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Evaluation of Side Ancient City within the scope of sustainable tourism criteria

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ABSTRACT

The need for production, driven by the rapid increase in consumption alongside the growth of the human population, has led to problems such as depletion of natural resources and environmental pollution. Sustainable tourism practices that respect the natural and cultural heritage of tourism destinations and foster a sense of protection while using these practices are of critical importance. This study aims to evaluate the ancient city of Side within the scope of sustainable tourism criteria. The ancient city of Side differs from other ancient cities in that it is a living city and demonstrates the originality of this article. The study was conducted using a qualitative method based on the interpretivist paradigm. The data were collected from 8 participants through a semi-structured interview. To examine Side within a living-heritage governance context, we adopted a qualitative single-instrumental case study grounded in the interpretivist paradigm (Merriam, 2018). This design enables an in-depth, multi-stakeholder understanding of sustainability criteria in practice. We used purposive (judgmental) sampling to capture diverse perspectives across stakeholder groups: archaeologists, museum professionals, local entrepreneurs/tradespeople, tourist guides, and foreign tourists. The final sample comprised eight participants. According to the research findings, the ancient city of Side is lacking in many respects when evaluated against sustainable tourism criteria. In light of this research's findings, the ancient city of Side is lacking in many respects when evaluated against sustainable tourism criteria. The ancient city of Side will become more sustainable through the “Heritage for the Future” project of the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, which was ongoing at the time of the research.

KEYWORDS

Sustainable Tourism, sustainability, Side Ancient City, ancient cities.

INTRODUCTION

Within the global economy, the tourism sector continues to grow day by day (Liu, 2003). The number of tourists increased rapidly until the pandemic and then began to decrease. According to WTO (2022) data, after these dark times ended, the number of tourists continued to increase. There is a similar situation in Turkish tourism; there have been differences in the number of incoming tourists as a result of political, military, and economic crises, and there has been a decline due to these crises, and an increase with the end of these crises (Baykal, Emekli & Oğan,

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2023). With the growth of the tourism sector, many types of tourism have emerged as an alternative to mass tourism (Yolal & Çetinel, 2009). As a result of criteria such as people becoming interested in new types of tourism, searching for tourism different from sea-sand-sun tourism and changing expectations of tourists (Ersoy, Tehci & Ersoy, 2018), cultural heritage tourism which is one of the sub-branches of alternative tourism and which passes on the sentimental values of the past to the present and aims to protect cultural values, has emerged (Türker & Yaşar, 2019). The rapid consumption of natural, cultural, and nonrenewable resources has heightened social awareness and underscored the importance of sustainable tourism (Lele, 1991). This global concern is particularly relevant to coastal archaeological sites, where tourism pressure often threatens the integrity of heritage.

One of the coastal archaeological sites is Side, located in the Manavgat district of Antalya, which stands out as a prominent ancient Pamphylian coastal town (Sert, 2020). Unlike many archaeological sites, its character as a 'living ancient city'—where contemporary life, local businesses, and ongoing restoration work coexist—presents a complex landscape for tourism management. While previous studies have often focused on the archaeological significance or general tourism potential of the region, there is a noticeable gap in evaluating such 'living' heritage sites through the specific lens of sustainable tourism criteria. The presence of local residents and commercial activities in areas like Kaleiçi and Stratonikeia, similar to Side's Selimiye Village, creates a unique socio-spatial dynamic that is both an asset and a challenge for preservation. Therefore, this study is unique in its attempt to bridge the gap between archaeological conservation and sustainable urban living. By evaluating Side Ancient City through primary data from key stakeholders, this research provides a strategic framework for managing the delicate balance between heritage integrity and socio-economic development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sustainable Tourism

The negative consequences of the production and consumption frenzy that people exhibit across all areas of life have underscored the need for sustainability to ensure a future for future generations (Kılıç, 2020). With the world population continuing to grow, the uncontrolled growth of sectors such as industry, technology, and transport has caused environmental problems and revealed the inadequacy of the natural resources used (Gündüz, 2004). Sustainability is the continuation of the environmental, economic, and social functioning of society and minimizing the damage to nature (Ballı, 2019). The needs of future generations should be taken into account when meeting today's needs by using resources more carefully (Sezgin & Karaman, 2008).

In 1972, the United Nations Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment was convened to develop an action plan to identify and control substances causing environmental pollution. The possibility that economic growth plans may damage nature, leading to social decline and the need to take measures to protect it, has been discussed within the scope of the concept of sustainability (Kılıç, 2020). The World Charter for Nature, approved by the World Union for the Conservation of Nature in 1982, states that land-, sea-, and air-based elements that people benefit from should be managed to achieve ecosystem sustainability (Mengi & Algan, 2001). In 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development published a program titled "Our Common Future" in recognition of the need for joint international efforts on environment and development issues (Yutsal, 2019). It was decided at the Sustainable Development Summit organized by the United Nations in 2022 that countries would create sustainable development strategies and implement them as of 2005 (Kaypak, 2011). Within these global strategies, industries that rely heavily on environmental and cultural assets have been prioritized for transformation.

As a service sector, tourism is a global activity area where production and consumption are the most intense (Yolal & Çetinel, 2009). The number of annual global tourists, which was 1.2 billion in 2016, increased to 1.4 billion in 2018 and decreased to 963 million in 2022 due to the pandemic. The number of tourists, which had increased continuously until the pandemic, decreased during the pandemic and then increased again (WTO, 2022).

The rapid growth of the tourism sector increases mass density, leading to environmental pollution and rapid consumption of non-renewable resources (Kılıç, 2020). Aims such as effective use of non-renewable resources, preventing environmental damage, and passing on natural resources to future generations have brought the concept of sustainable tourism to the agenda (Kılıç, 2020). The World Tourism Organization defines sustainable tourism as a model that meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while safeguarding opportunities for the future. Within this framework, sustainable tourism primarily aims to protect natural and cultural values—the cornerstones of the industry—and to pass them on to future generations without degradation (Yavuz, 2022). As Liu (2003) emphasizes, this approach focuses on three core objectives: improving the living standards of the local population, satisfying visitor needs, and ensuring environmental protection. To transform these theoretical goals into reality and manage resources while maintaining cultural and ecological integrity, a structured management approach is essential (Yolal & Çetinel, 2009, p. 37). Consequently, effective sustainable tourism planning is possible only through strategic cooperation between central and regional authorities at both national and regional levels (Güzeloğlu & Güç, 2021). Building on this collaborative framework, the evaluation of Side Ancient City within sustainable tourism criteria provides a critical perspective on how these theoretical principles are applied in a 'living' heritage site.

On the other hand, sustainable tourism is an approach in which people interact with the environment while preserving cultural integrity, ecological processes, biodiversity, and living systems, where the environment remains intact and unchanged, and all resources meet the economic, social, and aesthetic needs of people and tourists in the visited region. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) have defined this approach based on certain criteria. In this context, 12 criteria have been identified, as shown in Table 1. The criteria can be summarized as minimizing negative impacts while increasing economic and social benefits for local people, maximizing positive effects on cultural heritage, and minimizing aspects that harm the environment (Somuncu & Yiğit, 2009).

Table 1. Sustainable Tourism Criteria (*Source:* UNEP & WTO, 2005, pp. 18-19)

Economic Viability	Growth, development and sustainability of the destinations and tourism enterprises
Local Prosperity	To increase the contribution of the visitors coming to the destination with tourism activities to the regional economy
Quality of Employment	To increase the number and quality of employment through tourism in the region without discrimination
Social Equality	Accessibility of the service for everyone
Visitor Satisfaction	A safe and quality tourism experience without discrimination
Local Audit	To ensure that local people in the region contribute to the development of tourism and take responsibility and authority
Social Wealth	To protect and improve the life quality of locals without harming social structure and resources
Cultural Wealth	To protect cultural heritage, differences, customs, and traditions of the region
Physical Integrity	To improve the quality of urban and rural areas and to prevent physical deterioration
Biodiversity	To protect natural areas, flora, wildlife, and minimize damage
Resource Efficiency	To minimize the use of non-renewable resources in the activities of tourism enterprises
Environmental Cleanliness	To minimize environmental pollution caused by tourism enterprises and foreign/native tourists

Sustainability in Ancient Cities and Side Ancient City

Ancient cities, which bear traces of humanity, are archaeological heritage that spans from the past to the present, revealing information about lifestyles throughout history and the shared past of humanity (Tuna, 2014). Ancient cities are unique assets that illuminate a society's past within the scope of cultural heritage (Akbaş, 2020). It is extremely important for the community to protect,

preserve, and restore these values (Karapınar & Barakazı, 2017). For this reason, the evaluation of ancient cities in the context of sustainable tourism criteria is an important issue that warrants emphasis (Akbaş, 2020).

Side Ancient City has been home to various civilizations, including Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine, throughout history, with its fertile soils irrigated by many rivers, including Manavgat, Düdensu, Aksu, and Köprüçay in the east, and by the Taurus Mountains in the west and north. After the collapse of the Lycian Kingdom in the 6th century BC, it went under Persian rule like all Western and Southern Anatolian cities, minted its own coins, lived its most brilliant period under the rule of the Roman Empire after the Pergamon Kingdom, and became the most important port city of the Mediterranean (Sert, 2020). Side, which was used commercially as a warehouse of goods from other cities, became one of the slave markets of the Roman Empire (Taşbaş, 2017; Texier, 2002). The fact that transportation and trade were carried out by sea during the Ancient Age played a major role in the development of Side and in the continuity of life there (Yürük, 2017). With the death of Alexander the Great in 334 BC, Side was the cause of a great quarrel between the kingdoms of the Hellenistic period; it went under the rule of the Ptolemies in the 3rd century BC, the Syrian Kingdom ruled after 218 BC, and then Side experienced many earthquakes and fires, and finally was abandoned (Mansel, 1967). In the 18th century, some Turkish-origin families who were forced to migrate to Türkiye after the rebellions and uprisings in Crete were settled in Side (Yürük, 2017). The ruins, walls, and ancient theatre of the Side Ancient City have attracted the attention of many marine researchers and sea travelers passing along the coast (Sert, 2020). The famous Turkish sailor Piri Reis included a map of the ruins of the Side region in his famous work Kitab-ı Bahriye (Soykal Alanyalı, 2016).

The first scientific research conducted in the city was the study by the French consul Corancez in 1809, which determined that the city called "Satalia" was "Side". The fact that Corancez included coins and epigraphy, as well as the city's monuments, in this study is scientifically important (Yıldırım, 2013). Beaufort, who came to Side in 1812, was especially impressed by the Side Theatre and conducted research here. He provided information and drawings of the theatre's seating steps, scene, and galleries. In the 1990s, an Italian archaeological team came to the region and, unlike earlier researchers, focused on the epigraphy found in Side, making it known to the scientific world (Mansel, 1978).

The Turkish Historical Society, founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, sent Ord. Prof. Dr. Arif Müfid Mansel to Antalya in 1943 to observe the condition of the ancient cities of Pamphylia and to investigate the possibilities of excavation (Mansel, 1978). In his report, Mansel stated that a village had been established right in the middle of the ruins of Side, and that some of the structures on the seaside could be uncovered not by excavation but by cleaning and sweeping, as they were covered with fine sea sand. Upon the Turkish Historical Society's acceptance of Mansel's excavation proposal, the Side excavations began under Mansel's direction in the autumn of 1947 and continued uninterrupted until 1967. Afterward, the first excavation work was carried out by the Side Museum under the supervision of Dr. Ülkü İzmirligil in 1982 and continued without interruption until 2008. In 2009, excavation and conservation works were carried out under the direction of Prof. Dr. Hüseyin Sabri Alanyalı and continued until 2018 (Yıldırım, 2013). Since 2019, Side excavations have been carried out by Prof. Dr. Feriştah Soykal Alanyalı.

METHOD

To pass on our current cultural values to future generations, it is extremely important to manage the ancient city of Side, which is highly regarded and admired in the Mediterranean, in accordance with sustainability criteria. This study aims to comprehensively evaluate the ancient city of Side within the framework of sustainable tourism criteria by examining its cultural heritage assets, current tourism practices, environmental impacts, and management strategies, and to assess the extent to which these elements contribute to the long-term conservation and sustainable use of the destination. The study was conducted using a qualitative method based on the interpretivist paradigm. Qualitative research methods have many research designs. These are phenomenology, case study, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative analysis, and critical research (Merriam, 2018). In this study, a single instrumental case study was used. The research question is whether

the ancient city of Side meets the criteria for sustainable tourism. Purposive-judgmental sampling was used in the research, and the sample consists of local/foreign tourists visiting the ancient city of Side, merchants, tourist guides, museum staff, and local people of Side. Local and foreign tourists were selected in order to understand their purpose of visiting Side and how they evaluate Side within the scope of sustainable tourism criteria; merchants were selected to evaluate the interest of local people and foreign tourists in Side and the care they show to this historical heritage, and museum staff and tourist guides were selected to see a professional perspective.
In the research, data were collected through a semi-structured interview method. For the participant interviews, questions were prepared based on expert opinions gathered after the literature search and within the scope of sustainable tourism criteria. Interview questions were constructed by adapting established sustainable tourism indicators and criteria to ancient-city contexts, drawing on UNEP & UNWTO (2005), UNWTO (2004), and Somuncu & Yiğit (2009). Items targeted physical conservation, accessibility, waste management, local enterprises, employment, socio-cultural values, transportation, biodiversity, water consumption, and energy use. Content validity was ensured through expert review, and items were refined accordingly. At this stage, sustainable tourism criteria from the literature were adapted for ancient cities, and questions were developed to elicit participants' views. The questions were finalized with expert opinion, and ethics committee approval (20.12.2022, Decision Nr: 476) was obtained from the university. With these interview questions, the physical characteristics and general condition of the ancient city of Side, accessibility to everyone, waste management, local businesses, employment characteristics, social and cultural values, transportation status, biodiversity, water consumption, and energy use were examined within the scope of sustainable tourism. The subject and purpose of the study were explained to the participants; questions were asked with participants' permission, and voice recordings were taken. Average interview lengths were between 30 and 60 minutes. The voice recordings were transcribed and analyzed. Descriptive analysis was preferred as the analysis method. During the analysis, coding was performed, and themes were developed within the scope of sustainable tourism criteria, in line with expert opinion (Table 2).

Table 2. Participants' Names and Titles (*Source:* Own research)

P1	Archaeologist
P2	Archaeologist
P3	Tourism Entrepreneur & Local
P4	Tradesmen
P5	Museum Staff
P6	Foreign Tourist
P7	Foreign Tourist
P8	Tourist Guide

FINDINGS

The information obtained from the data analysis was systematically organized and categorized into nine main themes within the framework of sustainable tourism criteria. The identification and structuring of these themes were guided by widely accepted approaches in the sustainable tourism literature that emphasize the multidimensional nature of sustainability, encompassing environmental, socio-cultural, economic, and managerial aspects. This thematic categorization enabled a comprehensive and coherent interpretation of the findings. It facilitated the evaluation of the ancient city of Side for its alignment with sustainable tourism principles, as summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Themes (*Source:* Own research)

1.	Physical Characteristics and General Evaluation of Side Ancient City
2.	Accessibility for All in Side Ancient City
3.	Waste Management in Side Ancient City
4.	Local Enterprises in Side Ancient City
5.	Creating Employment in Side Ancient City
6.	Protection of Social and Cultural Values in Side Ancient City
7.	Transportation in Side Ancient City
8.	Biodiversity in Side Ancient City
9.	Water Consumption and Efficient Energy Use in Side Ancient City

Physical Characteristics and General Evaluation

Side was the trade center of the region until the establishment of Antalya and acts as a bridge in trade between east and west.

Deputy head of the excavation of Side Ancient City P1: *"The region where Side is located is the Pamphylia Region. Side was the only title of this region until Attaleia, Antalya was founded. A single model. For that reason, until Attaleia was founded, the city undertook all the trade by itself until the Hellenistic Period. For example, think about it, there is good which will go to the Rome from Africa, it has to stop by Side. Because it goes around the coast and all the ships and merchant ships on that line pass through Side. For all these reasons, Side is an extremely rich city. This place is rich enough to compete with Ephesus. It has maintained this wealth for many years. Although Attaleia was founded, it still kept trade alive for many years (until the 5th century). This is of course reflected in the structures of the city in a very serious way. Our only problem is modern settlement. Because, for example, if there had been no settlement here, perhaps we would have found much more finds in Side than Perge or Ephesus, but we can see almost nothing now."*

The most important characteristic that distinguishes Side from other ancient cities in the Pamphylia region is that it remains a living ancient city today. It also has a majestic structure such as the Temple of Apollo.

Tourist guide P8: *"There are lots of ancient cities such as Aspendos and Perge in Pamphylia Region. Side has not yet been excavated at a very advanced level, but Perge is very well excavated. The advantage of Perge is that it is only an ancient city, there is no life in the city. The disadvantage of Side is that the excavation works are limited since it is a living city, there is a settlement. When the excavation works are completed, it will attract as much attention as Perge and the sightseeing area will increase more. Temple of Apollo is an advantage. It attracts a lot of attention. It has an imposing appearance. At the same time, the presence of local people there means that it is protected. This is the breadwinner for them, we can say that it is protected for free."*

Archaeologist P2: *"Compared to other cities of Pamphylia, the works carried out in Side are in a different position. For 3 years, we have been trying very intensively to establish issues such as how modern settlement and ancient city can work together, how this balance can be established and how it can be protected. We have come a long way, especially in the last 2 years we have been receiving very good reactions. We hear that the work here is an example for the work in many ancient cities in Anatolia, and we also receive this feedback from the Ministry."*

The ongoing excavation, repair and restoration works in Side Ancient City are also carried out to protect this region. The houses in the settlement are restored in a single order.

P3: *"Side is the most seriously protected ancient city among the ancient cities in Türkiye, especially in recent years. In fact, the zoning plan which aims to protect has become a model project for the world. Construction is ensured by protecting the history living underneath. Side is a peninsula. The sea is all around it."*

Side also comes to the forefront with its ancient theatre. It is the only theatre in Türkiye built without leaning on any ground, and the only building in the world where the agora and the theatre are together.

Museum staff P5: *"The difference of Side Ancient City is the theatre. This theatre is the only theatre in Türkiye built without leaning on anything. It was built from the foundation to the floor."*

Deputy head of the excavation of Side Ancient City P1: *"Side has important characteristics that come to the forefront on a building basis. For example, the theatre structure. It is a theatre that has*

no other example in Anatolia and even in the world. The fact that the agora and theatre structures are planned together is the only example in the world. For example, when an announcement is to be made to the people living in the city, the agora and the theatre, which can meet this situation and keep that crowd together, were built together considering the common function. The agora also has a commercial side; there are galleries under the theatre, a characteristic that is not normally seen. These galleries were also used as shops. The first floor of the theatre is completely placed on a hill, which is a feature of the Hellenistic period. The second floor is raised with vaults. This is also a Roman feature. This is one of the rare examples where the first floor is Hellenistic and the second floor is Roman."

Accessibility for All

All museums affiliated to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in Türkiye have a "Museum Card" application. Entrance to Side Museum is free of charge for Turkish students under the age of 18, teachers accompanying this age group, Turkish citizens over the age of 65, spouses and children of veterans and martyrs, disabled Turkish citizens and one accompanying person, conscripts and privates, and foreign children under the age of 12. The use of a museum card provides free entry to archaeological sites and museums for a year with a one-time fee. Ensuring the museum card is accessible to everyone is crucial for local and foreign tourists to explore historical and cultural regions. In this regard, most participants found the museum card application affordable.

P3: *"There is museum card application and it is quite affordable. Especially for the Turkish citizens. Probably also for foreigners. Museum fees may seem expensive for a one-time visit to all the ancient cities and museums in Türkiye, but the museum card makes a lot of sense. I think the entrance to museums and theatre is very affordable."*

Entrance to the museums with a museum card is more advantageous than one-time tickets. For example, while the one-time ticket fee to the Side Museum is 130 TL, the discounted museum card fee is 30 TL and the non-discounted museum card fee is 60 TL.

P1: *"Actually, it is more affordable when you buy a museum card. Because you can use it yearly and it is valid in all museums you want. Otherwise, when you buy a single ticket, you can only enter the place where you bought the ticket."*

The academic museum card for students, including doctoral and master's students, is very advantageous as it provides free entry for one year. Visitors who are not familiar with the museum card application, especially when they come with a large family or group of friends, prefer not to pay this fee when they can pay one-time ticket fees at the ticket office.

Archaeologist P2: *"Since we are students and archaeologist we can benefit from the museum card application. This leads to a discounted museum card purchase. Apart from that, of course, when you come as a normal citizen, if you do not have a museum card, museum entrances are a bit high. Therefore, they prefer not to enter museums."*

Waste Management

Environmental pollution and waste management play an important role in evaluating an ancient city in accordance with sustainable criteria. The fact that Side Ancient City is a living city provides an advantage in this regard.

P3: *"Compared to many ancient cities, although it is a living ancient city, it is very organized and gets better every year in terms of cleanliness. Waste sorting is being done. More training needs to be given to businesses on this issue. Our municipality collects waste by sorting it as in hotels. Of course, it needs to be developed further. I don't know if it is 100% sorted. Side people and tradesmen are sensitive about this issue."*

Archaeologist participant P1 stated that waste sorting is carried out in the museum, but unfortunately no such sorting is carried out in the city. For Side Ancient City, recyclable waste and environmental management issues are addressed, and projects are carried out to address these issues. In this context, Side Ancient City will be more nature- and environmentally friendly when evaluated against these criteria.

Environmental cleaning may cause problems in the ancient city depending on the number of visitors.

P1: *"Since it is a living city, it is perhaps the most visited city in Türkiye. The tourist who come to the hotels are already travelling around the city. But since there are no barriers etc., we do not know how many people enter and exit. That is to say, when so many people come, cleaning can be really a bit of a problem."*
The fact that the entrance to Side Ancient City is free of charge for everyone, some vehicles are allowed to enter and exit, and the large area makes it difficult to prevent environmental pollution.
P2: *"First of all, this place is not an archaeological site, visitors which comes from different destinations, can visit on their own. This year, Side Ancient City is moving towards becoming an archaeological site and in this context, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism is carrying out very serious works. It is planned to provide more controlled entry and exit with a barrier to create a sightseeing route at certain points of the city, various benches, garbage bins, etc."*
The archaeological site project is a significant step toward the sustainability of the Side Ancient City. It is necessary to control entrances and exits, install barriers, place waste-sorting garbage bins with an emphasis on the environment, and take steps to reduce damage. With this project, the sustainability of Side Ancient City will increase. The majority of the participants stated that the recyclable bins that sort waste such as paper, glass, and plastic are insufficient, but the city generally looks well maintained.

Local Enterprises
Since there are still people living in Side Ancient City, there are neighborhoods and settlements. There are businesses such as shops, cafes, and restaurants that are not in many other ancient cities. These businesses are operated by both local people and citizens from other provinces of Türkiye. The quality of goods and services offered by the businesses needs to be improved and inspected.
P3, a hotel owner and manager: *"Shopping is very good here and the number of shops has decreased especially after the transformation of Side Ancient City. Illegal structures have been removed and cleaned here, but the quality of shopping needs to be slightly improved. Because the products we call more imitation are sold a lot in these businesses."*
However, P4, who is a tradesman in Side, stated his thoughts in the opposite way as follows: *"Unfortunately, the all-inclusive hotels in the area hinder our business a lot, tourists do not shop here. They can find anything they look for in the hotels already and if not, the hotel employees take them to the places of their choice and make them shop in these stores. That's why tourists don't shop when they come here. Mostly local people shop from us."*
Tourists who can find everything they want without paying anything at all-inclusive hotels do not prefer the restaurants and cafes in Side, and they avoid merchants who charge the euro exchange rate. Shopkeepers' approach to tourists is improving.
Tourist guide P8: *"Shopping is done from local businesses. However, tourists think that it is a bit expensive and looks a bit more distant. In addition to this, the approach style is not the same as it used to be; there are not so many words thrown at them like before. Honestly, I have not seen a tourist shopping to the fullest.*
It is evident that tourists do not shop enough at the shops in the Side Ancient City. Foreign tourists stated that these businesses are very expensive and that they do not find it right not to sell in Turkish Lira. Local tourists think the same; there are no accessible products because there is no sale in Turkish Lira. However, they stated that they went to the cafes and restaurants inside, and that it was pleasant to eat in an ancient city and have a drink with this view.

Creating Employment
Many enterprises in Side Ancient City employ local people. The locals of Side have opened food and beverage and retail businesses here and have offered jobs to many employees. In addition to these enterprises, locals can also find job opportunities in hotels in the region.
P3, a hotel owner and manager: *"There is a saying, in fact, the local rabbit holds the local greyhound. The locals in Side or those who have been here for a very long time are now considered locals, there are people who have been trading here for 20-30 years. Their trade here is very useful in terms of*

protecting Side. The majority of Side's food and beverage sector consists of local entrepreneurs. Visitors of Side create trade in and around the ancient city; this provides employment."
These enterprises are not affiliated with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism; they are private enterprises.
P5: *"I don't think it is right to have a privately owned place in this archaeological site under any circumstances. However, I can say that it provides a lot of employment."*

Protection of Social and Cultural Values
Protecting social and cultural values is important for passing them on to future generations. In this context, restoring damaged, harmed, or destroyed cultural and historical structures ensures that these values are preserved for future generations. In this regard, restoration work is a priority for the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.
P3: *"Restoration works have been going very fast in recent years, we, as Barut Hotel, have been sponsoring the excavation works of the entire ancient city for 15 years. For example, we are the sponsor of the fountain at the entrance. Now it continues with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Especially this year, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Türkiye is also supporting the excavations, it is going very well and this is one of the fastest excavations in Türkiye."*
P8: *"They build new buildings in the style of old Turkish houses, bay windows, asymmetrical, typical old Turkish houses. They are built in the style of Ottoman and Seljuk Period houses. It is impossible for them to build high-rise buildings. Houses have to be built in this style. The missing parts are usually completed with other style parts. The aim is to restore it as much as possible. For example, the fountain at the entrance is very beautiful. They also put the original stones in front of the building."*
The repair of the sculptures found in pieces during the excavations is carried out in the Side Museum. These artifacts are on display at the Side Museum after repair work. As the number of artifacts recovered from excavations has increased, the need for a new museum has become apparent.
Archaeologist P1: *"Restoration work is a work that needs to be done. Only excavation does not produce a result, it is also necessary to protect it. For this reason, restoration works were carried out in every area after every excavation work carried out here, and they continue. The restoration of the artefacts unearthed is being carried out, they are being moved to the museum. At the moment, there is a problem only at one point, since too many artefacts are obtained, the museum is not enough for this. We need a new museum."*

Transportation
Side Ancient City is accessible from Manavgat and all hotels in the region.
P5: *"It is actually easy to reach the region. Whether it is Kumköy or Çolaklı, minibuses and buses are provided from every region as you move away from here. Having a coastal road is also a great advantage, the coastal road has been built. Hotels make it easy to reach these regions for tourists."*
With some exceptions, vehicles are not allowed to enter and exit the ancient city of Side. There is a shuttle bus that runs from the city car park to the beach. Golf carts are used to transport visitors along the city's main streets from the main entrance gate. These vehicles are environmentally friendly as they run on electricity.
P3: *"There is a shuttle service from one end of the city to the other, and since the number of vehicles entering and leaving is low, it is done in a controlled manner. Electric golf vehicles are used by the municipality for visitors, and these vehicles provide transport until the first gate. There is no vehicle pollution in the city."*
Minibusses and golf carts for indoor transport are available for a fee. While minibus fares are considered accessible to everyone, electric golf carts are not preferred because of their high cost.
Tourist guide P8: *"Tour buses normally used to go all the way up, but they have stopped this service, which I think is very good. There are only golf carts that run on electricity. There is also a minibus moving. The fact that not too many cars enter the city has a positive effect on the city. Of course, I don't know how environmentally friendly the minibuses that move inside and take visitors from the top to the car park are, but golf carts are good in this regard, and we use these carts every time we*

go. A golf cart was 60 Turkish liras and it was for five people. The other option, a minibus, was 8 liras. But it would be much better if golf carts were more active."
It can be said that there is nature-friendly transport in Side. However, it is not accessible for everyone. Most visitors prefer to walk in the city rather than use these vehicles. More detailed studies should be carried out on this subject.

Biodiversity
In sustainability, not harming and protecting nature are among the most important criteria. To be passed on to future generations, flora and plants that are rare, under protection, and specific to the region should be protected. Archaeologist P2 gave information about the rare plant species under protection in Side Ancient City as follows: *"There is pancratium (sand lilies) in here. We pay attention to it especially; if there are sand lilies in our work areas, we carry out our work without harming them as much as possible and try to protect them. A lot of work is being done here on biodiversity. Professors from the Faculty of Science and Literature of Akdeniz University came here and made a project on the biodiversity of Side. They even placed a signboard about this on the small colonnaded street (C) of the ancient city. There is an information sign there about this. We do not have detailed information, but we know that detailed studies have been carried out on this."*

Water Consumption and Efficient Energy Use
Not wasting water and using it efficiently are important within the scope of sustainability. For a region to be sustainable, it must be careful with water consumption. The river in Manavgat is of great importance in this direction. Local people and businesses meet their water needs from this source.
P3, who is a hotel manager and also a local: *"Businesses have their own policies. Some of them use purified water. There are no free-flowing fountains in Side Ancient City. We, as locals, are lucky because we use the water of the river in Manavgat. There is no water shortage in the region for now. There is no wasted water."*
The night lighting of Side Ancient City and the efficient use of energy in this context are also important issues. Although there are deficiencies in this regard, it is seen that successful steps will be taken in this field with the ancient city becoming an archaeological site.
P1 and P2, who are archaeologists working on the excavations, provided important details on this issue. P1 stated: *"Of course, it is a bit incomplete at the moment, but as we said before, we have brought all of these to the agenda in this archaeological site project. For example, we need lamps for lighting at night because the city is very dark at night and you cannot walk around, it is not possible. The fact that the ancient city of Side is an archaeological site means that a certain route is drawn and this route is illuminated. This lighting is needed here. When we thought about how much and how we can use this lighting in a way that can be recycled back to nature, we said that we could use solar powered lighting and we prepared and presented projects. We did research on these together with our lecturer Feriştah. We have presented these ideas to the Ministry, and the relevant units are now working on these projects."*

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS
This study examined the current status of the Ancient City of Side in the context of sustainable tourism criteria. It provided a comprehensive assessment of the city's strengths and the factors that limit its sustainability. The findings, consistent with previous research on sustainable tourism (Karapınar & Barakazı, 2017; Akbaş, 2020; Somuncu & Yiğit, 2009), indicate that key components such as physical conservation, community involvement, economic contribution, accessibility, waste management, and energy efficiency play a decisive role in the sustainable management of cultural heritage sites. The fact that the Ancient City of Side is a living archaeological settlement both confirms the challenges highlighted in the literature and distinguishes the present study by offering a unique perspective. While this condition creates pressure from visitor density, irregular commercial activities, unplanned use, and waste management issues, it also offers significant advantages—such as fostering local ownership of cultural heritage, sustaining the regional economy, and preserving the historical fabric in the context of daily life. Therefore, Side

represents a "living heritage site" model, an approach mentioned in the literature but illustrated by relatively few examples. According to the research findings, the strongest aspects of Side include its unique geographical position, cultural and historical diversity, distinctive architectural character, regular restoration activities, and high visitor demand. However, the weakest dimensions include waste management, energy efficiency, regulated entrance–exit controls, inconsistencies in pricing and quality standards among local businesses, a lack of sustainability-oriented planning in commercial zones, and insufficient informational or interpretive practices. These findings closely align with the problems identified in archaeological cities by Akbaş (2020) and Karapınar & Barakazı (2017).

Overall, the Ancient City of Side is assessed as a heritage site that is partially strong but still requires substantial improvements in meeting sustainable tourism criteria. The "archaeological site project" led by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism represents a critical turning point for the city's sustainable management. Upon completion of this project, a more systematic process is expected to emerge in areas such as waste management, energy use, controlled visitor circulation, and cultural heritage conservation. This study helps fill a gap in the literature on the concept of "living ancient cities," offering a new evaluative framework through the case of the Ancient City of Side. It presents original thematic findings on how sustainable tourism criteria can be adapted to ancient cities and sheds light on the relationship between cultural heritage management and contemporary urban life. Based on the findings, several important recommendations have been developed for the management of the Ancient City of Side. An effective visitor control mechanism should be established in the site, including the organization of entrance–exit barriers, guided routes, and designated walking paths. The waste management system should be improved by increasing the number of recycling bins and providing training for local businesses. In terms of energy efficiency, solar-powered nighttime illumination projects would be particularly suitable for the site. Local businesses play a crucial role in sustainability; therefore, standards regarding pricing, quality, and appearance should be introduced. This study is limited to qualitative data obtained from only eight participants. The findings are specific to the Ancient City of Side and cannot be generalized. Due to time constraints, observational data were limited. Future research could employ mixed-methods designs with larger sample sizes. In addition, comprehensive studies can be developed on local residents' perceptions of cultural heritage in living ancient cities. The sustainable tourism performance of the Ancient City of Side can be monitored over time to support long-term sustainable practices. Moreover, the relationship between sustainability indicators and visitor behavior could be examined in future studies.

Declaration of Generative AI Usage

During the preparation of this work, the authors used *Gemini* and *Cloud* to improve the readability and language of the manuscript. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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