Exploring transformative travel experiences: The case of Turkish travelers

Explorando experiências de viagem transformadoras: o caso de viajantes turcos

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Abstract

Transformative tourism experiences result in long-term changes in attitudes and behavior. Although research on transformative tourism has flourished in recent years, there is still a limited number of studies that investigate the travelers' experiences to examine the impact of travel on one's attitudes and behaviors. This exploratory study seeks to identify factors affecting transformative travel experiences to emerge. A typology of travel transformations is also offered based on a qualitative case study conducted on Turkish travelers. As a result of thematic content analysis of in-depth interviews with 30 travelers, the main themes affecting travel transformations emerged as tripograhic, personal and destination-based determinants, whereas the types of transformations were classified under behavioral, attitudinal, and personality changes. If tourist transformations could be understood better, this might result in better promotion of travel as a leisure activity not just at the individual level but at the policy level. Destinations, tour operators, and other hospitality organizations would position their product in a potentially more transformative way if they know the causes and outcomes of travel-related transformations.

Keywords: Travel experience, transformation, transformative tourism, transformative travel experiences.

Resumo

Experiências turísticas transformadoras resultam em mudanças de longo prazo nas atitudes e no comportamento. Embora a investigação sobre turismo transformador tenha florescido nos últimos anos, ainda há um número limitado de estudos que investigam as experiências dos viajantes para examinar o impacto das viagens nas suas atitudes e comportamentos. Este estudo exploratório procura identificar os fatores que afetam o surgimento de experiências turísticas transformadoras. Uma tipologia de experiências transformadoras é proposta com base num estudo de caso qualitativo realizado com viajantes turcos. Como resultado da análise de conteúdo temática de entrevistas em profundidade com 30 viajantes, os principais temas que afetam as transformações das viagens são determinantes tripográficos, pessoais e baseados no destino, enquanto que as transformações foram classificadas como mudanças comportamentais, atitudinais e de personalidade. Uma melhor compreensão das experiências transformadoras resultaria numa melhor promoção das viagens como atividade de lazer, não apenas ao nível individual, mas também político. Destinos, operadores turísticos e outras organizações turísticas posicionariam os seus produtos de uma forma potencialmente mais transformadora, se conhecessem as causas e os resultados das transformações relacionadas com as viagens.

Palavras-chave: Experiência de viagem, transformação, turismo transformativo, experiências de viagem transformadoras.

1. Introduction

Literature has well covered the impacts of tourists on the destination (e.g., economic, environmental, and social issues) but neglected the effect of the destination on travelers. Although few studies focused on the impact of travel on well-being (Uysal et al., 2016), research is scant on long-term behavioral, attitudinal, and cognitive effects (e.g., Sampaio and Simoni Isnart, 2014) on individuals. Such effects that alter some fundamental personal characteristics (e.g., attitude, belief, behavior, performance) are also referred to as transformations by Pine and Gilmore (2011). They claim that transformation is only possible through reflection on personal and unique experiences, and human transformation is usually triggered by new knowledge and a change in the environment. Thus transformation usually occurs when external stimuli trigger the change. This might be a new place, new culture, new knowledge, new people, etc. These are also related to travel experiences. Seeking novelty, authenticity, and an escape from the daily routine are discussed as the main motivations of tourism (MacCannell, 1973; Smith, 1994). Thus, travel can be considered an agent of transformation. By definition, tourism requires a travel outside one's regular environment and might be considered a potential transformative activity. Transformations through tourism generate long-term changes in travelers (Wolf et al., 2017; Pung, Gnoth, and Del Chiappa, 2020). Yet, tourism literature focusing on the short-term benefits of travel has neglected the long-term transformations that travel experiences offer.

The transformation that occurs through encounters in a new place is shaped by different experiences of tourists and their interaction with the destination (Reisinger, 2013). Morgan (2010) argues that strong transformation occurs when there is a direct encounter with others and otherness (nature and culture). He emphasizes that characteristics of the destination, traveler's personal and collective motivation, intentional or unintentional forms of experience, duration of travel (long or short term), and distance (both physical and cultural) also affect the intensity of transformation. When tourists travel to unfamiliar places, the impact of the human-environment on transformation might even be stronger (Cetin & Okumus, 2018). Despite various literature discussions, a comprehensive discussion on the factors and typologies of transformative travel experiences has been overlooked.

Transformative experiences are also associated with individuals' personal backgrounds as well as events, perceptions, and interactions at the destination (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). Tourists make comparisons between their daily lives at the origin and the norms and values of their hosts as well as the physical environment at the destination. Therefore, a similar experience might cause different transformations for different tourists. Hence past experiences, cultural background, and personal characteristics of the tourist might also affect the type and intensity of transformation (Cetin & Bilgihan, 2016). Encountering the different cultures lead to being more tolerant towards different cultures and accepting them easily (Brown, 2009). This sophistication makes exploring transformations in the tourism context a challenging task. Yet, it is still possible to offer some shared characteristics of transformations and even a typology of changes they trigger in tourists. Experiential travel literature might benefit from a better understanding of transformative experiences and their antecedents.

In recent years, there has been an increase in studies on transformative travel experiences (Kirillova et al., 2017; Tasci and Godovykh, 2021). The reason for this increased interest is the attitude and behavior changes that these experiences bring in our consumption patterns and relationships with the other, compared to other experiences (Soulard et al., 2020). In addition, it is claimed that these behavioral changes will not be limited to the destination but will also affect the tourist's own environment when she returns home. (Lean, 2009; Smith, 2017). Santos et al. (2020) also propose a model for creating tourism products with an innovative approach that emphasizes memorable and transformative tourism experiences by noticing the value of tourist transformation. Destinations, tour operators, and other hospitality organizations would market their products and services in a potentially more effective way if they know the causes and outcomes of travel-related transformations. Governments and international organizations might also use travel as a tool to facilitate various transformations at a policy level. In their study, Alahakoon et al. (2021) investigated the characteristics of transformative destinations and emphasized that what these features mean for the traveler is more important than the characteristics of the destination. Hence, this study aims to identify the factors that affect transformative travel experiences to emerge and types of tourist transformations based on a phenomenological case study on Turkish travelers. Next, we conceptualize transformative travel experiences based on extant literature review; interview procedure, sampling, data collection, and analysis are explained in the methodology section. Finally, the paper concludes with the findings and conclusions.

2. Literature Review

Post-travel behaviors of tourists are often examined from a marketing perspective (e.g., loyalty), and literature focusing on tourists as consumers neglected that travel experience might have a wider scope of transformations and alterations on the individual (e.g. Cetin & Dince6r, 2014). While some research focused on the attitudes and behaviors of travelers during their stay, scant research addressed their feelings, values, and transformations after their return (Uysal et al., 2016). Some research explored the short-term impacts of tourism activity on well-being, quality of life, stress, life satisfaction, and so on (e.g., Chen, Petrick, and Shahvali, 2016). Yet, these studies also focused on short-term ephemeral changes, overlooked enduring transformational, attitudinal, and behavioral changes in travelers, and how travel experiences affect travelers' lives (Dilette et al., 2019).

According to Teoh et al. (2021), transformative travel experiences initiate a transformation process, and change occurs at the end of this process. And they claim that it depends on the change in the person's perspective in the transformation process and the transfer of this to the considerations, attitudes, and behaviors in daily life. Graburn (1978) also approaches transformation as a part of tourist experiences and emphasizes that travel experiences can be approached from the impact and change the trigger on tourists. However, Bruner (1991, p. 246) associates tourist transformation with understanding the world and being enthusiastic about knowing different cultures. Yet, the author also believes the potential of transformation through tourism is exaggerated for mass tourism and that "the tourist will become a different person forever is a strong claim". The author states that while transformation is limited for sunlust mass tourists who seek familiarity and comfort, special interest tourists might seek more genuine travel experiences. This is also supported by Cohen's (1972) tourist bubble concept, where mass tourists are defined as an isolated and homogenous group where their experiences are pre-arranged, staged, and usually all-inclusive.

Scant research on tourism mentioned travel transformations without a long-term holistic approach and empirical depth overlooking its factors and typologies of sustained tourism transformations. Various benefits e.g., educational (Stone & Petrick, 2013), health and wellness (Chen and Petrick, 2013) of travel have been listed, and transformation is usually associated with personal development and growth (Milstein, 2005; Stone & Petrick, 2013), cosmopolitan perspective (Bruner, 1991), alterations in values, growth and development of generic skills (Pearce and Foster, 2007) priorities, lifestyle (Reisinger, 2013), self-change (Noy, 2004) and well-being (Pung & Del Chiappa 2020; Lean, 2009). A limited number of scholars studying the relationship between travel and transformation have focused on different motivations, including backpacker's travel narratives (Noy, 2004), transformation power of sojourners (Milstein, 2005), ecotourism (Sowards, 2012), volunteer activities (Zahra and McIntocsh, 2007) and the educational (transformative and experiential learning) benefits of travel (Stone and Petrick, 2013). Moreover, studies on the relationship between transformation and travel have often explored the impact of travel on a particular tourist group, such as backpackers or ecotourists.

However, this study aims to determine which transformations occur as a result of travel experiences on Turkish travelers, regardless of individuals' travel motivation. Some tourists even "use travel to reflect upon their lives….and make crucial life changes upon their return" (UNTWO, 2016: 17). Kottler (1998) also refers to travel as the activity with the greatest potential to alter perceptions, attitudes, and the way one chooses to live. MacCannell (1976) discusses tourism as the modern pilgrimage and that tourists travel in order to see and experience the unseen and novel. Travel can shift one's perspective of life and alter their knowledge, values, attitudes, behavior, and the way people spend their time and use resources (Reisinger, 2013; Sheldon, 2020).

Bosangit et al. (2015) have shown the importance of self-reflections and emotions in personally meaningful travel experiences of British backpackers. Laing and Forst (2017) examined how the journey to Italy had a transformative effect on women through contemporary non-fiction books written by Western female authors. In a study about the self-change of Israeli backpackers, Noy (2004) found that the transformation of backpackers is positive and beneficial. The author also states that when backpackers describe their transformations, they emphasize that their personality has been altered, and they become more patient, tolerant, and open. In a study to examine the relationship between transformation and well-being, Pung and Del Chiappa (2020) stated that travelers' transformation took place to achieve more self-efficacy, humility, and enrichment. Hence transformation in tourism can be described as sustained, positive self-change of a person as a result of intentional and unintentional interactions between one's self and the destination (Noy, 2004). These events, perceptions, and characteristics of the destination that trigger these long-term alterations in an individual, on the other hand, are operationally defined as transformative travel experiences.

Pung, Yung, Khoo-Lattimore, and Del Chiappa (2019) also discuss tourist transformations facilitated by contextual factors that lead tourists to integrate new beliefs, skills, and knowledge. Thus, some trips might have greater transformative power than others (Stronza, 2001). The prospects for transformation might as well differ based on personal attributes. Although literature generally agrees on the relationship between travel experiences and personal transformations (e.g., Lean, 2012), scant research focused on the factors of transformative travel experiences and the typology of tourist transformations. Unlike previous research, this study focuses on a developing country where the transformation might be different from a developed country. Moreover, the study also looks into various factors that might affect the transformations while looking into transformative outcomes of travel with a holistic approach based on empirical data. Recently, scales have been developed to understand the multidimensional nature of the transformation (Tasci and Godovykh, 2021) and to measure the transformation process and outcomes (Soulard et al., 2020). However, the

transformation through travel differs for each individual, and how the transformation occurs is revealed by the travelers' narratives (Kirillova et al., 2017). Therefore, studies based on traveler experiences and investigating the kind of attitude and behavioral changes caused by the traveler's own narratives are important. In this study, based on traveler experiences, it will be revealed what transformative experiences are and which factors are affected.

3. Methodology

This exploratory study aims to identify sustained transformative travel experiences and how they affect tourists' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors and alter their daily lives. It also aims to explore personal (e.g., demographic, personality) and tripographic (e.g., characteristics of the destination) factors that affect the possibility of transformation. Unlike previous research focusing on the transformation of Western travelers from developed countries (Europe and US) to the developing world, this study focused on the experiences of travelers from a developing country. Exploring transformations experienced by travelers from developing countries might provide better insights into transformative changes as the degree of perceived gap and cultural distances would be more significant (Johnston, 2001; Weaver et al., 2020). Moreover, such an approach requires a more homogenous but distinct sample. Turkish travelers were selected as a case study to understand how their travel experiences changed their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors in their regular life at home.

Since the research is based on travelers' personal experiences, the study adopts a phenomenologic approach. Phenomenology aims to explore phenomena based on participants' lived experiences (Dayour et al., 2020). Such an approach is also used in different tourism settings to understand concepts that are emerging and not yet established (e.g., Alrwadieh et al., 2021). Because of the exploratory nature of the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with travelers who have been abroad more than three times within the last two years. This purposive sampling allowed researchers to collect rich in-depth data from experienced respondents. Semi-structured interviews are flexible ways of collecting in-depth data and reflecting on the terms discussed (Barribal and While, 1994). The interview guide included the main themes and follow-up questions at two levels. Spontaneous, follow-up questions made it easier for participants to understand what is meant by the main themes and direct the conversation to the main theme of transformations (Kallio et al., 2016). A more frequent travel experience would provide better insights into sharper transformations and would suggest a better comparison among different tripographic factors (e.g., motivation, duration) and transformative destinations' characteristics. Two years was set as the criteria so that respondents might be able to recall the specifics of their travel experiences. Yet, they were encouraged to provide potential factors of transformation in previous travel experiences as well. As extraordinary experiences usually trigger these transformations, they tend to be recalled for an

extended period of time. Respondents were requested to inquire about how previous travel experiences transformed them into different persons and the perceived reasons for such transformations. Morgan (2010) emphasizes that variables like a place, traveler's both personal and collective intention and motivation, intentional or unintentional form of experience, duration of travel (long or short term), and distance (both physical and cultural) should be studied. Transformations are also usually associated with changes in self-identity, perception of life, self-change, and self-development (Milstein, 2005; Stone and Petrick, 2013). Although various probing and follow-up questions were also used, two main questions developed based on theory were as follows;

- How did your travels transform your self-identity and your life? What type of long-term fundamental alterations/changes did you experience when you returned?

- What are the factors that influence transformative travel experiences?

The interview procedure was pretested on three respondents before it was adopted on a larger scale. Interviews were conducted between May-July 2018 in Istanbul, Turkey. The final sample consists of N=30 respondents. Participants were approached at Istanbul International Airport, which is the country's main gateway to abroad. Respondents were approached randomly based on their availability and informed about the study and duration of the interviews. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim within the same day. The average interview duration is 26 minutes, and the average transcript length is 667 words per respondent. Thematic content analysis (TCA) was used to analyze the data. Authors also read these transcriptions independently while interviews were in progress and started to code the contents individually. This initial coding was based on any related potential keyword that might cause and describe a transformation, as suggested by Creswell (2011) and Alrawadieh et al. (2019). After analyzing the data, a total of 67 keywords were identified. During the next stage, using open coding, these keywords were grouped under broader constructs based on factors and types of transformations by researchers individually. Besides the data (inductive approach), raters were also encouraged to use theory (deductive approach) to support their themes. When all authors completed their content analysis, they came together several times to discuss their classifications and check whether the themes reflected the dataset and keywords. In order to decrease the subjectivity, reliability checks were also employed, and quotations from interview transcripts were also used. At the end of the third discussion, they reached a consensus on the model's final structure, and an interclass agreement was reached.
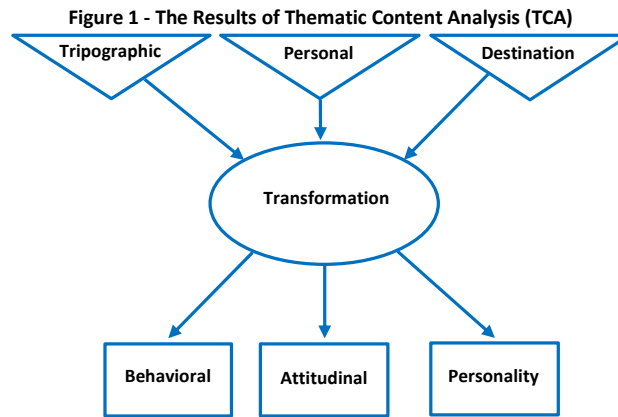
4. Results

Interviews were conducted with 15 male and 15 female respondents. The respondent's average age was *38,* and all had at least a university degree except two respondents. The median income bracket was 1000-2000 USD, and an average respondent visited four countries in his/her life (These are shown in Table 1).

Table 1 - Respondent profile (n=30)

Gender	
Male	15
Female	15
Age	
18-34	12
35-54	15
55+	3
Education	
High School	2
Bachelors	16
Masters and higher	12
Income	
0-3999 TL (Low)	4
4000-7999 TL (Middle)	11
8000+ TL (High)	5
Number of destinations	
0-5 destinations	12
6-10	14
11+	4

Concerning the impact of travel experience, the types of transformations were categorized under behavioral changes (e.g., new habits), attitudinal changes (e.g., alterations in beliefs), and changes in personality (e.g., self-confidence). The factors of transformation were also explored. Tripographic factors (e.g., length of travel), personal characteristics (e.g., cultural background), and destination features (e.g., cultural distance) were listed as the main factors that affect the level of transformation. These relationships and categorizations are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 - The Results of Thematic Content Analysis (TCA)

4.1 Factors of Transformative Travel Experiences

Based on the thematic content analysis, several keywords that affect transformative travel experiences were discussed. These were grouped under tripographic factors (e.g., duration, motivation for travel, travel arrangements), personal characteristics (e.g., demographic factors, travel experience, personality, cultural background), and destination features (e.g., landscape, governance, local traditions), and are discussed further below.

Table 2 - Themes and dimensions of factors of transformation

FACTORS OF TRANSFORMATION							
Tripographic	*N*	*%*	*Personal*	*N*	*%*	*Destination*	*N*	*%*
Tourism types based on motivation (e.g., leisure, culture, business)	11	37	Demography (e.g., age, cultural background, education, income, and occupation)	9	30	Distance from the origin (both physical and cultural)	6	20
Travel company (e.g., alone, family, friends)	8	27	Personality (e.g. openness, extraversion, adventurous, observant)	6	20	Language spoken at the destination	4	13
Travel arrangements (self vs. organized)	6	20	Previous travel experience to similar destinations	3	10	Level of interaction	4	13
Duration of travel (e.g., short and long term stay)	5	17	Living in the destination	3	10	Destination characteristics (history, heritage, customs, and people)	3	10
Previous planning (casual vs. detailed)	2	7	Country of origin	2	7			
Travel budget	1	3	Social network	2	7			
Lodging (shared vs. isolated)	1	3						

Table 3 - Themes and dimensions of types of transformation

TYPES OF TRANSFORMATION							
Behavioral	*N*	*%*	*Attitudinal*	*N*	*%*	*Personality*	*N*	*%*
New eating and drinking habits	10	33	Decreased prejudice about things (e.g., food), cultures (e.g., religion), and people	12	40	Becoming more extraverted, open-minded, social, and outgoing	9	30
Respecting traffic rules	5	17	Respecting cultural differences and realizing similarities with others	9	30	Enhanced self-confidence and independence, persistent, mindful, observant, vigilant, forward-thinking	8	27
Greeting people more often	4	13	Recognition of cultural diversity and values	8	27	Being more flexible, easy-going, understanding, tolerant, and less conservative	7	23
Using technology more	4	13	Attitudes towards other countries and own country	4	13	Becoming more patient and cautious, accommodating, friendly, and humane	3	10
Spending less	3	10	Increased motivation to travel abroad	4	13	Learning to cope with difficulties	3	10
Recycling	2	7	Enhanced environmental concerns	3	10	Personal development	2	7
Reading more	2	7	Becoming more socially responsible and aware	3	10	Becoming more adventurous and risk-taking	2	7
More active life	1	3	Accepting different sexual identities	2	7	Respecting for diversity	2	7
Doing more exercise	1	3	Valuing freedom more	1	3			
Apologizing more often	1	3						
Tipping service employees	1	3						
Quitting smoking	1	3						

4.1.1 Tripographic

Motivation (e.g., leisure, culture, business) and duration of travel (e.g., short-term stay, long-term stay), travel company (e.g., alone, family, friends), travel arrangements (self vs. organized), and previous planning (casual vs. detailed), travel budget and lodging (shared vs. isolated) were identified as main themes under tripographic factors.

Morgan (2010) emphasized that travel motivation affects the level and type of transformative experience. Almost half of the respondents mentioned the importance of travel motivation in a transformative experience. For example, a participant discussed:

"When you go to an all-inclusive hotel, you are staying in the same place for a week traveling to and from the airport, but if you are going on a cultural trip, then you have more chances of interacting with different things." [female, 57 years old, teacher].

A participant stated: *"Before traveling, you should know why you are going there…Travels that make me get to know new people change me more."* [female, 50 years old, architect]. Thus, the transformation can be more intense in some types of travel based on motivation (e.g., leisure, culture, and voluntary tourism) than in others. The lack of interaction with others and traveling alone might result in a more transformative travel experience (e.g., nature-based tours). Bruner (1991) claimed that special interest tourists would pursue more transformative experiences than mass tourists seeking comfort and relaxation. The travel purpose may change your expectations of traveling. Tasci and Godovykh (2021) reported in their study that pleasure/vacation travels are more likely to cause transformation.

"I went alone as a backpacker for 3 weeks …, I told myself that I won't go to any tourist places except principal ones. My aim was to go to places where local people go, and I wanted to eat and drink in places where local people prefer. I wanted to be close with them. … This travel, although was not the most comfortable one, was more transformative." [male, 29 years old, Ph.D. student].

"Your travel purpose is important. When you go abroad for business, your gains are about business earnings. But when you see and experience the culture, you have more opportunities to develop yourself as a person." [female, 31 years old, fashion designer].

"There's this beauty when traveling, not on business, but on holiday, you feel relaxed…You can think more freely because you have the time to do so. You are away from your daily need-to-do list…But there is stress in business travel. You have a duty given to you, you have to fulfill your duty." [female, 52 years old, textile engineer].

A majority of participants agreed traveling alone is more transformative. Pung and Del Chiappa (2020) indicated that traveling with a familiar companion is a transformation inhibitor. In other words, traveling with a familiar companion reduces the chances of having a transformative experience. Therefore, traveling alone might be more transformative as it can lead to encountering different people, cultures, and situations.

"… Travel alone. Your self-confidence increases when you travel alone. Go to places you don't know… Get together with people you don't know and try to understand them. Don't spend millions. Instead of spending millions, eat at a cheap restaurant, stay at a cheap hotel, and get to know the place." [female, 57 years old, teacher].

Organized package tours usually offer fewer opportunities for transformative travel experiences because the encounters are usually mediated by third parties and happen within the tourist bubble (Cohen, 1972). This was also reflected in the findings.

"I realized that what the tours are offering is a theatrical play. You don't perceive life itself much…. When we travel with a package tour, they organize some events like Flamenco Shows or Sira nights. Of course, we don't know how many of these are only fake shows or how many of these are still authentic and available today." [female, 53 years old, architect].

Lodging type and travel budget can also determine how the tourist experience will take shape. Staying, dining, or shopping in places where people can get more interaction with locals can provide more transformative travel experiences.

"We accommodated in a house in Serbia using Airbnb. We talked with our host couple, and we became friends. That is to say, instead of staying in a hotel you should contact local people." In a similar way, a 33 year old teacher (R26) mentioned: *'The place that you stay is also important… if you are staying at a shared accommodation or a hostel dormitory, then you have more chances to interact with other people and learn different things that you might adopt."* [female, 37 years old, psychologist].

Duration of travel is also stated as important. A participant discussed *"You need time to feel the place, you can not really get to know the culture and the people in a few days."* [male, 55 years old, teacher]. Findings in the study by Pung and Del Chiappa (2020) also confirm that staying longer or feeling like a resident living at the destination increases the transformative effect of travel for tourists.

4.1.2 Personal Factors

Personal characteristics such as demography (e.g., age, cultural background, education, income, and occupation), personality (e.g., openness, extraversion, adventurous, observant), previous travel experience to similar destinations, the usual residence of the tourists, and its characteristics, country of origin and social network were discussed as factors affecting the level of transformations. Fan et al. (2020) also discuss cultural distance (Fan et al., 2020) and the psychic gap (Ponsignon et al., 2020) between hosts and the guest might define the nature of perceptions and strength of travel experiences. Tourists sharing similar cultural backgrounds with the host country (e.g., Swedish tourists visiting Norway) might face less transformative travel experiences than a tourist visiting a country where cultural, economic, and social differences are greater. Kotler (1997) argued that experiences

are shaped by the individual's background (e.g., religious, education, cultural heritage, etc.), also referring to the significance of personal factors.

Atejlevic et al. (2016) suggest that travelers who seek transformative experiences generally share some common characteristics: being young or middle-aged, well-educated, and preferring to travel independently. This might be due to educated respondents being more open to experiences or being able to speak foreign languages and communicate with and understand the local culture better. Similarly, some participants in this study mentioned that age might be an important factor for experiencing transformation through travel.

"*Because I'm young, the things I'm paying attention to are different, but if I were in my 40s or 50s, it would be a different story. The experiences that affect my life can vary by age, so my perceptions.*" [male, 18 years old, high school student].

"*If I've started to travel younger such as at high school or university, it would be more transformative. Because you can easily change your perspective about the world at those ages.*" [male, 35 years old, scholar].

"*When you are young you are more open catching every information... When you are young, you have an active spirit.*" [female, 52 years old, textile engineer].

Talking about the importance of occupational background, a participant stated:

"*If you are a chef, culinary may impress you more. If you are interested in gastronomy, food…, you make an observation about food. When we go abroad, I am looking for a bazaar, but my wife is looking for a museum... Your motivations may be different.*" A 40 years old scholar (R7) stated: "*Personality is important in changing attitude [and] behavior. If someone is not open to change like me, he/she won't have an easy transformation… There are times when I compare my life with others during a vacation, and sometimes these affect me for a short period. But it is not really easy for me to change my way of life. I experience and enjoy these during the vacation without much of an impact on my usual life in here [Turkey].*" [male, 37 years old, chef].

4.1.3 Destination

Distance (both physical and cultural) from origin, language spoken at the destination, level of interaction, and destination characteristics (history, heritage, customs, and people) also influenced the transformations. This effect can either originate from tangible factors at the destination like landscape, nature, infrastructure, and architecture or intangible factors like culture, values, way of life, relationships, cost of living, etc. Tasci and Godovykh (2021) emphasized that travelers change more during travel when they have contact with nature and people and participate in cultural activities.

"*It was important for me that cultural differences between USA and Turkey are so much. My travel to the USA affected me more than other travels.*" [male, 18 years old, high school student].

"*It was surprising to see so many women included in the workforce. Especially as drivers, police, and even as construction workers in Sweden.*" [male, 21 years old, student].

Hospitality and the social environment at the destination is also a major determinant for transformative travel experiences to emerge. These interpersonal interactions affect the way people think and behave. Such alterations can even create sustained shifts in social values about human rights, gender equality, and so on. Morgan (2010) noticed that a direct encounter with otherness (nature and culture) might cause a more intense transformation. For example, a participant mentioned her experience in Lapland, Finland, to describe how he felt serene in nature (i.e., Aurora) and the positive effects on his environmental consciousness. "I realized that we as humans are only a small part of what is going in the universe." [female, 53 years old, architect].

4.2 Types of Transformations

Travel transformations also altered various distinct habits and long-term reflections on regular life. These were grouped under behavioral transformations (e.g., new habits, hobbies, activities, interactions with others), attitudinal shifts (e.g., changes in lifestyle, environmental and social concerns, enhanced worldview and objectivity), and personality (e.g., enhanced self-confidence, being more flexible and tolerant, becoming social, and outgoing). These are further discussed below, supported with quotations from the respondents.

4.2.1 Behavioral transformations

Traveling to other places makes people get out of their daily routine and provide them with different experiences. Some of these novel experiences are adopted to daily life and create sustained behavioral transformations. Most of the behavioral transformations involve personal, environmental, and social contribution and are informed by voluntary experiences (e.g., eating healthy food) others are triggered by mandatory encounters (e.g., recycling) and can cause people to transform and change their behaviors (e.g., littering). Some of these transformations appear to acquire new behaviors (e.g., tipping service staff), others in the form of giving up old habits (e.g., smoking). Tasci and Godovykh (2021), similar to this study, reported that travelers are more environmentally-conscious after travel.

New eating and drinking habits, more active life, doing more exercise, apologizing more often, saluting people more often, recycling, tipping service employees, spending less, reading more, respecting traffic rules, quitting smoking, and using technology more were among the behaviors changed by the travel experiences.

"*Coffee, espresso. You drink good coffee and quality wine in there (France). When I returned to Turkey, I also started hating instant coffee and replaced it with original roast coffee.*" A 26-year-old student (R24) also stated: "*I did not like filter coffee at all before going to Portugal. Now, I have a*

coffee machine at home, and I drink coffee approximately 1 liter a day. This happened after returning from Portugal." [female, 37 years old, psychologist].

"We saw in Venice trip that Italians drink Aperol spritz beverage at happy hours. Then, we liked it and began to have this beverage in stock at our home...we make sure we have a bottle of Aperol spritz at our home. It is a habit now." [female, 53 years old, architect].

Participants also mentioned changes in respect for others, obeying the rules, and giving up some old habits.

"I am obsessed with hygiene. It [traveling] made me more tolerant of this obsession. On my travels, I did things I said that I would never do at home. I remember once, I didn't take a shower for four days. In other words, what I learned from my travels is if something is not possible, I shouldn't moan and destroy the experience. I understood that you have to be content with anything." [male, 47 years old, scholar].

"I hired a car in Canada, unlike Turkish people lead the way and respect each other. My friends living there also warned me about driving. It made me a more careful and respectful driver." [male, 37 years old, sales representative].

"I learned a lot of things about environmental issues and saw people recycle everything. We also have recycle bins [in Turkey], but I did not really mind them. Now, I also started to recycle and separate glass and paper from regular waste, I am more careful now." [female, 35 years old, lawyer].

"Generally, people who live abroad greet every person... Even a woman who was cleaning her terrace greeted us when we were walking on the street. I was surprised about that. Now I am also greeting people and offering a 'good morning with a smile to people who I don't know. It makes them happy as well. A small smile and saluting are making people change. You don't have to talk with them. Only saying "Hi" with a smile is enough." [female, 43 years old, tour guide].

4.2.2 Attitudinal

Travel experiences have also triggered changes in the attitudes and perspectives of the respondents. Increased motivation to travel abroad, enhanced environmental concerns, recognition of cultural diversity and values, respecting cultural differences and realizing similarities with others, attitudes towards other countries and own country, becoming more socially responsible and aware, decreased prejudice about things (e.g., food), cultures (e.g., religion) and people, accepting different sexual identities, valuing freedom more are examples for sustained attitudinal transformations.

In a recent study, Pung and Del Chiappa (2020) found that Italian travelers learned to be non-judgmental towards others (people or situations) through transformative experiences during their trips. Pearce and Foster (2007) indicated that travels make passengers more responsible and understanding.

"I witnessed radical religious Muslim and Christian friends crying when they were leaving each other. Getting to know each other brings people together." [male, 26 years old, student].

"When we were looking for a cafe in Spain, we found and went to a gay café... After this experience in Spain, I noticed they are normal people... maybe even nicer." [female, 31 years old, fashion designer].

"In Turkey, we have a lot of resources we don't respect and utilize. Especially in terms of historic places, my outlook towards Turkey has changed." [female, 22 years old, student].

Pizam et al. (2000) found the increasing intensity of social interaction between tourists and hosts resulted in positive changes in attitudes towards hosts and destinations.

"Actually, before going to France, I thought we were so different from each other, but when I went there, I realized we are so similar. There are some differences in fact, but... we can also talk about the same brands, things and everyone can understand each other. There are some cultural differences, but now we have a lot of common ground with globalization and social media." R6, 31 years old Ph.D. student stated: "I realized we weren't that different from the people in the countries I traveled to. Actually, I realized that we can get on the same page, we can talk about the same things and laugh at the same things... Formerly, I thought that we had completely different values and lifestyles." [female, 37 years old, psychologist].

Previous research also confirmed travel experiences resulted in positive attitudinal changes among people from conflicting countries. For example, Pizam et al. (2002) found attitudes of ecotourists from Israel transformed into a more positive perception of Jordanian people after their travels to Jordan. These attitudinal changes offered by tourism activity are claimed to serve world peace (Bruner, 1991).

"I haven't met any black people before going to France. They were represented as bad people on TV. And the image in my head was that they behave badly... But, especially in the subway or other places, they always helped me in France." [male, 30 years old, master's student].

"My attitude towards the British people has changed. I thought that they were arrogant people, but in general, I met people who were the opposite... I realized that I had more stereotypes in my head than I thought." [female, 37 years old, psychologist].

"For example, before going to Spain, I thought that Spanish people who come to Turkey were rude. After going there, I found them so nice and friendly. I realized that they are so delightful, casual, talkative, and very sweet people..." [female, 43 years old, tour guide].

"I noticed that the people I thought were cold are not. For example, in France, people were more sincere and warm than I expected." [female, 35 years old, lawyer].

4.2.3 Personality

Personality is relatively stable, and possible changes require longer exposure to stimuli. Travel experiences are a part of life experience. Hence most of the keywords grouped under this construct were mentioned by experienced travelers based on their overall travel experiences rather than specific destination-based examples. The majority of the participants believe travel

makes them a better person, and their skills and personalities were improved. The personality characteristics attained as a result of transformative travel experiences are personal development, enhanced self-confidence and independence, persistent, mindful, observant, vigilant, forward-thinking, becoming more patient and cautious, accommodating, friendly and humane, being more flexible, easy-going, understanding, tolerant and less conservative, respecting diversity, becoming more adventurous and risk-taking, learning to cope with difficulties, and becoming more social, extraverted, open-minded, and outgoing. Pearce and Foster (2007) revealed that travelers become more self-confidence, open-minded, independent, patient, tolerant, understanding, and conscious through travels. Pung et al. (2019) also stated that the transformative experience increases the self-confidence of both female and male travelers.

> *"I think that traveling also awakens one's inner world. The more you travel, the closer you get to yourself. You discover another side of yourself."* [male, 29 years old, Ph.D. student].

> *"...Visiting Mecca made me more religious I guess, the divine environment, so many people, it was so intense."* [female, 50 years old, architect].

> *"... being part of a place, moving from the title of a tourist to the title of a person has more transformative effects since it requires more exposure to the dynamics of the local place. The fact that the new place you see is more alien to your emotions, cultural and mental structure, offers greater opportunities for change and transformation...Everything has changed from the design of my house to my desk, the books I read, and the series I watch. The places I want to go are now in that new world I'm impressed with. My social perspective did not lead to fundamental changes such as my political stance, but it only led to the development of my perspective."* [male, 35 years old, scholar].

Birgit (2019) suggests that long-term independent travel might enable travelers to change their perspectives and respect differences from a wider perspective.

> "*My travels increased my self-confidence. Especially travels I planned by myself or solo travels... Now I tell myself that I can handle much alone, and I feel independent*". [male, 40 years old, scholar].

> *"The world is shrinking in your eyes. It's nice to experience it. The more you travel, the more you learn about not only others but also yourself...."* [female, 33 years old, bank clerk].

5. Discussion and Conclusions

Despite understanding that long-lasting impacts of travel on tourists have important theoretical and practical implications, literature failed to offer a unified typology of reasons and outcomes of these transformative experiences. This empirical study explored the antecedents and types of transformative travel experiences through a qualitative study based on in-depth interviews with 30 travelers from a developing country, Turkey. Data analysis revealed three constructs that influence transformative travel experiences to emerge as tripographic,

personal and destination-related factors. Types of transformations were also categorized under three groups; behavioral, attitudinal, and personality alterations. Previous studies have also claimed that the transformation shows changes in behavior (Tasci and Godovykh, 2021; Pung et al., 2020) and attitudes (Pung et al., 2020). Although the influence of travel experience on tourists' behavior and well-being has been studied extensively, previous literature on tourist behavior overlooked the essence of travel transformations emerging from their travel activities. This research offers a typology of transformations and how these are influenced by other factors, such as tripographics, personality, and destination-based agents. This corroborates with Kotler (1997), who argues that personal factors shape consumer experiences.

If travelers and the tourism industry are better informed about the transformative effects of travel and how they are formed, they might be better positioned to influence these. They might design their product as more transformative. For example, tour operators might offer more informative and authentic services (e.g., rituals) and products (e.g., local food). Scholars might also have a better picture of how tourism affects individuals' behavior, attitudes, and personalities in their regular life. For example, various respondents mentioned that their travel experiences made them more active and environmentally responsible. Some travelers also started to apologize and greet others more often. They also became more tolerant of cultural differences, gained self-confidence, and became more curious and adventurous. Therefore, the results of this study are in line with Ateljevic et al. (2016) who stated that travelers, who are prone to transformation, are more sensitive to the environment and socio-economic issues and see travel as a good opportunity to learn. Morgan's (2010) findings that travel motivation has a major effect on the strength and type of transformation also confirm the impact of motivation on transformations.

The study also confirms travel experiences result mostly in positive transformations. Referring to the importance of travel in creating positive change and validating the findings, Pung and Del Chiappa (2020) also narrated: "...the participants mostly reported experiencing three main changes: increased self-efficiency, becoming humbler and being enriched (p. 7)**". Hence travel facilitation might even be considered a tool for public policy. Transformative tourism experiences facilitate understanding of different cultures, self-reflection, critical thinking, emotional connections, and developing a more tolerant and universal worldview (Soulard, McGehee, and Knollenberg, 2020) and can be acknowledged as agents of change in society. For example, a local government trying to improve environmental awareness might facilitate nature-based tours or promote environmentally-friendly destinations. Corroborating with this, Morgan (2010) argues that encounters with others and otherness may enhance the intensity of transformation. Ozcelik and Omuris (2020) found that nature-based travel experiences lead to environmental awareness, behavioral change, self-actualization, personal development,

socio-cultural alterations, and improved health and well-being in a nature-based tourism setting.

The results also show that the level and type of transformations also differ based on various factors, including duration of travel, level of interaction with local people, age, travel frequency, and cultural distance at the destination. Similar to these findings, Graburn (1978) also discusses some trips might have greater transformative power than others. The strength of transformation might as well differ based on personal and destination attributes. For example, independent travel, which contains social and cultural elements made to destinations with a larger cultural distance, is more prone to creating transformative travel experiences. Pung and Del Chiappa (2020) indicated that traveling with friends and family obstructs the level of potential transformative travel experience from emerging. Our findings also confirm traveling alone is more prone to transformations because of enhanced interaction with locals instead of the travel company. Some types of tourism are also expected to create different types of transformations than others. A political tour might have a stronger impact on attitudes, nature-based solo adventure tourism might alter personality, whereas a religious pilgrimage might affect behaviors more intensely.

The small sample size and concentration are the main limitations of this study. Yet, among the first preliminary studies on transformative travel experiences, in a developing country, the study might shed light on future studies on quantification and measurement of the level and type of transformation for different destinations, personalities, tripographics. Future studies looking into travel-related changes in individuals' behaviors, attitudes, and personalities using an international, diverse sample and how these transformative travel experiences are triggered are considered important to define these experiences and offer them at the destinations. Such knowledge might improve our understanding of the effect of tourist transformation on individuals, societies, and cultures. This understanding would also transform the image of tourism as a relaxing physical activity into a tool for personal and social transformative endeavors. Longitudinal studies exploring and measuring such transformation might also offer interesting findings. Adopting a story-telling approach or using travel journals as a way to investigate the transformative impacts of travel are also alternative methodologies that could be utilized in future research.

Exploring the transformative power of travel experiences is an individual phenomenon and might also offer social uses. The benefits of travel might be better justified when these transformations would benefit tourist-generating societies. Travel experiences, just like formal education, provide information and alter the attitudes, behavior, and personality of travelers. Pearce and Foster (2007) also discuss this transformative power of tourism as "University of Travel" where tourists have the instruments to improve themselves, particularly

in developing countries where the socio-cultural differences create major challenges for adopting universal behavior.

There might also be some negative aspects to transformative travel experiences. Travel experiences might trigger personal and social conflicts and tensions (e.g., increased motivation to live abroad, enhanced awareness about the gap between right and wrong). Yet this study failed to capture the negative outcomes and transformations of travel. Not all transformations were positive and negative transformations were also mentioned. Besides, the respondents might have positively exaggerated one's transformation. The others' perceptions of travelers about their transformation might also be an interesting approach to exploring transformations. These might also be explored in a future study.

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