

## **USING AWARENESS IN DESTINATIONS: ESREFOGLU MOSQUE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Every region has its own characteristics and assets since tourism is heterogeneously structured. Using these assets effectively and taking competition advantage by them is only possible when all the shareholders are aware of them. Because awareness provides revealing skills and strength, continuous development, smart preferences and persistent demands. And this awareness is formed by repetitions ending a successful result.

Built in 1296-1299, Eşrefoğlu Mosque is in UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List and the biggest and original example of wooden mosques in Anatolia. The mosque which has 42 wooden columns is situated in Beysehir county in Konya province and 715 years old. The mosque survived up to today without any damage in its wooden parts because it has got a huge snow pit in the middle of it. Not only the wooden columns but also tiles, monumental portal and Minber which is next to mihrap are very important in terms of history of art. Because the minber was made of wood without using any nails and glue since they were well-preserved by the locals.

Importance of touristic assets on tourism destinations is studied in this paper. In addition, importance of using these assets not only by tourists but also the locals and using them as a means of competition element is emphasized in the paper.

**Keywords:** Awareness, Competition, Destination, Esrefoglu Mosque

## **INTRODUCTION**

There is an intense competition not only in products or firms but also in countries and regions in today's tourism sector. Because of this reason touristic destinations that want to take the advantage are in an effort to determine all their touristic values and try to make use of them effectively. Tourism is a sector in which there is an intense competition among countries and regions since it has got employee advantages, hot money flow, and socio-cultural contributions to the regions.

Expectations and applications vary in tourism sector where the competition is at the highest level among the regions and enterprises. Tourism destinations should attuned to changing and developing conditions, and form an awareness both at domestic and foreign stakeholders by using their touristic assets effectively. Because forming awareness by moral and material assets, directing and using them correctly may create an easier sustainable competition advantage for tourism destinations

Esrefoglu Mosque is accepted as a very important touristic asset by 715 year historical background and its cultural and architectural richness. Contributions of touristic values like Esrefoglu Mosque to economical, social and cultural structures of a region are associated with the awareness formed on all stakeholders

## **AWARENESS**

Awareness is; to gather attention in order to focus on present time extrajudicially (Kabat-Zinn, 2012). Awareness is also accepted as a prior condition for the formation of perceptions and ideas (Uztuğ, 2010). In the general sense, awareness provides gaining

self-confidence against a person's own feelings and thinkings, and also provides withdrawing from types of thinking in which attention focuses on him/her negatively and cranky. Awareness is a kind of idiosyncratic and clear consciousness form like admitting momentary experiences clearly and extrajudicially, objective rating and analysing. Feelings and thoughts are not refused, judged, suppressed and spared in awareness. All the momentary experiences whether they are negative or positive are accepted and set free.

Many people make the mistake of living in the past or future, ignoring the momentary moment. Everybody is happy in the view of a beautiful building, scenery or event. But, while living the moment if an event from the past or present is thought, the beautiful moment disappears. We should be aware of the moment and environment and utilize of them. Because evaluation of the events are not by the eyes but the brain. Individuals, foundations or regions become aware of their timeframe and own assets and if they can evaluate them properly, they get an advantageous tool for competition.

### **Destination Awareness**

Destination in tourism consists of various tourism sources and direct and indirect tourism services provided by many establishments and foundations hosting and attracting tourists and their visits (Özdemir 2007). A region must have some qualifications in order to be a touristic destination and develop in terms of tourism. These qualifications can be expressed as the mixture of products and services such as particularly attractiveness, image, transportation, accommodation, dining, parks, museums, ruin sites and presence of leisure activity opportunities and so on (İlban, 2007). According to strategic management and marketing specialists, while destination is a combination of goods, services and holiday experiences served in a local scale; it is

a place where there are different natural attractiveness and properties that could be accepted as a charming place for the tourists according to other specialist group (Gürbüz, 2005). Because of these properties, while destinations are the most important components of tourism they are generally accepted as the most difficult touristic product to manage and market.

Destination selection is the most important indicator of life style for the today's tourists. Their preferred places must be a famous destination with emotional attractiveness to spend their time and money (Morgan et al, 2004). A destination can be differentiated by its upper structure investments and physical features like architecture. But these features are away from satisfying the consumer all the time since they are easily imitable. Destination awareness formed by destination branding is seen as the strongest marketing element of contemporary destination marketers operating in global competition (Yavuz, 2007).

Awareness of the destination is extremely important in terms of destination sustainability. Various methods are used to form destination awareness. Creating difference worth remembering, forming a motto or advertisement jingle, forming a sign or a symbol, appetency in national-international media, event sponsorship, brand extension, clue using, repetition and remembering (Akyol, 2010) are some of these methods.

Destination awareness is obtained by the utilization of the assets of the destination by as many tourists as possible (Gwinner, 1997). Awareness involves recognizability and memorability as the sign of destination in visitors' memory (Uztuğ, 2003). We need to make use of some principles about psychology and promotion to create a difference and make this difference sustainable. These principles may be

actualize by associating the events and assets with mottos and music. These kind of methods used to create awareness may help target group remember and recognize the products and services in the destination

### **Importance of Awareness in terms of Tourism**

Mostly, while evaluating the places for living, sight-seeing, and investing some simple cliches have important effects. Paris-fashion, Switzerland-health and watch, Rio De janerio-carnivals, and most of the African countries recall poverty, war, crime and famine. Most of us are not aware whether these connotations meet the truths or not. But these cliches affect our attitudes towards these places whether they are true or not, positive or negative (Özdemir and Karaca, 2009). Because of this, a lot of cities succeeded to be a destination are in an effort to brand themselves to increase awareness. Aeker points out that a strong brand can be formed in five (5) levels (Aeker, 1996). This model can be applied to the branding of destinations.

- 1. Strategic Analysis:** Destinations that want to be a brand, should analyse not only themselves but also their competitors, potential assets of the competitors and target market. Image, strong and weak sides of the rival destination should be determined, and destination brand should be located according to these features.
- 2. Brand Identity:** Brand identity reflects what the destination wants to be since it is going to represent the destination and the assets of it. Brand identity also requires adapting the changes occurring in micro and macro environments and meeting the expectations of the target group.
- 3. Developing Value Proposition:** Products and services, even their brands provided by the destination may be imitated very easily. Because of this

physical and emotional differences of the brand from other destinations should be emphasized.

- 4. Positioning:** In a general sense, positioning is locating the brand into the consumers' mind. The most important thing in positioning is emphasizing the different sides of the destination from the competitors. Because if it is understood that the destination has the same properties with the competitors, tourists are not going to be interested in that destination.
- 5. Application:** Branding is a process that takes a long time. Different kinds of communication activities should be used in order to form the brand about the destination in tourists' mind. In order to emphasize the difference from the competitor destinations, different type of media organs can be used for a different strategy.

Every touristic destination wants to be a brand and attract tourists. At the same time they are aware of their competition with the other destinations. Because of this reason, destination managers compete to make their destination more beautiful and different. They do not handle only the infra-structure problems. They also deal with the image and awareness. Because importance of awareness for the touristic destinations can be summarized as in the following:

- Awareness helps local people and tourists recognize the destination and distinguish the destination from similar touristic regions.
- Unexperienced risks of touristic products are decreased by the help of awareness.
- Awareness provides a clear identity to the destination and eases the classification of the market

- It contributes the products to symbolize the destination.
- Awareness coordinates the promotion of touristic products and marketing efforts.
- Destinations become physical and physiological attraction centers for the tourists by the help of awareness.
- By the help of awareness, a relationship is formed between the tourists and the destination assets and the destination becomes sustainable.

### **Use of Awareness as a Means of Competition**

The concept of competition which forms the nucleus of economy according to changing economic conditions is accepted as an event emerging from the necessity of sharing scarce resources for endless human requirements (Aktan and Vural 2004). If destinations make more value than the economic benefits created by their competitors, they can be more valuable than their competing destinations (Barney 1995). Destinations which want to get and sustain this advantage must analyze failure and success of their competitors. Destinations which analyze their competitors learn the reasons of both their and other destinations' success and failure. By the help of this knowledge they can develop suitable strategies and have sustainable competition ability.

But touristic destinations do not form an advantage by only marketing their tangible and intangible assets in global competition environment. By global competition, the most important item of the destinations is forming awareness by making a difference. By making use of Rhinesmith's view, the criteria that the touristic destinations should carry out in order to get the competition advantage can be summarised as in the following (Rhinesmith, 2000):

**1. Quality:** Quality is not the way of getting global competitive power, it is the minimal point of competition in global market conditions. Today, foundations change not only the processes but also their strategies, structures, cultures and employees to form a new quality standard.

**2. Diversity:** Diversity and quality of products and services in the destination modify by changing tourism understanding day by day. Destinations wishing to get the competition advantage should present their products and services to their target group with suitable quality and variety.

**3. Special Production:** Demands and expectations of tourists benefitting from products in tourism sector may differentiate. Everybody does not like the same item with the same level as the others. Because of this reason managers should design the assets of the destination according to different types of tourists and their likes. This can be conducted by forming awareness, and helps destination to take the competition advantage.

**4. Usefulness:** If a quality product or service is used everywhere and every time, then, it can be used as an important competition tool in getting a bigger market share. But, since touristic product has to be consumed at the production place this situation is not suitable for the tourism sector. Because of this property the tourists must be invited to the destination by an awareness.

**5. Cost:** Quality and cost are generally perceived as inversely proportional. But, touristic assets are presented to the tourist in a best way with the least cost to take the competition advantage in today's global tourism sector. The most important thing to do for this purpose is to form awareness both in internal and external environment.

**ESRREFOGLU MOSQUE AND AWARENESS**

Esrefoglu Mosque is located 100m North of Lake Beysehir in Icerisehir *Inner City*. It is the finest example of the Seljuk flat-wooden-ceiling and wooden column-style of mosque construction in Anatolia as one of the few remaining wooden mosques that date from the Seljuk period. Built by Eşrefoğlu Süleyman Bey in 1297-1299, it is the biggest of the flat-wooden-ceiling mosques with the exterior dimensions of 31.77 x 46.55 m.

Esrefoglu Mosque creates an important awareness by its exterior architecture, snow pit, wooden parts, tile decorated niche *mihrap*, the pulpit *minber* which was engraved with a technique called *kündekari* without adhesive for the region. The destinations which are not recognized by national and international tourism markets may take a good place in famous global destinations by emphasizing this kind of under recognized assets and take a competition advantage by making a difference in terms of touristic product diversity and quality.

Because of this reason, characteristics of Esrefoglu Mosque have to be recognized primarily by the destination people then the target group. There are national and international studies like Charles Texier, 1862; Friedrich Sarre, 1896; R.M. Riefstahl, 1931; M. Yavuz Süslü, 1934; Yusuf Akyurt, 1940; Ömer Tekin and Recep Bilginer, 1945; İ. Hakkı Konyalı, 1991; Ali Kızıltan, 1958; Yılmaz Önge, 1968; Mahmut Akok, 1976; Bilal Eyüboğlu, 1979; Yaşar Erdemir, 1999; Bilal Alperen, 2001; İsmail Efe, 2012 on the mosque. In the light of these studies, properties of the mosque which make awareness for the destination can be summarized as the following:

### **The Exterior of the Mosque**

The most distinctive characteristic of the mosque located on North-south direction is its five sided shape applied on a rectangular plan by adding an extra corner.

The fifth side was planned just because there had been a main road on this side (Erdemir, 1999). This property can be used to emphasize the importance of environment for those who built the mosque by changing the rectangular plan.



**Picture 1:** The Exterior of the Mosque

### **Stone Portal**

A grand Seljuk-style carved stone portal is on the fifth side next to the minaret with the dimensions of 7.05 m × 10.10m. Mainly there are floral reliefs on the portal. The outer side of the portal is surrounded by five curbs all with different sizes. Doorjambes and round arch were built by 17 white and gray stones by corner lap-joint method *zivana* (Efe, 2012). The inscription of the mosque is carved on four pieces of marble on the arch of portal. The inscription mentions building date of the complex, its estates and their usage.

There is a double leaf-door made of walnut wood in the main entrance with the dimensions of 1.10m × 3.10 m. The door was made by using lap-joint, carving, tongue-and-groove joining methods. There are two boards placed on the upper and lower parts of the door on both leaves. Lower boards are for the ornaments and upper boards are for an inscription. 73rd verse of Zumer sura was inscribed by sulus style. Sulus is a style of

Arabic script meaning *a third*. These inscriptions had been stolen in 1996 and later they were found in Denmark and finally brought to Turkey in 2000. After they had been brought to Turkey they were exhibited in Anatolian Civilizations Museum in Ankara and they are in Konya Sahip Ata Museum now (Efe, 2012). Contributions of Esrefoglu Mosque to the destination in terms of culture and faith tourism can be featured by emphasizing its properties mentioned above.



**Picture 2:** The Stone Portal

### **Water Sebil (Free Distribution of Water)**

It is a Roman sarcophagus placed next to the minaret. Sarcophagus was used to store water, with two holes. The small one is at the bottom to drain the water, the big one which is 40 cm diameter is on the top to pour the water in it. This sarcophagus was used to serve cold water by adding snow in it from the snow pit in the mosque and in Ramadan sweet drinks or sherbet was served to the locals. There are two figures carved on the sarcophagus. The figure on the right is a lecturer and the figure on the left is a

student listening to his lecturer. During the Ottoman era it had been discovered that drinking water from one source caused diseases and all the *sebils* free distribution of water from this kind of source were closed. After this, it was converted into a calms stone (Efe, 2012).

Two features of this sebil can be emphasized to form an awareness in the destination. First; use of a Roman sarcophagus as a sebil shows protection of the historical elements and respect. Second; its use as a calms stone. Calms stone is a symbol of social solidarity and a good example of real help conducted secretly.



**Picture 3:** The Water Sebil (Free Distribution of Water)

### **Interior of the Mosque**

Recognizing is not knowing the item or not aware of it even if it is seen. Remnants of an item in the mind are not gathered in our brains but they are scattered to different parts of our brain. While remembering the events or items the first thing came to mind is situation and the clue. Presentation of this clue and the power of relationship between the other items in the mind determine the related event or whether the item is remembered or not or what we remember (Franzen, 2005). Because of these reasons Esrefoglu Mosque has a good place in forming awareness in the destination especially

the interior of the mosque has many specialties to remember and recognize the destination. Some of these are: Sultans' *mehfil* division, müezzin *mehfil* division, ladies' *mehfil* division, snow pit, columns, ceiling, *mihrap* the niche, *minber* the pulpit, I'tikaf place.



**Picture 4:** Interior of the Mosque

## **Mehvils**

Mosques are generally consist of floor, muezzin and ladies' mehvils. Addition to these divisions there is a division or mehvil for sultans. Sultan or ruler mehvil is not seen in the Golden Age-Muhammad the Prophet's era. It was first seen in the Osman's era for the security of state men after the second caliph Omer was martyred in a mosque.

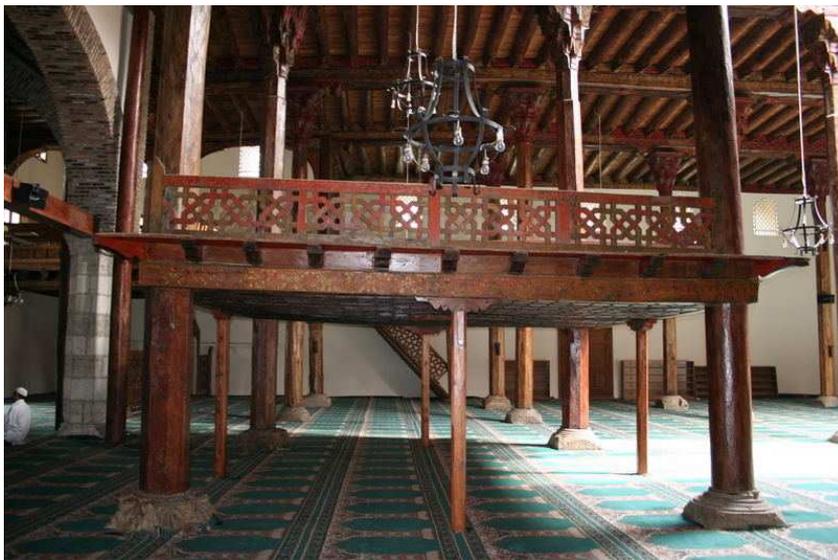
Sultans' mehvil is 3.95 m high from the floor and on the North-south side of the mosque. Second niche *mihrap* was added into the K1bla Wall of the division (Efe, 2012). The reason for the second niche *mihrap* is from Islamic rules: If there is a pray in a mosque or masjid with community under the supervision of a hodja, those who are late for the pray can not pray in front of the same niche *mihrap*. They can pray in the other part of the mosque all together (Emre, 2013). That's why there is a second niche

*mihrap* in the mosque. Sultans' mehvîl is not for only praying separately but it is a place where the sultan rests, listens to the citizens or decide important government decrees.



**Picture 5:** The Sultans' Mehvil

Floor mehvîl is used as a general mehvîl. Muezzin mehvîl is between the niche *mihrap* and the snow pit. It is square shaped and 2.30 m above from the floor. According to the inscription on the mehvîl, it was added to the mosque during Selim II (1571) by Mustafa who was son of sultan's vizier (Konyalı, 1991). Muezzin mehvîls are higher than the floor division because everyone can hear the voice of muezzins better.



**Picture 6:** The Muezzin Mehvil

According to Islam, ladies must not be seen by men while they are praying. Because of this reason ladies and men pray separately in mosques. Ladies mehvil was built at the back of the mosque above narthex as a second floor. Wooden ornaments of sultans' and ladies mehvils are very important for the awareness of the destination.



**Picture 7:** The Ladies Mehvil

### **Snow Pit**

Esrefoglu is a 714 year old wooden mosque. The reason of this survival from 1299 is the snow pit in the middle of the mosque. There are three narratives about the pit. First; according to Seljuk traditions it is a symbolic court instead of a court outside the mosque (Alperen, 200). Second; it was used as a cistern. But it can not be true for a building just 100m away from a lake.



**Picture 8:** The Snow Pit

Third and the most important opinion; it was used to store snow. There is a window on the roof just above the pit. The snow on the roof was carried to the pit from the window and covered by straws and kept till summer. There are a few reasons for storing the snow till summer. Some of these are: It was used as an air conditioner to cool the air in summers. Since there were no machines like refrigerators or freezers in the old times and when snow or ice was needed for medical use it was provided from the pit. One of the most important use of the pit is to provide humidity for the wooden parts of the mosque. This was done by clearing the straws on the snow for a while in summers (Efe, 2012).

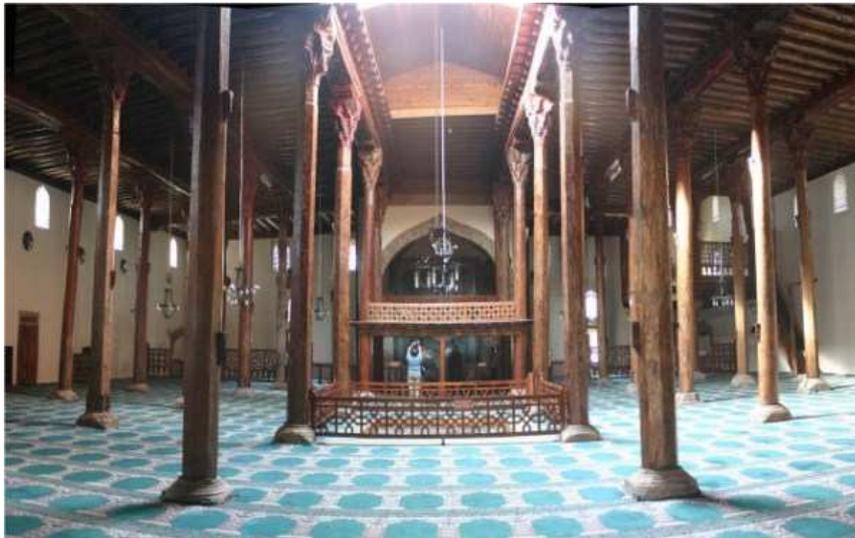
Today, none of these are applied. There are three windows over the snow pit with remote control. By the help of these windows the mosque is cool in summers and enough humidity for the wooden parts is provided from the air.

### **Columns and the Ceiling**

There are 42 wooden columns in 6 lines in the mosque. 3 of them were added in Ottoman Period. All the columns are made of cedar tree. 22 of them are octogonal, 1 of

them is decagon, 19 of them are round. Height of the columns are 7.50 m and their diameters vary from 0.40m to 0.45m.

Capitals of the columns have *kalemişi* hand-drawn ornaments. These ornaments are red, blue and cream. Sides of the abacus on the capitals were sharpened and their surfaces were ornamented by roman leaves in green, red, blue and yellow colors. Main girders are formed by connecting two of them side by side, the gaps between the girders were covered by piece of woods and the gaps were hidden. All of the columns and girders are original but only ceiling boards were changed in 1965. Seven pointed star or star of David on the ceiling is remarkable (Efe, 2012).



**Picture 9:** The Columns and the Ceiling

### **The *Mihrap* Niche**

The *mihrap*, niche in a mosque wall indicating the direction of Mecca was built as a cavity in the wall of the mosque. Building the niche *mihrap* as a cavity in the wall can be thought for gaining more place from the mosque.

The *mihrap* niche of Esrefoglu Mosque is one of the most successful tiled *mihraps* niches of XIII. Century. It is 4.58 m wide, 6.17 m high and 1.45 m deep. It is the only original *mihrap* niche among the tiled niches with 90 % originality. Bottom

part of the *mihrap* niche was damaged in 1940s by treasure hunters and it was restored in 2004 by drawing (Efe, 2012).



**Picture 10:** The mihrap

### ***The Minber Pulpit***

The *minber* is a pulpit in the mosques where the imams stand to deliver sermons. It is 4.02 m long, 1.02 m wide and 6.02 m high. The pulpit *minber* of the mosque was made up of walnut and had rich ornaments. The pulpit was engraved with a technique called *kündekari* without adhesive. *Kündekari* or tongue-and-groove joining is the name given to the technique of placing small pieces of wood side by side to form a design. This pulpit is the most splendid example of this technique unique to Turkish architecture. The act of writing Allah, Mohammed and the names of four caliphs on pulpit *minber* was applied at this mosque in Kufi style, geometrical writing style, a kind of calligraphic writing and also the name of “*Amel-i İsa- İsa the Labour*” can be seen on the pulpit gate among floral motifs known as *Rumi*. On the arch of the gate there is a board with an inscription mentioning the name Suleyman the builder of the pulpit. The

dimension of the board is 0.80m X 0.11 m. 225th verse of Bakara Sura was carved around the gate of the pulpit.



**Picture 11:** The Minber Pulpit

On the left side of the pulpit, facing the niche there is a relief. According to non-scientific comments it symbolizes the sun, the drawings around it are the sun rays, the big octagons are the stars and the five pointed stars among them symbolize the sky (Efe, 2012; Erdemir, 1991).

## **I'tikaf Division**

I'tikaf means to stay in a mosque for the purpose of worshipping Allah in the last ten days of Ramadan. The person in i'tikaf has suhoor and iftaree meals at the mosque, and rests here. He spends his day not by daily works but by reading Koran, worshipping Allah and praying. He goes out for a while for daily necessities and comes back to the mosque immediately.

The i'tikaf division in the mosque is separated from the rest of the mosque by a wooden fence. The fence is 1.40 m high and behind the fourth line from the kible wall. There are two gate openings on the two sides of the fence with "Bursa Arch" style. The dimensions of the gates are 0.95m X 1.90 m. These gates are designed for the people in i'tikaf. The people in i'tikaf do not use the main gate of the mosque when they want to go out but these gates in the fence lead them to the side gates of the mosque instead of the further main gate (Efe, 2012).



**Picture 12:** I'tikaf Division

## CONCLUSION

Destination consists of two groups: The people who want to make use of all the products and services are the first group, the second group comprises the people and the foundations presenting the services and the products. There is an intense competition among the destinations because of developments in technological and economical fields. The destinations which want to get a sustainable power try to evaluate all their assets in the best way. But many touristic assets which make the destination more valuable and different are not used effectively by the target group and the local people.

The destinations which want to have enough share from national and international tourism markets can make a difference by using their authentic touristic assets. Esrefoglu Mosque can be evaluated in this way and it can provide competition advantage by forming a difference. Contributions of Esrefoglu Mosque to the tourism diversity by forming a difference can be emphasized as follows:

- ✓ During its construction period the plan of the mosque was changed to protect the road. This is very important for the environment sensitivity.
- ✓ The ornaments used on the portal, the niche and the pulpit have cultural and religious values and importance.
- ✓ The use of Roman sarcophagus for water distribution shows importance of protection of the historical artifacts and respect to other cultures.
- ✓ Avoiding the use of sarcophagus for the health safety and its new design as an alms stone show the importance of health care and cooperation. These cases form a difference and contributes to the alternative tourism.
- ✓ Different divisions of the mosque prove that they are not only for praying but also for social living space.

- ✓ When the columns, ceiling and snow pit were examined the architectural originality of XIII. Century is seen.
- ✓ The i'tikaf division is very important for the destination in terms of faith tourism.

The awareness which is going to be formed by the features of Esrefoglu Mosque which is also in UNESCO World Heritage tentative list can provide important advantages to the destination. A sustainable development, social, cultural and economical superiority can be provided by the help of tourists. The awareness formed in this area can be a model for other destinations.

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