



Cultural Routes in Cappadocia – Suggestions for Tourist Development

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Received: 17 January 2023 ▪ Revised: 24 March 2023 ▪ Accepted: 20 April 2023

Abstract

This study aims to promote the special cultural monuments of Cappadocia and their organization in cultural routes, in order to promote and use them for touristic purposes. Cappadocia as a destination is a journey of life in the East. It has a strong Greek element, unique landscapes, such as the famous rock formations, the underground cities and the Byzantine cave churches. Its history is linked to the multicultural roots of different people, who have left their mark on the region. The special morphology, the volcanic rocks, as well as the rock formations, led to the creation of cities and neighborhoods with special natural beauty, functioning as a pole of attraction for tourists. Suggestions for the use of caves and cave churches could follow the example of Matera and Spinalonga.

Keywords: Cappadocia, rock formations, underground cities, cultural routes.

1. Introduction

The geographical area that makes up Cappadocia has been influenced by great civilizations, which, during the conquest and occupation of the aforementioned lands, penetrated into the life and culture of the inhabitants. The Greek element is still visible today. The conquest of Cappadocia by the nomads Seljuk Turks (late 11th AD), put an end to any strong population influx from Greece. After the Minor Asia catastrophe, some of the Greek populated villages had to be abandoned, in light of the “population exchange agreement” that had been organized through diplomatic means, thus marking the end of the Minor Asia war. Today, any remaining Greek element for the visitor to embrace can be found mainly in the remaining Greek communities. (Logothetis-Merlier, 1977).

2. Literature review

Since the middle of the 7th century BC, Greeks began to establish colonies throughout Minor Asia, something that was expected in ancient history. Cappadocia is not left out of this cultural expansion and is quickly becoming a special area of literature and art. Of course, the subsequent acceptance of Greek elements by the Persian king also contributed to this.

In the years of Christianity, Cappadocia helped a lot in spreading the gospel message. Today, it is full of places of great religious importance. Hellenized Jews were the main factor of spreading Christianity in Cappadocia. This was an easy task, as there was a lot of religious

diversity, the Greek language was predominant and the people at that time were quite financially distressed, so they relied on the Christian faith. The place where Cappadocia is located was consecrated by many Saints. The Apostle Paul together with Barnabas taught there on their third tour (Koukoula, 2022).

The Cappadocians received the gospel message very early on, while many were led to believe in Christ from the very first apostolic years. That is why many of the great fathers of the church come from Cappadocia. Greek was the main language used in the area. In the second century, Caesarea became an episcopal see as Christian communities grew. With the establishment of the patriarchate of Constantinople, Caesarea became the first place in the episcopal see and had the title of Protothron. Basil the Great strengthened the prestige of the church in Cappadocia. It has always been and still remains an important area for Christianity and is associated with desert and monastic life. It is comprised of a mosaic of Turkish, Greek, and Armenian populations, a unique example of multiculturalism and multilingualism (Megalommatis, 2022). Cappadocia is considered the most enchanting region of Turkey. It is a strategic, commercial and cultural passage. Built on a plateau of 1000-15000 meters, between the rivers Euphrates and Alis/Halys, with caves that hosted people from prehistoric times and even then/when houses were built, many continued to live inside the monoliths, out of love for their land. Today many caves have become hotels in the rocks, as is the case in Matera, Italy (Manola & Tsatambassoglou, 2021). Tourists have the opportunity to find themselves in one of the “most beautiful landscapes of the planet”, according to Maya Tsokli (2001), and to admire “the sculpture of the earth.” Houses in caves, fantastic views, historical places, balloons in the sky, underground cities, valleys, and special rock formations are all part of the trek. The Greek element in the area is very strong and there are points that are manifested in a very special way. Soil erosion has created caves that people have turned into homes and businesses (Liberi 2012). Several cultural elements from each culture are preserved. This place combines historical, religious and natural sights. The Greek element in the area is evident mainly in the religious and architectural context. Some Greek villages still retain the Greek dialect as a second language. The existence of the Greek element encourages the interest of Greek tourists. According to relevant research, the cultural points of the greatest touristic interest are the following.

3. Research on motivations and preferences monuments

Looking for the motivations of Greek visitors to Cappadocia, we interviewed a qualified guide in a travel agency group called “Thyamis”, who mentioned the following (Sarris, 2022):

“The ages we meet in the groups of 52 bus seats are 40 people over 60, 6 people around 40 to 50 and the rest (6) is under 40. The reasons and motivations of the first age group are to visit the land of their ancestors, since they are descendants of the Hellenism of Cappadocia; the rest are casual tourists. The reasons for their visit are emotional and a large percentage is informed in detail about the location of houses that used to belong to their families before 1922.”

According to the TripAdvisor and the comments regarding each attraction, the ranking of the most popular cities is as follows:

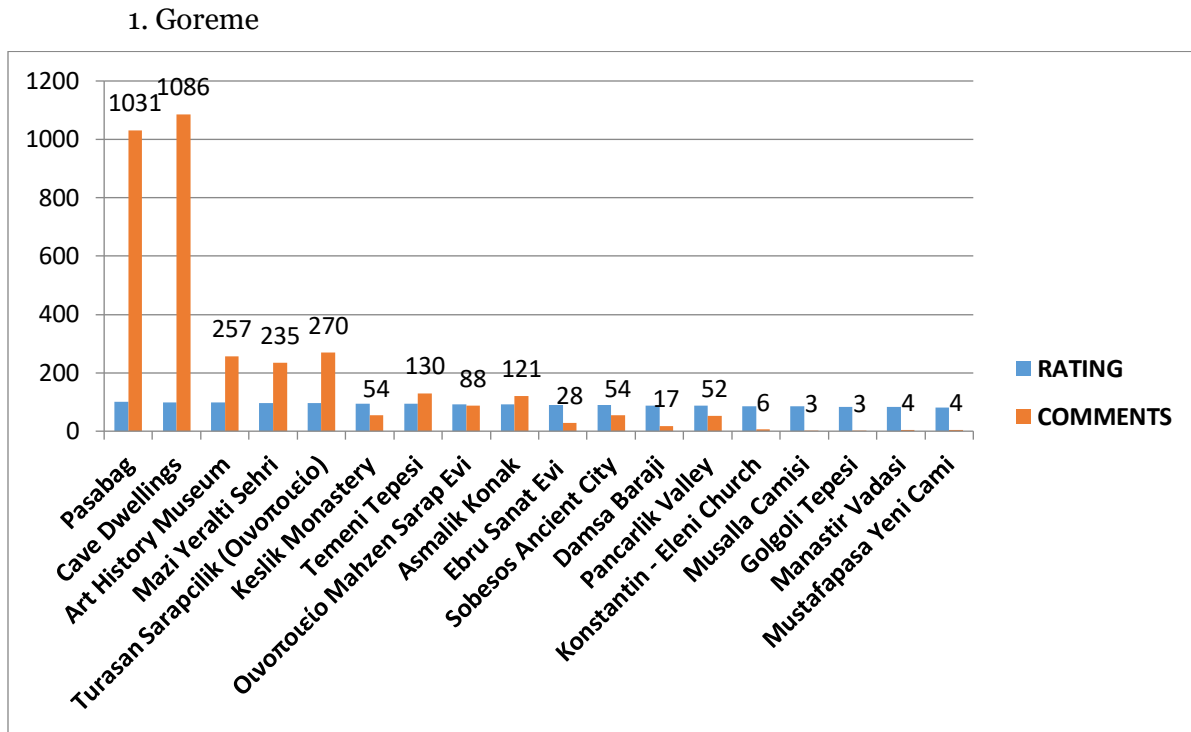
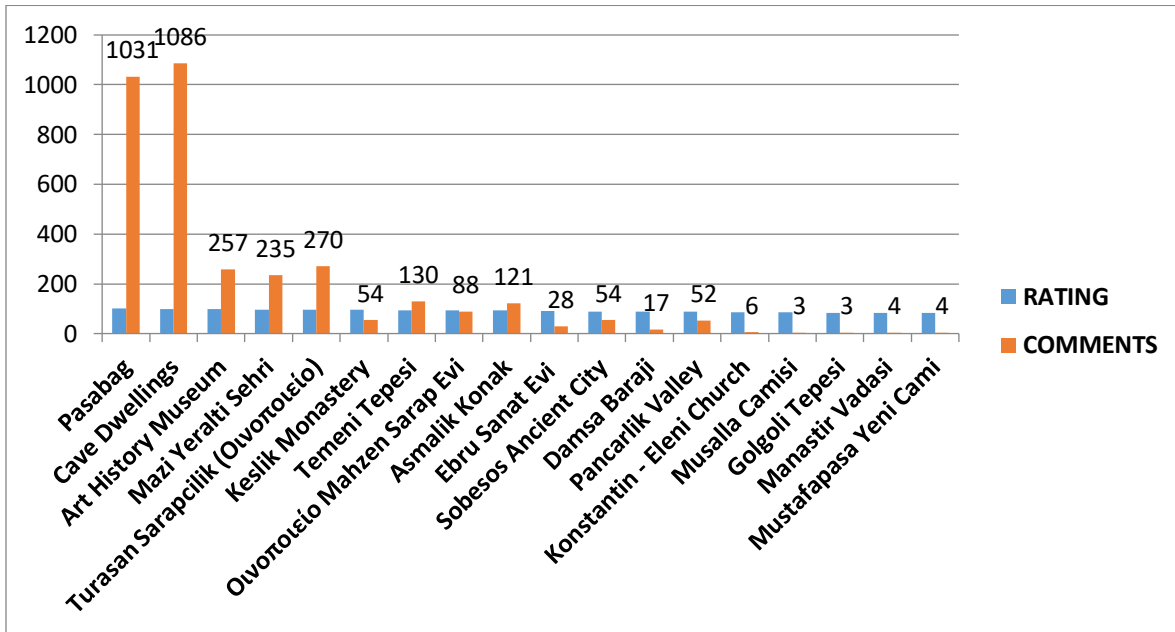


Figure 1. First popular city - Goreme

Third popular city

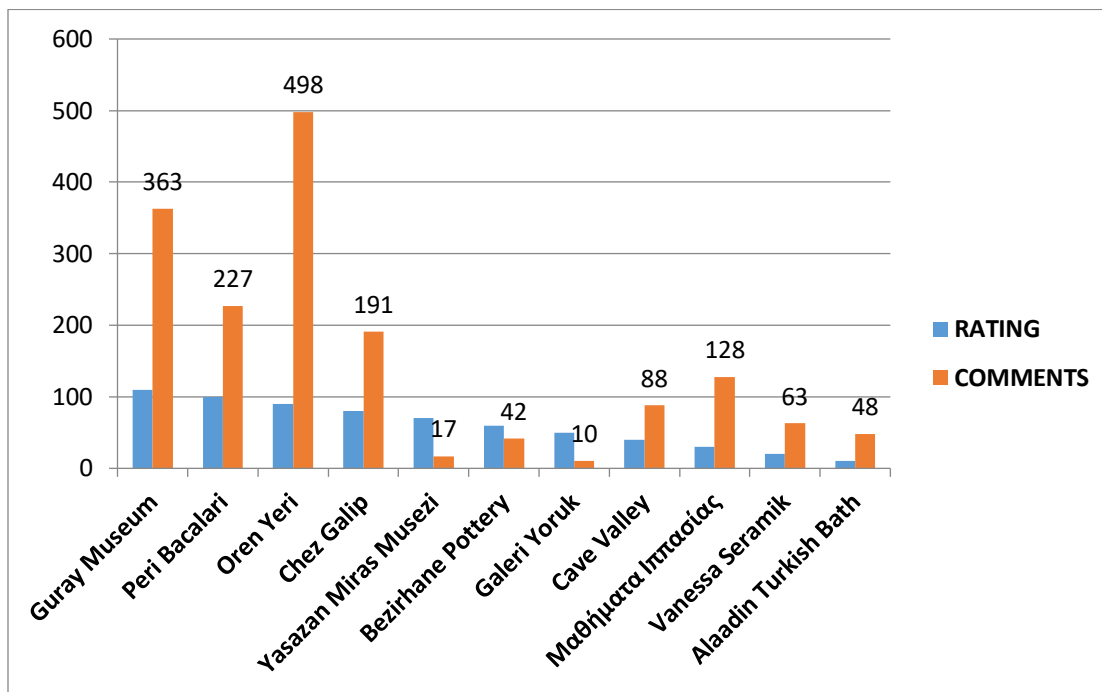
2. Urgup



Activities/attractions are ranked using Trip advisor data, including reviews, ratings, photos, and popularity.

Figure 2. Second popular city – Urgup

3. Avanos



Activities/attractions are ranked using Trip advisor data, including reviews, ratings, photos, and popularity.

Figure 3. Second popular city – Avanos

4. Uchisar

Activities/attractions are ranked using Trip advisor data, including reviews, ratings, photos, and popularity.

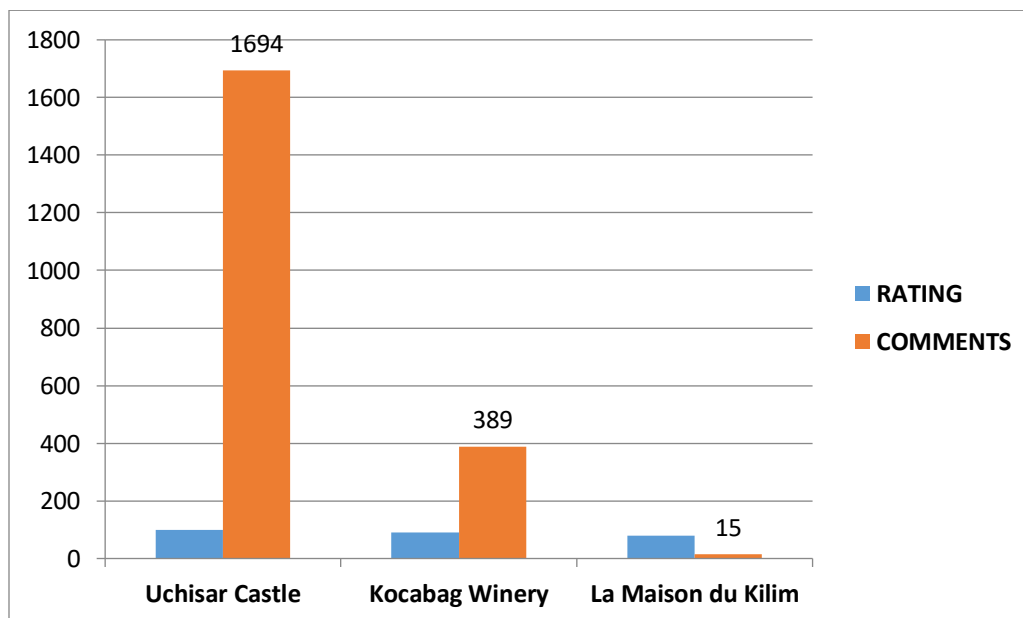


Figure 4. Second popular city – Uchisar

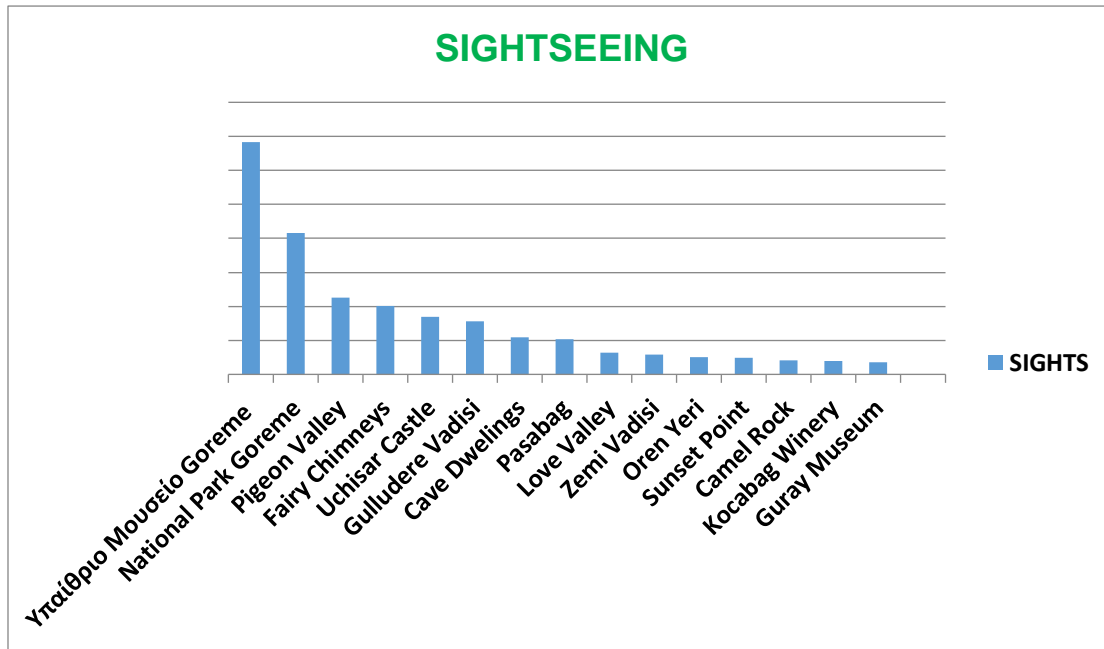


Figure 4. General table for sights

4. Results

70.6% of tourists in Cappadocia have emotional reasons to visit, as they are descendants of Greeks in the area.

Also, according to the TripAdvisor page and descriptive analysis of attractions in Cappadocia, the city of Goreme comes first in the preference of visitors/tourists followed by the cities of Urgup, Uchisar, and Avanos.

5. Suggestions/proposals for the creation of themed cultural routes in Cappadocia

The highlighting and utilization of the cultural resources of Cappadocia could be achieved through the creation of cultural routes, with a common reference point. The aforementioned routes could be centered on the monuments of greater interest, which then could be connected with special interest points via thematic routes, since both the monuments and the points are revolving around a common theme. The thematic routes are usually predefined. Their main objective is the experiential approach of the activities, so that the user is actively involved in any event; thus, they aim to create an overall experience for the visitor, not just informing him/her (Gkelli, 2017). Every cultural route should have a starting point, intermediate stops, as well as a finish point. This effort aims, both to extract the modern citizen out of his/her individual reality, and to create and highlight a cultural product that will benefit the tourism industry (Loupa, 2009). We present the cultural products of Cappadocia and suggest a few themed cultural routes.

5.1 Underground cities – Cave temples

Due to the Christian persecutions, a relevant organization had to be formed and structures were created with underground churches and facilities, which are now characterized as underground cities. Their creation is due to volcanic activity, while the majority of them consist of

many rooms. The construction and preservation of Cappadocia underground buildings over time excites researchers and is the subject of study in today's universities.

Derinkuyu was also the first to be discovered in 1963 and could serve more than 20,000 people. They vary in size, but all consist of many underground floors and countless rooms. The underground cities hosted the population of the area in times of persecution and raids and were shelters for Christians.

Petromonastira and cave Monasteries: Below the ground there are also the Petromonastira and cave monasteries as well as temples of Cappadocia. "In the more than 100 'stone monasteries' (cave temples) of Cappadocia, one can look for Byzantium in all its glory," says Maria Kazamia-Chernou, Associate Professor of Byzantine Archeology at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (Chatzigeorgiou, 2013). They date from the time of the Phrygians and the Hittites, who used them as shelters to protect themselves from foreign invaders. Also, today there are small churches, such as that of St. Nicholas of Basköy, whose frescoes are modern, a fact that further proves and certifies the existence of a local laboratory, whose activity is certified in other temples of Cappadocia. The frescoes of the Monasteries verify the presence of a relatively prosperous Greek and Christian population in the Turkish-occupied area. The Cappadocian Christians used them in hiding during the times of persecution, but later, when Christianity prevailed, they became places for their worship needs. The Cappadocians lived in this natural environment until 1924. Of course, after 1850, their way of life improved as the Tanzimat reforms enabled them to build churches and houses above ground. These temples continue the high architectural tradition of Cappadocia, are a testament to the strength of the Greek element in the region during the 19th century, as well as important monuments of Christianity and Hellenism and, located in the wider framework of the modern ecclesiastical architecture, demonstrate the unity of the Greek space at this time (Hatzigeorgiou, 2013).

The Göreme Valley: It contains many temples, where the visitor finds that their capacity does not exceed 10 to 20 people. They are also protected by UNESCO. Caves located in remote places did not have the same fate and protection. Some of them have been turned into warehouses, while others are endangered by tourism and Islamic fundamentalism. Well-known monastic complexes in the Göreme valley are the following: The church of scandals. The church of the buckles. The church of apples. The black / dark church. The hidden church, as it was unknown (Augustyn, 2022).

The fairy chimneys, a special creation of nature, is located in Cappadocia and is the chimneys of fairies. They are just 3 km from Göreme. These are intricate conical tower-like rocks with a height of up to 40 meters, resembling chimneys with a basalt cap on top. They were created by the erosion of volcanic rocks in the area, due to rain and natural phenomena during the 4th geological period and are today still unprotected, resulting in new damage (Athanasopoulou, 2016).

5.2 Museums - cities with carved rocks

The traveler will find hagiographies on rocks, but also many churches, chapels and monasteries with Byzantine frescoes or hagiographies, such as Agios Onoufrios or Agios Georgios. The 2nd museum is located in the Goreme area or in the Koramata valley, as named by the Christians, which has been voted as the most beautiful village in the world. Here are the most famous churches, such as the "Dark Church, which stands out due to the image of Christ the Almighty in its dome (mixanitouxronou, 2022).

Urgup or Prokopio. At this location there are well-known Christian churches, as well as monuments from the Ottoman era, where cultural events are often held. This was also the area of life and martyrdom of St. John the Russian. The homonymous church in the village of Prokopio

in Evia took its name from the Greeks, who ended up there due to the exchange of populations in 1924. The village was formerly called Osiana because the locals considered it to be the city of Osia and the Turks, as they could not pronounce that name, renamed the area “Urgiup” (mixanitouxronou, 21/12/2022)

Greek Sinasos. It is one of the eighteen Greek-speaking villages of Cappadocia and is considered the “Athens of the East”. The majority of the inhabitants were Greek and Christian Orthodox (Rizos, 2007). Today, there are many Orthodox churches that are accessible and, once a year, a Mass is held in the most important church, dedicated to St Constantine and St. Helen. Also, there are many mansions from ancient times, 100 of which are considered maintainable (Papatsoni, 2022). In this area the Greek element still exists today, while according to Guinness (1991) before the Asia Minor catastrophe, the area hosted 81 Greek settlements.

Uchisar Castle. The castle, located in the city of the same name, consists of a series of huge carved rocks whose top is one of the best places in the area, due to the unique view. Travelers can visit this spot and hike to the top, wander the caves that have been carved into the rocks and the rooms that used to be inhabited by people. At the moment, it is not allowed to enter the interior of the castle due to danger, but the view of the city from the top rewards the choice of destination (Troodostravel, 2020).

5.3 Valleys

In the region of Cappadocia there are many places and special valleys for walks, hiking and for travelers to enjoy the special morphology of the city, the soil and the peculiar rock formations. Some special and well-known examples are the following:

- *Valley of love.* The Valley of Love is a quiet area of unique beauty located near the town of Goreme. The landscape is characterized as spooky. Crossing it, the traveler can encounter neighborhoods with churches and museums. These particular formations have been caused by volcanic eruptions, where magma wears out and different forms are created. Visitors have the opportunity to cross the valley on foot, either individually or with the help of a local guide, or inside a hot air balloon, thus viewing the area from a different perspective. Due to Puritanism, the Turks do not promote and have not exploited the valley of the phalluses as it is called alternatively. (Liberi 2012)
- *Valley of the Pigeons.* This valley occupies an area of 4,100 meters and extends from the Uchisar area to Goreme. It is known for its special formations that in earlier times functioned as hermitages of monks and cells of Saints rock caves for farmers, while its current name came from the pigeons that were fed and stood on the carvings. It is a beautiful route away from the city and anything artificial. The rocks are white, intense and there is sparse vegetation that gives life to the landscape. (Troodostravel, 2020)
- *Red Valley.* The Red Valley is one of the most beautiful places where the traveler can enjoy the sunset. The rocks of the valley, at sunset, become colorful and a very intense color landscape is created which causes great awe and great pleasure to the traveler for the spectacle he/she enjoys. In the valley there is a 5 km trail, which is ideal for lovers of hiking, cycling or horse riding. The walk lasts at least 1 to 2 hours. It is located between the Goreme and Cavusin areas and allows visitors to access from both points, a unique fact.

Settlement – Ihlara Valley. It is located in a gorge that crosses the river Melendiz. In the past, due to the location and the natural shelters that existed, it served as a settlement of the first Christians during the period of persecution.

5.5 Christian churches and mosques

In these societies, the only means of livelihood were agriculture, trade, and the arts. This resulted in the construction of a large number of churches dedicated to Christianity. Some of these churches still operate today with the permission of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. One of the churches that still operate in Sinasos is the one dedicated to St. Konstantine, St. Eleni, Karvali and St. Grigorios (troodostravel.gr, 2020). Some examples of churches are the following:

- *The Dark Church.* (Karanlik kilise), part of the Byzantine churches, was built in the 11th century AD and is dedicated to the “Ascension of the Savior”. It is built inside the rocks. The hagiographies depicted inside have been characterized as works of art which, due to certain special factors, have been preserved in a very good condition and are of the best examples of Byzantine frescoes. The colorful angels beautifully adorn the pillars and vaulted ceilings, which are accompanied by scenes such as the birth of Jesus. The lack of light in the church contributes to the good maintenance of the representations that continue to look fresh and lively after 1000 years. Testimonies about the frescoed churches in the areas around Prokopi (Urgrup), Goreme and Soganli, as well as a touristic description of the history and the sense of loss of a familiar culture can be found in Seferis (2005). Today, they are part of the open-air museum "Göreme", where the traveler visits both internal and external sights.
- *Mosques.* In addition to churches that have been converted into museums, a significant number of them have been converted into mosques that still function today with Muslim services. Some examples are the church of St. George in the Karacaören neighborhood of Bünyan, where both the original gate and a bell tower were preserved.
- Church of St. Georgios in the same area was also converted into a mosque in 1966.
- A former church that has now been converted into a mosque in 1906 in the area of Taşlık near Vatzvatan.
- An Armenian church in Melikgazi area which is open today, dedicated to St. George with its last renovation taking place in 1996.

5.6 Underground cities

There are about 40 underground cities, with Kaymakli being the most prominent one.

Kaymakli. It is one of the deepest underground cities in Cappadocia. It housed about 3,500 people and was used by Christians during the attacks by the Arabs in the 8th century A.D. It is located on 8 levels below the ground. Inside it hosts a castle of the time, as well as wine, grain and auxiliary warehouses. Its inhabitants could live with relative comfort, while the air supply was ensured by an air duct system which reached the top floor at 80 meters high. Today guests can explore only four of the eight levels and tours are available (Mutlu, 2008).

Derinkuyu. The city of Derinkuyu retains similar characteristics to the example of Kaymakli, with the difference that it has greater depth, larger corridors and rooms but also more open points and skylights. It is located on eleven levels. It housed the inhabitants in order to protect themselves from the attacks of the Arabs and other conquerors in the 8th century AD. The above two examples (Derinkuyu and Kaymakli), are two famous attractions for tourists in this category (Mutlu, 2008)

6. Conclusions – Suggestions

The main source of tourism is the organized trips that are carried out under the auspices of the tourist offices. Many of them start by road from Turkey or abroad or even using the compatible airports and guide the groups to the open-air museums, the underground cities, some villages and other attractions. The visitor can embrace, through these programs, all the influences existing in the specific geographical area of Cappadocia, while enjoying the landscapes and cultural attractions offered.

The phenomenon of religious tourism that has been presented in the area, gives life to the place as there is growth, due to the tourists. The chain reaction has helped the Greek element to remain in the area as “Greek taverns” or other restaurants that have dishes inspired by the Mediterranean kitchen are located in the area. The hotels that have been built in these areas and specifically those that have been operating for a long time, are reminiscent of inns of the Roman period.

The region of Cappadocia as a city with a biblical atmosphere and has all the prerequisites to develop into a unique cinematic destination, if it is properly screened and there is favorable legislation for filmmakers. If the cinematic scene is developed and utilized as it was done in Matera, Italy and Spinalonga, Crete, it could attract tourists but also greatly increase the income through movies and gain worldwide projection and interest (Manola & Gioka, 2021).

It could also become a cultural capital to gain more life by projecting itself as a sample of an underground city in the wider Mediterranean region.

To be subsidized and restored as a World Heritage Site and to acquire more cultural value.

To create the conditions for the inhabitants to return to the traditional soils and to become “fashionable” as in Matera the residence in the underground cities (Manola, 2020).

To create cinematic routes and literary parks from the films such as in the Basilicata of Italy where more than 60 films have been shot, whether dramatic, historical, biblical, etc. and in fact by very important directors such as Taviani, Gibson, Jenkins (Manola & Tsatambassoglou, 2021). They could also be returned to Cappadocia as a multicultural underground city since the geographical part of Cappadocia has passed into the hands of many conquerors, from the ancient colonies to the Persians and the Ottomans.

It is also an important condition to have empathy in the tourism industry and care for the environment and monuments (Manola, & Papagrigoriou, 2020) for a sustainable tourism in the city of Cappadocia.

Acknowledgements

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

The author declares no competing interests.

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