

ETHNIC TOURISM: AN EXAMPLE FROM ISTANBUL, TURKEY

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Abstract – Ethnic Tourism: An Example from Istanbul, Turkey. Globalization has not only produced a trend towards economic integration and cultural homogenization but has also encouraged the preservation of local diversity and of multiculturalism. Whereas in the past ethnic or religious minorities were seen as a threat to the territorial unity of the country, today, increasingly countries are promoting ethnicities to attract tourists. Ethnic tourism is an alternative form of tourism that relies on attracting tourists to see sites connected to the cultural and historical heritage of ethnic minorities. This study explores the potential for ethnic tourism development in Istanbul, a city with a multicultural past and great heritage attractions.

Key-Words: ethnic tourism, heritage tourism, legacy tourism, alternative tourism, minority populations, Istanbul, Turkey

1. Introduction

At its height, the Ottoman Empire expanded from the outskirts of Vienna in the north, to Yemen and Eritrea in the south, and from Algeria in the west to Persia and Azerbaijan in the east, covering 5.2 million square kilometers, and incorporating more than 35 million people in the mid 19th Century and about 24 million in 1912. An important number of subjects were not Turks and many were not even Muslim. These ethnic groups have managed to survive even after centuries of Ottoman domination. This was possible due to the *millet* system under which confessional communities were allowed to retain their religious practices and laws, their languages and their cultural traditions under the protection of the Sultan.

While these religious minorities did not enjoy all the rights of the Muslims living in the Empire and paid higher taxes, they were allowed to rule themselves based on their religious and legal systems. The *millet* system permitted the coexistence of almost completely separated religious and ethnic communities within the Ottoman Empire and prevented the assimilation of conquered populations even after more than 500 years.

Not only that conquered populations were allowed to keep their ethnic and religious identity but also the Sultans have encouraged

populations that were oppressed in other parts of the world to settle within the limits of the Empire and enjoy all the benefits of living within their own community, or *millet*. For example, when Jews were expelled from the Iberian Peninsula following the Reconquista, Sultan Bayazid II (1481-1512) issued an invitation to Jews to come and settle in Istanbul and other parts of the Empire where their skills were greatly needed. Jews arrived in great numbers so by the end of the 15th Century Istanbul had 44 synagogues and a Jewish community of 30,000 people (According to Wikipedia citing <http://www.eleven.co.il>).

Before the start of World War I there were an estimated 1.8 million Greeks (Alaux, L-P. and R. Puaux (1916), *Le declin de l'Hellenisme*. Paris: Librairie Payot et Cie.) living in the Ottoman Empire and probably around 1.5 million Armenians (J. McCarthy (2001), *The Population of Ottoman Armenians*. In, *The Armenians in the Late Ottoman Period*. The Turkish Historical Society for the Council of Culture, Arts and Publications of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, Ankara, pp. 65-86. [www.tallarmentantale.com/PopulationOttomanArmenians .pdf](http://www.tallarmentantale.com/PopulationOttomanArmenians.pdf)). The Greeks lived mainly in Istanbul and in Western Anatolia whereas the Armenians were concentrated in Istanbul and in the eastern provinces. The Jewish population was also estimated at about 200,000 people.

However, while the *millet* system has

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allowed the preservation of different ethnicities even after centuries of Ottoman rule, it has also contributed to the weakening of the Empire after the rise of nationalism. Faced with national uprising movements in the Balkans, the Ottoman Empire lost almost all its territories in Europe. Then, during and after World War I the Ottomans lost all their colonies in the Middle East and North Africa. One consequence was that Turks have abandoned the idea that they could peacefully coexist with other ethnic groups as they started to doubt the loyalty of minority groups. Due to the population exchanges and several pogroms, Turkey has lost most of its Greek, Armenian and Jewish populations. The number of people that belong to religious minorities is extremely low today in Turkey.

On the other hand, there are millions of people living all around the world who were either born in Turkey or have ancestors or relatives born in this country. It is reasonable to believe that these people would desire to return as tourist or to visit the land of their ancestors. The following article is about ethnic Greek, Armenian or Jewish tourists from outside of Turkey visiting in Istanbul objectives that are connected to their communities.

2. Methods

In order to meet the objectives of this study we chose the interview method. We interviewed people on three levels:

1. Interviews with governmental and non-governmental agents: During the first stages of the research we met with the local official of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and with an official from the Tourist Information Office as well as with representatives of two travel agencies in Istanbul. The main purpose of these interviews was to gather preliminary information on the dynamics of ethnic tourism in Turkey in general and in Istanbul in particular and on the government's approach and policies regarding this type of tourism.

2. Interviews with local community leaders: The second step was to meet with leaders representing the three major historical ethnic minority communities in Istanbul (Greek, Armenian and Jewish). We first contacted the

Greek Patriarchate and met with the authorized person in charge of public relations. Next, we met with Mr. Mihail Vasiliadis (journalist with the local Greek paper, *Apoyevmatini*). Both interlocutors proved to be very knowledgeable of the local community and provided us with relevant information on the history and cultural-religious traditions of the Greek community as well as on particular issues related to the visits of their co-nationals living abroad (reasons for and timing of their visits and main sites and objectives visited). In order to better understand the visitation pattern of Armenians to Istanbul we approached some leaders of the Armenian business community which dominate the jewelry quarter in the Grand Bazaar. Lastly, Ms. Nisya Allovi from The Quincentennial Foundation Museum of Turkish Jews provided valuable information on the local Jewish community and their cultural traditions as well as on the profile and patterns of Jewish tourists visiting from Israel or from other countries.

3. Interviews with ethnic tourists: The Easter Orthodox religious holiday offered us a great opportunity to meet with and interview Greek and Armenian tourists. The interviews took place between 27 February and 28 April 2012 at Fener Greek Patriarchate, in Şişli neighborhood, in Taksim Square and in Queens Hotel in Laleli with Greek tourists and Grandbazaar and Yeşilköy neighborhood with Armenian tourists and community members but we also interviewed over the Internet both Greeks and Armenians. In total a number of 40 interviews were taken. Of these interviews, 27 were with Greek tourists and 13 with Armenians. Interviewing participants at religious processions is always a difficult task and the interviewer has to proceed with patience, discretion and respect. Many pious participants are too marked by the religious importance of the event to accept to be interviewed. An initial questionnaire designed for the ethnic tourists to be distributed during the Holy Week in front of the main Greek and Armenian churches had to be replaced with short semi-structured on-site interviews due to the low questionnaire acceptance. Even so, the interviewer had to deal with issues of distrust and fear especially among

Armenian tourists due to the tense political relations that exists between the two nations¹.

We have also used numerous secondary sources to collect data for this study. These included official censuses of the Republic of Turkey, data from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and several other databases as well as newspaper and scientific articles, books and websites. In addition we have consulted a number of tourist blogs available on the Internet.

3. Literature Review

Globalization has not only produced a trend towards regional economic integration but also a counter-trend that is celebratory of diversity and multiculturalism (Almeida Santos et al, 2008; Doorne et al, 2003). Increasingly developed and developing countries alike are promoting ethnicities to attract tourists (Jamison, 1999).

The term “ethnic tourism” was first used by Smith (1989, p. 4) who defined it as tourism marketed to the public in terms of “quaint customs of indigenous and often exotic peoples”. Van den Berghe (1994, p. 8) also understands ethnic tourism very narrowly as tourism happening in “ethnically exotic, in as untouched, pristine, authentic form as can be found”. These tourists could visit “native homes and villages”, could observe dances and ceremonies and could shop for “primitive wares and curios” (Smith 1989, p. 4; also in Moscardo and Pearce 1999). For these authors, ethnic tourism refers to the “search for the other” (van den Berghe 1994), those ethnic groups that display cultural characteristics that are clearly different (even opposite) to that of the visitors (Almeida Santos et al 2008). For example Ishii (2012) and Leepreecha (2005) use the term ethnic tourism when discussing the tourism happening in the hill tribes of Thailand and de Azeredo Grunewald (2002) uses the term “Indian tourism” to refer to the ethnic tourism promoted in the territories of the Pataxo Indians of Porto Seguro in Brazil. By “ethnic tourism” Yang (2011; Yang and Wall,

2009; 2008; Yang et al, 2006) also understands the tourism that is happening in the “tribal area” of Yunnan Province, China, exploiting the image of multiculturalism and “exoticism” that characterizes this province. When “ethnic tourism is defined this way, authenticity is an important factor for attracting tourists to the area (Young and Wall, 2009; Zhu, 2012; Xie, 2011).

Two other terms that are used to describe the type of tourism in which visitors are drawn to a place by the different cultural characteristics of a certain ethnic group are “indigenous tourism” and “aboriginal tourism” (Moscardo and Pearce 1999; Ryan and Aicken 2005). However, the difference is that these terms refer exclusively to tourism involving indigenous populations whereas ethnic tourism refers to the visitation of any ethnic community regardless of whether they are indigenous or not.

Ethnic minorities represent an important resource for attracting tourists not only in developing countries but also in developed countries, mainly in the form of ethnic enclaves (Almeida Santos and Yan, 2008; Almeida Santos et al, 2008; Henderson, 2000, Li, 2000, Phua et al, 2012; Moscardo and Pearce, 1999). Consequently, Poria and Ashworth (2009) argue that the ethnic heritage site is a political resource that aims to legitimize the social division of people into “we” and “they”.

Pitchford (1995) proposed that the term “ethnic tourism” be extended to the visitation of Welsh heritage sites in the United Kingdom. He contended that Welsh’ desire for identity is connected to the representation of their culture for tourism. Moreover, Pearce and Moscardo (1999) argued that the term “ethnic tourism” should also apply to those situations when tourists visit places connected to their own ethnicity.

“Heritage tourism” is another form that is often used in connection to travels to sites that are part of our (ethnic or cultural) heritage. This may refer to “our connections to anything from history, art, science, lifestyles, architecture, to scenery found in a community, region, population, or institution that we regard as part of our collective lineage” (McCain and Ray 2003, p. 713). Heritage can be understood as

¹ Other researchers reported similar difficulties in interviewing minority populations in Istanbul (see, for example Mills, 2008).

both a “material and socio-psychological testimony of identity” (Park 2010, pp. 116-117). Therefore heritage tourism serves an important role in the forging or reconstruction of a national identity (Park 2010). For example many Turkish tourists travel to the Balkans or the Middle East to visit places connected to Ottoman history¹.

Another term that may better describe the situation discussed in this article is “legacy tourism”. McCain and Ray (2003) used this term for those situations in which tourists visit a place in search for genealogical information or to which they feel connected through their ancestors. Poria et al (2003) contend that when visiting a heritage place for which we feel a personal connection our visitation pattern and our behavior will be different than that of other visitors. For example, many Americans travel every year to Europe (mainly Ireland but also Italy or Scandinavia among other places) to search for their ancestral roots or for distant family. Jews from Israel or USA also travel to places that are connected to genocide places (such as Auschwitz) or to the lands where their grandparents used to live especially in the countries of the former Jewish Pale of Settlement (Ukraine, Romania, Moldova, Russia, Poland). King (1994) contended that in situations in which friends and relatives travel to explore their ethnicity in other locations or in which the primary motivation of the travel is ethnic reunion should also be considered as forms of ethnic tourism.

Hakkarainen (2011) has discussed the travel of Jewish tourists from Israel and the Diaspora to the Pale of Settlement where their ancestors had lived. Some of these tourists were researchers of Jewish traditions, languages, literature, history or arts doing field research; others were Hasidic pilgrims visiting the graves of their spiritual teachers; and still others were local people who emigrated abroad or family members of local émigrés visiting their ancestral places. All these people had strong

personal motivation and their trip was characterized by great emotional experience. While ethnicity played a significant role in motivating the trips, Hakkarainen (2011) argues that including these visits into the ethnic tourism category would not be right because of the strong personal attachment that tourists felt to the sites they visited.

Çalışkan (2010) has studied the travel of Rums to the Turkish islands of Gökçeada and Bozcaada to attend religious holidays and fairs. The use of the term Rum instead of Greek is not coincidental as this is how Greeks living in Turkey are called. In the past these two islands were inhabited mainly by Greeks; however, due to the political situation over the last one hundred years most of these have emigrated to Greece and other parts of the world and the ethnic composition of the islands has changed with the Rums remaining but a small minority. Every year thousands of these émigrés return to the islands to attend religious ceremonies, to meet with neighbors and friends and to visit those places where they or their ancestors had lived in the past.

Ethnic tourism is based on the commodification of ethnic culture (Leong, 1997; Almeida Santos et al, 2008). Countries characterized by ethnic diversity present a clear advantage because they can use this to attract tourists and generate local economic development (Henderson, 2003; Smith, 1989; Phua et al, 2012). Moreover, tourist interests and the economic benefits deriving from it may also be important for the survival or revival of minority culture (van den Berghe, 1992; 1994; Pitchford, 1995; Jamison, 1999). However, there are more advantages that come from the development of ethnic tourism besides the obvious economic ones. For instance, in many minority communities, the development of ethnic tourism has also been instrumental for heritage preservation (Yang and Wall, 2009; Yang et al, 2006). Tourists’ interests have also contributed to the revival of cultural pride, and to the process of identity formation in the case of new nations (Hitchcock 1999; van den Berghe 1992, 1994; Jamison 1999).

Moreover, when ethnic tourism involves a cultural minority, it may determine the majority

¹ See, for example, Miki Trajkovski, “Eid al-Adha Brings Money to the Balkans”, SES Türkiye, 26 October, 2012. http://turkey.setimes.com/en_GB/articles/ses/articles/features/departments/economy/2012/10/26/feature-01

population to re-evaluate their relationship with the minority (Hitchcock 1999). Whereas in the past ethnic diversity may have been perceived by many states as a problem because minorities were seen as a threat to the territorial unity of the country, today ethnicity is seen as a resource that could generate income and foreign exchange through tourism (Leong 1997).

However, so far too little attention has been given to the relationship between ethnic tourism and sustainability (Garrod and Fyall, 2000). Li (2000) argued that development of ethnic tourism could have negative consequences besides the positive ones and therefore, in the planning process, we need to emphasize those actions that would foster the positive impacts and would minimize the negative ones.

In this study, by ethnic tourism we understand travels to sites associated with the cultural or historical heritage of an ethnic or religious minority by tourists from the same ethnic group living abroad. More specifically we refer to tourists of Greek, Armenian and Jewish ethnicity or religion visiting sites connected to these three historical minorities in Istanbul.

4. Study area: Ethnic and Religious Minorities in Turkey and Istanbul

The Republic of Turkey recognizes only three ethnic minorities: Armenians, Greeks and Jews (Karimova and Deverell, 2001). Taken together they represent less than one percent of the total population in Turkey. Other minorities may be much better represented; however, they are not recognized as such and their numbers can only be estimated. Together all ethnic minorities may represent about 25 percent of the total population of Turkey¹.

The most important, in terms of numbers are the Kurds who represent about 20 percent of the total population². Although some were forcibly dispersed after an uprising in 1935 most Kurds still tend to live in the southeastern

provinces (Ülker 2007). A heavy military presence is highly visible in the nine provinces where the majority of the Kurds live in order to discourage any separatist movement.

Other ethnic minorities are: Arabs, Turkmen, Laz, Roma, Circassians, Georgians, Azeris, Assyrians and others. Their numbers vary between a few thousand and more than one million but some are highly assimilated.

4.1. The Greeks (Rums) in Istanbul

Greeks, Armenians and Jews constituted in the past the main ethnic and religious minorities. However, over the last century their number has been greatly reduced. About 1.5 million Greeks were compelled to leave the country following the population exchange in 1924 between Turkey and Greece being replaced with approximately 500,000 Muslims (mainly Turks) from Greece. The only Greeks that were not part of this exchange were those living in Istanbul and in the islands of Gökçeada and Bozca Ada, off the western entrance to the Dardanelles numbering about 200,000. However, beginning in the 1930s the Greeks were encouraged to emigrate and their population continued to decline³. Today fewer than 3000 are estimated to live in Istanbul and the two islands⁴. Although very few remaining, Rums are among Turkey's wealthiest communities (Chapin Metz, 2007). Most of those remaining are old with only 240 students studying in the 22 Greek schools (Head, J. (2011), Greek Community in Turkey Fears for Its Survival. BBC News, 7 January 2011. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-12133163>).

The remaining Greeks generally live in the

³ By 1965 there were only 48,000 left and in 1995 less than 20,000 (Chapin Metz, 1995)

⁴ Karimova and Deverell (2001) estimated the Greek population in Turkey at 3000. Based on several sources, Kara and Karakuyu (2009) put the population of Greeks in Istanbul (only) between 2000 and 2500. Turkish Censuses have not recorded data on ethnicity and religion since 1964 so that no exact data exist. These numbers refer to Orthodox Greeks exclusively. If we also consider the Muslim Greeks their population could be as high as 200,000 – 300,000 people; however these are highly assimilated (Karimova and Deverell 2001 citing Bilgin Esme and Aggeliki Ralli, "Greek Speaking Muslims", <http://www.tufts.edu/org/hellenic/m-asia/muslim-greeks.html>).

¹ According to CIA Factbook (2008 est.) <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tu.html>

² ibidem

newer and more modern neighborhoods of Istanbul such as Kurtuluş, Nişantaşı, Şişli or Kadıköy on the Asian (Anatolian) part of the city [fig. 1]. Smaller communities of Rums have survived also on the two sides of the Bosphorus in neighborhoods such as Yeniköy, Arnavutköy, Emirgan, and Kuzguncuk. Very few of them are still living in the old, historical neighborhoods. Many Greek Orthodox churches have been

preserved in the old neighborhoods of Kumkapı, Karagümrük, Samatya, or Balat although very few Rums still live there. Less than one hundred Greeks have remained in the old, traditionally Greek neighborhood, Fener, where the Patriarchate is located. Some Greeks also live on the Princess Islands and many other Greeks have summer residences there (especially on the islands of Heybeliada, Buyukada and Burgaz).

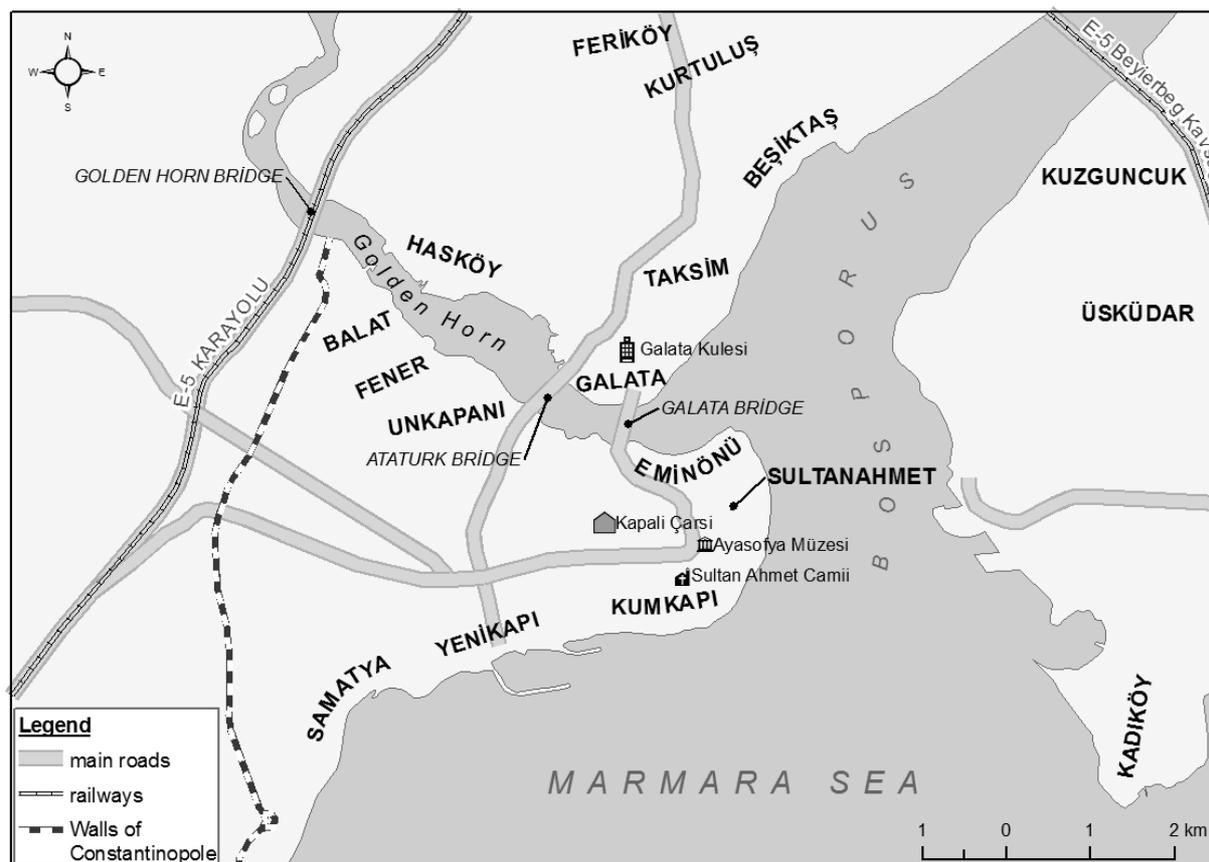


Figure 1: *Central Historical Neighborhoods of Istanbul* (Cartographer: Ionut Augustin Craciun)

4.2. The Jews in Istanbul

The total number of Jews in Turkey is estimated at 24,000 - 25,000¹ of which 20,000 – 22,000 in Istanbul². Jews are the most assimilated of the minority groups in Istanbul (Mills, 2008). About 96 percent of them are Sephardic Jews who were expelled in the 15th Century from the Iberian Peninsula and speak

Ladino (a form of 15th century Spanish). The majority of the rest are Ashkenazi Jews who speak Yiddish (derived from German) and originated from Central and Eastern Europe. A small minority are Karaites, considered by some mainstream Jews as heretics. Inter-marriage has not been common; hence the three Jewish communities have retained their different identities (Chapin Metz, 1995).

Similar to the other two historical minorities (the Greeks and the Armenians) the number of Jews has decreased continuously since the foundation of the Republic. However,

¹ According to Kara and Karakuyu (2009) citing various sources.

² About 2000 live in Izmir and the rest in Ankara, Bursa, Antakya, Adana, Çamakkale and Kırklareli (Kara and Karakuyu, 2009 citing various other sources).

the outmigration of the Jews was voluntary not decided by the government. Most of the Turkish Jews decided to move to Israel but many have also joined Jewish communities in other parts of the world. Between 1948 and 1951 alone, almost 35,000 Jews emigrated to Israel which represented nearly 40 percent of the Jewish population at the time (Toktaş, 2006).

The centers of the Jewish community in Istanbul are the Balat area along the Golden Horn and the Galata district in Beyoğlu. However, very few Jews still live in those areas. Most have moved to newer and more modern neighborhoods on both sides of the Bosphorus such as Şişli and Kadıköy.

4.3. The Armenians in Istanbul

Whereas in the past the majority of Armenians lived in Eastern Turkey, today most Armenians living in Turkey are concentrated in and around Istanbul. Many of them are bankers, jewelers and merchants with extensive international connections (Karimova and Deverell 2001; Kara and Karakuyu, 2009). Numbering 50,000-60,000¹ people, they represent a close knit community with their own schools, newspapers and nursing homes and the church plays a central role in their lives (Chapin Metz 1995). Less than 20% of Armenians from Istanbul speak Armenian; most speak only Turkish as a mother language². However, apart from language and religion, in many other aspects, the Armenian community is like a mirror of the Turkish society (Kara and Karakuyu, 2009). Due to massive outmigration following the proclamation of the Turkish Republic there is a considerable Armenian diaspora spread all across the world. Armenians in Istanbul do not consider themselves as part of the diaspora but claim to be indigenous³.

¹ This is an estimate. The exact number of Armenians in Istanbul is unknown as not all Armenians are registered at the Patriarchate. Of the 60,000 Armenians in Turkey, about 47,000 -50,000 live in Istanbul (based on Kara and Karakuyu 2009).

² Leon Petrosyan (2007) - "Armenian Churches in Istanbul". <http://www.bvahan.com/armenianpilgrimages/petrosyan1.htm>

³ Mark Grigorian- "Armenian Istanbul" <http://tangentialia.wordpress.com/2008/09/09/11/> and

The districts in Istanbul where most Armenians live are: Samatya, Kumkapı, Kadıköy, Üsküdar, Kartal, Kurtuluş, Kuzguncuk, Feriköy, Rumelihisarı and Şişli. Also about 90% of the population on the island of Kınaliada (Princess Islands) is Armenian. Most Armenians belong to the Armenian Apostolic Church while a minority is Catholic or Protestant⁴.

5. Analysis

We divided our analysis into three sections.

5.1. Greek Ethnic Tourism*

According to many of our informants, Greeks that were born in Turkey love Istanbul more than Greece. They were forced to leave the city in the past and are driven back by nostalgia. The younger ones, who were born abroad, grew up listening to stories about this city so they are driven by curiosity: they want to learn more about the city in which their ancestors lived and want to see the houses where their parents or grandparents lived, the churches they attended or the schools in which they studied. They want to get a feel of the neighborhood and of the community they've heard so much about. Istanbul (Constantinople by its old name) has represented a great chapter in the history of Greek people.

Many Greeks have studied about Constantinople in schools, yet due to the tense relationship that has existed between Greece and Turkey since the treaty of Lausanne in 1923 which established the current borders, few have had the chance to visit. When coming to Istanbul they visit places that tend to be popular with all visitors, such as Hagia Sophia, the Grand Bazaar, and the Galata Tower and tour the Bosphorus and the Princess Islands. Besides

Vahe Sarukhanyan (2011) – "Istanbul Diary: The 'Old' City's 'New' Armenians. <http://hetq.am/eng/news/1057/istanbul-diary-the-%E2%80%9Cold%E2%80%9D-city%E2%80%99s-%E2%80%9Cnew%E2%80%9D-armenians-video.html>

⁴ About 47,000 are Orthodox (Armenian Apostolic Church), 2500 are Catholic and 500 are Protestant, according to the Governship of Istanbul's Bureau of Minority Affairs cited by Kara and Karakuyu (2009).

these, Greek tourists are also interested in places that are connected to their national history or to the historical Greek community in Istanbul such as the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Fener as well as the numerous Greek Orthodox churches that have survived in the city, many of them hidden behind other buildings.

Another important factor when considering Greek ethnic tourism is religion. Many such tourists visit Istanbul during feasts and other important religious dates. According to one of our informants, every year thousands of tourists arrive from Greece to celebrate Easter in Istanbul. As a matter of fact, due to shrinking of the Rum community in Istanbul, at many of these religious feasts and celebrations local Rums are outnumbered by the tourists coming from Greece or Diaspora.

The economic factor has also been important for the success of Greek ethnic tourism in Istanbul. Economic crisis has reduced the number of Greek outgoing tourists and more importantly changed their orientation to cheaper places, situated closer to them. Istanbul fits this description: it is situated within easy drive from Greece and is cheaper than many other tourist destinations in Europe or North America.

According to one informant about 40,000 Greek tourists visit Istanbul every year and the number is increasing. An Armenian tourist, after visiting some of the best known historical objectives in Istanbul, has written:

“I am amazed, however, of the sheer number of Greek tourists in the city. You can hear the language being spoken everywhere.”¹

The Ecumenical Patriarchate in Fener (Phanar) is the highest see of all Christian Orthodox Churches in the world. It is also a place of great historical and religious significance for all Greeks in the world and the

place from where the affairs of the Greek confessional community (millet) were administered after the Ottoman occupation of Constantinople. The Ecumenical Patriarchate was transferred here in the 16th century. The Patriarchal church since the 16th century is the Church of Saint George situated also in Fener.

Another former Patriarchal church is Hagia Irene (The Church of the Holy Peace) situated today in the inner courtyard of the Topkapı Palace. The church was built during the fourth century and served as the Patriarchal church before Hagia Sophia was completed in the sixth century. The church was considerably damaged by an earthquake in the eighth century and subsequently repaired and then enlarged during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. It is a great example of Byzantine church architecture. After the Ottoman conquest, the church was included within the walls of the Topkapı Palace and used as an armory and warehouse for war booty. Since the 18th century it is a museum and, due to its extraordinary acoustic, is also used as a concert hall for classical music.

Also a museum is today the well-known Hagia Sophia (The Church of the Holy Wisdom). The former Patriarchal basilica was built during the sixth century, commissioned by Emperor Justinian and remained the largest cathedral in the world for almost 1000 years. The cathedral so impressed Sultan Mehmet II, the conqueror of Constantinople that, instead of having it destroyed, he transformed it into a mosque. Moreover, it served as model for many great mosques subsequently built in the city. Since 1935 it is a museum.

The Church of the Holy Savior in Chora is also a former church that has survived since Byzantine times. The church was built during the 5th century and is situated near the city's defensive walls in Balat. The church suffered destructions and was re-built several times and its current look dates back to the 13th century. After the Ottoman conquest of Istanbul, the church was converted into a mosque (Kariye Camii). Since 1958 it opened to the public as museum (Chora Museum or Kariye Müzesi). The former church is smaller than other churches from its time and is famous rather for its mosaics.

¹ Mark Grigorian- “Armenian Istanbul”

<http://tangentialia.wordpress.com/2008/09/09/11/> and Vahe Sarukhanyan (2011) – “Istanbul Diary: The ‘Old’ City’s ‘New’ Armenians.

<http://hetq.am/eng/news/1057/istanbul-diary-the-%E2%80%9Cold%E2%80%9D-city%E2%80%99s-%E2%80%9Cnew%E2%80%9D-armenians-video.html>

5.2. Jewish Ethnic Tourism

Many Jewish tourists from Israel or from the Diaspora, when in Istanbul, also plan to visit synagogues or other objectives that are linked to the historical existence of the Jewish community in this city¹. Some of these are located in the Jewish historical neighborhoods such as Balat, Galata or Kuzguncuk. Others may be in the more modern neighborhoods where most Istanbul Jews live today, such as Şişli or Kadıköy.

Neve Shalom (meaning “Oasis of Peace”) is the largest synagogue in Istanbul and one of the most beautiful. It is situated very close to Galata Tower, an area with a high concentration of Jews in the past. The synagogue opened in the early 1950s and (unlike many other synagogues) is still open for prayers on Saturdays. It also hosts many community events such as weddings, funerals, circumcisions and Bar Mitzvahs. Very close to this synagogue, on an adjacent street, is the only Ashkenazi synagogue that has remained opened in Istanbul. The synagogue was built in 1900 by Jews coming from Austria. Also in the Galata neighborhood is located the Italian Synagogue (also known as Kal de los Frankos) initially built in the 19th century and then demolished and rebuilt in 1931. The synagogue was constructed specifically for the foreign Jewish community and is completely separated from the local Sephardic community.

The Ahrida Synagogue is the oldest and, some say, the most beautiful synagogue in Istanbul. Built by Jews coming from Ohrid (in today’s Macedonia), it is one of two remaining synagogues in Balat (once a Jewish dominated neighborhood), the other one being Yanbol Synagogue (founded by Jews that came from the town with the same name in Bulgaria).

Other interesting synagogues can be found in Kuzguncuk (Bet Nissim and Bet Yaakov), Kadıköy (Caddebostan and Hemdat Israel), Şişli (Bet Israel – the most populated today), Bakırköy, Ortaköy (Etz Ahayim), Yeniköy and

Princess Islands (Hesed Le Avraam in Büyükkada, Bet Yaakov in Heybeliada, and Burgazada on the homonym island).

Due to the shrinking Jewish populations many synagogues have remained without worshipers and were forced to close their doors. In Balat, out of the twelve synagogues, only two are still active today. The others were either demolished or converted. Balat also has a Jewish hospital that is still open today but is used as public hospital (open for everyone, regardless of religion). Hasköy, situated on the opposite shores of the Golden Horn from Balat is another historical Jewish neighborhood. Here, of the twelve synagogues that existed at the beginning of the 20th century, only two are still active. They are situated inside the Jewish Elderly Home and the Darulaceze Hospice respectively. Most of the other synagogues were converted into small factories or warehouses. Hasköy also has two Jewish cemeteries (one Sephardic and one Karaim).

Similarly, in the Galata neighborhood, the Zulfaris Synagogue was converted into the Jewish Museum and the Tofre Begadim Synagogue was converted to Schneider Temple Art Gallery. The Zulfaris Synagogue was constructed at the beginning of the 19th century on the site of another synagogue from the 17th century. Due to the massive outmigration of Jews from the neighborhood, the synagogue was closed in 1979. In 1992, to celebrate 500 years since the first Sephardic Jews, expelled from the Iberian Peninsula, decided to settle in Istanbul, a decision was made to convert the synagogue into a museum that was opened in 2001. The mission of the museum is to preserve and display the heritage of Jews in Istanbul².

Tofre Begadim Synagogue was built in 1894 by Ashkenazi tailors who migrated to Istanbul from Russia and Eastern Europe. As the number of Ashkenazi Jews in the area dwindled, the synagogue was converted into an art center in 2002. The center hosts different exhibitions from September to June, mainly in the form of caricatures.

A Jew from Istanbul, Dani Altaras, captured

¹ See for example Luca T. Davis’ “The Jewish Community and Notable Synagogues in Istanbul”. <http://www.wittistanbul.com/magazine/the-jewish-community-and-notable-synagogues-in-istanbul/>

² <http://www.muze500.com/content/view/249/244/lang,en/>

very well the character of Galata as a Jewish neighborhood:

*“Galata, with its tower, its restored Dogan building, its Nardis Jazz club, its Tapas Spanish restaurant, its coffee houses is the favorite neighborhood of the tourists and foreigner living in Istanbul. For those above 50, Galata is a nostalgia. With the Apollon Synagogue, the Mutlu patisserie, the Neve Şalom Synagogue, the fisherman Avram, and the Jewish Primary School of Galata was the ‘kula’, the last Jewish neighborhood.”*¹

Jewish tourists visit Istanbul throughout the year but the number of those interested in visiting synagogues in Istanbul increases during the summer holiday or during religious feasts (especially “Passover” and “Hanukkah”). The Jewish visitors are interested in attending the religious rituals but also in visiting Jewish historical places and in learning about the Jewish heritage in Istanbul.

5.3. Armenian Ethnic Tourism

Most of the sites belonging to the Armenian historical and religious heritage are situated in Eastern Anatolia. However, many Armenian tourists also visit Istanbul because this is where their relatives or friends live. Here they visit Armenian historical neighborhoods, churches as well as other sites connected to the Armenian community. Some also visit the headquarters of the Armenian language newspaper, *Agos*, where Hrant Dink was the chief editor. A prominent member of the Armenian community in Turkey, Dink was assassinated in 2007 by a young Turkish nationalist.

Most Armenian tourists visit Istanbul during religious feasts and celebrations and many are staying with family and friends. Besides the Armenian minority, unofficial statistics also mention the existence of between ten and twenty thousand immigrants from Armenia who live and work in Istanbul illegally². Overstaying their

tourist visa, they cannot visit their home country for fear of not being able to return. Instead, their family and friends from Armenia visit them. These tourists represent the majority of ethnic Armenian tourists in Istanbul. Speaking to Armenian tourists we usually received the same answer: “Istanbul is a very interesting and beautiful city and we were always curious about it but were too afraid to visit because of political reasons” and then adding: “especially after the Hrant dink event”.

Istanbul is the seat of the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople. The Patriarchal church is Surp Asdvadzadzin (Holy Mother of God) Church which is situated in Kumkapı neighborhood. The Catholicos in Etchmiadzin, Republic of Armenia is recognized as the spiritual head of all Armenians; however, in matters pertaining Armenians in Turkey the local Patriarchal See enjoys a high degree of autonomy. There are a total of forty churches belonging to the Patriarchate, although not all of them are still active. The churches are spread all over the city. A minority of Armenians also are Catholic and Protestant. There are nine Armenian Catholic churches in Istanbul, of which only three are still active: two in Beyoğlu and one in Kadıköy, on the Asian side. Armenians also have two Protestant churches: one in Beyoğlu and one in Gedikpaşa. The Armenian community also owns three newspapers, sport clubs, schools, cultural centers and two hospitals³.

Kumkapı is a neighborhood on the Marmara shore, not far from the Grand Bazaar and was until recently inhabited by Armenians. The seat of the Armenian Patriarchate is located here as are several churches and Armenian schools. Here, and in other historical Armenian neighborhoods such as Yenikapı, Gedik Pasa or Beyazıt one can still hear Armenian spoken in the streets⁴. Many tourists come to eat fish in

and-countries/Turkey/Armenian-migrants-in-Turkey-an-all-female-story-125834

³Leon Petrosyan (2007) - “Armenian Churches in Istanbul”. <http://www.bvahan.com/armenianpilgrimages/petrosyan1.htm>

⁴ See Mark Gregorian- “Armenian Istanbul” <http://tangentialia.wordpress.com/2008/09/09/11/> and Vahe Sarukhanyan (2011) – “Istanbul Diary: The ‘Old’ City’s ‘New’ Armenians. <http://hetq.am/eng/news/>

¹ <http://www.jewishtoursistanbul.com/galata.html>

² Mat, Fazile (2012), Armenian migrants to Turkey: an all-female story. www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/regions-

one of the many restaurants situated by the sea. Few of them, however, are aware of the ethnic characteristics of the neighborhood.

Samatya is another neighborhood situated by the Marmara Sea. It attracts many tourists for the traditional Fish Festival which is organized here. The neighborhood is very old; Armenians were allowed to settle here not long after Constantinople's conquest by the Ottomans. The most representative Armenian church in the neighborhood is Surp Kevork (St. George). Greeks also lived in the neighborhood attested by the Greek Orthodox churches erected here (such as Hristos Analipsis and Haghios Menas). Meanwhile, many Armenians have moved out to other neighborhoods but the neighborhood has preserved its character.

Many other neighborhoods in Istanbul are celebrated for their multiethnic character. Kuzguncuk is an old village in Üsküdar, on the Asian shore of the Bosphorus. The first Sephardic Jews started to settle here not long after they were expelled from Spain and the first synagogue was built in the 17th century (Kastoryano, 1992 and Banoğlu, 1966; cited in Mills, 2008). Later the Greeks and the Armenians have also built houses and churches in the neighborhood. Historically, very few Muslims lived there and until the mid 20th century the neighborhood was known as a non-Muslim neighborhood¹. After that, most people belonging to the three minority groups decided to move out (some emigrated while others have moved to other neighborhoods) and were replaced by rural Turkish migrants coming from Anatolia. While the synagogues, churches and the old cemeteries attest to a culturally rich historical community, the cosmopolitan character is certainly lost (Mills, 2008).

Kurtuluş (known until 1929 as Tatavla), a neighborhood in Şişli (north of Taksim Square), emerged in the 16th century and had a Greek atmosphere with Orthodox churches, schools, taverns, and gardens so that many Muslims called it "Little Athens". It even had the only carnival in the Muslim world. The Baklahorani

carnival was celebrated annually by the Greek community in Istanbul on Shrove Monday (48 days before Easter) in the same tradition Mardi Gras (Fat Tuesday) continues to be celebrated in New Orleans, Louisiana (USA). Greeks from all neighborhoods, dressed in costumes and wearing masked participated in the parade dancing and singing folk songs. Non-Greeks could join as well and many did as Baklahorani was a very popular event in Istanbul back then. The annual celebration was, however, discontinued after 1941 due to a law banning people from wearing masks. The carnival was resurrected in 2010 by a Turkish researcher born in Kurtuluş (Hüseyin İrmak) and a Greek historian and musician (Haris Theodorelis Rigas) and was attended by a group of Greeks and Turks happy to rediscover Turkey's multicultural past². The number of attendees continued to increase in the following years; in 2012 more than 800 people, local Greeks, Turks and tourists have attended each day of celebration held not only in Kurtuluş but also on İstiklal Street in Beyoğlu.

During the last decades, most Greeks have moved out of Kurtuluş; however, many Armenians and Jews stayed. Many visitors from Armenia are amazed to discover in the heart of Istanbul a "little Armenia" in which many local shops display signs written in Armenian and where one can find more records with Armenian popular musicians than in Erevan³.

Other neighborhoods situated near Kurtuluş, Feriköy and Elmadağ, display similar characteristics having historically been inhabited by various non-Muslim communities. Elmadağ has in the past had a combination of Armenians, Greeks, Jews and foreigners. It was known for having a high concentration of

1057/istanbul-diary-the-%E2%80%9Cold%E2%80%9D-city%E2%80%99s-%E2%80%9Cnew%E2%80%9D-armenians-video.html

¹ According to Banoğlu (1966), in 1914, Kuzguncuk had 1600 Armenians, 400 Jews, 250 Greeks and only 70 Muslims.

² See Ayla Jean Yackley – "Istanbul Celebrates Carnival after Nearly 70 Years. Reuters, 9 March 2011.

<http://blogs.reuters.com/faithworld/2011/03/09/istanbul-celebrates-carnival-after-nearly-70-years/> and Ansel

Mullins – "Reviving Carnival in Istanbul". In *Transit: A Guide to Intelligent Travel*, New York Times, 27

February 2011,

<http://intransit.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/02/27/reviving-carnival-in-istanbul/>

³ Mark Gregorian- "Armenian Istanbul"

<http://tangentialia.wordpress.com/2008/09/09/11/>

Catholics¹ with their own institutions such as schools, churches, foundations and houses (Danis and Kayaalp, 2004).

6. Conclusion

Although the number of Greek, Jewish and Armenian tourists in Istanbul has been on the rise over the last few years, ethnic tourism is still in its infancy. The Jewish community seems to be the most organized for tourism. The Jewish community has opened a museum with the goal of preserving and displaying the Jewish heritage in Istanbul. There are also several travel agencies offering tours of the Jewish neighborhoods and synagogues². Similarly, the Greek Patriarchate is also involved in the attraction of Greek tourists, although not in the organization of tourist tours.

A number of problems could hamper the further development of ethnic tourism in Istanbul. While the city has grown tremendously over the last five decades to reach over 13 million inhabitants, the number of people belonging to the three historical minorities in Istanbul has continuously decreased to the point where they have almost become invisible. In many historical minority neighborhoods, Greeks, Armenians and Jews have slowly been replaced by rural migrants coming especially from East Anatolia. These migrants generally have large families increasing the general density in the neighborhood which has led to a speedy deterioration of the buildings. Most of these families have paid second to nothing to acquire the dwellings in which they live and have very few resources to maintain them. They have even fewer incentives to preserve the ethnic fabric of the neighborhood. Consequently, many of these historically ethnic neighborhoods are in visible decay and need urgent restoration works. Many important buildings that have previously been used by ethnic communities (including places of worship) have been demolished or have been converted to other uses. Many other places of worship have closed and/or are inactive.

Therefore, although there is an abundance of “ethnic tourist sites” in the city, the communities that have created those sites are being thinned out. Some of these communities are still promoting a very intense community life but their members are too spread out to make any major impact on the cultural landscape of the city of Istanbul. The situation seems to be the most problematic in the case of the Greek community. Most of the approximately 2500 remaining Rums are old while the Greek schools are closing one after another due to lack of students. The outmigration of Rums seems to have stopped by now but the community may never be able to recover completely.

Paradoxically, many Istanbulites started to appreciate the multi-ethnic and multi-religious character of their city after this was gone. Many have become nostalgic after the old times when people in a neighborhood, regardless of their ethnic or religious identity, lived like siblings. Their children played together, they learned each other’s language, celebrated religious holidays together and helped each other in times of need (Mills, 2008). In Kuzguncuk, for example, “the landscape has come to represent a nostalgic cultural memory of close neighborhood life and tolerant cosmopolitanism” (Mills, 2008: 387).

Over the last several years, nostalgia for the city’s cosmopolitan past has led to more opening towards celebrating Greek culture and traditions in Istanbul. More Turks are getting involved in an effort to save or even revive minority culture. We have discussed about the revival of an ancient carnival celebrations in Istanbul in which local Turks have played an important role. This was not an isolated act. A number of cookbooks with Greek recipes originally from Istanbul have been published in Turkey, rebetiko (urban Greek folk music) bands are invited to perform weekly in Beyoğlu bars and a number of Greek-style tavernas³ were opened and became immediately popular⁴.

¹ Including Catholic Armenians and Greeks.

² See, for example, www.goreme.com7istanbul-jewish-heritage-tour.php or www.istanbuljewishtours.com.

³ See, for example, <http://www.mekanist.net/istanbul/restoran/sureyya-teras-greek-taverna>

⁴ Simon Johns – “Greek Carnival Revives the Spirit of an Ancient City”, Huffington Post, 29 February 2012.

Another problem is the tense relationship that has existed between the historical minorities and the Muslim majority on one plan and between Turkey and Greece, Armenia and Israel on the second plan. While the ethnic tensions in Istanbul have lessened with the massive outmigration of minorities, the relationship between Turkey and Armenia has not improved and the relationship between Turkey and Israel has even worsened over the last few years. This poses the question of security for tourists coming from those countries.

Finding and interviewing Armenian tourists in Istanbul turned out to be a real challenge for us because most of them were suspicious of our questioning them and preferred to keep a low profile. Moreover, all the synagogues and the Jewish museums mentioned in this study can be visited only by appointment made weeks in advance¹ due to fear of terrorist attacks². Members of the consulate of Israel in Istanbul have also advised Jewish tourists to keep a low profile and take all precautionary measures when in Turkey. They argue that, although Turkey is in general a very safe country, for Israelis it is one of the most dangerous countries because of its position close to the Middle East and its very relaxed visa regime with bordering countries which makes it relatively easy for violent anti-Israeli militants to enter the country³.

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- ¹ See, for example, <http://www.wittistanbul.com/magazine/the-jewish-community-and-notable-synagogues-in-istanbul/>
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