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# 9 Challenges to sustainability in prospective world heritage sites

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## The objectives of this chapter are to:

- Investigate how a centralized governance structure affects the potential to achieve sustainable tourism development.
- Explore whether the sustainability challenges that arise from the top-down management approach in heritage sites in Turkey proposed in 1990s improved over the years.
- Assess empirical data collected through interviews and focus groups in Iznik/Nicaea and use the sustainability framework as a basis for a thematic analysis on the impact of Iznik's prospective inscription as a World Heritage Site.
- Describe the role of coordination between stakeholder groups, previous urban development patterns, conservation of heritage assets and the natural landscape for potential sustainable tourism development.
- Address theoretical and practical implications of inscription as a World Heritage Site and tourism development on sustainability.

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**Keywords:** cultural heritage; World Heritage Sites; sustainability; urban development; spatial planning.

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## Introduction

Heritage cities often build on their cultural assets to develop as destinations. Yet, the assets communicated to visitors usually present only part of the picture. Heritage cities often tend to possess a significant cultural value that is hidden from the prying eyes. This value is not only exhibited as tangible assets, but the accumulation of knowledge and experience in the culture-laden milieu is also central to the notion of heritage (Falser, 2015). Such intangible elements have found their way into international discussions in recent years (Vecco, 2010). Heritage cities, as living spaces, also embrace a cultural heritage inseparable from local communities, and in a broader perspective, from the whole of humanity. This perspective is central to the creation of World Heritage Sites (WHSs) seeking to protect the world's heritage with Outstanding Universal Value under the umbrella of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (1972). In this process, however, the heritage assets inscribed as WHSs are nominated by national governments which, upon inscription, become the primary entity responsible for safeguarding their integrity.

The primary motivation for this research is the centralized governance structure in developing countries and how this affects the potential to achieve sustainability through tourism development. Turkey is an example of such a centralized system in regard to tourism and heritage management (Yüksel et al., 2005) which includes the WHSs. In Turkey, WHSs are not only effective tools to aid foreign policy (Atakuman, 2010) but are also integral to culture-driven tourism strategy (Ozturk & van Niekerk, 2014). Despite inconclusive evidence in the literature on the relationship between proliferation of tourism and WHS status (Jimura, 2011; Poria et al., 2013), Turkey's proactive relationship with UNESCO may be interpreted as reaffirming the perceived linkage between WHS status and visitation.

Furthermore, extant studies in Turkey argue that the central governance structure in Turkey commonly excludes local stakeholders from planning processes (Tosun & Jenkins, 1996; Yüksel et al., 1999). Still, in the subsequent years, scholarly interest in the governance of tourism and heritage in Turkey declined considerably and does not reveal if earlier recommendations have been taken into consideration. Although efforts are made to decentralize development mechanisms in Turkey and to increase region-based decision-making (Alvarez et al., 2014), their ramifications for tourism and heritage are virtually non-existent in the literature. This research aims to have a glimpse of the Turkish perspectives on heritage governance and to investigate whether the sustainability challenges that arise from the top-

down management approach in heritage sites proposed in 1990s (Tosun, 1998) improved over the subsequent decades. To this end, this research places the ancient city of Iznik/Niceae in Bursa province of northwestern Turkey under the microscope.

Iznik, as a living city for the last three millennia, represents a unique accumulation of cultural heritage assets of different empires (Stefani-dou, 2003). Despite being inhabited for its entire history, the city has had a tumultuous past, with shifting geo-political and economic importance (Lowry, 2003). Iznik's cultural importance for the national government resonates in the city's recent nomination as a prospective WHS (UNESCO, 2014). Many heritage cities are also living cities, thereby implying a series of challenges when WHS inscription, urban and tourism development and sustainability objectives are pursued. The literature tends to prioritize either heritage/conservation or destination development, with implications often favoring a centralized system in order to facilitate decision-making. The question arising, however, is whether those in charge do learn over time, grasp the essence of good/bad practice and are, in the end, in position to support sustainability. Since WHS status is an important asset for destination promotion of rural areas in particular (Wuepper & Patry, 2016), development objectives may prioritize economic growth and, in the process, neglect environmental and socio-cultural attributes.

Drawing on previous scholarship on WHSs and destination management, this research investigates Iznik's administrative framework pertinent to its tourism prospects and to-be WHS status for an *ex ante* evaluation of the sustainability challenges. To achieve this, we particularly focus on how the culture embedded in Iznik and its inhabitants is reflected in administrative stakeholders and how this reflection is interlinked with sustainability objectives in this heritage city.

## Literature review

WHSs and heritage cities (e.g., those cities in which sites of the UNESCO World Heritage List are located) need to embrace future generations while extending beyond today's local communities to international visitors. As such, their sustainable development relies on three pillars, namely the economic, the socio-cultural and the environmental ones (United Nations World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2013). Yet, literature suggests that the policy, tourism and development objectives which are linked to each one of these pillars may not necessarily be reflected in practice when a living city is inscribed as a WHS by UNESCO.