

**T.C.**

**İSTANBUL KÜLTÜR UNİVERSİTY**

**INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

**THE ROLE OF TOURISM IN ENHANCING TÜRKİYE SOFT POWER:  
CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES AND STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENTS**

**MA Thesis**

**By EL OUALI Sarah**

**2200008402**

**Department: International Relations**

**Program: International Relations**

**Supervisor: Prof. Dr. İbrahim Mensur Akgün**

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**Members of Examining Committee:**

**Assoc. Prof. Dr. Can Kakışım**

**Asst. Prof. Dr. Nihan Akıncılar Köseoğlu**

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This thesis was motivated by the rich tourism scene of Türkiye, which I learned about while working in a hotel to finance my education. I want to sincerely thank my Turkish family, friends, and colleagues for making this journey possible and for their crucial encouragement and support during the process.

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**Sarah EL OUALI**

<b>Üniversite</b>	:	<b>İstanbul Kültür Üniversitesi</b>
<b>Enstitü</b>	:	<b>Lisansüstü Eğitim Enstitüsü</b>
<b>Dalı</b>	:	<b>Uluslararası İlişkiler</b>
<b>Programı</b>	:	<b>Uluslararası İlişkiler</b>
<b>Tez Danışmanı</b>	:	<b>Prof. Dr. İbrahim Mensur Akgün</b>
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## **ÖZET**

Bu çalışma turizmin Türkiye'nin gücüne etkisini incelemiştir. Turizmin ülkenin küresel imajını nasıl etkilediğine vurgu yaparak Türkiye'nin tarihi, kültürel ve ekolojik zenginliğine bakıyor. Araştırma, turizmin ekonomik katkıları, kültürler arası alışverişler ve Türkiye Turizm Tanıtım ve Geliştirme Ajansı (TGA) gibi kuruluşların uluslararası pazarlama kampanyaları hakkında tartışıyor. Ayrıca ırkçılık, bölgesel eşitsizlikler ve Türk diasporasının rolü de dahil olmak üzere konular ve öneriler hakkında çatışmaları barındırıyor. Uluslararası işbirlikleri, KSS ve tıp turizmi de Türkiye'nin turizm gücünün önemli yönleri olarak incelenmektedir. Bu çalışma, Türkiye'nin bahse konu alanları dikkatle analiz ederek uluslararası etki kazanmak için turizmi kullanmadaki zorluklarını, fırsatlarını ve rolünü değerlendirmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Türkiye'nin dış politikaları, Turizm, Yumuşak Güç

**University** : **Istanbul Kultur University**  
**Institute** : **Institute of Graduate Studies**  
**Department** : **International Relations**  
**Programme** : **International Relations**  
**Supervisor** : **Prof. Dr. İbrahim Mensur Akgün**  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This work examined the effect of tourism on Türkiye's soft power. It looks at the historical, cultural, and ecological richness of Türkiye with an emphasis on how tourism contributes to impact the global image of the country. The research discusses about the tourism economic contributions, cross-cultural exchanges, and international marketing campaigns by organizations like the Türkiye Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (TGA). But also about issues and recommendations, including racism, regional inequalities, and the role of the Turkish diaspora. International collaborations, CSR, and medical tourism are also examined as important facets of Türkiye's soft power. This work evaluates Türkiye's challenges, opportunities, and role in using tourism to gain international influence by carefully analyzing these fields.

**Keywords:** Türkiye foreign policies, Tourism, Soft Power

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATION

- ACI : Airports Council International
- AKP : Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi
- CBT : Community-based tourism
- CCI : Cultural and Creative Industries
- CEO : Chief Executive Officer
- CSR : Corporate Social Responsibility
- EU : European Union
- FDI : Foreign Direct Investment
- GDP : Gross Domestic Product
- GSTC : Global Sustainable Tourism Council
- IST : Istanbul Airport
- JCI : Joint Commission International
- NATO : North Atlantic Treaty Organization
- NGO : Non-Governmental Organization
- OTS : Organization of Turkic States
- TEDA : Türk kültür, sanat ve edebiyat eserleri
- TGA : Türkiye Turizm Tanıtım ve Geliştirme Ajansı
- TIKA : Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı Başkanlığı
- TÜİK : Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu
- UEFA : Union of European Football Associations
- UNDP : United Nations Development Programme

UNESCO : United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

US : United States

USD : United States Dollars

WTO : World Tourism Organization

WTTC : World Travel & Tourism Council

YEI : Yunus Emre Institut

YÖK : Yükseköğretim Kurulu



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Turkish history is rich. Different civilizations, empires, and multiple cultural exchanges. Turkish culture has influenced and has a worldwide impact. From the Ottoman Empire's splendor to the Republic's contemporary vision, Türkiye has always used its history, culture, and advantageous geographical position to make its mark on the international scene. The nation has adopted soft power as a crucial diplomatic instrument in recent decades, using media, cuisine, cultural diplomacy and tourism to change its reputation abroad. Even though Türkiye made important alliances on the military and regional plan, especially with NATO, to secure its place on the international stage, the country still had a negative image abroad due to, again, the usage of hard power, the military coup attended, the struggles with the internal politics. The country was seen as unstable and authoritarian. Five military coups participated in this international image of authoritarian authority but had an impact on Turkish economy and politics that deeply affected its functioning. The coup of July 15, 2016 has been a real sledgehammer for Türkiye modern politics and history. The president has consolidated his country's power which has been qualified as authoritarian by opposed groups. A faction of the military army has organized the coup aiming to overthrow Recep Tayip Erdogan, the president of Türkiye. They took control of the key areas of the country, such as the bridges of Istanbul, the media, and military bases. But the society stood. A massive civilian resistance came up, along the other military side and loyalist forces, and terminated the coup within hours. Tens of thousands of people were arrested, and more than 100,000 people had their jobs suspended or fired. The coup and the repression that followed had a major effect on Türkiye's reputation abroad. The government was accused by critics of using the coup as an excuse to stifle dissent, undermine democratic values, and restrict press freedom. As worries about human rights and the rule of law grew, this resulted in strained relations with Western allies, especially the US and the EU. That is not all, 2016 has been a terrible year for the nation, more than the military coup, more than 18 different terrorist attacks have stormed the country. We can cite the one January 12th 2016, in Sultan Ahmet area near the Blue Mosque and Haghia Sophia, one of the most touristic places of Istanbul killing 12 German tourists and one Peruvian. But also attacks have touched Ankara, Gaziantep, Bursa, Diyarbakir, Hakkari, Mardin and other area of Istanbul, Taksim, Vezneciler, Beşiktaş, and the Atatürk Airport. This last one carried out by Daesh has

killed 45 person, 23 Turkish citizens, 6 Saudi Arabians, 3 Palestinians, and Jordanian, Chinese, Iraqi, Ukrainia, Iranian, Uzbek, Tunisian, ... more than 100 persons has been injured as well. 2016 has been a dark year for Türkiye, and 2017 has started also with a dark start with an attack on the 1st of January in a club in Ortaköy. Beside the 17 000 police presence in Istanbul this night which was reinforced after this tragic year, this last attack has killed 39 people from 15 different nationalities, and wounded more than that.

After all of these events, Türkiye found itself at a critical crossroads. It was all about to ensure security for its citizens but also to rebuild its international image. After 2016 tourists have radically stopped coming, countries where sharing publicly some warning on avoiding going to crowded places in Türkiye. Making the country perceived as an 'unsafe' place. Before 2016, Türkiye has made effort to attract foreign tourists and these effort paid. All these events, tourism has dropped drastically. But today, Türkiye is one of the top destination of the world. We wil study in this thesis how Türkiye has managed to ameliorate its image abroad, its Soft Power aiming tourists to come visit the country.

The concept of Soft Power was introduced by Joseph Nie in 1990. Before defining what Soft Power is, it is important to define what is the role of Power in the international relation field. It is the capability to exert influence on the behavior of others or events, but also it could be, specifically for international relations, the fact that the countries could execute its politics without the interference of the other countries. (Heywood, 2011) Power in global politics can be divided into two types, Hard Power and Soft Power. The first one is military and economical based Joseph Nie used the image of the 'stick' and the 'carrot' to define it. It is the ability to use rather threats and, or bait. Türkiye could be defined before as a total Hard Power user, as many other countries, but the use of Hard Power declined little by little in the profit of the Soft. But still countries are investing and using in some cases Hard Power. It is like the nuclear power we have but we do not use it. The tools of Hard Power are military force, sanction, payments, and bribes.

The 2024 Global Firepower Index<sup>1</sup>, places Türkiye's military 8th in the world, demonstrating the country's growing hard power in recent years. In 2023, the defense budget amounted to \$46.1 billion, which helped to support strong developments in the home defense sector, including domestic initiatives like the Kaan National Combat Aircraft (Sıtkı Egeli, Serhat Güvenç, Çağlar Kurç and Arda Mevlütoğlu, IISS, 2024). In 2023, defense and aerospace exports reached \$5.5 billion, a 25% increase from the previous year (Can Kasapoglu, Atlantic Council, 2022) Almost 80% of the equipment is produced within Türkiye borders according defense production, Türkiye is far away from being dependant on foreign importation. Bayraktar TB2 exports are an example of how Türkiye's drone diplomacy has increased its geopolitical influence, particularly in conflicts like Libya, Syria, and Ukraine. In addition, Türkiye maintains its vital role in regional peacekeeping operations and has built military bases overseas. The Turkish Armed Forces is estimated to have 512,000 active soldiers. These accomplishments demonstrate Türkiye's growing stature as a major force in military innovation and international defense. With a GDP of about \$1.1 billion USD (World Bank, 2023)<sup>2</sup>, its economy is reinforced by its solid trade alliances and building projects around the world with especially the European Free Trade Association countries “Türkiye became the EU’s 5th largest trade partner in 2023, representing 4.1% of the EU’s total trade in goods with the world (compared to 3.3% in 2022).” (European Commission, 2024)<sup>3</sup>, But also, with a balanced stance toward superpowers like China or Russia, Türkiye hopes to solidify its position as a regional leader through strategic alliances and nuclear power ambitions. Türkiye is receiving financial support from Russia for the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant Project, the construction of a four-unit plant which “will provide electricity to more than 12 million consumers”<sup>4</sup>, in May 2010, Russia and Türkiye signed an agreement on this project. As today, the project was successful, and strengthened the relation of both countries, and increased Turkish hard power.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.globalfirepower.com/searchresults.php?q=turkey+military#gsc.tab=0&gsc.q=turkey%20military&gsc.page=1>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/turkey/overview>

<sup>3</sup> [https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/turkiye\\_en](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/turkiye_en)

<sup>4</sup> <https://akkuyu.com/en/about/info>

Soft Power on the other hand is based on cooperation and attraction rather than coercion, it will use culture, attractiveness, and tourism. Soft Power will increase the positive view of the nation on the international scale and will influence their behavior. It is the most popular type of power used nowadays, it permits us to exert power and to ameliorate the nation's image, economy, and social part. Soft power and Culture became the main tools of Turkish foreign policies and diplomacy. Eventhough Türkiye has a strong Hard Power as seen before, the country is investing effort in its Soft Power to ameliorate its Global Image. Türkiye cultivates good relations with both nearby and far-off countries by preserving its historical legacy, promoting Turkish language and cuisine, and engaging in cultural diplomacy. Initiatives like supporting Turkish TV series, educational exchanges, and international humanitarian aid help to establish trust and influence. This well-rounded strategy guarantees that Türkiye's leadership goes beyond the use of force alone and enables it to influence perceptions both locally and internationally. We will study during the next chapter, the literature review to understand what type of research has been done about Soft Power, Diplomacy, Culture and Türkiye. The country has exploded in terms of tourism and cultural power, beside cities such as Antalya, Bodrum known for the sea, sand and sun tourism, cities as Istanbul and Izmir are now on a touristic boom for their rich culture. Tourism has also, thanks to this, built closer relations with other countries and has expanded the positive perception of the country. The government has worked on promoting Turkish culture abroad, playing on an idea of traditionalism and modernism to attract a large scale of tourists. Türkiye became the first choice for middle easterners that are traveling to Türkiye as a muslim country and westerners are coming to Türkiye for its charming balance between tradition/history/exotic and modernism.

Even though there is obviously a tourist boom, an increase in soft power usage by the Turkish government there are few research studies about the subject. Especially about Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) which is an important term that has affected the tourism field for a few years, we will study how Türkiye is working on CSR's opportunities and challenges. CSR is already implemented in the tourism sector; it is not anymore, a trend to follow but a minimum to respect. CSR is about sustainability, work ethic, ecology.

We will follow the following problematic sentence in this work: How can Türkiye successfully use the tourist industry as a soft power instrument to increase its worldwide influence while tackling the social, cultural, and economic issues that affect its reputation abroad?



## 2. STRUCTURE AND CENTRAL ARGUMENT

This thesis investigates the interplay between Türkiye's tourism sector and its role in shaping the nation's soft power on the global stage. The structure begins with a foundational analysis of soft power theory and its relevance to international relations, particularly in the context of Türkiye's geopolitical and cultural position. In the second part, we will analyze how the International and Turkish searchers have worked on the topic through the Literature Review. The methodology and the context of data will be presented. The core of the research will be presented starting from general information about Turkish Soft Power, then about the tourism influencing the Turkish Soft Power and finally the challenges and opportunities about the same subject. We will study the results and findings of the questionnaires by comparing the answers of the tourists who visited Türkiye and those who did not.

### 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Although we understand that Türkiye's usage of soft power seems to be more and more important, there is not a huge amount of research about it. There is more research linking diplomacy, soft power under International Relations eyes but not so much that is linking these to topics with Tourism and Türkiye. We will develop this literature review in different parts starting with the widely discussed topic to finish on the research approaching Turkish eyes, and how Türkiye has utilized Tourism to promote its image abroad as a diplomatic tool. We can also see that there is definitely a gap of research about CSR in Türkiye.

Soft power and diplomacy are well known subjects and have been discussed a lot. It helps the countries to shape their images and their international perceptions. Public diplomacy is according to the Turkish bureaucrat, Ibrahim Kalin, a multidimensional communication process and is a key element of diplomacy. Using those new communication processes is more dynamic and "*Its key elements are listening as much as talking, understanding as much as explaining, and communicating as much as informing.*" (I. Kalin, 2011). He is also reminding us also that the whole process's purpose is not propaganda but to create an honest communication based on "*facts and truth*" (I. Kalin 2011) and put away the negative image made by previous acts. The idea is to shift from a coercive leadership, run by the military and economy, to a soft power leadership. We can talk about Cultural diplomacy as a tool of public diplomacy. Dr Cansu Güleç gave us the definition of Cultural diplomacy by firstly stating its difference over Cultural Relation. Cultural relations implies human scales that are meeting, who are looking to films, media, travel, intermarriage, foreign studies, etc. On the other hand, Cultural Diplomacy is on the National scale. It can only exist if the government is involved in national interests by, preferably, sharing to others internationally. Cultural Diplomacy is used to promote the actions at a regional or national interest of the public sector. The Turkish government has made an effort on that topic to encourage and promote NGOs actions on the international scale. "*In other words, national culture is utilized for the intention of promoting that nation's standing on an international stage*" (Güleç, 2015). It is not only about attracting tourists for the Turkish Sea-sand-sun offering, but attracting them for Turkish cultures, actions, and

richness. This shift about Cultural diplomacy offered Türkiye a way to evaluate its perception abroad. Tourists were coming before just aiming at the relaxing Turkish beaches and landscape of the South-West, but it is more and more about coming to Türkiye for its culture. The Turkish government worked more and more to promote its culture. Linking Cultural Diplomacy and tourism has made the international perception of Türkiye deeply change. The government has officially collaborated and created new institutions aiming for that project. Still, according to Güleç, the Turkish government has created the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency, in Turkish Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon İdaresi Başkanlığı (TİKA). *“TIKA is a government organization and is a department of the Prime Ministry that designates development projects in various sectors of the economy in the developing world by providing know-how, personnel training and technical equipment. TİKA also implements projects for promotion of Türkiye in order to establish cultural relations and increase the number of the people having information about Türkiye. Turkish pavilions arrangements; opening exhibitions; inviting the top-ranking officials to give speeches about the activities of Türkiye in different areas; issuing various publications about Turkish World and organizing programs including workshops regarding Turkish culture and traditions can be included in the promotion aids organized by TİKA.”* (Güleç, 2015). So, we understood that Türkiye do not work only within its borders in terms of Cultural Diplomacy but also externally in other countries. This point has been also discussed by a group of scholars during a discussion about Tourism and Diplomacy. Tourists are diplomats, the countries are sending tourists aiming to work on the image of the sending country as a welcoming country. (Rosenbaum, 2019) Tourists are diplomats that are confronting themselves with an ‘alien’ politic, socioeconomic system, and cultural economy. (Noack, 2019) Tourism has always been use by government to change the perception, (Baranowski, 2019), is using the example of the Nazis during the Second World Wide, they were sending “*whitewashed*” tourists abroad to try to de joint the link between nazism with racism, coercion and corruption. And in this case tourism has been used as propaganda. So we understand that Tourism has its place in the Soft Power concept.

Türkiye has worked on, again, shifting its image abroad. Türkiye has made a work making its perception different according to the region. The country has adopted a dual image with both a western and modern side and a muslim, Ottoman, traditional side. *“For instance, in relation to the tradition versus modernity debate, Türkiye is perceived as a country that is able successfully to fuse traditional Islamic-Ottoman culture with socio- economic modernization. Turkish modernization is taken up in debates about classical modernity, multiple modernities, multiculturalism and globalism, and this carries the discussions about Türkiye beyond its borders. The relationship between tradition and modernity simultaneously includes the ideal of a balance between conservative values and modern means. Türkiye is perceived as a country that transforms modernity through the preservation of its conservative values.”* (Kalin, 2011). Cankurtaran and Cetin in their research in 2016 announce the foreign policies and the political principles of the AKP, lead by Erdogan, which is more traditionally centered and on muslim values attracted tourists coming from the Middle East.

Tourism can be also used as a pressure tool within International Relations (Özkan, Yasin, 2021). The authors are giving an example of 2015 when Türkiye destroyed a Russian missile at the Türkiye-Syrian border, so Russia has blocked the touristic departure to Türkiye. That has impacted importantly the touristic businesses of Türkiye. But on the other hand, it allowed businesses which stayed active after that crisis to be less dependent on Russian tourists. Claude Ruiz's research clarifies how Türkiye's geopolitical location affects its diplomatic and tourism achievements. Türkiye has been able to profit from its unique cultural and geographical situation because of its position as a bridge between the East and the West, but it has also exposed the nation to criticism from the public and international observation. However, Türkiye has maintained its position as a major power in the region by effectively employing public diplomacy and using tourism to boost its geopolitical stature (Ruiz, 2011). This careful balancing act between tourism and geopolitics demonstrates how complicated and dynamic Türkiye's soft power and cultural diplomacy tactics are.

Corporate Social Responsibility within the tourism sector is growing in importance. More and more tourists want to travel sustainably. Since hospitality businesses are being held to higher standards for sustainability and community involvement, CSR is particularly important to the travel and tourist industry. Businesses that participate in CSR, according to Manisha Singal, have a great environmental impact, increase employee's retention and operational effectiveness. These ideas are becoming more popular in Türkiye, but there is still some improvement to do “*stakeholders and tourism establishments of Istanbul and Antalya must be made aware of the need to implement clear, environmentally friendly practices that contribute to CSR.*” (David A. Fennell, Kadir Çakar, Nurullah Cihan Ağbay & İsmail Uzut, 2024). The authors have made research on Istanbul and Antalya and conclude that in both cities there is lack of awareness about that subject. But also, that these two cities are living on mass tourism “*Tourism in crowded destinations, such as Istanbul, depends on mass tourism and, as such, the immediate consumption of attractions and resources*” (David A. Fennell, Kadir Çakar, Nurullah Cihan Ağbay & İsmail Uzut, 2024). Through the implementation of sustainable development methods, the Turkish tourist sector may enhance its worldwide reputation and contribute to the nation's overall diplomatic strategy by better aligning with global standards.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

For this thesis we will use a mixed-methods approach with qualitative and quantitative data. We will use official data coming from ministries, but also from well known Turkish companies. We will also use Academic literature to rely on. This study also will use data from interviews with stakeholders in the Turkish Tourism sector especially from the Hotel sector to explore their perspective about diplomacy, foreign Turkish perceptions, and especially CSR initiatives, as same as with foreign and Turkish workers working in Türkiye. We will also study the results of a survey done by 150 non-Turkish people that either already went to Türkiye or are planning to go to Türkiye to study the perception before and after they went, and how their visits have been motivated and if the visit changed their perception.

In the context of this study, it is important to acknowledge that the distribution of the questionnaires. They have been distributed through channels where there were mostly French. This method of dissemination resulted in a higher proportion of responses from French-speaking individuals.

While the data collected provides valuable insights, it is necessary to consider this context when interpreting the results. The predominance of French respondents may influence the generalizability of certain findings, particularly in terms of cultural perceptions or familiarity with Türkiye. Nonetheless, the diverse range of responses, including those from non-French participants, offers a robust foundation for analyzing the interplay between cultural diplomacy, soft power, and tourism in Türkiye. This demographic nuance underscores the importance of situating findings within their methodological framework, ensuring that conclusions are drawn with appropriate consideration of the sample's composition.

## **5. SOFT POWER OF TÜRKIYE – CULTURAL DIPLOMACY AND PEACEMAKER POSITION**

Soft power is the capacity to use instruments like culture, values, and diplomacy to influence the choices and actions of others through attraction rather than force. Soft power is the capacity to influence and persuade people by appealing to their shared values and interests, opposed to hard power, which depends on economic or military force (Nye, 2004). Soft power is particularly important for middle powers or “semi-peripheral countries” (Dunn, Kawana, Brewer, 2000), like Türkiye in the context of international affairs. Despite not having the overwhelming economic or military power that the superpower has. These peripheral countries could capitalize on their industry, innovations, reforms in terms of politics, social or organizations, and of course their diplomacy and culture. It enables the nation to project influence through diplomacy and appeal rather than force, soft power is an essential instrument for Türkiye in navigating complex geopolitical processes and situations. Although it is not a superpower, soft power gives Türkiye a means to influence the world arena because of its distinct geopolitical position, rich potential cultural influence, and growing participation in international humanitarian endeavors -especially in Africa-. Türkiye's distinct geopolitical location strengthens its soft power approach, the country is in the middle of multiple different cultures mainly influenced by the old Ottoman time also, so beside the political questions between Türkiye and its neighborhood there's a cultural appeal with them, coming from the same root. Türkiye is a cultural, political, and economic bridge that connects the East and West, situated at the intersection of Europe and Asia. While its cultural legacy enables it to be a major participant in international diplomacy, its geographical location offers it considerable influence over regional security and economic matters. As said before, due to its historical heritage of the Ottoman Empire's culture, Türkiye has been able to interact with both Muslim-majority and Western countries. Being officially a secular nation since 1923, but with Islamic heritage, Türkiye is a special actor in international diplomacy because of its capacity to strike a balance between these two identities which attract two different types of targets. Its dual identity enhances its role in soft power operations, its strategic

location and cultural diversity enable it to be a crucial mediator, promoting communication between Western and Eastern nations.

One of the main key components of Türkiye's soft power strategy is its cultural diplomacy. Turkish television dramas in particular have emerged as a key medium for promoting Turkish culture outside and globally. These dramas, which are particularly well-liked throughout the Middle East and the Balkans, highlight traditional cultural values while showcasing contemporary Turkish society, which contributes to the country's reputation as a modern yet culturally diverse place. According to the UNESCO report on “Export of Turkish drama series” in 2021, these dramas are increasing the national economy for sure, and more than just middle-east and balkans, the Turkish-made series are globally watched “*reaching some 700 million people in nearly 146 countries.*” (UNESCO, 2021)<sup>5</sup>. According to the same document of the Unesco, The Cultural and Creative Industries’ (CCI) account for 4.34% of employment and 2.88% of GDP, making them a major contributor to the Turkish economy. This development has been led by the Turkish ministry of Culture and Tourism, and has been successful. “Dizi”, or Turkish dramas, have grown to be one of Türkiye's most important cultural exports, increasing the country’s soft power across the globe. More than 600 million people watch these shows every year, and they are currently present in more than 150 countries but mainly present in regions such as Latin America, the Middle East, and South Asia. With an annual revenue of about \$600 million in 2021, Türkiye is the world's second-largest exporter of TV shows (UNESCO, 2021). By showcasing Türkiye’s rich history and contemporary identity to audiences around the world, Turkish dramas help in the country's cultural diplomacy. By promoting a positive perception of Türkiye and stimulating interest in its history and culture, these shows serve as unofficial ambassadors. The notable increase in travel to places like Istanbul, Cappadocia, and Bursa that are depicted in these dramas is indicative of this. Many tourists’ aim is to see the famous place of their favorite series, which strengthens the local economies and increases Türkiye's appeal as a historical and cultural center worldwide. This achievement shows how cultural items

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<sup>5</sup> [https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/dcc002/QPR\\_2021\\_TR\\_17d8573b-95a5-4875-a838-37057e9196d9\\_31.pdf](https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/dcc002/QPR_2021_TR_17d8573b-95a5-4875-a838-37057e9196d9_31.pdf)

may improve a nation's soft power and affect attitudes abroad. Furthermore, promoting Turkish culture abroad, facilitating educational exchanges, and establishing cultural ties with other countries are all made possible by Türkiye's investment in language and cultural institutions like the Yunus Emre Institute (YEI). The institute's aims are clearly indicated on its website<sup>6</sup>, “*To increase the number of people who forge bonds with, and are friendly to, Türkiye all around the world*” and “*To enhance Türkiye's recognition, credibility and prestige in the international arena.*”. Founded in 2009, the institute is one of Türkiye's most important organizations for strengthening its soft power and advancing cultural diplomacy. Yunus Emre was a Turkish poet and Sufi from the 13th century, he is considered as an important intellectual for humanism and universal values, which the thinking has inspired and enhanced the Turkish culture. The Yunus Emre Institute is now a crucial instrument in Türkiye's effort to promote intercultural understanding, establish international alliances, and help its influence worldwide. The organization, which runs 80 cultural centers across 50 countries, such as Pakistan, China, Palestine, Senegal, Ukraine, France, Canada, Bahrain, and others. (YEI website) YEI hosts a variety of events, such as literary translation projects, art exhibits, festivals, and Turkish language classes. Its global reach includes places like Europe, where it interacts with Turkish communities and diasporas, the Middle East, where it emphasizes shared historical and cultural links, and Central Asia, where it fosters relationships based on a shared Turkic history. Furthermore, recent forays into Latin America and Africa demonstrate Türkiye's increasing dedication to developing relations in formerly underrepresented areas (Güleç, 2015). Teaching Turkish is one of the institute's most effective initiatives. The YEI has created internationally acknowledged standardized curricula for Turkish language instruction and certification. Over 100,000 students have taken Turkish language classes offered by the YEI globally by 2021, fostering long-lasting ties and enhancing cultural ties between Türkiye and its students (UNESCO, 2021). These students support Türkiye's soft power diplomacy by serving as unofficial ambassadors in their home nations, many of whom go on to promote Turkish culture. Turkish literature and the arts are also actively promoted by the Yunus Emre Institute. Turkish literary works are translated into various languages through its programs, such as TEDA. The TEDA

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.yee.org.tr/tr>

Project aims to translate classical and contemporary works of Turkish culture, art and literature into languages other than Turkish by the well-known publishing houses of the respective countries, it is a translation and publication support project based on the publication and promotion of the language in the country or countries where it is spoken. Additionally, by hosting workshops and exhibitions around the world, the organization promotes traditional Turkish art forms like calligraphy, ceramics, and marbling. The institution regularly hosts festivals, concerts, and Turkish film screenings as part of its programming to promote intercultural understanding and highlight the diversity of Turkish culture. The promotion of public diplomacy is an essential component of the YEI's objective. The institute promotes communication and understanding with audiences from other countries by planning events that highlight Türkiye's historical, cultural, and contemporary identity. By assisting the Turkish diaspora in preserving their cultural legacy and promoting absorption into local societies, it also significantly contributes to the strengthening of links with this group, especially in Europe. The YEI has adopted digital channels in recent years in an effort to reach a wider audience. The COVID-19 epidemic has expedited worldwide changes, making online Turkish language classes and virtual cultural events crucial. By accessing the YEI's website we have access for example to 20 online courses to learn Turkish language. This change has made Turkish culture more accessible and enabled the institute to interact with younger or tech-savvy audiences. It also allows, to be present in countries where there is no physical YEI.

By using its strategic geopolitical location, cultural clout, and active diplomatic involvement to promote peace and resolve disputes, Türkiye has progressively established itself as a peacemaker in the global arena. Türkiye has embraced a more proactive foreign policy under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, frequently serving as a mediator in regional and international conflicts. Türkiye's soft power is greatly increased by its diplomatic role, which enables it to forge solid bonds with a range of stakeholders and exercise influence without using force. President Erdoğan has been instrumental in reinforcing Türkiye's status as a crucial mediator. Türkiye has demonstrated its growing significance as a mediator through its involvement in the Syrian war, by being the main support for Syrian opposition (Dalay, 2024) -even-

though this position has been criticized due to the increase of racism in Türkiye against Syrians- ; Türkiye's effort for peace in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine is remarkable as well. During the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine, Türkiye has been a crucial peace broker, using its advantageous location between the East and the West to arbitrate talks, provide military backing for Ukraine, and uphold strategic connections with Moscow. Türkiye exhibits its ability to stabilize the Black Sea region and support a practical approach to conflict resolution by pursuing a triangular balancing act that includes preventing Russian aggression, fortifying NATO ties, and encouraging communication. (Outzen, 2024). Beginning in the late 1980s with the fall of the Soviet Union, the long-running dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh—a region that is internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan but has a majority ethnic Armenian population—has resulted in two major wars, including the one in 2020 that saw Azerbaijan reclaim significant territories. By providing Azerbaijan with military support, notably cutting-edge drones, and strong diplomatic backing during the 2020 war, Türkiye has been instrumental in the fight. Türkiye actively participated in post-war reconstruction and regional connectivity initiatives after Azerbaijan's victory, including pushing for the Zangezur Corridor to connect Türkiye with the Caspian region. Although Türkiye has also advocated for peace negotiations and normalization with Armenia, its role as a regional stabilizer is complicated and significant due to its historical difficulties with Yerevan and alignment with Baku. (Papazian, 2024). Türkiye's diplomatic might has been further strengthened by Erdoğan's ability to keep cordial ties with both Western allies and Middle Eastern nations like Russia and Iran. His leadership in these peacebuilding initiatives is essential to Türkiye's soft power because it positions the nation as one that is dedicated to dialogue and stability in areas that are prone to violence. In addition to serving Türkiye's domestic interests, Erdoğan's pragmatic and dialogue-focused diplomacy enhances Türkiye's reputation internationally by establishing the nation as a responsible player in international peacebuilding (Nwosu, 2012). Türkiye is able to create an image of stability, humanitarianism, and moderation through measures like hosting peace conferences and mediating ceasefires. This enhances its soft power by appealing to audiences around the world that value collaboration and peace. Depending on the media outlet's political stance, there can be differences in how Erdoğan's diplomatic role and

Türkiye's peacebuilding efforts are portrayed. Right-wing media, for instance, frequently highlight Erdoğan's efforts to promote stability in the Middle East, his role as a mediator between Russia and NATO, and his support for Turkish sovereignty abroad. The effectiveness of Erdoğan's effort to establish Türkiye as a growing power on the international scene and to emphasize its role as a diplomatic and peacemaking power. (Benhaim, Öktem, 2015). On the other side, Erdoğan's internal policies, such as restricting press and political freedoms within Türkiye, may be criticized by left-leaning media, which occasionally harms Türkiye's soft power reputation internationally. Nevertheless, the same media also emphasize Türkiye's humanitarian activities, including its reception of refugees from Syria and other war zones, which might strengthen Türkiye's soft power in the eyes of the world community (International Crisis Group, podcast, 2023)<sup>7</sup>.

Although Türkiye's soft power initiatives are admirable, internal political difficulties and regional security concerns can compromise them. Sometimes, Türkiye's internal political dynamics and its involvement in regional conflicts—most notably Syria—make it difficult for it to present a consistent and positive image. These security and political issues may make it more difficult for Türkiye to keep up a positive international reputation. Balancing its modern, secular identity with its historic Islamic-Ottoman past is another difficulty facing Türkiye. Depending on the intended audience, this dichotomy may produce distinct impressions. Countries with a majority of Muslims may place more value on Türkiye's Islamic past than Western countries do on its secularism. Since Türkiye must negotiate these multiple identities to appeal to a range of international audiences, these divergent viewpoints may make its soft power initiatives more difficult. By portraying itself as a mediator, Türkiye enhances its diplomatic ties and fosters confidence with nations from different parts of the world. By garnering recognition and respect for its capacity to uphold regional security, handle humanitarian emergencies, and promote communication between disputing parties, mediation diplomacy is an essential component of Türkiye's soft power strategy. Türkiye's diplomatic engagement is a key component of its soft power, as seen by its participation in peace discussions and negotiations.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://shows.acast.com/60b88c52aca4ed0019987fa7/6479f77824aece0011a0ab6e>

## 6. TOURISM: A MAJOR TURKISH SOFT POWER TOOL

Another important pillar of Türkiye's soft power is tourism. Millions of tourists visit the country each year. Türkiye's tourism industry has grown significantly, securing its position as one of the most popular travel destinations in the world. Over 49.21 million foreign tourists visited the nation in 2023 (Invest in Türkiye, 2023)<sup>8</sup>, FIGURE 1. bringing in over \$55.87 billion in tourism-related income (“2023 Yılı Sınır Giriş-Çıkış İstatistikleri”, Turkish Tourism and Culture Ministry)<sup>9</sup>. Continued success was seen in the first quarter of 2024, when tourism revenue increased by 32.3% to \$8.69 billion (TÜİK, 2024)<sup>10</sup>. Türkiye continues to be an important hub for international travel, with GDP contributions expected to reach 12.5% in 2024 (WTTC, 2024)<sup>11</sup>. Drawn by its ancient buildings, its 21 UNESCO World Heritage sites such as the Sumela Monastery, Konya, and others, and natural wonders like Cappadocia or Pamukkale. This flood of tourists promotes mutual understanding and cultural exchange between Türkiye and the rest of the world. Türkiye can influence how others view its rich cultural legacy, friendliness, and scenic beauty through tourism. In addition to being a significant economic engine for Türkiye, tourism is essential to enhance the nation's soft power.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.invest.gov.tr/en/sectors/pages/tourism.aspx>

<sup>9</sup> <https://yigm.ktb.gov.tr/TR-338403/2023.html>

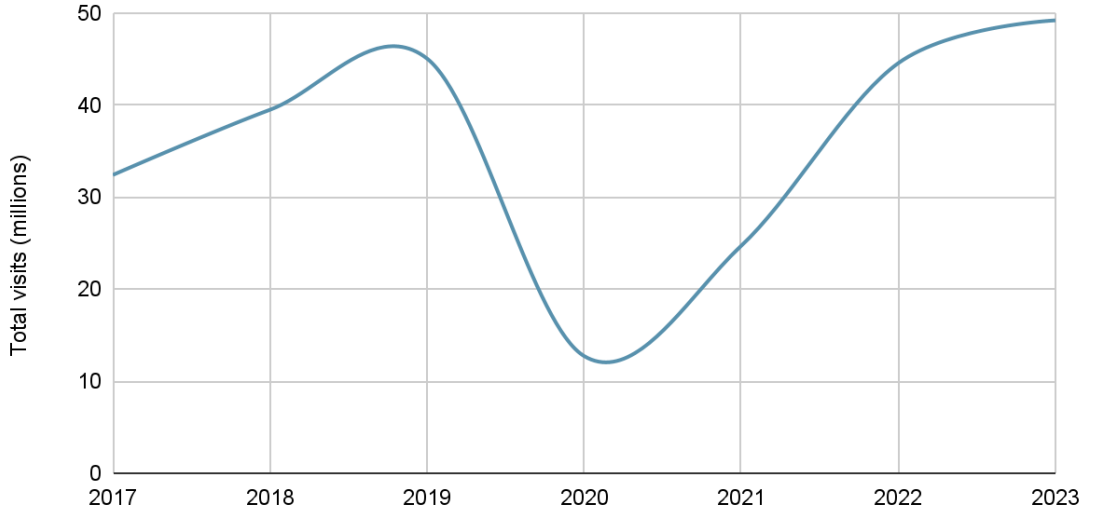
<sup>10</sup> <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Household-Domestic-Tourism-Quarter-I:-January-March,-2024-53703>

<sup>11</sup> <https://wtcc.org/news-article/travel-tourism-sector-reached-record-breaking-new-heights-last-year>

FIGURE 1.

### Total visits (millions) of Türkiye

Source: "2023 Yılı Sınır Giriş-Çıkış İstatistikleri", Turkish Tourism and Culture Ministry



Türkiye has established tourism as a vital tool to form its global image, encouraging cross-cultural communication, and strengthening diplomatic ties through calculated investments in infrastructures, culture, and international marketing. What is known as Marketing in the Business field, can be transcribed in International Relation as well, the strategic process of promoting and selling goods or services - and cultural values beyond a country border - could be applied to nations. This is, again, Nye in 2004 who brought this idea that a nation utilizes its global networks, soft power, and diplomatic channels to establish connections, promote understanding, and change attitudes. So, the usage of International Marketing. Later in 2010, Anholt wrote about the “*Nation Brand*” dealing with a nation as a brand, to understand and emphasize its different dimensions - culture, political, economical - All of this idea of nation branding leading to an international influence and cooperation.

Türkiye's economy depends heavily on tourism, which also plays a key role in the country's soft power strategy. In 2023, according to the airport data of Airports Council International (ACI), Türkiye was among the top 10 most visited nations in the world, taking the 5th place globally, and Istanbul being the first city the most visited of the world, and Antalya being the 4th one. The significant income generated by this tourist inflow goes to a number of economic sectors, such as local companies, transportation, hospitality, and retail. Beyond the short-term financial gains, tourism also supports long-term infrastructure development, generates employment, and stimulates regional and national economic growth. About 12% of Türkiye's GDP was generated by tourism in 2023 (WTTC, 2024), making it a substantial direct contributor to the nation's economy. This contribution is derived from the money spent by international visitors on products and services while they are in the nation. Spending by tourists benefits attractions, lodging facilities, dining establishments, and transit providers. *“International and domestic visitor spending also exceeded their previous records, reaching TRY 1.68TN and TRY 761.3BN respectively.”* (WTTC, 2024)

Additionally, the tourism sector multiplies the effects of other industries. Local manufacturers, suppliers, and service providers benefit from the increased demand for goods and services brought about by tourists. For instance, when tourists buy goods to take back to their home countries, local craftspeople, souvenir makers, and textile producers frequently profit from higher sales. Especially in rural and impoverished areas, this chain of effect strengthens the local economy by lowering poverty and generating job possibilities. One of the main employers in Türkiye is the tourism industry. *“The sector also supported more than 3.2MN jobs, representing one in 10 jobs across the country, and more than 18% above the 2019 high point.”* (WTTC, 2024) Including jobs in hotel, food service, tour operators, and transportation, the tourism sector directly employed over 3.2 million people and over 5 million people are employed as a result of tourism in globality, including indirect employment from industries like construction, retail, and agriculture (WTTC, 2024). In addition to creating jobs, tourism fosters the growth of skills in areas like customer service, hospitality, and language competency. Consequently, tourism generates a pool of talented workers that can benefit the nation's economy outside of the tourism industry.

Türkiye's socio economic stability depends heavily on the jobs created by tourism, which also promotes social mobility and supports a variety of communities. The advantages of tourism are not limited to large cities like Istanbul, Antalya or Izmir; they also extend to underserved and rural areas. Visitors to Türkiye's historical sites, cultural attractions, and natural wonders support the growth of local businesses outside of the country's cities. Cappadocia, Pamukkale, and Ephesus, for instance, are not just important cultural destinations; they are also important sources of revenue for the local population, supporting local agriculture, fostering small companies development, and attracting regional investment. According to the governmental website of the investment office, Türkiye is the 7th country of Europe for tourism FDI (foreign direct investment) between 2016 and 2020 “with 36 FDI projects, according to *fDi Intelligence’s Tourism Investment Report 2021.*” (Invest In Türkiye). According to the Action plans of the Türkiye Foreign Direct Investment Strategy forecasting from 2024 to 2028, the objective would be to increase the regional share in FDI inflows to 12%. Concentrating the FDI on six different main themes and objectives, “*Investment Climate and Competitiveness, Green Transformation, Digital Transformation, Global Value Chains (GVCs), Talent Pool , Communication and Promotion.*”<sup>12</sup>. The FDI aim is to make Türkiye a “global economic powerhouse” as said by Burak Dagliogly, the President of the Investment Office.

In order to accommodate foreign tourists, governments and private businesses engage in building and enhancing highways, airports, public transit systems, and hotel amenities. This is another way that tourism propels infrastructure development. Türkiye should anticipate more infrastructure upgrades that will raise its standing internationally as it grows its tourism industry. Projects like the Istanbul New Airport, one of the biggest international airports in the world, are excellent illustrations of how tourism investment can raise a nation's infrastructure to worldwide levels, benefiting not only visitors but also the local population and the economy of the country. The project began in 2015, the IST airport opened publicly on October 29, 2018, coinciding

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.invest.gov.tr/en/Documents/turkiye-foreign-direct-investment-strategy-2024-2028.pdf>

with the Republic Day of Türkiye, since that the airport has received the award of the European Best Airport in 2023, and the second-best airport of the world in 2021 at the Air Transport Award. (Simple Flying, 2023). According to the CEO of iGA Istanbul Airport, the operator of the airport, the airport is still in expansion and will be capable of welcoming 120 million people by 2025, and once the project is completed the airport's capacity will reach 200 million passengers. S. Bilgen also reported that the new airport was breaking the European aviation records, welcoming 80% of international passengers, half of them being on transfer, "*contributing directly to our economy through their foreign exchange expenditures*". The aim of this next year for Türkiye is to increase the number of people choosing Türkiye as a destination instead of being here for only the transfer. The national flag carrier of Türkiye, Turkish Airlines, has made use of IST as a hub for its vast network, which links flights on different continents. The airline's "*Stopover in Istanbul*" program promotes Türkiye as a tourism and cultural appeal by allowing transit passengers with lengthy layovers to explore the city. By highlighting IST's significance as a gateway to Türkiye as well as an airport, this initiative enhances Türkiye's soft power influence and global connectivity. Effectively, this program offers the Turkish Airlines passenger to "*enrich their travels by discovering the city's history and cultural life with Stopover in Istanbul - and enjoy free accommodation in partner hotels!*" (Turkish Airlines)<sup>13</sup>. The stopover needs to be of at least 20 hours to benefit from this free of charge stay. The passenger needs to apply 72 hours before their flight and give all their flight information, and preference in terms of accommodation, in a 4 star hotel for one night and for business class they may stay two nights in a 5-star hotel. This allows the passengers who were not planning to visit Türkiye, to discover in a short way the city, and maybe giving them the desire to come again, and as said S. Bilgen, to choose Türkiye as a destination and not only a stopover. Turkish Airlines serves as a cultural and diplomatic ambassador on a global basis, greatly enhancing Türkiye's soft power. With more than 300 destinations across the globe, the airline presents Türkiye as a friendly and approachable country. Türkiye is positioned as a must-see destination in its advertising campaigns visible on TV in multiple countries, such as France for example, and visible

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.turkishairlines.com/en-int/flights/stopover/>

also on their website GoTürkiye.com<sup>14</sup>, which frequently highlight famous Turkish landmarks and cultural features. Türkiye's influence is further expanded through sponsorships of international events, including UEFA tournaments, and collaborations with international brands. An important part of Turkish Airlines' global branding strategy and a vital instrument for bolstering Türkiye's soft power has been the airline's collaboration with UEFA. By officially sponsoring UEFA competitions, such as the esteemed UEFA Champions League, Turkish Airlines has partnered with one of the most well-known sports platforms globally. In addition to giving the airline unmatched worldwide exposure, this sponsorship has established Türkiye as a major participant in major international athletic events. Guy-Laurent Epstein, the UEFA marketing director told about this partnership: *“The UEFA Champions League is the world’s greatest club competition, and we are delighted to have Turkish Airlines on board as a partner. We both share a global reach, connecting fans across continents and we are delighted that their debut season as a partner will culminate in the final of this prestigious tournament taking place on home soil in Istanbul. We both share similar passions, and truly believe that the sky is the limit when it comes to our partnership.”* Through this collaboration, Turkish Airlines promotes Turkish hospitality and culture to a large, interested audience while showcasing the country's love of football, a game that unites people from all walks of life. With millions of viewers, the airline's branding is clearly visible in stadiums, on official tournament materials, and in international broadcasts. Turkish Airlines presents Türkiye as a dynamic, forward-thinking nation with a significant global presence by linking itself with the glamour and excitement of UEFA competitions. This calculated partnership demonstrates how Türkiye can use sports diplomacy to raise its profile abroad. The airline enhances Türkiye's reputation as a modern, vibrant nation and promotes international goodwill and cross-cultural exchange by embodying Turkish hospitality and service excellence. Turkish Airlines' important contribution to advancing Türkiye's tourism industry internationally flows naturally from its role in bolstering Türkiye's soft power through international connectivity and cultural diplomacy.

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<sup>14</sup> <https://goturkiye.com/>

In addition to its obvious economic benefits, tourism has developed into a platform for cultural diplomacy, allowing tourists to experience Türkiye's rich history, contemporary innovations, and friendliness, all of which enhance its diplomatic connections and worldwide prestige.

Türkiye's tourism industry serves as a platform for exhibiting its cultural legacy and richness, which has drastically changed its image abroad. The combination of ancient and modern Türkiye offers tourists from all over the world a complex and multi-layered view of the nation. Effectively in the yearly report on tourism of Invest in Türkiye, it highlights seven different types of tourism popular in Türkiye, Beach & Seas, Culture & Historical sites, Golf, Halal tourism, Health, Nature and Wellness. The Ottoman Empire as well as the ancient Hittite, Greek, Roman, and Byzantine civilizations legacy are attracting tourists from all over the world. Famous sites like Ephesus, Topkapi Palace, and the Hagia Sophia serve as reminders of Türkiye's historical and cultural importance as well as its ties to the rest of the world. Along with these historical sites, travelers looking for adventure and beauty are drawn to Türkiye's natural settings, like the Turkish Riviera, Cappadocia, Pamukkale, Mardin, İzmir or Antalya. As visitors from a variety of backgrounds enjoy the actual locations as well as the warmth and hospitality that Türkiye is known for, these locations provide the perfect setting for cross-cultural interaction. Cross-cultural interactions is the dynamic process of people or groups from various cultural backgrounds interacting with others, it allows them to navigate between cultural differences and so develops the understanding of one another, improving the cooperation and communication between individuals (Adler & Aycan, 2018).

A key element of soft power is international goodwill, this idea supports the goal of promoting goodwill and respect between countries, frequently through exchange programs and cultural diplomacy. Goodwill ambassadors, for example, are people who spread beliefs or viewpoints from one organization/country to another in order to build a positive relationship. Nye and Keohane in 2000, did not directly define international goodwill but it could be interpreted as the beneficial connections and

reciprocal advantages that result from states' interdependence, made possible by non-coercive means like trade, cooperation, and cross-cultural interactions. Keohane and Nye stress that cooperative tactics and soft power are essential for building long-lasting relationships that put common interests ahead of disagreement in an increasingly interconnected world. This viewpoint is consistent with the more general idea of international goodwill, which entails encouraging mutual respect, trust, and cooperative relationships between countries (Keohane & Nye, 2000). By providing a forum for cross-cultural interaction and business cooperation, tourism is essential to boosting Türkiye's standing abroad. By promoting tourism, Türkiye highlights its openness and hospitality, qualities that enhance its reputation internationally. Its appeal as a travel hub has been greatly increased by initiatives like the "Go Türkiye" campaign and Turkish Airlines' active participation in promoting the nation's destinations. Furthermore, Türkiye's investments in infrastructure, like Istanbul Airport, which promotes worldwide connectivity, strengthen its standing as a major force in international travel. By enabling foreign tourists to directly experience its cultural diversity, tourism also contributes to Türkiye's soft power by promoting goodwill and enduring partnerships. This industry boosts Türkiye's economy and international clout while fortifying its relations with other countries. Through tourism, Türkiye can interact with the globe outside of conventional political channels as a means of diplomacy. After seeing Turkish culture, history, and society firsthand, tourists frequently have favorable opinions of Türkiye when they return home.

Promoting Türkiye as a top international travel destination is mostly the responsibility of the Türkiye Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (TGA). The agency focuses on improving visitors' entire experience while drawing them in with creative national and international marketing. In order to maintain the tourist industry's competitiveness on a worldwide scale, TGA works to modernize and diversify the country's promotion. By promoting economic development and cross-cultural interaction, these programs seek to establish Türkiye as a leader in the travel and tourist sector. The agency was created in July 2019 and promotes Türkiye as a tourist destination both for domestic and international tourism. They are the one responsible for the promotion, one of the most important steps in a marketing strategy.

The term "*promotions*" refers to the full range of actions that inform the consumer about the brand, product, or service - in our case the country. The goal is to raise awareness, attract the customers, and persuade them to choose the product - the country- over competing ones (AMA Dictionary). In their monthly report<sup>15</sup> of November 2024, multiple information according to their communication is available. The Turkish ministry of Tourism is communicating on all platforms under "Go Türkiye". In November they have broadcast for example seven different films in more than 200 countries on TV, and 15 films in 200 countries, for 1,6 billions views for the digital campaigns. In 2021, the year on the agency started to publish the reports, the only TV campaign "Istanbul is the new cool" was broadcast on only 19 countries and for the digital campaign six films were broadcast in 79 countries for 1.3 billions viewers, which demonstrate an important increase in terms of broader impact, resources, operational capacity and implication. Their instagram page followers has increased by 271% (985,742 in 2021 and 3,665,035 in 2024), their TikTok account is the most popular reaching 4,100,000 followers in 2024. Go Türkiye has also been present on Douyin - considered often as the Chinese Tik Tok - and Vkontakte - the Russian Facebook - since April 2024, showing Türkiye commitment to diversify its target. Russian tourists were and are already present in Türkiye, less Chinese tourists. Promoting on these social media allows Türkiye to engage with the younger population and reach a varied geographical audience. The report also shows the presence of the TGA in worldwide fairs, in London, Warsaw, or Doha. The TGA is also organizing conferences, congresses and hosting events. The 35 hosting event was made possible in November 2024 for 390 guests from 41 different countries to discover 30 different Turkish cities such as Van, Diyarbakir, Mardin, Gaziantep, Sirnak, and others. They have hosted influences and press events sometime in partnership with Turkish Airlines Offices from other countries. These events reached a total of 1,214,1 billion people for the period from January to November 2024. It is also on the TGA website where we can have access to all Go Türkiye promotion spots for TV or on digital, which highlight theme such as gastronomy - with The Michelin Guide videos about restaurants, chefs, neighborhood specialities, etc.-, cultural heritage - for example a presentation video about Zeugma, an ancient antique city-, landscape -they have a series of videos "Sight

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<sup>15</sup> <https://tga.gov.tr/en/activities/monthly-reports>

& Sound Sessions” on which a Turkish DJ is mixing in a place in Türkiye, a drone is showing the natural beauty of the around in the same time - or adventure tourism - showing the Paragliding experience in Babadag, making short interviews with tourists who jumped. By strategically attending international tourism fairs and working with international media, Türkiye hopes to draw a wide range of visitors and establish itself as a vibrant, welcoming, and alluring travel destination. This strategy combines the goal of soft power with the expansion of tourism.

By promoting people-to-people interactions through tourism, Türkiye develops unofficial diplomacy that helps in the development of lasting ties with other nations. In particular, the growth of cross-border tourism projects has helped to increase Türkiye's regional importance. To promote reciprocal tourist development, Türkiye has signed a number of tourism cooperation agreements with its neighbors, as with the Turkic alliance, the Organization of Turkic States (OTS). OTS held its first summit in 2011, but was established on October 3, 2009, with the aim of fostering cooperation and collaboration among Turkic-speaking nations. Its founding members include Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. Turkmenistan and Hungary are participating as observers. The OTS seeks to strengthen cultural, economic, political, and social ties among its member states, promoting mutual understanding and development. By working together, the member countries aim to enhance their collective influence in regional and global affairs while preserving their rich cultural heritage. In 2014, in Bodrum the 4th OTS Summit was held, with the major theme “*Tourism Cooperation*”. Initiatives such as the “*Turkic World Tourism Capital*” designed to enhance local tourism. Cities like Kokand in Uzbekistan, Shamakhi in Azerbaijan, and Turkistan in Kazakhstan have been named “*Turkic World Tourism Capitals*” organizing numerous events, festivals, and initiatives to promote tourism growth. Furthermore, the Secretariat has been proactively advocating for the Modern Silk Road Joint Tour Package and coordinating international conferences, training sessions, and various initiatives to strengthen tourism cooperation among Member and Observer States. The Modern Silk Road Joint Tour Package is a creative project designed to bring the ancient Silk Road back to life via contemporary tourism.

This initiative links nations along the historical trade routes, to develop cohesive, cross-border travel experiences. Through the integration of cultural, historical, and economic interactions, the tour package promotes enhanced comprehension and cooperation among involved countries. The Modern Silk Road Joint Tour Package unites several nations that boast a rich heritage from the Silk Road. Every nation adds their own cultural and historical factors, resulting in a rich and interconnected travel experience. This partnership enables travelers to discover the common heritage of commerce, artistry, and culture that characterized the Silk Road. A key feature of the tour is its emphasis on cultural and historical discovery. Travelers can explore ancient cities, important trade centers, and notable landmarks along the Silk Road. These excursions highlight the blend of different cultures, featuring architectural marvels, historic marketplaces, and UNESCO World Heritage locations that exhibit the varied impacts of earlier times. The tours included in the provide a range of multi-country travel plans. Visitors engage with regional customs, handicrafts, and foods, resulting in a comprehensive, immersive exploration of the area. This tour took four years to develop, after multiple ministerial, working group meetings and familiarization trips. The travelers could visit the five member countries, or make the trip personalized as their wishes. The familiarization trips took place with 59 journalists, bloggers and regional experts, and tour operators representatives. 16 different countries were represented during these test trips. As said the travelers could choose to visit only one, more or all countries members, the tour details are on the Modern Silkroad Joint Tour Packages website. They are recommending five days in Türkiye, visiting Istanbul major tourist sites, Konya, Kaymakli and Cappadocia. Three days are reserved for Azerbaijan, four for Kazakhstan, four days for Kyrgyzstan and finally five days for Uzbekistan. On the website<sup>16</sup>, we have access of some short review of these first participant, Finn Olaf Jones an American journalist said about this tour *“There is no one around you have a very few tourists, this is an unspoiled area, and I think this is a great idea for the Turkic council to be developing trips among this area, because it is so rich with sights both natural and historical and wonderful people and the food is outstanding [...] This is a must go for travelers who are willing to take the next step before it changes”*. On the website, we have access, after some research, to all detailed

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.modernsilkroadtour.com/en/what-do-participants-say>

information about the famous sites of all the countries that will be visited for the travelers who decided to join one of the tours. The package “*aims to bring tourists together with the unique cultural, spiritual, historical and gastronomic life of the traditional Silk Road. This joint package will pave the way to increase the flow of tourists among the Turkic States and also boost the touristic visits from third parties to these countries.*” (OTS Website). A promising project, the Modern Silkroad Joint Tour Package seeks to encourage travel along the ancient Silk Road while offering a singular chance for cross-cultural interaction and discovery. But there is still a lot that could be done to improve the tour's communication and online presence. It is difficult to find comprehensive information about the tours, locations, and general package structure due to out-of-date websites and poor user experiences. Furthermore, questions concerning transparency and efficient marketing are raised by the absence of statistical data or recent updates about visitor numbers and tour results. The initiative's current marketing and communication strategy is inadequate, despite the fact that it has enormous potential to increase tourism and promote cultural heritage. Improving the user experience, giving current information, and maintaining regular communication could greatly increase this endeavor's visibility and success.

Türkiye's foreign policy since these programs aim to enhance diplomatic relations in addition to promoting a common cultural heritage. For instance, cooperative tourism routes connecting Türkiye and Greece or cultural contacts with Central Asian nations aid in fostering communication, bridging political divides, and enhancing Türkiye's standing as a regional diplomatic leader. Even Though a known rivalry between Greece and Türkiye, both countries have made efforts to collaborate. Numerous territorial, cultural, and geopolitical conflicts have influenced the historically complicated relationship between Greece and Türkiye. Historical disputes, territorial claims, and divergent national interests have all contributed to tensions between the two countries over the years. However, a greater understanding of the value of communication and collaboration in tackling these issues has emerged in recent decades. Through diplomatic efforts and collaboration on a variety of issues, both nations have aimed to advance understanding and peaceful coexistence. With both

Greece and Türkiye financing programs to encourage reciprocal travel and cross-cultural interactions, tourism has become a crucial area of collaboration. The goal of these initiatives is to foster mutual respect and understanding as well as closer ties between their respective peoples; by providing chances for cultural experiences, interpersonal relationships, and economic growth, tourism seems to be the perfect tools to improve nations' relations. Türkiye and Greece have been able to project a more cohesive image to the world through a variety of tourism initiatives, shared heritage sites, and cooperative events. The 5th Joint Tourism Committee Meeting between both parties was held in Athens between the Turkish minister of Culture and Tourism, Mehmet Nuri Ersoy, and Greece's Minister of Tourism, Olga Kefaloyanni, they both signed the Joint Tourism Committee Meeting Protocol. The Greek Minister stated, *"Tourism helps break historical prejudices and brings the people of Türkiye and Greece closer."* Minister Ersoy highlighted *"This collaboration will yield substantial economic and cultural benefits, opening a new chapter in our relations."* They agreed on the collaboration between them especially on promotional campaigns, sustainable tourism projects, and niche areas such as gastronomy, agrotourism and health tourism. Notwithstanding the difficulties, both nations are still striving for a more collaborative future, utilizing tourism as a means of promoting respect for one another and common interests. (Athens-Macedonia News Agency).

Türkiye is also developing its diplomatic relations with more distant countries. As with Thailand in September 2018 a declaration of partnership between the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Türkiye and the Ministry of Culture of Thailand on the occasion of the 60th Anniversary of the Diplomatic Relations between Türkiye and Thailand. Both countries agreed on a tourism cooperation agreement. *"The two Parties shall create favorable conditions for the development of long-term cooperation in the field of tourism for mutual benefit of the two countries."*, *"The two parties shall promote and encourage travel, exchange of information on tourism, culture, lifestyle and good understanding between the two countries."* in the Agreement on tourism cooperation between the Government of the Republic of Türkiye and the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand. Ankara, 11 November 2019, framed by the United Nation. With tourism acting as a key instrument for promoting

bilateral ties and understanding, the relationship between Thailand and Türkiye can be seen as an illustration of soft power. Both nations use their natural beauty, cultural heritage, and hospitality sectors to improve perceptions and fortify their international standing. Both countries strengthen their soft power by promoting tourism, which allows them to present their traditions and values in an interesting and approachable manner. Their dedication to promoting goodwill is demonstrated by collaborative tourism initiatives like cross-promotional campaigns and participation in joint fairs. These initiatives show how tourism can be used as a strategic tool to improve diplomatic and cultural relations between countries, in addition to its economic advantages.

The Safe tourism initiative was launched in June 2020 as a response to the COVID-19 and “*certifying tourist facilities’ compliance with international hygiene measures against the COVID-19 pandemic in order to present a safe travel experience to all our guests.*” (Safe tourism website)<sup>17</sup>. The program is aimed at different objectives but mainly about health, hygiene and safety protocol to cultivate the confidence of tourists. It includes accommodation, restaurant, touristic tour, transfers, exhibitions... everything in touch with the hospitality and tourism sector. A logo is given to be placed on the vehicles, the lobby of the concerned hotels, restaurants, etc for the tourists to be able to recognize the infrastructure and vehicles that received accreditation. A QR code is included in the logo to provide clear access to the inspection data. The certificates are valid for a month. The “ASSESSMENT FORM FOR HYGIENE PRACTICES FOR ACCOMMODATION FACILITIES” have a total of 117 questions - criteria - there is about the staff training, if the water kettles and other rooms equipments are sanitized at the check-out, are the cleaning chemicals of the kitchen and the equipment are place separately, is the logo of the Safe Tourism Sign Board hung properly? The Safe Tourism Program's strong procedures were recognized on a global scale. During a difficult time for the world travel sector, it assisted Türkiye in preserving its standing as a top travel destination. The initiative

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<sup>17</sup> <https://safetourism.goturkiye.com/>

was successful in fostering confidence among travelers and helped Türkiye's tourism industry bounce back from the pandemic. But in practice, safety was prioritized over more comprehensive environmental efforts.

Speaking about applying marketing rules on foreign policies to increase a country's soft power, Türkiye utilizes different strategies to target a variety of tourist demographics and increase its attractiveness on a global scale. By attracting foreign tourists seeking alternative healthcare treatments and showcasing the country's modern medical infrastructure, the promotion of medical and wellness tourism adds another facet to Türkiye's soft power. The country's reputation in medical tourism is high, the prices are low, the professionals are qualified, and advanced technology. Türkiye imposed itself in medical tourism, especially with the hair transplantation techniques, but also more and more about global surgeries, check-ups, urology and cardiology. Many Turkish hospitals have received the accreditation from the Joint Commission International (JCI), which is a sign for the patients of a qualitative medical service. The JCI is a United States based nonprofit organization, this accreditation is one of the strictest in the world according to the sanitary field, having more than 1200 standards to analyze per infrastructure. The organization works in more than 100 countries and aims to increase the patients' security by ameliorating the quality of professional attention. Many of the Turkish hospitals have an international patient center, offering a large range of services for facilitating their process. In Türkiye, there are a total of 41 establishments accredited with JCI. (Heal In Türkiye)<sup>18</sup> For example, the Turkish Acıbadem Hospital Group which has 24 hospitals, in five different countries -Türkiye, North Macedonia, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Netherland-, 15 medical center, an average of 5 millions patients per year, and has 22,500 professionals, is one of the most famous medical group of Türkiye. The first JCI accreditation was received in 2006, for Acıbadem Kent Hospital, and six other hospitals followed the same path between 2010 and 2029 for the last one, accrediting the quality of these hospitals. On Acıbadem website<sup>19</sup> all information is available, and they are easily reachable -24/7 consultations

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<sup>18</sup> <https://healinturkiye.gov.tr/why-turkey>

<sup>19</sup> <https://acibademinternational.com/>

are available, international call center via their number, via WhatsApp, via mail, via social media, etc. *“Once International patients choose to come to Türkiye for their treatment, they can easily get their travel and treatment plans from Acıbadem information offices. Until now Acıbadem launched more than 50 information offices outside of Türkiye. International patients will be warmly welcomed at our Health Point desk once they have arrived at the airport in Türkiye. Patients can wait and use wifi until their transfer. Our patients will be transferred directly to their hotel or to hospital by private transportation. At our Health Point desks, located in hospitals, our translators will be welcoming our patients and support them throughout their treatment within 20 different languages.”*. The group is also providing the estimation of the cost, the assistance with the visa procedures, hotel arrangement, transportation from the airport, translation, easy payment procedures, assistance with international insurance companies, etc. making the decision making and the arrival easier for the international patients. (Acıbadem international website) According to the IHH -is a Malaysian group holding Acıbadem group- yearly report<sup>20</sup> the average occupancy of Acıbadem group in 2023 is 70% and the inpatient admission is 249,829 people. It is stipulated that *“half of Acıbadem business are in non-Turkish Lira denominations, such as Euros. Acıbadem will continue to attract more foreign patients from its surrounding regions and grow its Euro-based revenue portion. [...] Currently, more than 45% of Acıbadem’s revenue is from foreign medical travelers who seek treatment in Türkiye, and from its European operations. We will focus on growing this portion of the business as part of our currency risk diversification strategy to mitigate the effects of a volatile Lira on the Group. Our Türkiye operations will continue to focus on attracting more medical travelers into our network of hospitals in Istanbul. Also, a portion of its foreign currency denominated bank borrowings will be fully repaid by mid-2024.”* (IHH Healthcare Berhad annual report 2023)<sup>21</sup> Showing that investing in attracting foreign patients is vital for medical groups of Türkiye. Acıbadem presents Türkiye as a center for reasonably priced and high-quality healthcare. This improves the nation's reputation abroad and builds trust with foreigners who have direct

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.insage.com.my/ir/cmn/downloading.aspx?sFileName=24355000055430&sReportType=AUDIT&sCompanyCode=IHH>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.insage.com.my/ir/cmn/downloading.aspx?sFileName=24355000055430&sReportType=AUDIT&sCompanyCode=IHH>

experience with its healthcare system. Globally speaking, Türkiye has attracted in the second quarter of 2024 801,723 tourists-patients (TUIK). By making research about the medical sector in Türkiye, the sources and datas available are wide and consequent, Heal in Türkiye, a government supported online portal is only aiming to promote Türkiye as medical tourism destination, the website is also promoting the Turkish Airline partnership offering up to 20% for any -foreign- person who is visiting Türkiye for medical purpose, for the patient and two accompanying persons. Other advantages are also trying to push the tourists to come for medical purposes, facilitating the decision for those hesitating. According to the 2011 report of the World Health Organization (WHO) jointly with the IRIS, in 2010, more than 100,000 foreigners came to Türkiye in the whole year for medical services, showing that the country's international marketing is effective.

While Türkiye emerged as the European medical hub, some concerns are still emerging, and the country needs to work carefully on this pan of its soft power. Effectively, many press articles, social media posts, reviews, and comments are speaking about aggressive marketing tactics from Turkish clinics, complications after surgery, sometimes fatal - according to The Times, since 2019, at least 28 British patients have passed away due to medical complications after a passage in Türkiye. In order to maintain Türkiye's standing as a top medical tourism destination and protect the health of foreign patients, these problems highlight the necessity of more regulatory control and open procedures.

The medical tourism industry in Türkiye is a distinctive fusion of soft power diplomacy and healthcare innovation. Türkiye has improved its reputation as a medical center and a pioneer in public diplomacy by consistently enhancing its healthcare system and cultivating international collaborations. The nation secures its place as a global influencer in healthcare and beyond, fosters cultural interchange, and fosters international goodwill through medical tourism.

Student exchanges are one of the best ways that tourism supports Türkiye's soft power. As part of its involvement in the Erasmus+ program as an example. The nation joined the European program in 2004, in its effort to strengthen its relation with the European Union and improve its educational system via reaching the international community. The program is open to students, apprenticeship, teacher, formatter, internship but also voluntary. In 2023, 24 121 learners and 11 042 staff came to Türkiye through Erasmus ; This is also 40 746 learners leaving Türkiye and 18 806 staff. (Data on Erasmus+ in Türkiye in 2023 - fact sheet)<sup>22</sup>. Even Though there is still almost half more leavers, Türkiye's attraction in terms of education is growing up, in a research of Débarre and Erdinç in 2022 they are pointing out that the gap was more important, in 2018, the number of leavers - 17,319 - was 5 times more than comers - 4,171- The program probably recovering from the image of the attempted coup of 2016. By taking part in Erasmus+, Türkiye sought to foster cooperation and understanding between its students and their European counterparts. Since then, the initiative has grown to be a key component of Türkiye's soft power strategy, positioning the nation as a desirable center for intercultural communication and education.

Türkiye has accepted more and more international students throughout the years, especially those from Africa, and especially Maghreb countries. Comparatively to Erasmus + students, the international students are coming to study for at least 2 years - talking about higher education. During the year 2022, there were a total of 260,316 foreign students enrolled in Turkish higher education institutions, beside them “1,434 international academics with PhDs work at 169 universities” (YÖK, 2023). The process of admission is different between public and private schools. It is still a long process for international students to join a Turkish public university. Taking the example of Galatasaray University, it is really a complicated - described as “*impossible process*” by a teacher of the university- process for joining the university for a non-turkish student outside of Erasmus + program, even though there are still some motivated students who did it. But according to the 2023 University Monitoring and Evaluation General Report of the YÖK, Turkish universities are expanding their

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<sup>22</sup> <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/factsheets/2023/t%C3%BCrkiye>

collaboration with international universities, increasing the number of possible interested incoming and exiting students, developing the relation between countries, and increasing the number of “diplomats”. The number of agreements for Erasmus is certainly increasing, but also Dual Degree Programs and Joint Research Projects. Istanbul Technical University has for example multiple agreements with European universities for dual degree programs allowing students to earn a double diploma, but also allowing a global exposure for both universities, fostering cross-culture interactions and preparing the students for the international market. The joint research projects are cooperative scientific or academic projects carried out by researchers or organizations from two or more organizations, frequently located in different countries. These initiatives seek to address common scientific issues or challenges by pooling knowledge, resources, and viewpoints. The results of cooperative research are usually published in joint papers, patents, or products, and joint research frequently benefits from funding from governments, corporate groups, or international organizations. The searchers are focusing on the same goals but living in different regions of the world, benefiting from a mutual knowledge exchange, and shared recognition. Also, the way of teaching is important for Turkish education recognition, according to the same report of the YÖK, more than 2,000-degree programs are taught in English, increasing from 2010 to 2023 the number of english-taught degrees by 40%. (YÖK, 2023). In the research work of Patrick C. Lewis and Demet Lüküslü in May 2024, Syrian students are the most present over the country with a significant increase of other nationalities, as Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Iraq, Somalia, Egyptian students -the presence of this profile is translating a historical and regional important presence. The authors are also precise “*For most international students, Türkiye is a temporary residence: a place to earn a degree and explore the world before returning to their countries, a way station onto Europe or North America, or an interim site of refuge from political or economic crises back home.*”. (Lewis, Lüküslü, 2024) Türkiye needs to work on its student retention, and open position and domestic mind to try to make European and Middle Eastern long term workers especially due to an important brain drain of the Turkish students seeking for better university abroad -which can also make of them unofficial diplomats.

In addition to supporting the local economy, the international students serve as cultural ambassadors, promoting enduring diplomatic ties between Türkiye and their home nations. International students get a personal look at Turkish culture through these university exchanges, where they visit Turkish colleges, participate in community service projects, and even learn the language. These students gain a more complex and favorable view of Türkiye by engaging with Turkish society, which they then take back to their own nations. Because the students become unofficial diplomats who share their experiences and support Türkiye within their own social and cultural circles, these international students play a crucial role in advancing Türkiye's soft power. Additionally, foreign students frequently establish enduring professional and personal ties with Turkish nationals, fostering a network of friendship that lasts long after their studies are over. Through those programs, Türkiye can connect with a youthful, multicultural population that is more receptive to interacting with people from different cultures and forming global connections. Given that many of these students will go on to occupy prominent roles in their home nations, whether in industry, government, or civil society, Türkiye's diplomatic impression is boosted by the favorable impressions they have made while there. Furthermore, universities and other higher education establishments in Türkiye are essential to soft power. By providing international student-attracting programs and scholarships, “*The latter phenomenon is exemplified by the creation of the state-run Türkiye Scholarships Program (Türkiye Bursları) in 2012—a program that reportedly received 117,000 applications from 162 countries in 2023 and which now awards 5,000 undergraduate and graduate scholarships to international students annually.*” (Lewis, Lüküslü, 2024) Türkiye establishes itself as a leader in higher education, enhancing its cultural influence and attracting talent from around the world -but also tries to retain the national and international brains. As the upcoming generation of scholars, professionals, and world leaders learn about Türkiye's modern accomplishments, cultural diversity, and position in international affairs, this educational exchange functions as a kind of public diplomacy.

For Türkiye, the changing tourism scene has presented both new opportunities and challenges. More and more tourists are looking for more ethical and ecological travel options that fit with their values. This draws in eco-aware tourists looking for sustainable adventures. In order to promote responsible tourism practices like waste management, the use of renewable energy, and the preservation of natural resources, the Turkish government and local stakeholders are investing in ecotourism. Türkiye has made an effort to include sustainability into its tourism industry by encouraging eco-friendly methods that protect the environment and improve the nation's reputation abroad. Türkiye's dedication to environmental control is demonstrated by the growth of eco-lodges, sustainable resorts, and green tourism activities in areas like Antalya, Muğla, and Cappadocia, which draws eco-aware tourists to the country. Supporting local communities through tourism has also been a priority for Türkiye as part of its CSR programs. The Türkiye's Sustainable Tourism program started in 2022 and “ensures to maximize social and economic benefits for local communities, enhances cultural heritage, protects biodiversity, ecosystems and landscapes, reduces pollution and conserves resources.” (GoTürkiye.com) by verification and certificate, accommodations, tour-operators and even destinations which meet the standards of the Turkish program. These criteria are meeting the international CSR standards. The program has been developed for the first time in Türkiye between the government (The Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Culture and Tourism & Türkiye Tourism Promotion and Development Agency) and the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) which put in place international norms for sustainable tourism and have the highest standards for sustainable tourism of the world. The obtention of the certification is in three steps, and verifies a total of 42 criteria with 167 indicators. (Fact sheet of Sustainable Tourism, TC. Kültür ve turizm bakanligi and TGA)<sup>23</sup> The criteria are grouped in four different themes, “effective sustainability planning, maximizing social and economic benefits for the local community, enhancing cultural heritage, and reducing negative impacts to the environment.” (CSTC website)<sup>24</sup>. There are a total of

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<sup>23</sup> [https://cdn.tga.net.tr/tga-prod/document\\_pool/2024/1/25/Sustainable-Tourism-Program\\_01.10.2023-de2ea831-a4db-45fc-9373-94a485a85b38.pdf](https://cdn.tga.net.tr/tga-prod/document_pool/2024/1/25/Sustainable-Tourism-Program_01.10.2023-de2ea831-a4db-45fc-9373-94a485a85b38.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.gstcouncil.org/>

19,076 certified facilities in total in November 2024, comparatively in November 2023 there were a total of 8,520 facilities certified by the Sustainable Tourism Program. (TGA, Monthly activity report)

FIGURE 2 -



The figure 2 shows a considerable recent acceleration in focusing on sustainability by increasing the coverage of sustainable certification. We can also advance that a project like the new Silk Road, studied previously, is entering into a new sustainable Türkiye, promoting its cultural heritage. Türkiye guarantees that locals profit from the economic inflow of tourists by encouraging community-based tourism (CBT). CBT is defined by the WTO in 2009 as the “*Tourism development that places the community at the centre of tourism planning, development and management. CBT aims to improve the residents’ quality of life by optimizing local economic benefits, protecting the natural and cultural environments and providing high quality visitor experiences*”. (World Tourism Organization, 2009). The main example of the CBT in Türkiye is given on the United Nation website, Future is in Tourism, UNDP Türkiye CO, as part of the "Future is in Tourism" campaign, the Lavender Scented Village Project in Kuyucak.

This initiative, which was carried out in collaboration with the UNDP, Anadolu Efes, and the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, demonstrates how tourism can support local enterprise, encourage rural development, and empower communities—especially women. The village supports 93% of the national lavender production. This cooperative for women offered training about tourism in the area, how to manage and welcome in a guest house, design and marketing. The project has increased the number of visitors in this rural area, passing from 20,000 in 2016 to 1 million visitors in 2019. Of the 2000 trained persons, 1,104 were women, including the gender in the tourism value chain. This project is one of the major advances in Türkiye in terms of sustainable tourism and has motivated other areas to do the same. The sustainable projects promote Türkiye rich natural and cultural heritage, balancing between the traditional and preservation of the tradition and the investment on modern tourism, attracting as we see more and more tourists. By trying to portray Türkiye as a responsible and forward-thinking country, this strategy not only strengthens the tourism industry's sustainability but also advances Türkiye's soft power. The growing emphasis on community-based tourism as promoted by organizations like UNWTO reflects an ideal, but the reality still faces significant challenges in implementation, particularly in ensuring sustainable and inclusive practices. In the World Economic Forum white paper of September 2023, the authors are addressing the challenges faced by Türkiye in terms of travel and tourism sustainability. Water stress is in the eagan cost region an important issue “*Türkiye scores more than 20% below the index average for water stress, with most of its Aegean and Mediterranean coasts under high stress and at medium-high risk of water depletion.*” (Karasar and Gomez, 2023)<sup>25</sup> When the demand for water outpaces the supply or when low quality limits its usage, water stress results. It gauges the strain on an area's water supplies by taking into account variables including population density, industrial demands, agricultural production, and environmental regulations. It can be caused by an over usage of the water resource, the climate change, the pollution, and a poor management of the resources. It is an important issue for the residents of the region who are seeing their live-ability

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[https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_Driving\\_Turkiyes\\_Travel\\_and\\_Tourism\\_Development\\_2023.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Driving_Turkiyes_Travel_and_Tourism_Development_2023.pdf)

decreasing, and even more since the tourism sector can be in danger in the region due to this water stress. An important obstacle to Türkiye's use of soft power is overtourism, which can jeopardize the nation's attempts to promote a welcoming and sustainable image abroad. Overcrowding, environmental damage, and stressed infrastructure are all results of the tourist concentration in well-known locations like Istanbul, Antalya, and the Mediterranean and Aegean shores. With a large percentage of concentration in a small number of areas, it can exacerbate unfavorable opinions about the viability of the destination. Additionally, the problem is made worse by high seasonality and short stays; about 80% of the international tourists go to Antalya and Istanbul alone, which restricts the spatial distribution of the advantages of tourism, and again concentrates the infrastructure (Karasar and Gomez, 2023). The authors are also pointing to another big issue for Turkish tourism related to soft power, the decrease of resident live-ability. Effectively, the rent prices are increasing, the resources are being damaged, the perpetual overcrowding of some areas is hard to live in, even-more when we know that Türkiye has been facing monumental inflation for years. This decrease of buying power and quality of life could be felt by tourists who can leave the country with a bad image of the country due to “backlash by residents”.

Türkiye's diplomatic efforts and its capacity to project soft power internationally are closely related to the economic impact of tourism. The pleasant experiences of foreign tourists act as unofficial ambassadors for Türkiye, utilizing tourism as a tool for public diplomacy. Positive travel experiences encourage visitors to tell friends, family, and coworkers about their experiences and suggest Türkiye, which broadens its impact outside of official government-to-government relations. Additionally, Türkiye is able to reinvest its tourism earnings on diplomatic and cultural projects, which are essential to strengthening its soft power. Tourism revenue can be used to sponsor foreign cultural initiatives like film festivals, art exhibits, and educational exchanges, all of which enhance Türkiye's standing abroad and foster cross-cultural understanding. Türkiye's influence on the international scene is increased by its rising popularity as a travel destination. The nation's tourism policy is in line with its larger diplomatic objectives of establishing Türkiye as a major regional player and international center of culture. Türkiye's capacity to impact global

discussions on topics like cultural heritage, tourism policy, and sustainable development grows as more nations and foreign visitors become aware of its charms. As a result, Türkiye's standing in international organizations like the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), where it actively engages in debates over sustainable tourism practices and policy, is enhanced. Being a popular travel destination in the Middle East, Europe, and Asia, Türkiye is able to establish and reinforce diplomatic relations with a number of different regions. Türkiye's reputation as a diplomatic actor with considerable soft power is further enhanced by tourism, which enables it to portray itself as a mediator between Eastern and Western states. Strong tourism ties with Türkiye increase the likelihood of additional forms of interaction between the two nations, including trade, security, and cross-cultural interactions.

In order to make sure that the advantages of tourism are both financially and environmentally responsible, Türkiye is spending more and more on sustainable tourism techniques. Initiatives for sustainable tourism are centered on reducing the environmental impact of travel, protecting cultural landmarks, and encouraging tourists to behave responsibly. The Turkish government is promoting eco-tourism and cultural tourism that respects the environment and local people in collaboration with the corporate sector. This dedication to sustainability not only fits in with international trends but also establishes Türkiye as a progressive travel destination.

Türkiye's economic influence and soft power will only increase as it expands its range of tourism products and establishes itself as a world leader in environmentally friendly travel.

In Türkiye, tourism is more than just a business; it is a strategic instrument that is mixed with the nation's diplomatic effort and soft power projection capabilities. Türkiye has established a strong and vibrant tourist industry that not only propels economic growth but also strengthens its global impact by utilizing its rich cultural legacy, varied attractions, and modern infrastructure for tourism. The contribution of tourism to Türkiye's economy lays the preparation for future economic growth, cultural

diplomacy, and international cooperation, establishing Türkiye as a major actor in the world economy and diplomacy.



## 7. TÜRKIYE'S TOURISM SOFT POWER: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

As we studied in the previous part, Türkiye's tourism industry is essential for its soft power, which allows the nation to expand its influence internationally through diplomatic contacts, economic exchanges, and cultural exchanges. But even with its expansion and promise, the industry still faces several obstacles that limit its ability to fully represent Türkiye abroad. Nonetheless, the industry has several issues that affect its efficacy and global influence. These difficulties include anything from infrastructure and sustainability concerns to controlling overtourism, guaranteeing security, and promoting inclusion in travel experiences -as observed in the preceding parts-. These issues, which are closely associated with tourism, touch on more general geopolitical, cultural, and sociopolitical facets in addition to economic ones. In a world that is becoming more competitive, resolving these problems is essential to ensuring that Türkiye preserves and strengthens its soft power. This section will examine the particular difficulties that the Turkish tourism industry faces and offer solutions.

There are notable regional differences in Türkiye's tourism industry, with some regions drawing the majority of visitors while others are still undeveloped. The country's soft power projection, cultural interaction, and economic progress are all impacted by this unequal distribution. Türkiye's tourism business is dominated by the coastal regions of the Mediterranean and Aegean, which include cities like Antalya, Muğla, and İzmir, and Istanbul. These regions are popular travel destinations for both domestic and foreign travelers because of their developed infrastructure, rich cultural heritage, and pleasant weather. According to a study of Kervankıran and Sert Eteman, in 2023, Istanbul and Antalya are the two cities the most visited and the most developed provinces. (Kervankıran, Sert Eteman, 2023). The authors are putting in highlight that Istanbul and Antalya were two leaders and were both precursors in the tourism field and being helped by governmental projects as well in the start of the 1960s. On the other hand, a disproportionately small number of tourists visit interior and eastern regions like Central Anatolia, Eastern Anatolia, and Southeastern Anatolia.

These places frequently lack the marketing, infrastructure, and funding required to attract tourists. As a result, they lose out on chances for cultural interaction and possible financial gains. According to the same studies, 51 cities are concerned by this situation. They are explaining this issue due to the lack of infrastructures for accommodation and transportation, the poor demand -due to a poor promotion?-, and security problems for some of the cities. The “*Undeveloped Tourism Cities*” are facing social-economical obstacles, “*many of these cities exhibit lower levels of development across various indices, encompassing socio-economic, education, health, and investment. This suggests that, beyond the realm of tourism, these cities face broader socio-development challenge*” (Kervankiran, Sert Eteman, 2023)

Tourist accessibility can be greatly increased by developing excellent lodging, upgrading transit systems, and installing essential facilities in undeveloped areas. In addition to drawing more tourists, better infrastructure also incentivizes companies to make investments in these regions, promoting sustainability and economic growth. Promoting less-traveled locations can be greatly aided by regionally customized marketing initiatives. Emphasizing these areas' distinctive historical, cultural, and environmental features might draw a wider variety of visitors. It can be especially helpful to use social media and digital platforms to highlight places that provide unique experiences. For example, using thematic campaigns to promote the historical monuments of Southeastern Anatolia or rural settlements in Central Anatolia can draw in niche customers like adventurers and cultural tourists. By doing this, travelers will be inspired to venture outside of the conventional coastal locations, more fairly allocating the economic advantages of tourism. Following the path of the Lavender Scented Village Project, the region focusing its marketing on local experience, should earn the attraction of the tourists. For the advantages of tourism to be distributed sustainably and fairly, local people must be involved in its growth. By including locals in decision-making, responsible tourism practices are encouraged, and local heritage can be preserved. In addition to generating employment and business opportunities, community-led tourism projects guarantee the preservation of cultural authenticity. Additionally, encouraging cooperation between regional stakeholders and tourism authorities might result in more specialized experiences that appeal to tourists. For

instance, in underrepresented areas, community-organized cultural festivals or village homestays can greatly increase tourism appeal while empowering locals. Targeted policies that promote equitable tourism development across regions must be put into place by the Turkish government. Growth can be accelerated by offering financial incentives to companies that operate in less-traveled areas and by encouraging regional tourist development through grants or tax cuts. Additionally, forming alliances between governmental and private sector entities helps guarantee that developing areas get the assistance they want. A wider variety of tourists can be drawn in by policies that emphasize the diversification of tourism offers, such as eco-tourism, nature-based tourism, and sustainable heritage tourism. Regional imbalances will be lessened, and tourism will contribute to the overall development of the country with the support of effective policy frameworks.

As tourism grows in Türkiye, protecting the country's cultural legacy continues to be a major challenge. There is a growing risk of commodification and authenticity lost, due to tourism. In order to solve this, Türkiye could put in place plans that strike a balance between the preservation of its rich cultural legacy and the expansion of tourism. It is crucial to implement programs like encouraging local craftsmen and involving the community in the management of historic sites. Richards explains in his research about cultural tourism that encouraging collaborations between local groups and government agencies to preserve historical monuments, guarantees that cultural authenticity is preserved while offering visitors real experiences. (Richards, 2018) This strategy bolsters Türkiye's soft power by highlighting its rich cultural diversity and long history. Rapid tourism expansion in Türkiye has occasionally resulted in tensions within communities and social inequalities. (Karasar and Gomez, 2023) Models of inclusive tourism that involve local people in decision-making are desperately needed. More equitable distribution of the benefits of tourism is ensured when communities are involved in the creation of tourism policies. Türkiye has already shown amazing results based on CBT and needs to follow this route. The swift growth of tourism in Türkiye, especially in locations like Antalya or Bodrum, has put a burden on social services and local resources. Maintaining social cohesion has become difficult as a

result, with some villages feeling overtaken or left behind by the inflow of tourists. (Karasar and Gomez, 2023) In order to solve this, Türkiye needs to give top priority to eco-friendly tourism strategies that incorporate community services and social infrastructure, such healthcare, with tourism growth. All Turkish residents will benefit from the growth of tourism if cooperative tourism policies that prioritize striking a balance between financial profits and social well-being are implemented.

Racism and prejudice have a major detrimental effect on Türkiye's tourism sector, affecting both the overall experience of both domestic and foreign visitors as well as the nation's reputation as a friendly travel destination. Since the industry depends on inclusivity and cross-cultural contact, discriminatory practices make it difficult for Türkiye to strengthen its soft power and attract a varied tourist base. When racism and discrimination are brought to light, it damages Türkiye's standing as a welcoming and varied vacation destination. Unfavorable experiences might generate negative word-of-mouth and discourage prospective tourists from traveling. The anti-Syrian and generally anti-arabs spread effect increased after 2011, when Syria's civil war broke out, and that approximately 3,8 millions of Syrians came to find refuge in Türkiye according to the last numbers of the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations. -this number being the number of official Syrian registered, the reality is different-. Millions of Arabs also found their home in Türkiye to raise their family, study or work. Türkiye is attractive for these populations. As said before, the country is the balance between modernity with access to the global connectivity of Türkiye, its progressing infrastructures, the development of health; on the other side of the balance there is the traditional Türkiye which cultivate values as family, community and Islam. The Turkish population saw their country evolve and needed to cohabit with a culture which is not them. Economic hardships like unemployment and inflation have increased animosity toward foreign investors and citizens, especially wealthy Arabs who are sometimes thought to be responsible for the increase in real estate values. (Dogan-Akkas, 2023) Videos of aggressions or scam are shared on social media, and could affect the country's image abroad, especially in the Arab countries. Arabs represent for sure the most important parts of tourists in Türkiye, if the nation's authority is not working effectively on this topic of xenophobia,

they will lose many important attractive sources of tourists. The incoming question now that Syria has been delivered from the El-Assad regime on December 8th, 2024, is, will the Syrian refugees in Türkiye decide to return to their home country? If yes, how? How much time will it take? And how will the Turkish population react to the departure of these millions of refugees? Will it ameliorate the situation with ones who will decide to stay in the country? And so on, will it ameliorate the Arabs tourist's situation? And so the image of the country abroad?

Ensuring fair advantages from tourism is a difficulty for Türkiye, especially for underrepresented populations including women, youth, and minority communities. According to the World Bank Datas, the labor force's population gap between Women and Men in Türkiye is still important. In 2023, 71.6% is the labor force participation for males, and 35.3% is the one for females, i.e., a gap of 36.3 points, comparatively Europe and Central Asia's data give a gap of 14,8%, and with the data concerning the world, the gap 24,4%. Showing that Türkiye has huge improvement to do on this topic of Women employment, the World Bank Datas, showing that there is not huge evolution since 1990. This type of datas can tarnish the Turkish image abroad, the country can appear as unprogressive and traditional, which can sometimes scare some tourists.

In response, the nation has started a few programs aimed at empowering these communities through economic activity associated with tourism. To encourage diversity and equity in Türkiye's tourism industry, for instance, support is being given to women-led tourism businesses and CBT initiatives. By ensuring that underprivileged populations take advantage of the financial opportunities brought about by tourism, these initiatives contribute to enhancing Türkiye's standing as a destination that embraces all cultures.

To promote a sustainable and inclusive tourist industry, Türkiye's legislative and policy frameworks must be updated. Given the continued importance of tourism in projecting Türkiye's soft power, a strong legal and policy framework guarantees the

growth of the industry in a way that is both effective and compliant with international norms. A multifaceted strategy is required to improve Türkiye's legal system. Revision of environmental regulations to guarantee that tourism initiatives are in line with sustainable development objectives is one important suggestion. Additionally, enhancing consumer protection laws would ensure that tourists have a secure experience, reducing instances of discrimination, scamming and mishandling of grievances. This work needs to be done on the society directly, offering training, and cooperation. Also, it is now essential for tourism plans to incorporate digital technologies. Türkiye has made an impressive effort on its digitalization, as seen while studying the Go Türkiye promotions. In general, all the websites and their information from the government are easily accessible. There is also the E-Visa Application System that was launched in April 2013, which allows tourist and business travelers to obtain their visa for Türkiye in approximately three minutes. The website is available in nine languages, visa fees are going from 0 to 60 US Dollars online and are cheaper than the visa once obtained once in the airport. For example an Australian tourist will pay his visa \$60 online and will pay \$70 at the airport. It allows the tourist to prepare everything upon their arrival, reduce stress, and improve the experience. Türkiye is in constant research for improving its strategy for tourism, with its governmental institutions, ministry of culture and tourism, other institutions such as unions of guides, investors, tourism unions, etc. They are constituting the Tourism Council, to give every year the Tourism Strategy of Türkiye.

The Turkish diaspora is, as well, a strengthening component of tourism and so on Soft Power promotion. Turkish communities overseas operate as crucial cultural ambassadors, promoting Türkiye's thanks to their deep ties to their homeland -for a majority- and their worldwide presence. Through interpersonal ties and cultural diplomacy, this involvement goes beyond tourism to support Türkiye total worldwide influence. According to the data of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye, there are 6.5 million Turkish living abroad, and 5.5 million of them are living in Western European countries. Nevertheless, despite the promise, there are still obstacles in the way of fully utilizing the diaspora's influence to promote travel. The question is how

to keep contact with the Turkish diaspora, how to keep a formal collaboration between the diaspora and the government of their home country. This question is, of course, not only to Türkiye but to all countries with an important brain drain, or simply an important part of the population living from the home country to a host country. One of the most important aspects of Türkiye's soft power is cultural diplomacy, which is fostered in large part by the diaspora. The Turkish government should also increase collaboration with regional and international organizations to facilitate this process. For example, partnerships with Turkish cultural organizations abroad have been successful in creating community-led, locally targeted tourism projects.



## 8. RESULTS

Concerning the questionnaires four different surveys have been created, For Tourists who have already visited (TWV) Türkiye, in French and in English and For Tourists who have never visited Türkiye (TWNW), also one in French and one in English. The answers formulated in French have been translated in English. We got a total of 69 answers for TWNV and 32 answers for TWV. Questionnaires have been shared on social media, and via message for 2 days.

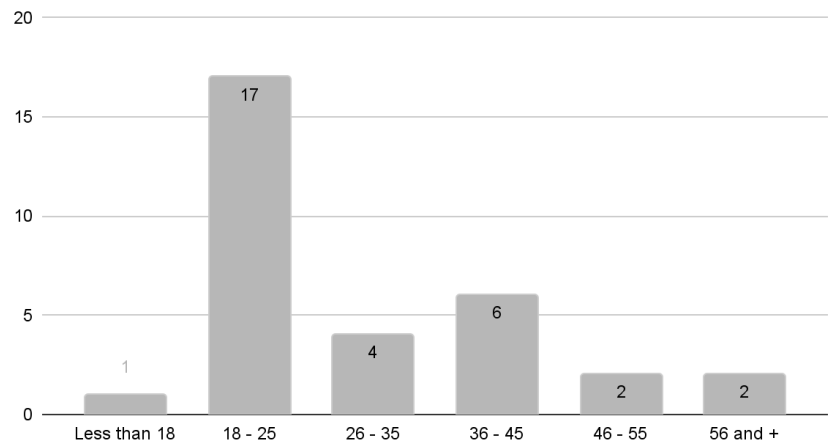
The answers will be presented to each questionnaire separately. Only the demographic part will be presented combined.



TWV - Nationality and age

NATIONALITIES	TOTAL
French	25
Turkish and French	2
Congolese	1
Egyptian	1
Ethiopia	1
Kosovare	1
South Korea	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>32</b>

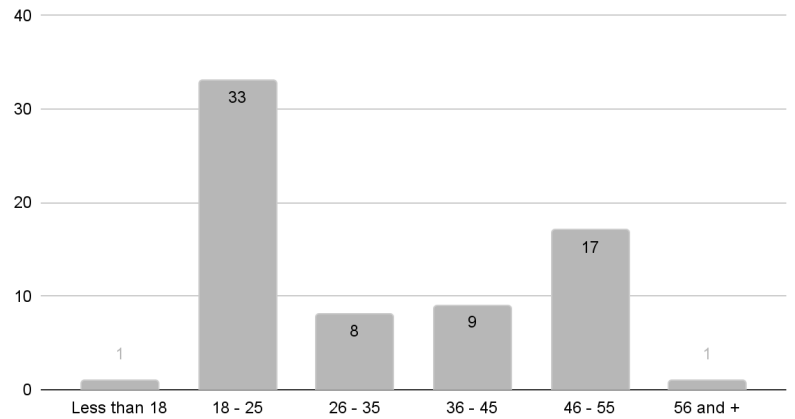
Age of the participant of TWV



TWNV - Nationality and ages

NATIONALITIES	TOTAL
French	55
Nepali	3
Indian	2
Filipino	1
Kenyan	1
Malgache	1
French and Moroccan	1
French and Tunisian	1
Algerian	1
Lebanese	1
Moroccan	1
Portuguese	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>69</b>

Age of the participant of TWNV

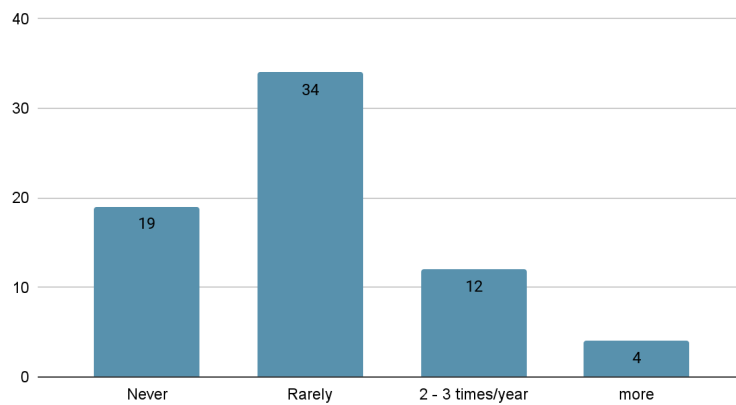


French nationality is mostly present for both surveys, but some other nationalities are represented as well. According to the age rank 18-25 are mostly represented for both surveys, we can also see a high representation of 46-55 for the TWNV.

## 8.1 Answers to TWNV

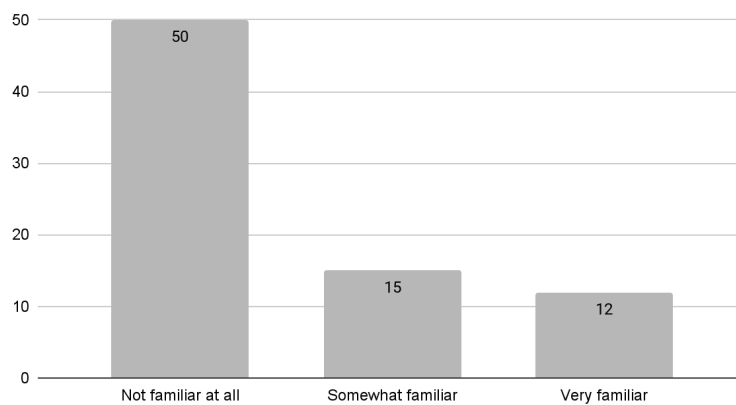
### QUESTION 1 - HOW OFTEN DO YOU TRAVEL ABROAD?

FREQUENCY OF TRAVEL - TWNV



### QUESTION 2 - HOW FAMILIAR ARE YOU WITH TÜRKIYE AS A TRAVEL DESTINATION?

TURKIYE = TOURISM? - TWNV

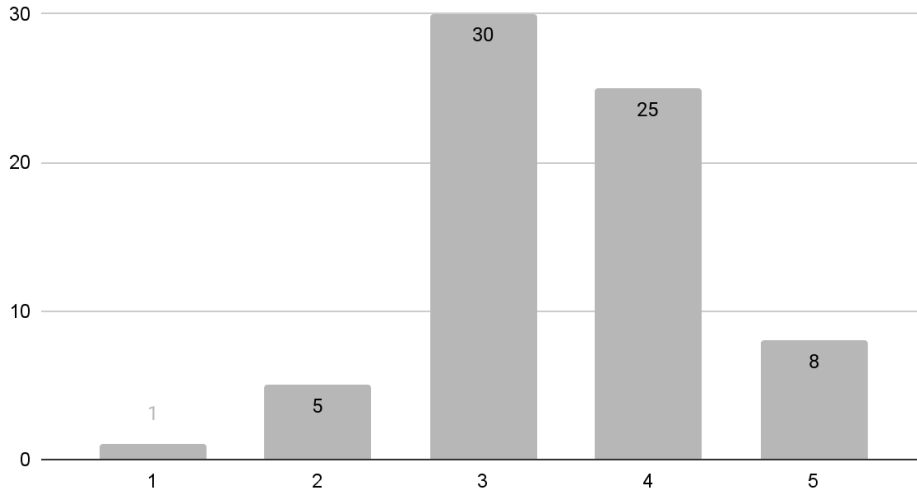


QUESTION 3 - WHAT COMES TO YOUR MIND WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT  
 "TÜRKIYE" ?

THEMES	NB OF MENTIONS	COMMENTS
CITIES AND CULTURES	46	"Hot air balloons" ; "Cats" ; "Modernity mix, with old and traditional values" ; "Istanbul" ; "Mosques" ; "Bosphorus" ; "Pamukkale" ; "Ankara" ; "Architecture"
GASTRONOMY	23	"Kebab" ; "Baklava" ; "Loukoum" ; "Coffee"
VACATION	19	"Sun" ; "Sea" ; "Good weather" ; "Discovering a new country"
HISTORY	6	"Ottoman empire" ; "Orient" ; "Red" ; "Large cultural basin in Antiquity"
OTHERS	6	"Atmosphere" ; "Beautiful" ; "Friendly" ; "Business"
POLITIC	5	"Erdogan" ; "Dictature" ; "EU enter attempt"
MEDICAL	4	"Hair" ; "Tooth" ; "Hair transplant" ;
TOTAL	109	

QUESTION 4 - HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOUR CURRENT PERCEPTION OF TÜRKIYE? (1 - very negative, 5 - very positive)

Perception of Türkiye - TWNV



QUESTION 5 - WHAT ARE THE SOURCES OF INFORMATION THAT HAVE SHAPED YOUR PERCEPTION OF TÜRKIYE?

SOURCES	TOTAL
Friends and family	26
Social medias	20
New medias	21
Films/séries	7
Restaurants	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>75</b>

QUESTION 6 - DO YOU ASSOCIATE TÜRKIYE WITH ANY PARTICULAR CULTURAL ELEMENTS (e.g., cuisine, art, history, music, traditional dance)? PLEASE SPECIFY

THEMES	NB OF MENTIONS	COMMENTS
GASTRONOMY	50	“Food” ; “Pide” ; “Loukoum”; “Baklava”
CITIES AND CULTURES	40	“art” ; “Traditions” ; “Blue Mosque” ; “Sainte Sophie” ; “Islamic Architecture” ; “Soufi Dance”; “Dance (Halay)” ; “Movies” ; “Muslim”
HISTORY	20	“Ottoman empire” ; “Art from Ottoman Empire”; “History” ; “A lot of middle eastern traditions” ; “Ataturk” ; “Greek mythology”
OTHERS	6	“Business”; “I don’t know” ; “Lack of knowledge”
VACATION	4	“Beaches” ; “Sea” ; “Sun”
POLITIC	1	“Confrontation europe/occident”
TOTAL	121	

QUESTION 7 - PLEASE, WATCH THIS 30 SECOND ADVERTISEMENT

We proposed here an advertisement that is available on Go Türkiye, the official Türkiye website led by the Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Türkiye Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (TGA). The video name is “İstanbul is the New Cool | Go Türkiye”.<sup>26</sup>

QUESTION 8 – HAVE YOU EVER SEEN THIS ADVERTISEMENT OR ANOTHER IN THE SAME STYLE? IF YES, WHERE DID YOU ENCOUNTER IT? (Select all that apply: TV spot, social media, online ads, travel agencies, magazines, billboards, other – please specify).

SOURCES	TOTAL
Never seen	33
Social medias	13
TV	16
YouTube	5
Travel Agency, Airport	3
TOTAL	70

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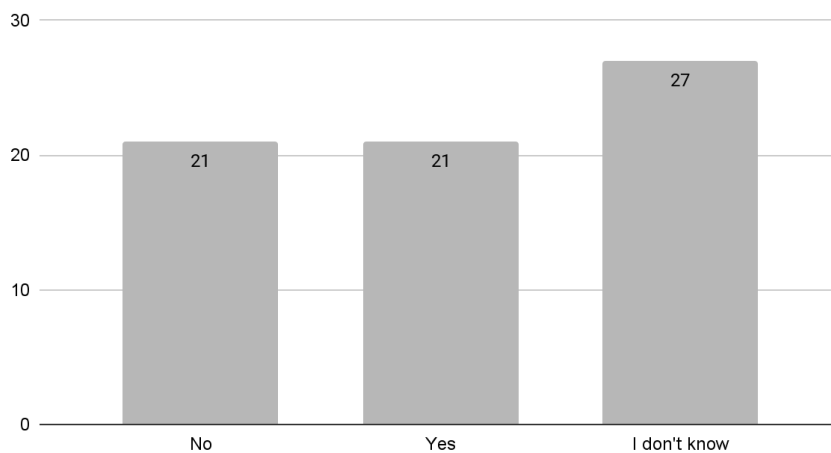
<sup>26</sup> [https://youtu.be/JoF\\_bdOVrWU?si=izGWWmpMJNDChRPC](https://youtu.be/JoF_bdOVrWU?si=izGWWmpMJNDChRPC)

QUESTION 9 - IF YOU WERE CONSIDERING VISITING TÜRKIYE, WHAT TYPE OF TOURISM? WOULD ATTRACT YOU THE MOST? (Cultural tourism, Beach vacation, Historical sites, Adventure tourism, Religious pilgrimage, Others)

TYPE OF TOURISM	TOTAL
Cultural tourism	48
Historical sites	32
Beach vacation	27
Adventure tourism	21
Religious tourism	5
No	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>134</b>

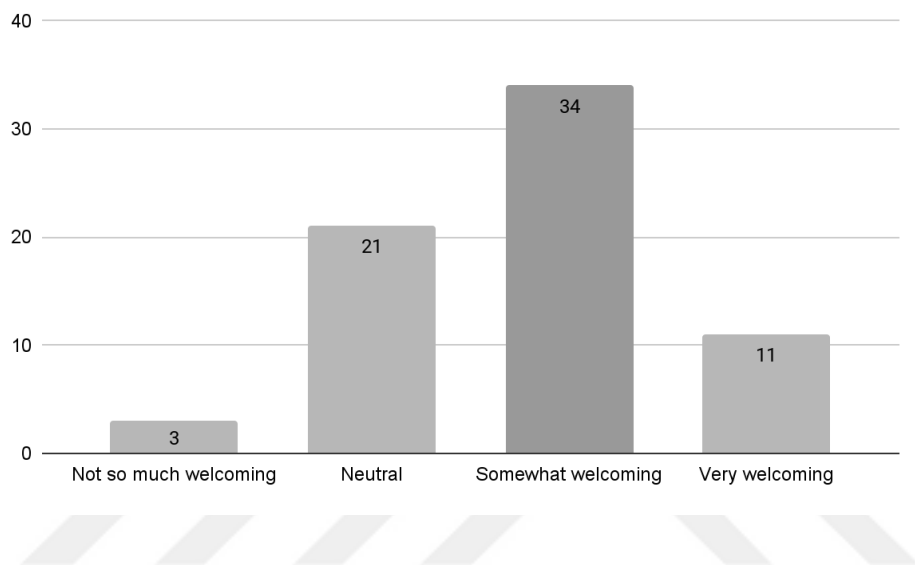
QUESTION 10 - DO YOU THINK TÜRKIYE'S CULTURAL DIPLOMACY HAS INFLUENCED YOUR PERCEPTION OF THE COUNTRY? (E.g., promotion of Turkish arts, films, exhibitions abroad)

Cultural diplomacy influence - TWNV



QUESTION 11 - BASED ON WHAT YOU KNOW, HOW WOULD YOU RATE TÜRKIYE AS A WELCOMING COUNTRY FOR FOREIGN TOURISTS?

TURKIYE = WELCOMING - TWNV

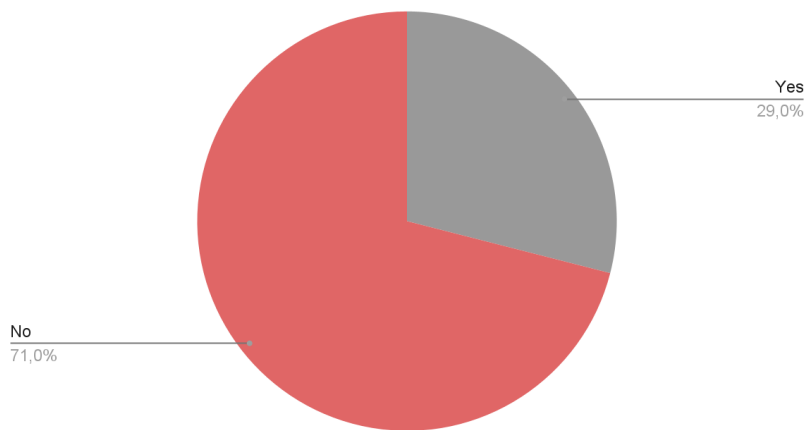


QUESTION 12 - HOW DO YOU PERCEIVE TÜRKIYE’S IMAGE IN TERM OF SAFETY, HOSPITALITY, AND FRIENDLINESS TOWARD TOURISTS?

PERCEPTION OF TÜRKIYE AS SAFE AND HOSPITALITY	TOTAL	COMMENTS
Not good	2	“Not safe, open door to Syria”; “Not safe”
Neutral	20	“Very good hospitality, but unsafe for women”; “Hospitality depending on the size, and safety i don't know” ; “Safe only in touristic area” ; “In big cities good” ; “Depending on the place” ; “Good hospitality but not safe due to geopolitical situations”
Good	31	“Very good”, “Good”
I don’t know	16	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>69</b>	

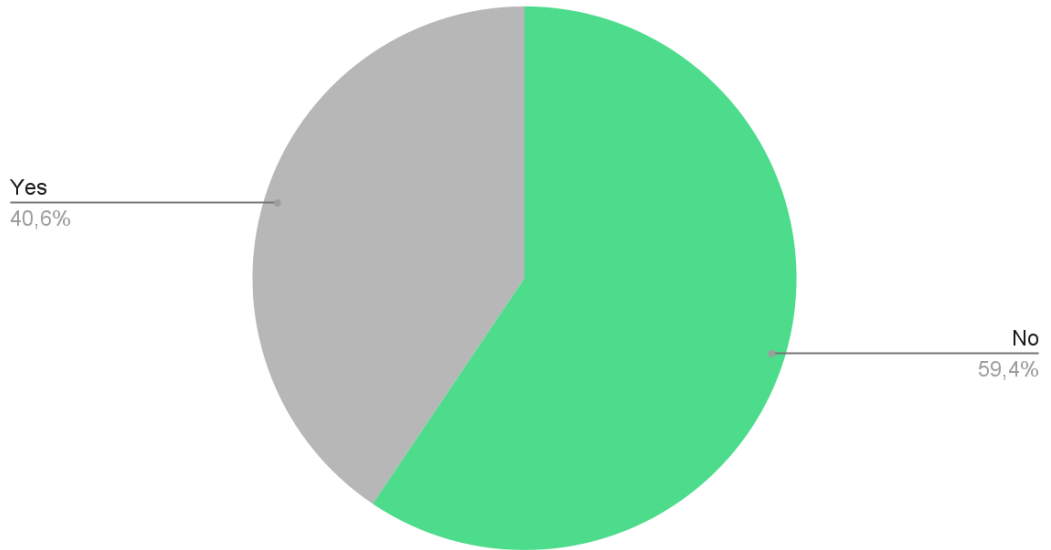
QUESTION 13 - ARE YOU FAMILIAR WITH THE CONCEPT OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR)? (Yes/No)

Knowledge about CSR



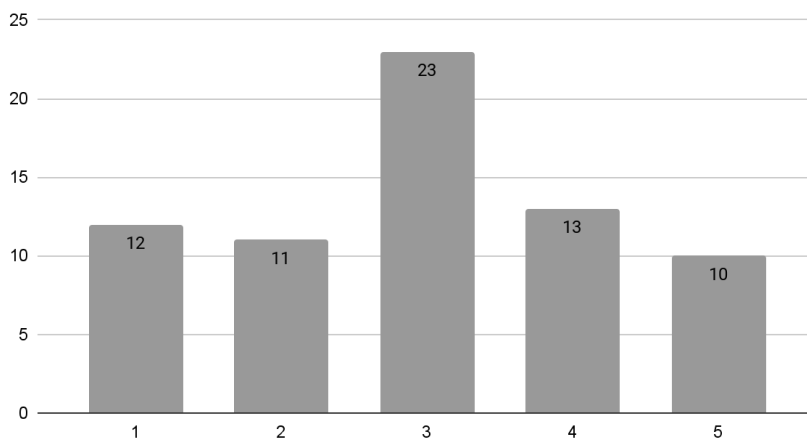
QUESTION 14 - WOULD A COUNTRY'S ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT IN SUSTAINABLE AND ETHICAL PRACTICES INFLUENCE YOUR DECISION TO VISIT? (Yes/No)

Influence of CSR on decision



QUESTION 15 - ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 5, HOW LIKELY ARE YOU TO VISIT TÜRKIYE IN THE NEXT FIVE YEAR? (1 – very unlikely, 5 - very likely)

Visit Türkiye in near future



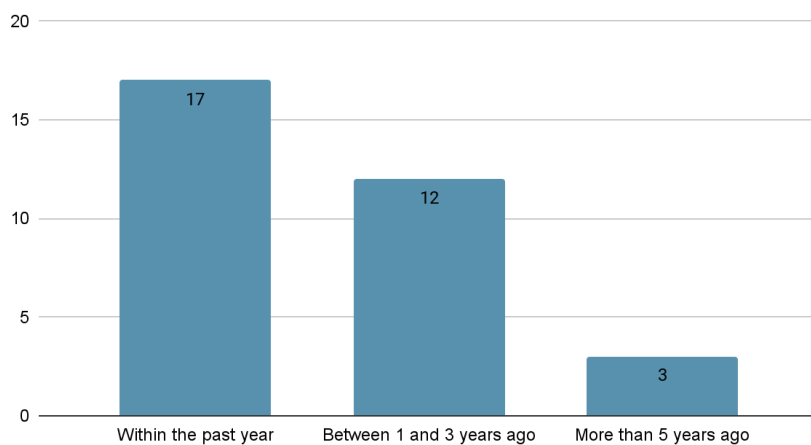
QUESTION 16 - WHAT WOULD BE YOUR MAIN CONCERNS, IF ANY, ABOUT VISITING TÜRKIYE? (Safety, cultural differences, political situation, cost, etc.)

MAIN CONCERNS	TOTAL
Safety	29
Politic	15
Nothing	8
Langage	7
Culture	5
Prices	5
TOTAL	69

## 8.2 Answers TWV

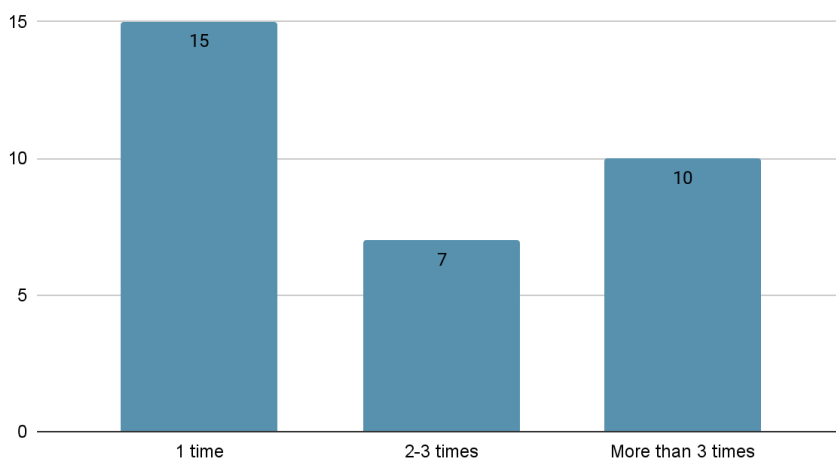
### QUESTION 1 - WHEN DID YOU VISIT TÜRKIYE?

When? - TWV



### QUESTION 2 - HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU VISITED TÜRKIYE?

How many times? - TWV



QUESTION 3 - WHICH REGION OR CITIES DID YOU VISIT DURING YOUR STAY?

REGION OR CITY	TOTAL
Istanbul	26
Izmir	8
Ankara	6
Cappadocia	5
Antalya	6
Bodrum	3
Konya	2
Bursa	2
Edirne	2
Mardin	2
Trabzon	2
Afyon	1
Denizli	1
Sivas	1
Nevşehir	1
Karaman	1
Butterfly Valley	1
Kusadasi	1
Yalova	1
Samsun	1
Kars	1
Fethiye	1
Kocaeli	1

QUESTION 4 – WHAT WAS THE PURPOSE OF YOUR VISIT? (You can select more

TYPE OF TOURISM	TOTAL
Cultural tourism	18
Friends or Family meeting	9
Study	9
Adventure tourism	2
Beach vacation	1
Business	1
Medical	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>41</b>

than one)

QUESTION 5 – DID YOU EXPERIENCE ANY CULTURAL EVENTS, FESTIVALS, OR EXHIBITIONS DURING YOUR VISIT? IF YES, WHICH ONES?

TYPE OF EVENT	TOTAL
No event	15
Music event	8
Cultural event	7
Religious event	2
Gastronomical event	2
Sportive event	2
Family event	1
Political event	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>38</b>

QUESTION 6 – HOW DID YOUR PERCEPTION OF TÜRKIYE CHANGE AFTER YOUR VISIT? (Became more positive, Stayed the same, Became more negative) WHY?

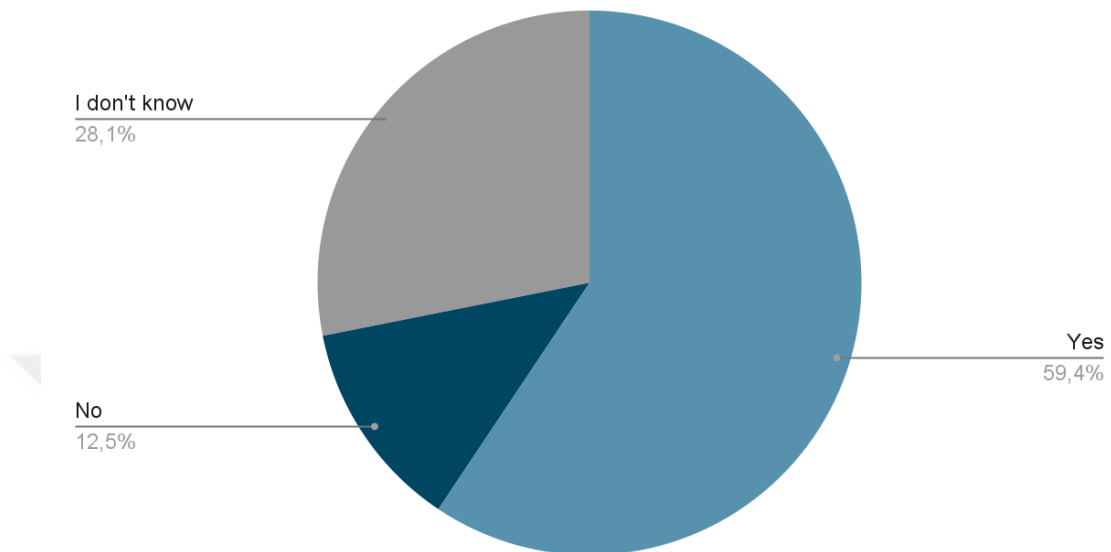
PERCEPTION	TOTAL	COMMENTS
More negative	1	“Racism against Arabs”
Same	6	“Same since childhood” ; “Same, too crowded but sympathetic”
More positive	23	“More positive (cosmopolite characters of Istanbul, sympathy; sharing, happiness in the street, poetry)” ; “Safety, culture” ; “Richness” ; “I was scared about the dictature stereotype”
Neutral	2	“Good but conservative spiral that I don’t like”; “More positive as a tourist, but less good when I am putting myself as a local (politic)”
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>32</b>	

QUESTION 7 – WHICH ASPECTS OF TÜRKIYE SURPRISES YOU THE MOST (positively or negatively)? (select more than one if applicable)

ASPECTS	TOTAL
Cultural richness	20
Safety	19
Food	18
Hospitality	18
History	17
Landscape	16
Infrastructure	9
Modernity balance with traditions	1
Cats	2
Mixity	1
Nothing	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>122</b>

QUESTION 8 - DID YOU NOTICE ANY EFFORTS TO PROMOTE TÜRKIYE'S CULTURE DURING YOUR VISIT? (e.g., festivals, exhibitions, events)

### Effort in promotion the culture



QUESTION 9 –PLEASE, WATCH THIS 30 SECONDS ADVERTISEMENT

We proposed here an advertisement that is available on Go Türkiye, the official Türkiye website led by the Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Türkiye Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (TGA). The video name is “İstanbul is the New Cool | Go Türkiye”.<sup>27</sup>

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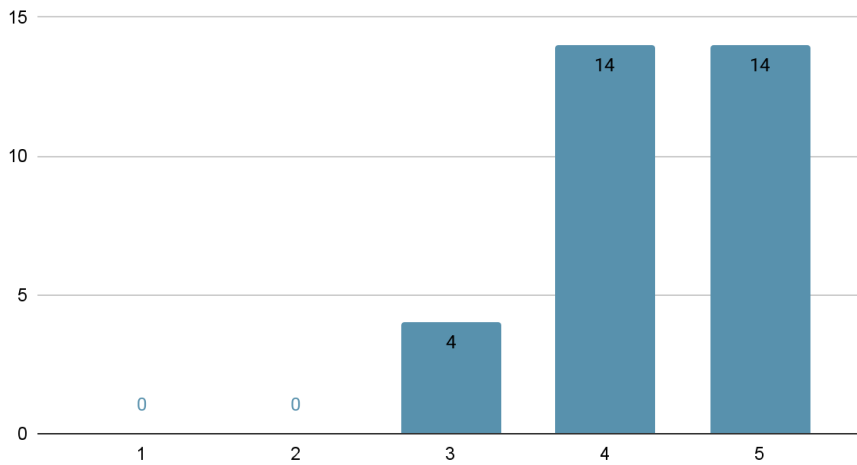
<sup>27</sup> [https://youtu.be/JoF\\_bdOVrWU?si=izGWWmpMJNDChRPC](https://youtu.be/JoF_bdOVrWU?si=izGWWmpMJNDChRPC)

QUESTION 10 - HAVE YOU EVER SEEN THIS ADVERTISEMENT OR ANOTHER IN THE SAME STYLE? IF YES, WHERE DID YOU ENCOUNTER IT? (Select all that apply: TV spot, social media, online ads, travel agencies - please specify),

SOURCES	TOTAL
Never seen	14
Social medias	7
TV	9
YouTube	5
Ad Panels, Turkish Airlines	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>37</b>

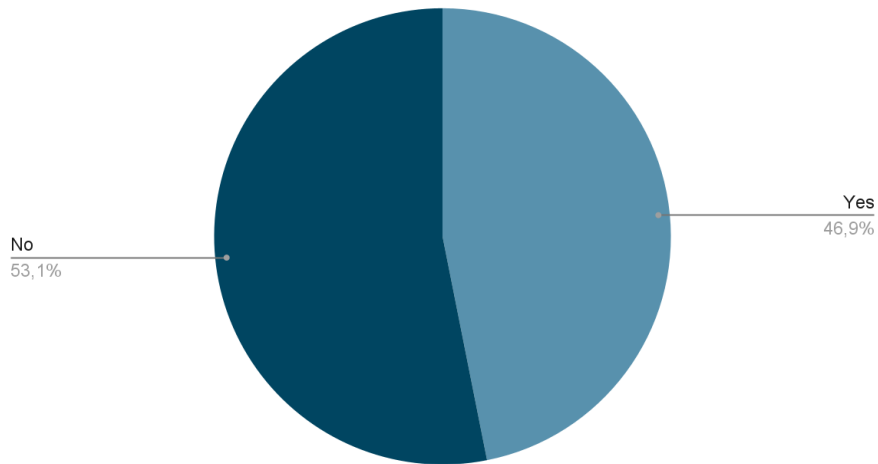
QUESTION 11 - HOW WOULD YOU RATE TÜRKIYE IN TERMS OF HOSPITALITY AND FRIENDLINESS TOWARD TOURISTS? (1 - Poor, 5- Excellent)

Rate hospitality toward tourists



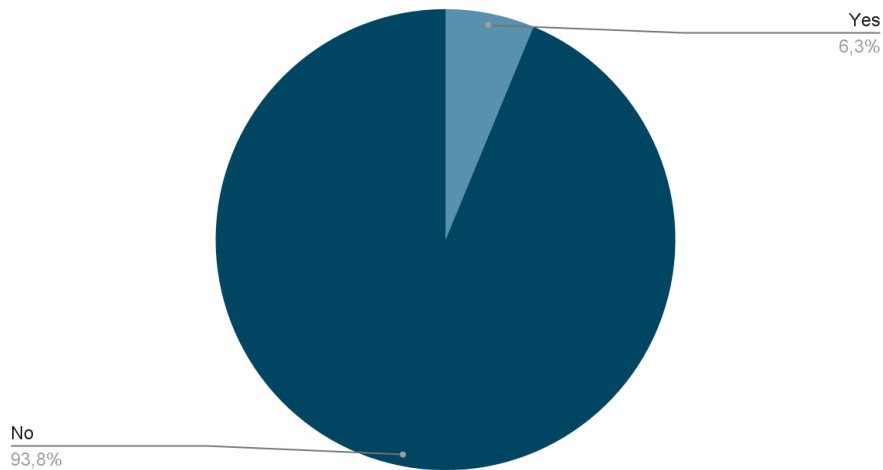
QUESTION 12 - ARE YOU FAMILIAR WITH THE CONCEPT OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR)?

FAMILIAR WITH CSR



QUESTION 13 - DURING YOUR STAY, DID YOU OBSERVE OR LEARN ABOUT ANY CSR INITIATIVES IN THE TOURISM SECTOR? (E.g., eco-friendly practices, supporting local communities)?

Observation of CSR initiative in Türkiye

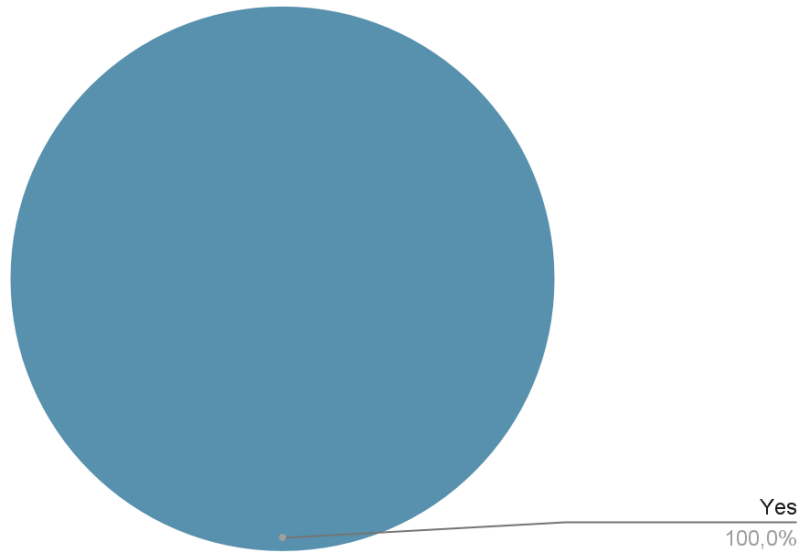


QUESTION 14 - WOULD A COUNTRY'S ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT IN SUSTAINABLE AND ETHICAL PRACTICES INFLUENCE YOUR DECISION TO VISIT? (Yes/No)

YES OR NO	TOTAL	COMMENT
YES	17	"I felt bad in Türkiye according to ecology"
NO	15	"Usually just a marketing tool"
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>32</b>	

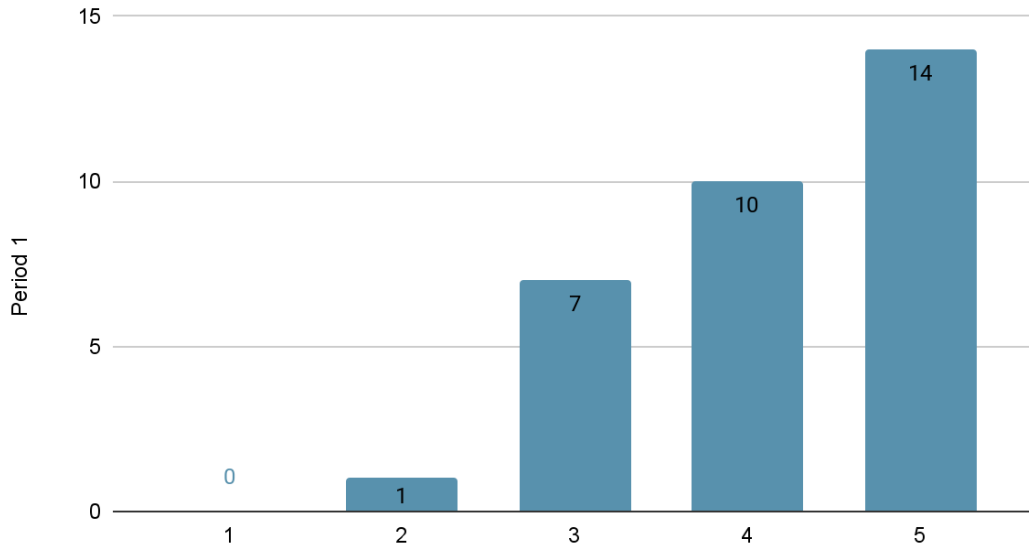
QUESTION 15 - WOULD YOU RECOMMEND TÜRKIYE AS A TRAVEL DESTINATION TO OTHERS? (Yes/No)

Recommannation to visit Türkiye



QUESTION 16 - COMPARED TO OTHER COUNTRIES YOU HAVE VISITED, HOW DOES TÜRKIYE RANK IN TERMS OF CULTURAL EXPERIENCES AND AUTHENTICITY? (1 - Very Low, 5 - Very High)

### Cultural authenticity comparaison



QUESTION 19 - DID YOU ENCOUNTER ANY CHALLENGES OR CONCERNS DURING YOUR TRIP? (Safety, cultural differences, language barriers, political issues, etc.) PLEASE EXPLAIN

MAIN CONCERNS	TOTAL
Nothing	15
Langage	8
Politic, Administration, Protests	6
Prices, Economy	2
Safety, Racism, Scam	2
Culture, Hospitality	1
Yes	1
Traffic	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>36</b>

## 9. FINDINGS

With a focus on comparing respondents who have visited Türkiye (TWV) and those who have never been (TWNV), this part explores the analysis of the questionnaires' answers. By comparing these two groups, we want to identify disparities in attitudes, preferences, and perceptions of Türkiye, particularly when it comes to the use of tourism as a soft power instrument. The findings are interpreted in the context of earlier studies, making links to topics like cultural diplomacy, international marketing tactics, the potential and problems facing Türkiye's tourism industry. Due to the questionnaire's primary focus, again, on French respondents, the results are analyzed via a particular cultural and geographic lens. 32 of the 101 respondents had been to Türkiye, while the remaining 69 had not. This distinction enables us to examine how ideas about Türkiye and its capacity to use tourism as a tool for diplomatic and cultural influence are shaped by actual experiences as opposed to outside impressions. By combining the data with previously published works and research findings, we want to offer an accurate comprehension of the data. In addition to highlighting trends and patterns, this method critically evaluates the perception of Türkiye's tourism industry and its consequences for the country's soft power strategy.

With the demographic datas we can firstly say that the study is made and needs to be studied, again, through a western lens, due to the geographical answers. 78% of the respondents of TWN are French, and almost 80% of respondents are French for the TWNV. The age group the most represented in both questionnaires is 18-25 with also an important representation of 46-55 in TWNV.

Almost 80% of TWNV respondents have answered “never” or “rarely” to question 1, indicating that the majority do not travel frequently. According to question 2, although they do not travel much, almost all TWNV respondents have some understanding about Türkiye. Including its history, politics, culture and gastronomy. The respondent has acquired this knowledge in several ways: 30% cited traditional media, 29% social media, 38% cited friends and family, and 10% mentioned exposure through Turkish TV shows and movies. The preponderance of French in the demographic group of respondents leads to a significant data gap. As television shows and films are particularly popular in the Middle East and Africa, more participants would have helped to better understand the influence of Turkish series and films. However, the high levels of intercultural connection are highlighted by the important role played by friends and family as the primary source of information. This finding supports the theory that members of the Turkish diaspora and former students in Türkiye serve as "unofficial diplomats" (Rosenbaum, 2019), thereby strengthening the country's reputation through their unofficial networks. The TWNV respondents are still not familiar with Türkiye as a travel destination, despite their knowledge of the country's culture. When asked if they knew the destination Türkiye is a travel destination in question 2, 72% of respondents said “Not at all familiar”. This suggests that while respondents recognize Türkiye's cultural and historical diversity, it is not considered a must-see destination. Using targeted marketing techniques to fill this perception gap can help turn awareness into travel interest.

The majority of TWV respondents - 46% - said they have only been to Türkiye “One time”. Surprisingly, 31% of respondents chose "More than 3 times" which was the second most often given option. Furthermore, just 9% of respondents said they had been in the nation more than five years ago, 37% “Between one and three years ago”, and 53% “Within the past year”. The large percentage of recent visits within the last year makes sense given the prevalence of the "one time" response. It is interesting to note that a few ‘first-time’ tourists came back more than one time during this period, indicating that their first impression of Türkiye was favorable and led to further travel. This supports the idea that the nation has indeed improved its attractiveness and reputation abroad. Respondents to the TWV survey visited a wide variety of locations,

with the most popular being Istanbul (34%), Izmir, Ankara and Antalya. The popularity of these cities indicates a high demand for leisure travel and cultural tourism. There was some interest in visiting lesser known places, as indicated by the inclusion of less crowded areas such as Trabzon, Bursa and Mardin. Türkiye could do better to promote these under-represented regions, highlighting their distinctive natural and cultural attractions, in order to take advantage of this trend. In addition to diversifying the Turkish tourism industry, increased travel to these destinations strengthens the country's reputation as a diverse tourist destination and stimulates economic growth in less developed regions. This approach is part of broader initiatives to use tourism as a tool for equitable economic development and to balance regional differences in tourism growth.

The clear difference between perception and experience is highlighted by the examination of TWV and TWNV answers. TWV respondents show a great personal experience, which greatly improves their impression of the country, but TWNV respondents show limited familiarity with Türkiye as a travel destination. This highlights how crucial it is to offer potential travelers the opportunity to visit Türkiye, whether through digital campaigns, targeted advertising or cultural exchanges. Both groups demonstrate how interpersonal networks shape views, and their friends and family stand out as important sources of information.

The responses from TWNV and TWV participants highlight Türkiye's close ties to history, culture and gastronomy while highlighting areas that need improvement in order to increase its attractiveness as a travel destination worldwide. The views of TWNV respondents on Türkiye are strongly linked to its cultural diversity; according to the different 121 mentions to question 6, at 41% gastronomy mentions are the most famous, showing an international attract to Turkish Cuisine with mention for the famous Turkish desserts "Baklava" or famous meat "Kebab" mostly, but some less known mention has been mentioned as well as "Pide" which are less known in western countries, but still mention in the answers.. Culture came next with 33% of the references with mentions as "Sainte Sophie", "Red" - probably according to the flag's

colors -, “Islamic architecture”, “Dance (Halay)”, followed by history with mention about Atatürk and the Ottoman Empire. Turkish culture and history have broadened its bounds and is known outside its borders. But in this context, only one respondent talked about politics. It is interesting to note that this contrasts sharply with question 16, where political concerns, for 15 of the participants and safety concerns, for 29 of them, were identified as major barriers to travel in Türkiye. This suggests a divergence between the practical considerations that influence travel decisions and the cultural perception of Türkiye.

The reasons given by TWV respondents for visiting Türkiye demonstrated the country’s attractiveness as a cultural destination. According to 18 out of 41 answers, cultural discovery was the most frequently mentioned objective as indicated in question 4. This confirms Türkiye’s status as a cultural centre and corresponds to the preferences of TWNV respondents. As a student abroad and visiting family and friends, each was cited 9 times. Other reasons, such as adventure, beach, medical and business travel have also mentioned, indicating the variety of travel experiences that Türkiye has to offer, even-though this is only a very small sample for questionnaire, it shows how Türkiye can appeal to a wide range of tourists. The combined answers of TWNV and TWV’s responses highlights Türkiye’s transition from the early 2000s "sun, sea and sand" to a tourism strategy known as a cultural destination. Effectively for both questionnaires “Cultural tourism” and “Historical Tourism” are the most represented answers to question 4 for TWV and question 9 for TWNV. Although there are still a number of obstacles to overcome, this change is part of Türkiye’s broader tourism objective to showcase its rich heritage. One of the biggest obstacles to turning desire into a true journey is the ongoing concern of TWNV respondents are about politics (22%) and safety (42%). Improving Türkiye’s tourist attractiveness requires proactive measures to address security concerns and political instability. Perceptions can be changed with advertisements highlighting security and stability, and visitor comments that highlight satisfactory encounters. The "Go Türkiye" campaign is an effort to rebrand the country into a contemporary, modern, cosmopolitan and culturally diverse travel destination. Targeted advertising such as the campaign “Istanbul is the New Cool”. Both questions examined the effectiveness of this marketing. When asked

if they had seen the ad “Istanbul is the New Cool”, participants were asked where they had seen it. Among TWNV participants, 47% had not seen the ad, 23% had seen it on television and 26% had seen it on YouTube or other social media sites. Comparatively, of TWV respondents, 32% said they had seen the ad on social media, 24% had seen it on television and 38% had never seen it. For both questionnaires, some members also reported exposure through Turkish Airlines, ad-panels and travel-agencies. It shows that there is still room for improvement to increase the promotion of these campaigns, but that the campaign is effective especially on social medias, and youtube, not forgetting that our demographic answers shows that there are more a young population, more active on social medias, if having a more large scale of respondent with different age, will maybe increase the response about TV. Even-though a small-scale questionnaires, there is mention about Turkish Airlines, it shows the company important role in promoting Türkiye tourism, and so on soft power.

Furthermore, the low participation rate in cultural events among TWV respondents suggests that these events need to be better promoted and made more accessible. The cultural tourism experience could be enhanced by working with local communities and tourism organizations, increasing the CBT initiatives, as well as increasing the visibility of regional festivals, exhibitions and performances. Even-though a high presence of Istanbul as destination and the Eagan Coast, there is still a show of attract for other regions, and focusing on the development and promotion of CBT initiatives would probably increase the tourism in the region.

The information from TWNV and TWV respondents identified areas of importance for development, even if Türkiye is recognized as a culturally rich travel destination. Türkiye could become a leading cultural destination by addressing security concerns, encouraging more extensive participation in cultural events and capitalizing on its appeal to a wide range of types of travelers. In addition to enhancing the visitor experience, these initiatives would strengthen the country’s soft power and international reputation.

It is evident from the TWNV replies that most people have a cautious view on Türkiye. In question 4, 43% of respondents selected "3," indicating a neutral viewpoint, when asked to rank their perception on a scale of 1 (extremely negative) to 5 (highly positive). Following that, 36% gave Türkiye a "4" rating, indicating a favorable sentiment. But just 12% of respondents said they had extremely good opinions about Türkiye, giving it a "5" grade, while 7% said they had somewhat negative opinions, giving it a "2." Just 1% of respondents thought highly negatively of Türkiye, giving it a "1" rating. According to these findings, the majority of TWNV respondents have a cautious attitude about Türkiye and show little affection or goodwill for the nation. The TWV responses, on the other hand, show a more noticeable improvement in perception. In question 6, for example, 71% of TWV respondents said their visit had improved their opinion of Türkiye. This demonstrates how direct interaction shapes impressions by giving tourists a first-hand look at the friendliness, culture and security of Türkiye, which strengthens the emotional and supportive associations. Only 1% of TWV participants were more pessimistic, compared to 19%. This striking difference demonstrates the ability of first-hand knowledge to change attitudes and use soft power. When we consider the hospitality of Türkiye, other revelations become obvious. With 49% of TWNV respondents viewing Türkiye as somewhat welcome and 16% extremely welcoming, the country's hospitality is viewed with cautious optimism. However, 100% of the TWV respondents would suggest visiting Türkiye. This resounding support demonstrates how Türkiye's tourism initiatives can create a positive and sustainable image. Perceptions are still strongly influenced by safety. Safety is a major concern for 42% of respondents to the TWNV survey, indicating serious concerns about safety. A conservative perspective is influenced by issues such as racism complaints, women's safety and global instability. On the other hand, only 6% of TWV respondents mentioned safety concerns when travelling, a much lower percentage. This illustrates how Türkiye has made progress in reducing security concerns by using soft power tactics and effective tourism management. - Safety issues in Türkiye would be only a stereotype, vehiculate by western medias, or due to the politic style of Türkiye, which is different from the western -more aggressive-, but once in Türkiye tourists realize that the country is Safe.- The chance of traveling to Türkiye serves as another example

of how TWNV and TWV respondents perceive the country differently. According to the TWNV replies, 33% of respondents chose a neutral stance, suggesting hesitancy or apprehension regarding further visits. Just 12% said they were very interested in going. On the other hand, 100% of TWV respondents stated they had a good experience and planned to review or suggest Türkiye to others, making them far more inclined to do so. This disparity emphasizes how crucial experience travel is for altering attitudes and fostering closer emotional ties. Perceptions that are political and cultural are also quite important. 15% and 5% of TWNV respondents, respectively, expressed greater anxiety about political instability and cultural differences. 8% of respondents also mentioned language problems. TWV respondents, on the other hand, note a shift in perspective, with 15% praising Türkiye's friendliness and 16% expressing astonishment at its security improvements. This demonstrates how firsthand exposure to Türkiye's cultural diversity and security measures may change opinions into favorable connections.

In conclusion, a thorough examination of TWNV and TWV's answers shows a pronounced difference in Türkiye's perspectives. TWNV respondents often hold a neutral and cautious stance, heavily impacted by political, security, and external storylines. After the visit, TWV respondents, on the other hand, show a notable movement towards more positive attitudes, emphasizing Türkiye's effectiveness in using soft power to promote its hospitality, security, and rich cultural heritage. Türkiye can continue to expand its impact as a soft power destination by bridging perception gaps and building deeper emotional bonds with both new and returning tourists through experience tourism and effective engagement.

When reviewing TWNV's responses to question 13, the majority, 59%, do not know about "CSR". In question 12, is giving the same result for TWV a 53%. In question 13 while asking if the TWV has been in confrontation with any CSR initiative during their travel 94% of them said they had not been exposed to any CSR initiatives. These results show that while CSR is becoming increasingly popular in the travel industry, tourists and non-visitors still feel it is only at its infancy and needs more well-known

and effective programs. Furthermore, TWV question 14 looked at the significance of ethical and ecological factors when traveling. During their visit, half of the respondents, 50%, expressed genuine worry about the ethical behaviors and ecological imprint they saw “I felt bad in Türkiye according to ecology”, and they identified these concerns as essential. Nonetheless, 50% saw these initiatives as marketing gimmicks rather than actual procedures “No, it is just a marketing tool”, highlighting the apparent disconnect between marketing and practical application. Despite obvious interest from the Turkish government to include CSR into tourist strategy, this opinion reflects widespread doubt about the genuineness of sustainability efforts. This skepticism is also seen in the TWNV replies, where 41% of respondents believe that ecological and ethical factors are significant while 59% disagree, suggesting that these ideas are neither relevant or necessary when making travel decisions. These results point to a notable discrepancy in awareness and commitment to CSR, indicating a broader divide in the ways non-visitors see the significance of sustainable development in the travel industry. The result of question 13, supports the notion that while CSR has started to be included into tourist marketing in Türkiye, its use is yet insufficient to provide a noticeable and long-lasting effect. A chance to use soft power through sincere sustainability efforts is lost as a result of low visibility and insignificant CSR activity. Türkiye has to try to close the gap between perceived efforts and real sustainable practices, since sustainability plays an increasingly important role in determining soft power in the tourist industry.

It is evident by examining the opinions of TWNV (Tourists Who Never Visited) and TWV (Tourists Who Visited) on Türkiye's tourist appeal that people are still drawn to the country because of its rich cultural heritage and historical significance. However, there are significant obstacles that need to be overcome if Türkiye is to become a more popular tourism destination worldwide. The Turkish Government has worked hard to expand its tourism offers beyond the conventional "sun, sea, and sand" combo of the

2000s. Cultural tourism is now a key element of its soft power approach. 72% of the TWNV group are either unaware of Türkiye or have little to no knowledge of it as a trip destination. This illustrates worries about political stability and security, which continue to be significant turnoffs for prospective travelers. Initiative as Safe Tourism certification, that was a start an initiative answering to the COVID-19 issue, is now a global Turkish Safety Certification, showing to the tourist the “Safe” accommodations, vehicles, etc. answering to the concern about safety in Türkiye which as a direct impact on the decision to visit the country, this type of initiative needs targeted efforts, to help to improve the international perception. The result of TWV shows that once the decision to come has been taken, safety is not a main issue faced in Türkiye.

Furthermore, the traveler experience continues to underrepresented environmental and corporate social responsibility activities. Just 6% of TWV respondents acknowledged the existence of CSR programs, indicating that they were not exposed to many of them during their visit. Given the emphasis on ecological and ethical travel practices in global tourism trends, this disparity is crucial. Understanding this, the governmental usage of CSR initiative for sustainable tourism as a means of enhancing Türkiye's influence by presenting a favorable image internationally through morally and responsibly conducted tourism. This strategy includes the TGA's cultural tourism marketing plan, which emphasizes the value of presenting genuine experiences that strengthen bonds with local communities. Türkiye needs to improve the effectiveness of its marketing initiatives, including the "Go Türkiye" campaign. Although progress has been made in raising awareness, a significant majority of respondents who are TWNV and TWV still do not know about these campaigns. Effective soft power initiatives need a comprehensive and multi-channel strategy involving digital platforms, conventional media and collaborations with major players such as airlines and travel agents, and the TGA is answering to this. We understand that the campaign clips are seen on French TV for example. To increase the attractiveness of Türkiye on a global level, a greater integration of sustainable practices and CSR is necessary, while the governmental efforts to interact with underdeveloped regions of Türkiye are little by little improving their visibility.

Türkiye's tourism industry is changing, and its impact is being bolstered by sustainable practices and cultural devotion. But to realize its full potential, Türkiye has to improve safety perceptions, raise awareness of CSR programs, and provide immersive cultural experiences that appeal to a larger audience. In line with national and international standards for the development of responsible and inclusive tourism, these initiatives, bolstered by strategic government policies and international collaboration, will enhance Türkiye's standing as a major travel destination.



## 10. CONCLUSION

The tourism industry in Türkiye is in a unique position at the connection of soft power, cultural diplomacy, and economic opportunity. Because of its geographical location, which connects East and West, it offers a natural entry point for global trade. Türkiye has established a solid platform for drawing millions of tourists annually thanks to its rich historical history, dynamic cultural identity, and updated infrastructure, making tourism one of its most effective instruments for influencing the world. Even while the industry has advanced significantly, the opportunities and difficulties it faces highlight how difficult it is to use tourism as a strategic soft power tool.

According to Joseph Nye, soft power is the ability to make others lean by appeal and persuasion rather than force. This idea is put into practice for Türkiye through tourism, which allows the country to present its values, hospitality and cultural diversity to the world. Projects such as the "Go Türkiye" campaign show how tourism is being used to change mindsets and promote Türkiye as a safe, exciting and contemporary travel destination. By showcasing its natural beauty, culinary traditions and heritage, Türkiye captivates a wide range of viewers and strengthens its reputation as a country that promotes openness and intercultural interaction. The significant involvement of Türkiye in cultural diplomacy has broadened its scope beyond commercial initiatives. Initiatives such as the Modern Silk Road Joint Tour Package, created in collaboration with the Organization of Turkish States (OTS), show how committed Türkiye is to promoting regional cooperation and a shared history. Through these initiatives, Türkiye not only improves its ties with its neighbors but also establishes itself as a pioneer in innovative tourism and cultural preservation.

Türkiye's economy depends heavily on tourism, which generates billions of dollars in GDP and job opportunities in the whole country. The construction of top-notch infrastructures, such as Istanbul Airport, the biggest in Europe, has made travel easier and increased Türkiye's accessibility and competitiveness. With its wide worldwide network, Turkish Airlines' development highlights the nation's dedication to developing into a major international travel center. Traveling to Türkiye is now easier than ever thanks to these developments and creative visa regulations like e-visas and

made the entrance procedures easier. But the impact of tourism on the economy goes beyond just generating income. For example, medical tourism has become a highly profitable industry, attracting patients from all over the world, who are looking for high-quality treatments at a reasonable price. The position of world leader in medical tourism in Türkiye has been consolidated by international certification as the JCI which rewards Turkish hospitals such as Acibadem Healthcare. In the same vein, the enrolment of foreign students, supported by initiatives such as Turkish scholarships, not only strengthens the soft power of Türkiye, but also builds lasting cultural and economic ties that will ultimately benefit the nation. Thousands of students from all over the world have been welcomed thanks to programs like the Türkiye Scholarships and collaborations with foreign colleges that have promoted cross-cultural exchange. These students frequently end up serving as unofficial ambassadors for Türkiye, sharing their stories and forming enduring relationships that improve the nation's standing abroad. Furthermore, cultural diplomacy has been essential to improve Türkiye's reputation abroad. Turkish television, film and music have attracted viewers from all over the world, but especially from the Middle East where they serve as cultural bridges. Türkiye has strengthened its persuasive power by successfully using cultural exports to support its tourism initiatives through international events and diaspora networks.

Despite its achievements, Türkiye still confronts a number of obstacles that might jeopardize its attempts to fully utilize tourism as a vehicle of soft power. With the majority of tourist activity focused in big hubs like Istanbul and Antalya, regional differences in tourism growth continue to be a key problem. Despite having a wealth of natural and cultural attractions, lesser-known areas like Mardin and Trabzon find it difficult to draw in tourists from abroad. Targeted expenditures in marketing, infrastructure, and community-based tourism projects are needed to correct this mismatch. Sustainability is another important issue. Popular tourist destinations are at risk of losing their natural and cultural resources due to overtourism, while less developed areas lack infrastructure to accommodate more tourists. One positive move is Türkiye's commitment to sustainable tourism, demonstrated by its partnership with the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). To attract environmentally

conscious tourists, these initiatives need to be multiplied and better disseminated. Social issues such as racism and xenophobia make it even more difficult for Türkiye to aspire to soft power. The country's reputation as a friendly travel destination is tarnished by reports of prejudice against specific tourism groups, particularly Arabs and Africans. Promoting inclusion requires that these issues be addressed proactively through awareness campaigns, regulatory changes and better training for tourism industry workers.

To use tourism effectively as a soft power tool, Türkiye needs to adopt a comprehensive approach that takes advantage of its advantages and addresses its problems. To achieve this goal, we need to invest in underrepresented regions, encourage sustainable practices and intensify cultural diplomacy initiatives. In addition, strengthening links with the Turkish diaspora and cooperation with international groups such as OTS can increase Türkiye's influence on the international stage. In addition, the tourism industry has a chance to strengthen Türkiye's role as cultural mediator and peacemaker. In an increasingly divided world, Türkiye can establish itself as a place where different cultures meet by highlighting its identity as a bridge between East and West. This will promote communication and understanding.

Türkiye's tourism industry reflects its soft power goals by providing a stage to present its hospitality, culture and values to the world. Despite the current challenges, there are countless opportunities for development and impact. Türkiye can become a world leader in tourism and an example of using tourism as a diplomatic tool by tackling social, cultural and economic barriers and adopting creative approaches. In doing so, it leaves a lasting impression on the international scene and strengthens its reputation while promoting goodwill and understanding among nations.

Millions of Syrian refugees living in Türkiye may return because of the recent political changes in Syria, which have included the emergence of new leadership and possible stability. Türkiye, which is home to more than 3.5 million Syrians, has been essential in handling the humanitarian fallout from the Syrian war. But as things in Syria become better, the possibility of mass repatriation raises important concerns about Türkiye's changing role in the area and its social development. The domestic and international landscape of Türkiye is likely to change because of this possible change. Economically, industries that have been dependent on Syrian labour could be disrupted by the departure of a large workforce. Socially, areas where the Syrian community is well integrated may have difficulty reintegrating to become less refugee. In terms of diplomacy, Türkiye's position as a major player in the region could change, impacting its ties with international partners and neighbors. It will be crucial to understand how Türkiye is managing this change as these dynamics develop. In addition to having an impact on bilateral ties, the repatriation of Syrians is a test for Türkiye's policies to promote stability, economic resilience and social harmony in the face of changing conditions. We could imagine in the future, a rapprochement between both nations, to work on their Soft Power, and a greater cooperation on issues such as regional stability, cultural exchanges and economic growth. But this process requires delicate diplomacy and a balance between managing humanitarian obligations and negotiating complex political relations. Therefore, how Türkiye responds to this changing situation will be crucial in determining its future regional position, with a focus on stability and long-term collaboration.

Türkiye can successfully handle these issues, build a stronger worldwide reputation, and encourage a more upbeat and cohesive dialogue on the international scene by utilizing its tourist industry as a soft power instrument.

*"Soft power is not what you do, but the way you do it."*

Joseph Nye, 2002



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