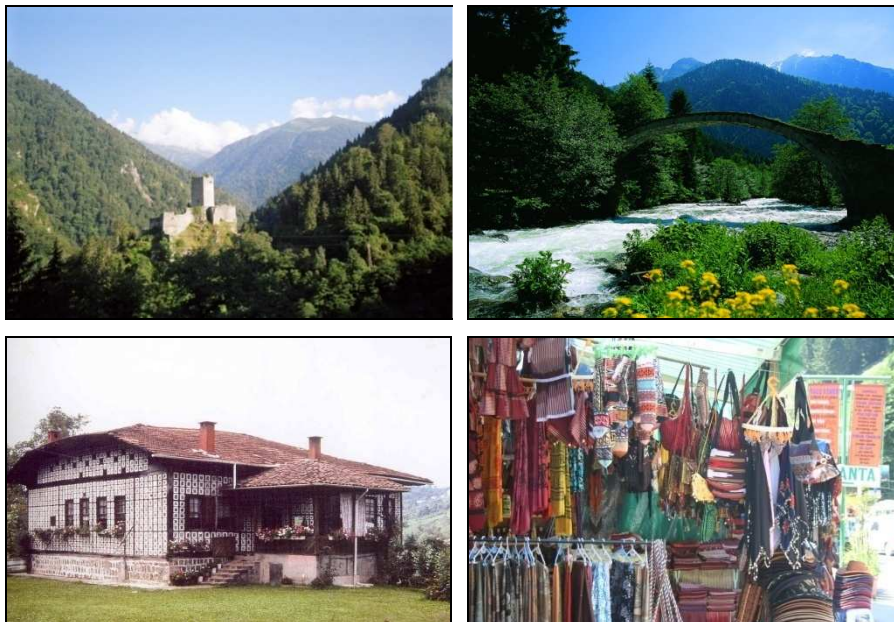


**Photograph 2.** The potential of the Kaçkar Mountains National Park in mountain tourism includes tracking and hiking, peak and glacial climbing and heliski.

The mentioned area has rural tourism facilities with its rural life style, traditional village and high pasture life, scattered settlement, houses built in accordance with wooden civil architecture, customs and conventions, garden and agriculture activities, and animal husbandry.

In addition, the fact that the thermal springs in Ayder High Pasture, which is the thermal tourism centre, have positive effects on the treatment of rheumatism, on skin, blood system, respiration, gynaecological system, neural system and muscles attract many tourists to the area.

Firtına Basin is also one of the most attractive places in terms of cultural tourism with its historical sites like Zilkale and Kale-ı Bala as well as stone bridges, its architecture, music, wearing style of people, food culture, rural residences, high pasture festivals, bullfights and life style (Photo 3).



**Photography 3.** The castles on the basin (e.g. Zilkale), historical stone bridges, residences and local clothes are among the elements that contribute to the development of cultural tourism in the area.

Hunting tourism and bird watching are also available in Firtına Basin (Photo 4). In addition to diversity of wild life, the large number of bird kinds adds value to the area, which has been announced as one of the 100 significant bird areas of Turkey by The Society for the Protection of Nature and by Bird Life International. 57 of the bird kinds have been taken under protection in accordance with Bern III Contract.

In addition, capercaillies in the area have given the area the status of being one of the 217 endemism areas (Kurdođlu, 2002: 5/Bird Life,1995).



**Photography 4.** In recent years, bird watching has been carried out in Firtına Basin and Kaçkar Mountains National Park.

Having a unique botanical diversity, the area holds a number of rare kinds with its 537 woody plants, Firtına Basin remains one of the 122 significant plant fields(Yeğen,2007:101-103). All these demonstrate that the area has a significant potential for the development of *botanical tourism*.

Since 2003, *heliski* has been available in the National Park(Photo 5). Tourists, especially from Sweden, Switzerland, Norway and Finland, join heliski activities which are mostly held on Kaçkar Mountains and such valleys as Kavran, Ceymakcur and Avacur.



**Photograph 5.** The tourists landed on the peaks of Kaçkar Mountains join heliksi.

As for river tourism, the area offers such alternatives as *canoe* and *rafting* thanks to the length of the course, flow rate and valley slope(Photo 6).



**Photograph 6.** Canoe and rafting are carried out in Firtına Stream especially in the period of transition from spring to summer.

In recent years, *jeep safari* and *mountain cycling* have become popular activities in Firtına Basin. There are many routes for these activities. In addition, the area has often been preferred by the campers with its magnificent views and fresh, clean air.

With its unique natural beauty, the basin provides heavenly facilities for photographers and *photo safari*.

As for as their height, slope and wind are concerned, the peaks of Kaçkar Mountains are suitable for paragliding (Photo 7). Sal, Pokut and Hazindak high pasture are among the appropriate places for this activity.



**Photograph 7.** Firtına Basin and Kaçkar Mountains National Park have places suitable for camping and paragliding.

Apart from these, local residences, thermal spring, accomodation sites and cultural structure of Ayder High Pasture can be arranged so as to host congresses to be held, which will add to sustainable tourism activities in the area. In addition, there are suitable places for *horse riding*, *orienteering*, *view watching* and *picnic*.

## Conclusion

Firtına Stream Basin and Kaçkar Mountains National Park offers various alternatives of sustainable tourism for tourists. It is obvious that present state of the National Park, which has a number of natural, social and cultural sources, can only be maintained by the protection and sound use of these sources.

To do so;

- Economic, ecological and social aspects of sources should be assessed together for a sustainable development.
- Plans, projects and investments that may cause pollution and environmental damage should be avoided.
- Ecological capacity should be taken into account while development is supported.
- Natural, cultural and social diversity should be protected and supported.
- Tourists and local people should be informed about possible negative environmental effects.
- Sustainability of the above without doubt is closely connected with the continuity of the relationship between tourism, and natural and social environment in a sound and positive manner.

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