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## Could the Southern-Kurtalan Express be as Popular as the Eastern Express? Comparative SWOT Analysis

### Güney-Kurtalan Ekspresi Doğu Ekspresi kadar Popüler Olabilir mi? Karşılaştırmalı SWOT Analizi

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#### Abstract

Train tourism can play a critical role in the development of the tourism potential of the cities, such as increasing the tourism potential of the cities, economic contribution, reducing the differences in the level of development between regions, and employment in the cities where the railway line passes, and thus in the development of the country's tourism potential. This situation occurred in the cities of the route where the Eastern Express passed. Therefore, this research aims to present a comparative SWOT framework on whether the Southern-Kurtalan Express has the potential to be popular like the Eastern Express, and to explore the perception and behavioral tendencies of travelers towards the Southern-Kurtalan Express. While conducting interviews with 30 participants to create a SWOT matrix for the Southern-Kurtalan Express, the SWOT matrix for the Eastern Express was compiled from the relevant literature. Comparing the data from the participants and the SWOT matrices compiled from the literature, it can be deduced that the Southern-Kurtalan Express is as strong as the Eastern Express and even has more advantages but has similar weaknesses and that the Southern-Kurtalan Express faces significant opportunities as well as similarly wider threats. In this regard, the Southern-Kurtalan Express has a high potential to be as popular as the Eastern Express, but success can be achieved if all stakeholders act together to determine strategies for reducing the threat width and improving the potential.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Southern-Kurtalan Express, Eastern Express, Train Tourism, Rail Tourism.

#### Öz

Tren turizmi, şehirlerin turizm potansiyelinin artırılması, ekonomik katkı, bölgeler arası gelişmişlik düzeyi farklılıklarının azaltılması ve demiryolunun bulunduğu şehirlerde istihdam gibi şehirlerin turizm potansiyelinin geliştirilmesinde dolayısıyla ülkenin turizm potansiyelinin gelişmesinde kritik bir rol oynayabilir. Doğu Ekspresi'nin geçtiği güzergahtaki şehirlerde bu durum gerçekleşmiştir. Bu nedenle bu araştırma, Güney-Kurtalan Ekspresi'nin Doğu Ekspresi gibi popüler olma potansiyeline sahip olup olmadığı konusunda karşılaştırmalı bir SWOT çerçevesi sunmayı ve yolcuların Güney Kurtalan Ekspresi'ne yönelik algı ve davranış eğilimlerini ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır. Güney-Kurtalan Ekspresi için SWOT matrisi oluşturmak amacıyla 30 katılımcı ile görüşmeler yapılırken, Doğu Ekspresi için SWOT matrisi ilgili literatürden derlenmiştir. Katılımcılardan elde edilen veriler ile literatürden derlenen SWOT matrisleri karşılaştırıldığında, Güney-Kurtalan Ekspresi'nin Doğu Ekspresi kadar güçlü olduğu ve hatta daha fazla avantaja sahip olduğu ancak benzer zaafılara sahip olduğu ve Güney-Kurtalan Ekspresi'nin önemli fırsatların yanı sıra benzer şekilde daha geniş tehditlerle karşı karşıya olduğu çıkarımı yapılabilir. Bu bakımdan Güney-Kurtalan Ekspresi de Doğu Ekspresi kadar popüler olma potansiyeline sahiptir ancak başarı, tüm paydaşların birlikte hareket ederek tehdit genişliğini azaltacak ve potansiyeli artıracak stratejiler belirlenmesiyle sağlanabilir.

**Key Words:** Güney-Kurtalan Ekspresi, Doğu Ekspresi, Tren Turizmi, Demiryolu Turizmi.

## 1. Introduction

The history of rail transport can be traced back to the industrialization of railway networks, which began in the 18th century in other Western European countries after England and Germany. While railways indicate economic development in countries that have completed industrialization, their ability to transport significantly larger amounts of freight than road transport has made railway transport prominent in Europe and North America (Güney and Kızılırmak, 2021). The connection between railroads and tourism dates back to the late 1800s, extending to other parts of the world in the decades following the 19th century and early 20th century. However, in the mid-20th century, passenger numbers began to decline after competition from roads and air transport. The declining use of railroads as a mode of transport and thus a travel route for tourists continued to decline until the second half of the 20th century. Although rail travel hasn't been considered the primary mode of transport for decades, there is currently a resurgence in countries such as the United States of America (USA) and most Western European countries. Moreover, significant changes in travel behavior have occurred in the luxury "transport and tourism" market (Lee and Cheng, 2017).

Rail transport has witnessed various movements of people from the past to the present. Particularly, the train travels initiated by Thomas Cook in England in 1841 are considered a significant milestone in mass travel movements (Güney and Kızılırmak, 2021). Initially, trains were designed and built specifically for short-distance tourist needs; however, over time they have become widely used in countries such as Switzerland. Private initiatives in countries such as France and Italy have offered special services with different alternatives, particularly for holidays and specific events, through historical and old trains on small lines (wine trains, mountain trains, and trains to the sea) (Bayat, 2021). In Western culture, travel has long been associated with the collection of information, the discovery of the self, and the other, unknown, distant places and exotic environments (Winter, 2007). The first form of train-rail tourism, linked to recreation and exploration, included a variety of practices developed in France over nearly 150 years and emerged in the 1870s when travelers wanted to see beautiful mountains or coastal scenery. Beginning in the 1950s, people's nostalgia and curiosity about living in the past led to the development of a second type of rail tourism based on nostalgia for old trains. Since the 1980s, hybrid train-railway tourism forms have emerged, combining features based on exploration and living-experiencing past lifestyle and culture, such as local railways and luxury trains. Thus, train-railway tourism has been enriched with an ever-increasing range of experiences, from the pleasures of discovery and comfortable travel to nostalgia and "tasting history" (Blancheton and Marchi, 2013).

The development of transportation technology from the past to the present is viewed as the most important factor in modern tourism welfare. Although it has been widely discussed in the literature that tourism is semantically and practically related to transportation, there is a common consensus that transportation infrastructure is a prerequisite for the development of the tourism industry and destinations (Yan et al., 2014). Transportation is an important part of the holistic destination experience, and the quality of the transportation experience is a determinant of destination attractiveness. For instance, a rail journey with a beautiful view can emerge as the focus of the tourism experience (Lee and Cheng, 2017). Nowadays, the increase in the curiosity and interest of individuals has turned trains and railways into tourist products, beyond being a means of travel. This situation brought a different task to railways in many parts of the world and revealed the concept of train-railway tourism in line with the special interests of tourists. Therefore, it has become possible to come across train

tours and routes in many parts of the world (Bayraktar and Selçuk, 2022). In this respect, the Eastern Express, which has recently become popular, is the leader in this field in Turkey, and the reason behind this leadership lies in the desire of local and foreign travelers to experience unique, unforgettable, and nostalgic features. Some of the features of the Eastern Express (for example, TCDD operates both train lines and destinations such as Kayseri and Sivas are on the same route) are also valid for the Southern-Kurtalan Express. Therefore “Can the popularity experienced in the Eastern Express also occur for the Southern-Kurtalan Express? Or what similar/different features does the Southern-Kurtalan Express have to make this happen?” the research question was focused on within the scope of the present research. In this respect, the main purpose of the study is to present a comparative SWOT framework on whether Southern-Kurtalan Express has the potential to be popular like Eastern Express. Additionally, the study aims to uncover travelers’ perceptions and behavioral tendencies toward the Southern-Kurtalan Express.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Train-Railway Tourism**

Train-railway tourism, as a form of special interest tourism, represents a niche market sector. It is considered a slow and sustainable form of travel that consumes less energy and has a lower environmental impact than other modes of transport. Train-railway tourism is a type of tourism that provides access by passing the train, the destination itself, and the route until the destination is reached (Lee and Cheng, 2017). According to Blancheton and Marchi (2013), tourism and leisure trips that utilize railways to transport tourists, regardless of the purpose of the trip, are generally referred to as train-railway tourism.

The first form of rail tourism, clearly linked to leisure and exploration, emerged in the 1870s when travelers sought beautiful mountainous or coastal landscapes, and then evolved into a type of tourism combining cultural heritage, curiosity, a sense of discovery, and luxury (Blancheton and Marchi, 2013). Today, railways themselves and the trains that run on them have become a distinct category of tourist attractions (Yan et al., 2014), and people worldwide often choose trains and railways, primarily for nostalgic reasons (Korkusuz and Özdemir, 2020). With the emergence of this tourist attraction, rail travel and the presence of cultural values accompanying these trips, along with wider travel experiences, came to the fore as effective factors (Yan et al., 2014). Indeed, Lee and Cheng (2017) highlight that train-rail tourism is enriched with a wide range of experiences ranging from exploration and comfortable travel pleasures to nostalgia and seeing the historical texture or enjoying history. Hall (2000) emphasized that the introduction of innovative themes and the integration of other products, particularly travel and entertainment, have further expanded and enriched the offerings (Yan et al., 2014).

Transportation systems play a crucial role in the development of tourism (Kurihara and Wu, 2016), and it is widely acknowledged that transportation, on a larger scale, makes significant contributions to the development of a destination across various contexts, including economic, socio-cultural, anthropological, environmental, and technical aspects (Yan et al., 2014). Many different purposes have been realized through railways. While the main function of the railway is passenger and freight transport, the railway sometimes serves as a transportation corridor connecting parks and other rural areas or urban settlements and green lanes, and sometimes serves as a recreational area for local people as well as domestic and foreign tourists (Jellum,

2012). Pan (2005) describes tourism transportation as a dynamic and complex system that constantly interacts with other components of the tourism system (Yan et al., 2014). Scenic rail journeys can be regarded as a distinctive tourism product, providing pleasant and unforgettable travel experiences, mainly in train cars. Furthermore, Lee and Cheng (2017) suggest that the train journey itself can be seen as a simplified "mobile destination" by encompassing various destination features.

## 2.2. Nostalgic Train Travels

In terms of train travel, France, Russia, Austria, and Switzerland are leaders in the world, as is nostalgic train travel in many countries (Bingöl and Kozak, 2020). The popular routes are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Nostalgic Train Travels

Railway	Country	Route	Distance (km)
Trans-Siberian	Russia	Moscow-Vladivostok	9289
Palace on Wheels	India	Yeni Delhi-Agra	3000
The Ghan	Australia	Adelaide-Darwin	2979
Rocky Mountaineer	Canada	Vancouver-Banff	1398
Eastern Express	Turkey	Ankara-Kars	1310
Inland Line	Sweden	Kristinehamn - Gällivare	1288
The Trochita	Argentina	Patagonya	402
Bergen Railway	Norway	Bergen-Oslo	371
Glacier Express	Switzerland	Zermatt-St. Moritz/Davos	290
TranzAlpine	New Zeland	Christchurch-Greymouth	223
Bernina Express	Switzerland	Chur/Davos/St Moritz-Tirano	144
Grand Canyon Railway	USA	Williams-Grand Canyon-National Park	105
Kalka Shimla	India	Kalka-Shimla	96
Darjeeling Himalayan Railway	India	New Jalpaiguri-Darjeeling	88
Alishan Forest Railway	Taiwan	Chiayi	86
Durango and Silverton Railway	USA	Durango-Silverton	72
Flamsbana	Norway	Myrdal - Flam	20

**Source:** It was created by the author based on Bingöl and Kozak, 2020; Bayat, 2021, and relevant literature.

Trans-Siberian, one of the most attractive routes in the world, the railway connecting West Russia to Far East Russia, has drawn attention because it is the longest nostalgic route. Tourists using this nostalgic railway route can see Siberia, Eastern Russia, Mongolia, China, and the Sea of Japan (Bingöl and Kozak, 2020).

The Palace on Wheels luxury train takes tourists on glamorous travel through the royal realm, filled with dunes and magnificent palaces. Promising luxurious travel and chosen as the 4th best luxury train in the world, Palace on Wheels offers an interior ambiance that blends perfectly with the splendid charm and beauty lavishly spread over the land of India. Each cabin of the train has facilities such as air conditioning, Wi-Fi, safety, carpets, and a personal attendant, also known as khidmatgars, at your service in each hall. Also on the train are two Resto-Bar lounges and a spa facility (Thepalaceonwheels, 2022).

Today, the Ghan holds significant importance as an icon in the Australian tourism industry (Winter, 2007). It crosses Australia from south to north, starts in the city of Adelaide, located in the southernmost part of the continent, and ends in Darwin,

located on the northern coast of the country, accompanied by desert and mountainous landscapes (Bingöl and Kozak, 2020). It stands out as a themed product related to the branding of Australia and the creation of a national identity using outback images. Ghan's image has been designed using visual imagery and selected directions from its own history, desert environment, Afghan camel men, and indigenous Australians. The relatively late arrival of transport to Australia has had less impact in Australia than the major impact transport has had in Europe. Considering that the historical contribution of transport to development and nation-building would be small, contemporary Ghan was used to evoke ideas about the nation through its desert environment and connections with the Aboriginal Australians and Afghan camelids. Likewise, with the aim of being in the heart of a nation and especially attracting tourists, marketing elements have been used to position Ghan not only as the geographical center of the Australian continent but also as the heart of the nation: the legendary journey to the heart of Australia... is the ultimate journey to the heart of this continent (Winter, 2007).

Rocky Mountaineer offers luxury train journeys in Western and Southwest America. The world-famous train travels in daylight, allowing tourists to experience some of the most spectacular scenery that North America has to offer. Rocky Mountaineer is renowned as a legendary rail route between Vancouver and Banff/Lake Louise, and the journey across Canada from East to West aims to provide tourists with a memorable and luxurious experience, passing through legendary spiral tunnels, mountain passes, and magnificent canyons (Rockymountaineer, 2022).

The Eastern Express is a train service that has been carried out regularly since 1991 and takes approximately 24 hours between Ankara and Kars (Eser and Asmadili, 2019; Güney and Kızılırmak, 2021). Although the Eastern Express is accepted as Turkey's first tourism train, it was discovered because of people's search for new and different touristic experiences and offers tourists nostalgic and entertainment-themed experiences (Bayraktar and Selçuk, 2022). Especially in the winter months of 2017, the service, whose popularity increased through social media, became the focus of attention of those who sought nostalgia, unique scenery, and experience, mostly young people (Eryılmaz and Yüçetürk, 2018). In addition, backpackers prefer the Eastern Express, and the travel preferences of people who live in the Western and Southern regions of Turkey and want to experience winter conditions also increase the intensity of Eastern Express services. The main motivation of tourists participating in these trips is to photograph natural beauties, blend these images with their unique themes, share them on social media platforms (Bayraktar and Selçuk, 2022; Saylan, 2021), and create unforgettable, memorable, and original experiences. The increasing popularity has increased the demand for Eastern Express services. This increase in demand has made it almost impossible to find tickets and to increase ticket prices.

The inland line has a railway line running through the Swedish landscape from Gällivare in the north to Östersund, and in the south to Peloponnese and Kristinehamn. While this trip invites people to explore Sweden's interior, it also takes passengers to a unique cultural environment with stops along the way. Many reindeer and birds of prey can be seen in their natural habitat as the train passes through landscapes where wildlife is plentiful, and Sweden's four major predators are the natural habitats of the bear, wolf, lynx, and wolverine. Moreover, during this journey, a stopover is made in the Arctic Circle (Inlandsbanan, 2022).

The Old Patagonian Express, known as La Trochita, is always seductive with the magical Patagonian landscape of the highlands, sea, mountains, lakes, and rivers. Although the old Patagonia Express is seen as one of the most famous trains in the

world and has a unique historical and cultural heritage that attracts railway fans from all over the world, La Trochita has been opened for tourism purposes since 2006 (LaTrochita, 2022).

The Bergen Railway was built in 1909 and runs through the highlands between Oslo and Bergen, Norway's two largest cities. Crossing the Hardangervidda National Park and reaching the Hardangervidda Plateau, Europe's highest mountain plateau, offers one of the most spectacular landscape experiences in Europe. In addition, the Bergen Line is the highest railway line in Northern Europe, reaching 1222 meters above sea level at the Finse train station (Bergenline, 2022).

The Glacier Express offers a panoramic trip between Moritz and Zermatt in the Swiss Alps. On the railway route between Moritz and Zermatt, 291 bridges and 91 tunnels are passed, and journeys are carried out accompanied by magnificent views of nature (Glacierexpress, 2022).

The TranzAlpine train journey starts east of Christchurch and continues through the vast grasslands of the Canterbury Plains to the Southern Alps via Arthur's Pass before descending on the Waimakariri River and the 8.5 km long Otira Tunnel. Passing through ancient river valleys, finally following the Arnold and Gray rivers and the verdant plains of Inchbonnie and Moana surrounding the great calm waters of Lake Brunner, the journey ends at Greymouth, the gateway to the stunning west coast (Tranzalpine, 2022).

The Bernina Express crosses the Alps on the Chur/Moritz-Val Poschiavo-Tirano route. This rail link between Northern and Southern Europe builds bridges between regions with different languages and cultures. The railway line Thusis-Valposchiavo-Tirano has UNESCO World Heritage status, as it crosses 55 tunnels and 196 bridges, with mountain views around the Albula and Bernina Passes (Bernia, 2022).

The Grand Canyon Railroad has been running between Williams-Arizona and the awe-inspiring Grand Canyon since 1901. A journey back in time can be realized in restored nostalgic wagons with the antics of entertaining musicians and cowboy characters. In this journey, the land transforms from desert to country and from country to pine, and an ever-changing landscape accompanies travelers until they encounter a very bright landscape (Thetrain, 2022).

Kalka Shimla, the narrow-gauge route, often called the toy train line, was opened by the British administration in 1903 to connect Shimla, the summer capital of India, to the northern plains. The railway line starts climbing immediately after leaving the Kalka railway station and passes through the forests of Deodar, Pine, Ficus, Oak, and Maple at 22 km/h. The journey is accompanied by a change in vegetation and views of train stations and gothic-style bridges on the route, as well as natural vegetation, bird chirping, and grazing cattle (Himachalservices, 2022).

The Darjeeling Himalayan Railway was developed in 1881 as a vehicle for the economic and social development of colonial India. After the 1950s, the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway was awarded the World Heritage Status at the 23rd Session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in Morocco in 1999, as it offers bold and ingenious engineering solutions to the problem of establishing an effective rail link in a magnificent mountainous landscape, is still operational today, and retains many of its original features. (Roy and Hannam, 2013).

The Alishan Forest Railway was used to transport timber in the past. However, with the rapid development of tourism and passenger loading, the main purpose of the railway has shifted from timber transportation to passenger transportation since 1962, and has gradually turned into mountain tour trains. This travel makes it possible to bring new experiences to tourists, such as discovering the deep roots of the local culture, inheriting the historical context, forestry, ensuring the preservation of cultural heritage, promoting the preservation of the natural environment, and supporting local life (Afrch, 2022).

The Durango and Silverton Railroad lines were built in 1882 to transport silver and gold ore from the San Juan Mountains of Southwest Colorado. However, passengers soon started using this trip for travel, rather than just carrying cargo, as it had a truly magnificent view. The Durango and Silverton lines promise to offer passengers a glimpse of the past while offering Colorado's mountain scenery that is inaccessible by road (Durangotrain, 2022).

The Flamsbana train takes you from Flam (located at sea level) to the Myrdal Mountain station (867 m above sea level), offering breathtaking views throughout the journey. As the train moves 40 km, it passes through 20 tunnels accompanied by magnificent landscapes such as mountains, small villages, and bubbling waterfalls (Norwaytrains, 2022).

In brief, train-rail tourism enhances travel experiences, including nostalgia, a sense of history, and authenticity. In addition, the design of a railway as a product, by adding concepts such as luxury, sustainability, and nostalgia, having features that reflect national identity or culture, to appeal to a large-scale tourist mass (Peira et al., 2022), is a vital and basic element in the formation of a popular railway image. Camargo et al. (2014) took a broader view of the factors to consider when developing rail tourism, including heritage themes, wagon experiences, connectivity to historic attractions and sites, stakeholder support and collaboration, financial investment, pricing, accessibility, passenger safety, and future development (Lee and Cheng, 2017). Therefore, it can be concluded that many of the features expressed here are effective in their popularity as nostalgic train lines.

### **3. Methodology**

This study aims to reveal the touristic potential characteristics of the Southern-Kurtalan Express by presenting a comparative perspective between the SWOT matrices created with the data obtained from travelers using the Southern-Kurtalan Express and compiled from studies on the Eastern Express in the literature. Thus, a comprehensive and holistic framework will be created on the touristic features of the Southern-Kurtalan Express with the data obtained from travelers, and a comparative perspective will be presented by revealing a situational analysis from the studies on the Eastern Express. The reason for choosing the South-Kurtalan Express within the scope of the research is that, thanks to the recently popular Eastern Express, the cities where the railway line passes have increased their share of tourism, their recognition, and the number of visitors, similarly, the South-Kurtalan Express has the potential to increase the tourism potential of cities such as Malatya, Elazig, Diyarbakir, Batman, Kurtalan-Siirt unlike the common line cities with the Eastern Express. In addition, as stated by Alkan (2018), cities on the Southern-Kurtalan line have historical, cultural, religious, gastronomic, and authentic architectural structures, handicrafts, and traditional lifestyles in the context of tourism attractions. The fact that there are destinations with important tourism attractions, such as Mardin, Urfa, and Adiyaman, which have a wide variety of tourism

attractions in terms of tourism, near the route where the Southern-Kurtalan Express passes constitutes the reason for focusing on this line within the scope of the study.

SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats), also known as the SWOT matrix, is a research method for analyzing a certain status quo and is used to systematically evaluate a particular decision, project, or policy directive (Reihanian, 2012). In other words, SWOT analysis is a situational analysis that allows the evaluation of the current situation and future expectations of an organization and provides some important advantages, such as taking action to minimize or neutralize threats and turning weaknesses into strengths in situations revealed through analysis. In addition, SWOT analysis can be applied at different levels of analysis, from the individual (for example, personal SWOT) to the international level, and can be performed at different scales and at various levels of measurement and precision (Madsen and Stenheim, 2022). This method consisted of two separate analysis layers. The first step focuses on analyzing internal factors (local analysis), which includes a discussion of strengths and weaknesses for the purposes of SWOT. The second step provides an assessment of external factors (global analysis), which includes a discussion of the relevant opportunities and threats (positive/negative framework conditions, potential chances, and risks) (Reihanian, 2012).

In this study, the qualitative method, which makes it possible to obtain in-depth data from travelers, was preferred. The reason why the qualitative research method is preferred is that it is a type of research that gives importance to subjectivity, which has an "interpretive" feature. In other words, it defines the world experienced by individuals and explains the essence of experiences to discover the common meanings underlying a phenomenon (Altunışık et al., 2022). The phenomenological design was preferred among the qualitative research designs in the current study since it focuses on evaluating the experiences of individuals (Altunışık et al., 2022) and aims to reveal the meanings by describing the facts, objects, and situations in an integrated and versatile way (Karagöz, 2017).

In connection with the purpose of the research, eight open-ended questions and four questions were created to determine the demographic characteristics of the participants by examining the literature in depth. The interview form was sent to two academicians who had previously conducted qualitative studies and were experts in tourism science. Their opinions were then asked about the questions. In line with this feedback, the interview form was prepared for the pilot test by making word changes to make it easier to understand within the scope of the suggestions. A pilot test was conducted through face-to-face interviews with seven people. After the pilot test, which was carried out to ensure reliability and validity, the field application was started because there was no negative feedback from the participants about the understandability and clarity of the questions. The interview questions were as follows:

- *What is the purpose of making a train journey?*
- *Which wagon would you like to travel in on your next train journey, and why?*
- *What comes to mind when you think of the Southern-Kurtalan Express?*
- *What are the strengths of your Southern-Kurtalan Express journey?*
- *What are the weaknesses when you evaluate your South-Kurtalan Express journey?*
- *What possible opportunities does the Southern-Kurtalan Express have, why?*

- *What possible threats does the Southern-Kurtalan Express face, and why?*
- *Should the Southern-Kurtalan Express be as popular as the Eastern Express, what do you think about it? What should be done to make it popular or not?*

Within the scope of this study, the ethics committee report dated 14.03.2023 and numbered 4445 was received from Siirt University. Between 5-11 December 2022, and 16-22 January 2023, travels were made on the Southern-Kurtalan Express (between Kurtalan and Ankara), and the data were collected through face-to-face interviews by two academicians. For data collection, a convenience sampling technique was chosen from purposeful sampling methods. The convenience sampling method is widely used in qualitative research (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2013) because it provides the opportunity to choose from voluntary samples to participate in the study as well as the opportunity to quickly collect samples according to money, time, resources, and cost criteria (Altunışık et al., 2022). While the data obtained were analyzed, the data collection process of the research was terminated at the point where the answers given by the participants started to repeat; in other words, the saturation point was reached. The number of data obtained from the volunteer participants in the study was 30, and the duration of the interviews with the participants varies between 10-25 minutes. In qualitative studies, there is no limitation or calculation method for the number of samples, and researchers decide, based on certain criteria, that the number of samples is sufficient. Karagöz (2017) also emphasized that small sample numbers should be preferred to analyze events or situations examined in phenomenology studies. To ensure confidentiality, the data obtained from the participants was coded between K1 and K30.

In this study, which focused on reaching analytical generalization by assessing the situation examined in depth, instead of reaching generalizable results, content analysis was performed on the obtained data and divided into themes. Content analysis is a technique used to make reproducible and valid inferences from text or other significant topics that vary according to the context of use (Krippendorff, 1980). The purpose of this analysis was to identify relationships or themes that would help explain the data obtained. Content analysis was carried out in four stages: "coding the data, finding the themes, organizing the codes and themes, and defining and interpreting the findings" (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2013).

In the present study, manifold procedures were applied to increase validity and reliability. To ensure internal validity, the literature was investigated in depth, and research questions were formed in this direction. Opinions were requested from two academics who had previously conducted qualitative studies on the questions and were experts in the field of tourism science. To ensure the internal and external reliability of the research, the process, method, data collection, and analysis related to the qualitative study were explained in detail. The data obtained were presented in an in-depth, systematic, and comprehensive manner, and the findings were interpreted through analytical generalization. Furthermore, to ensure the reliability of the study, two researchers used the reliability of the encoders recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994) to determine the consensus and differences among the researchers. The Kappa statistical values obtained are presented in the relevant table, and each value indicates a high agreement between the coders (Karagöz, 2017).

#### 4. Findings

This research focuses on shedding light on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the Southern-Kurtalan Express and reveals the perceptions and behavioral tendencies of travelers towards the Southern-Kurtalan Express. Interviews were conducted with 30 volunteer participants. Behavior matrices were derived from the obtained participant data, and themes were created by performing content analysis on these data. Regarding the demographic profile of the participants, data were obtained from 17 female and 13 male participants. Although the age dispersion of the participants varies between the ages of 18-62, the majority of the age variables are 18-21 and 30 and above. While many of the participants were teachers and students in terms of profession, most of them are 1-3 times in terms of preferred the Southern-Kurtalan Express.

**Table 2:** Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	17	56.7
	Male	13	43.3
Age	18-21	9	30.0
	22-25	6	20.0
	26-29	6	20.0
	30 and above	9	30.0
Profession	Student	14	46.8
	Teacher	4	13.3
	Housewife	2	6.7
	Lawyer	2	6.7
	Retired	2	6.7
	Academician	1	3.3
	Engineer	1	3.3
	Chess trainer	1	3.3
	Court clerk	1	3.3
	Military personal	1	3.3
	Worker	1	3.3
Frequency of travel (Annual)	1-3 times	19	63.3
	4-6 times	9	30.0
	7 and above	2	6.7

The opinions of the participants on the reasons for preferring the Southern-Kurtalan Express were divided into six themes based on the content analysis. Participants evaluated the Southern-Kurtalan Express in the context of transportation to work, school, university, and living places. Participants in the Southern-Kurtalan Express also tended to be heavily used because of the attractiveness of train travel and tourist travel to other places. In addition, meeting new people, feeling good, relaxing, and the attributes offered by the train were among the reasons for the participants.

**Table 3:** Reasons for Preferring Southern-Kurtalan Express

Themes	Participant
Meeting new people	K1, K17, K26
Relax and feel good	K1, K3, K4
Having appropriate conditions (systematic structure, flexibility in time and cost)	K6, K10, K15
Attractiveness of the train journey (experience the difference, scenery, nostalgia, authenticity)	K1, K4, K11, K9, K6, K8, K9, K11, K19, K22, K25
Transportation (work, school or university, place of residence)	K2, K7, K8, K10, K12, K13, K14, K15, K16, K18, K24, K28, K29, K30
Tourist travel	K5, K12, K20, K21, K23, K27

**Kappa value: 90.0**

The behavior matrix of the participants regarding the reason for choosing the Southern-Kurtalan Express wagon is discussed under the titles of the reason for choosing and the reason for not choosing it under Pulman, Couchette, and Wagon-lit. The Pulman wagon consists of a seat system and stands out as it is more economical than the Couchette and Wagon-lit. The bunk wagon varies according to the train but generally comprises four compartments. The compartment, which is designed as two seats facing each other, can also be converted into a bed (four units) when necessary. In the Wagon-lit, there is a bunk bed for two people (TCDD, 2023). Participants generally prefer the Pulman wagon for short-distance journeys, as they are affordable and are at the front of the train. Pulman wagons were not preferred by the participants as they were noisy, crowded, and uncomfortable. The Couchette wagon is in demand in terms of having four seats and beds for four each, providing an opportunity for family and friend groups to travel together and offering reasonable prices. In addition, these wagons are not preferred because of the noise coming from the adjacent compartments and the fact that the number of groups is less than four and that foreigners will stay together. The Wagon-lit has more technical equipment compared to other wagon types, and attributes such as providing a comfortable, comfortable, hygienic, and safe living space unique to the people are the reasons for the preference of the participants.

**Table 4:** The Matrix for the Reasons of Participants' Wagon Selection Behaviors

Pulman		Couchette Compartment		Wagon-Lit
Reason for Choosing	Reason for Not Choosing	Reason for Choosing	Reason for Not Choosing	Reason for Choosing
Short distance	Noisy	Traveling together as family and friends	Staying with foreigners due to the small number of groups	Technical equipment (Sink, mini fridge, etc.)
Reasonable price	Discomfortable	Reasonable price	Noise from side compartment	Personal custom field
Position of train carriage (in front)	Crowdedness	Suitability for multi-purpose use (bed-seat)		Living space-home environment feeling
	Hygiene problem			Being more hygienic
				Comfortable
				Security

All the participants' views on Southern-Kurtalan Express have positive features, and the features they attribute are presented as four themes: emotion, nostalgia, train route, and service quality, and two aggregate dimensions: affective and cognitive. The characteristics-images attributed to the participants predominantly had emotional characteristics. Affective features-images reflect feelings and emotions towards an element (Gorji et al., 2023), and are seen as an important attraction for travelers (Yağmur and Aksu, 2020). On the other hand, cognitive feature images are related to the perceived features of an element (Ma and Li, 2023) or the evaluation of its objective features (Yağmur and Aksu, 2020). The affective aggregate dimension features emphasize the emotional aspect theme, such as excitement, adventure, happiness, comfort, longing or reunion, mystery, warm environment, authenticity, and the combination of the elements of the past and present point to the theme of nostalgia. Cognitive aggregate dimension features characterize the geographical, cultural, historical, and architectural features of the route where the train line passes. Comfort, price, and increasing popularity emphasize the theme of service quality.

**Table 5:** Features Attributed to Southern-Kurtalan Express by Participants

Aggregate Dimension	Themes	Codes
Affective	Emotion	Enjoyable travel-trip
		Exciting
		Adventure
		Calm- Comfort
		Warm - cozy atmosphere (sweet conversations, chats with friends, meeting new people, making friends)
		Longing and happiness
		Concealment - waiting to be discovered
	Nostalgia	Authenticity (Local foods, local architecture, and train-related features such as beds, tables, curtains, ornaments)
		Combination of past and present
		Nostalgic value reminding of the past
Cognitive	Train Route	Route cities or region (South and East Anatolia)
		Geographical features (mountains, vegetation, lake, landscape, streams, etc.)
		Superstructure and historical elements (bridges, tunnels, historical sites, and architectural elements)
		Route line culture (people, behavior, clothing styles, intact Turkish culture, etc.)
	Service Quality	Cost-effective
		Comfortable
		Growing in popularity

**Kappa value: 0.95**

Participants' views on the Southern-Kurtalan Express were grouped under the headings of Strengths-Weakness and Opportunities-Threats based on the SWOT matrix. Undiscovered features, nostalgic elements, high service quality, technical features of the train and its capacity to meet various needs, security, and route lines constitute the strengths of the Southern-Kurtalan Express; its weaknesses are the train's standard technical equipment, inability to provide personalized service, frequent stops, and slowness consisting of perceptions and security control views regarding the use of lower classes. Selling tickets through the application, increasing interest of Z

generation members, low accident risk compared to its competitors (road and airway), low cost and high passenger carrying capacity, and being a driving force for regional tourism, and development point to the opportunities faced by Southern-Kurtalan Express. Terrorism, lack of publicity, overcrowding, high potential for use by refugees, risks of natural disasters, and risk of loss of authenticity are threats to the Southern-Kurtalan Express.

**Table 6:** SWOT Analysis for Southern-Kurtalan Express

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weakness</b>
Affordability-Reasonable cost	Lack of recognition
Technical features of the train (speed, comfort, convenience, technological equipment, air-conditioning systems, wide seating, bed service, private space in the compartment and the option to stay together for family and friends groups, transition between wagons)	Lack of personalized service (small and inadequate personal hygiene space, lack of storage space for valuables, long stays with strangers, encounters with families with children)
Capacity to meet various needs (food, entertainment, recreation, socialization, and special services for children)	Lack of service for passengers at stations
System functioning well (accessibility and transport)	Waste of time due to slowness
High service quality (cleanliness, helpful, friendly, and sincere behavior of employees)	High number of stations, low number of train services and delays
Opportunity to see many cities (historical artifacts, culture, and gastronomic elements) and proximity to important destinations (Mardin, Adiyaman)	Perception that people with low budgets prefer
Presenting nostalgic elements (merging the past with the present, childhood memories, etc.)	The technological features offered are at the standard level
Not being crowded or becoming popular	Frequent security check
Slow travel (see everywhere, savor the moment, low noise)	
Train safety	
<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>
Ticket sales application through the application (Eybis)	Lack of publicity
Increasing interest of young people in train travel	Terrorism
Minimum damage to the environment	Crowdedness-popularity
Cost-effective compared to its competitors (bus, plane and Eastern Express)	Alternative new routes to Southern-Kurtalan Express
High passenger carrying capacity (compared to bus and plane)	Competition with other transportation vehicles
Perception that accident risk is lower (compared to bus and plane) and safer	Security perception for superstructure elements such as bridges, tunnels, and rails
Opportunity to increase the tourism potential of the region and to develop alternative tourism	Natural conditions (avalanche, earthquake, flood, etc.)
Regional development promotion and increase in local investments	Losing the authenticity of the Southern-Kurtalan express by focusing on technological development
	Highly preferred by refugees

**Kappa value: 0.95**

The focus of this research is to reveal the strengths and weaknesses of the Southern-Kurtalan Express and the opportunities and threats it faces or is likely to encounter in terms of creating a strategic framework. In addition, the SWOT analysis of

the Eastern Express, which has recently become popular, is to perform a comparative SWOT analysis of these two railway lines. The SWOT matrix for the Southern-Kurtalan Express is outlined in Table 6 by performing content analysis on the opinions of the participants, while the SWOT matrix for the Eastern Express is compiled from the relevant literature and presented in Table 7.

**Table 7:** SWOT Analysis for Eastern Express

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weakness</b>
Recognition-popularity in social media	Crowdedness
Geographical attractions-landscape (winter conditions)	Inadequacy of city tourism information-advisory offices
Pop culture influence	Lack of personalized service
Connected strong tour, excursion, etc. availability of activities	Lack of entertainment or other activities during the long journey on the train
Being an alternative type of tourism rather than a means of transportation	Inadequacy of Erzincan, Erzurum and Kars transportation network and lack of promotion of city attractiveness elements
Adequate technical equipment	
Local cultural features (tradition, gastronomy, handicrafts, etc.)	
Nostalgic and romantic features	
Slow travel	
Undiscovered destinations	
Security	
Authenticity	
<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>
Travel agencies	Purchase of tickets by travel agents
Sharing of social media phenomena	Popularity
National photography competition organized by TCDD (The State Railways of the Republic of Turkey) for the Eastern Express every year	Lack of protection of historical and cultural sites despite the increasing number of visitors
	Commodification-display of pretentious behavior
	The cost of tickets

**Source:** Doğan et al., 2018; Buluk and Eşitti, 2019; Çanakçı et al., 2019; Bingöl and Akoğlan Kozak, 2020; Korkusuz and Özdemir, 2020; Güney and Kızılırmak, 2021; Bayraktar and Selçuk, 2022.

The fact that travelers shared the visual elements they obtained during their Eastern Express travels through social media aroused interest in potential travelers, and thanks to this interest, the Eastern Express has become a trend (Doğan et al., 2018). Turning to this trend has caused many problems, such as not being able to find travel tickets on the Eastern Express, low service quality, as well as increasing the tourism potential of destination cities and causing various important vital effects, such as regional development. In this regard, the opinions of the participants regarding the popularity of the Southern-Kurtalan Express are presented in Table 8 by creating a matrix.

**Table 8:** Opinion Matrix of Participants on the Popularity of the Southern-Kurtalan Express

Should Be Popular		Shouldn't Be Popular	
Why	What should be done	Why	What should be done
Quality service and top-quality service perception	Intensive promotion and advertising - use of social media platforms and shares by social media phenomenon	Inability to find or reach tickets	Prevention of promotion on social media platforms
Reasonable price	Service diversification	Loss of authenticity	
Adequate equipment	Cooperation with local governments	Price increases	
Cultural values	Price regulation		
Route cities	Connected tours		
Tourist attractions			

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

The reasons for participants' preference for the Southern-Kurtalan Express can be primarily categorized under the themes of transportation, tourist travel, and the appeal of train journeys. In addition, meeting new people, relaxing, feeling good, and the suitable conditions of the train are among the reasons why it is preferred among the participants. Travel preferences generally affect the choice of the wagon type of participants. Instead of spending a travel time of about 30 hours in the Pulman wagon type, people tend to exhibit behaviors towards the Couched compartment and Wagon-lits, which stands out with its comfort and various features as a logical behavior. While the participants tended to prefer the Pulman wagon for short distance travel and for the purpose of affordable transportation, it is not preferred due to the noise, crowdedness, hygiene problem, and lack of comfort compared to the wagon-lit and couched compartment type because many people are in the same wagon. In contrast, for long-distance and tourist trips, mostly Couchette compartments and Wagon-lits are preferred. The Couchette compartment stands out because it is suitable for traveling together as a family and friend group, its function can be converted into a bed and armchair, and its relatively affordable price option. Wagon-lits are preferred because they offer a personal space, and have equipment such as a sink and mini fridge in this area, create a feeling of home environment, and are more comfortable, hygienic, and safer than the other two wagon types. It is possible to increase the quality of service, increase the quality of service according to the purpose of travel, diversify the options, determine the various characteristics of the people who travel, and realize appropriate marketing strategies for these, through the matrix of the carriage preference behaviors of the travelers.

All characteristics that the participants attributed to the Southern-Kurtalan Express were positive, but the participant characteristics were divided into two aggregate dimensions: affective and cognitive. Affective and cognitive element-images are powerful stimuli for activating people's behaviors and behavioral intentions (Afshardoost and Eshaghi, 2020), satisfaction (Omo-Obas and Anning-Dorson, 2022), and even the formation of loyalty (Trang et al., 2023; Tran et al., 2023) also have strong effects. In this context, it is possible to say that improving the behavioral intentions of travelers, increasing their satisfaction levels, and building their loyalty can be achieved based on the strategy of creating a strong affective and cognitive image of the Southern-Kurtalan Express. In addition, affective features reflecting participants' views of the Southern-Kurtalan Express outweigh their cognitive features. The affective

aggregate dimension consists of themes of emotion and nostalgia. The widespread presence of emotional features in the opinions of travelers also points to strong ties between the consumer-traveler and the brand-Southern-Kurtalan Express. Establishing a strong bond with the Southern-Kurtalan Express shows that the potential to create a strong brand image is high. Although the theme of nostalgia is closely related to emotional characteristics, the concept of nostalgia is seen in the body of knowledge as closely related to tourism and travel, and is identified with each other. Nostalgia is a phenomenon that occurs in the emotional gap between memory and identity, and it is crucial for individual and social memories in relation to individual and shared identities, created memories, and memories of the past. In addition, nostalgia can affect future behavior and experience by providing consumers with a rich imagination with sensory, emotional, and ritual connotations (Earl and Hall, 2023). In this respect, the fact that the Southern-Kurtalan Express contains high nostalgic elements in the traveler's mind highlights the behaviors of participants, such as creating participant satisfaction and loyalty, repurchase-revisit intention, and word-of-mouth advertising (wom or e-wom). On the other hand, the cognitive aggregate is divided into the themes of service quality and train routes. Train route features have been included in travelers' opinions relatively broadly compared with service quality. The cities on the route where the train passes, the cultural characteristics and architecture of the cities, various superstructures (bridges, tunnels, etc.), and historical elements characterize the main-basic-priority source of attraction for travelers. The fact that cognitive features are prominent and vital is also because of the formation of affective features. The view that cognitive features play a critical role in the formation of affective features is widely accepted (Yağmur and Aksu, 2020).

The Eastern Express cannot be compared to the Southern-Kurtalan Express in terms of its potential and popularity. However, some of the charms of the Eastern Express are also present in the Southern-Kurtalan Express, and the popularity jump that occurred in the Eastern Express in a short time is likely to occur in the Southern-Kurtalan Express as well. In this regard, the comparison is significant in terms of establishing a framework for determining and implementing similar strategies for the development of the Southern-Kurtalan Express by revealing due diligence. When the strength features of the Southern-Kurtalan Express and the Eastern Express are evaluated from the SWOT matrices, because similar trains are used on both railway lines, the trains have similar features in terms of technical features, capacity to meet various needs, good functioning of the system, high service quality, safety, nostalgic elements, and slow travel. The strength of the Eastern Express is due to the geographical, cultural, gastronomic, historical, and archaeological features on the railway line and its proximity to important destinations (e.g., Van, Ardahan, and Artvin). Although the Southern-Kurtalan Express has some similar strengths, the difference arises from the unique landscape brought about by the winter season and the features of the Eastern culture. Geographical features, gastronomic elements, destinations with important cultural and religious tourism resources near or on the route line (Mardin, Adiyaman), and the Southeastern Anatolia Region, as the cradle of multiculturalism and tolerance in the past and present, make up the strengths of the Southern-Kurtalan Express. In this context, marketing strategies for these strengths should be developed by focusing on one or more of the strengths of the Southern-Kurtalan Express, like the features highlighted in the Eastern Express, and advertising and promotional activities should be supported, especially through social media phenomena. Moreover, the Southern-Kurtalan Express has factors such as being convenient-economic and not crowded-popular, which makes it stronger than the Eastern Express. As for the weak points, the South-Kurtalan Express and the Eastern Express's lack of personalized service and the train's standard technological features specify similar negative aspects.

The negative features that make the Eastern Express different are crowdedness, lack of information, and tourist information offices for the route cities, while the negative aspects of the Southern-Kurtalan Express are that it does not have enough recognition by people; it is seen as a means of transportation for people with low budgets, and the number of services is low. In addition, slowness can sometimes be viewed as a strength and weakness for the participants. In the situation seen as a weakness, this situation can be eliminated by increasing the number of services and skipping some stations for train speed, that is, by diversifying the options. When the opportunities of both railways are assessed, all themes for the Southern-Kurtalan Express are valid for the Eastern Express, which is based on the activities of the travel agencies brought by the Eastern Express, which is heavily preferred, the sharing of social media phenomena, and the national tourism competition organized by TCDD for recognition. If these features can be realized in the Southern-Kurtalan Express, it can be expressed that its popularity and recognition will increase. When it comes to threats, in the context of the Eastern Express, while the problems in the context of popularity and tourism activities, ticket price increases and ticket unavailability, artificial behavior or corruption, and commodification, themes such as security-terrorism, problems arising from popularization, lack of promotion, and use by refugees come to the fore in the Southern-Kurtalan Express. The climate of peace and trust that has emerged in the region as a result of the recent elimination of security problems outside the borders of the country opens the door to the disappearance of the most important threat element under the heading of threats. However, it is understood that there is little more time for the perception of this to form in people. In addition, important strategic planning and measures should be taken to address the serious problems encountered after becoming popular and problems arising from the use of refugees. In summary, the South-Kurtalan express, which is not possible to compare with the Eastern express for now, is faced with important opportunities, although it has as much strength as the Eastern express, even in some respects. The Southern-Kurtalan Express may have the potential to be an important and powerful alternative route in the future, with marketing strategies focusing on strengths by eliminating these negativities through remedial strategic decisions regarding the weaknesses and threats it has encountered or will encounter. At this point, it is thought that the popularity of Southern-Kurtalan Express can be increased by selecting some of its strengths (winter travel features) as in the Eastern Express and determining strategies for the development of these strengths (for instance gastronomy, culture, architecture features, and historical places). In addition, the local governments of the cities on the railway route, tourism provincial directorates, TCDD city management administrations, and universities have important duties, and it is a vital element in ensuring success that all stakeholder groups act together to determine common strategies (Ivanov, 2023).

While the opinions of the participants about the popularity of the Southern-Kurtalan Express are mainly reflected in the matrix, as it should be popular, high service quality, a reasonable price policy, the availability of important destinations, tourist attractions, and cultural values are the reasons for their popularity. Opinions on what to do in terms of being popular came to the fore as titles such as advertising and promotion activities on social media and other channels, cooperation with local governments, diversifying or personalizing the services offered, price adjustment, and organizing tours related to the route. Yet, whereas the reasons for the desire to be unpopular consist of price increases, not being able to find tickets, and loss of authenticity, the strategy to be done is to reduce or prevent sharing by phenomena or individuals on social media platforms. The existence of the opinion that it should not be popular is due to the serious problems that arose after the popularity of the Eastern Express. Developing strategies to eliminate the perception that a similar situation will

occur in the Southern-Kurtalan Express is a requirement of proactive behavior and at the same time, a solution proposal to the problems faced in the Eastern Express.

### 5.1. Theoretical and Practical Implications

The research holds both theoretical and practical implications. In terms of theoretical implications, there is a limited number of studies in the literature focusing on the Southern-Kurtalan Express. In this respect, it is considered that the determination of the current situation of Southern-Kurtalan Express and its future expectations and foresight evaluations, by presenting them within the framework of the SWOT matrix, will not only make a significant contribution to the literature but will also form a basis and inspire future studies. On the other hand, although the academic interest in the Eastern Express seems to be wide in terms of quality and quantity, studies on the Eastern Express have been limited to fields of study such as social media, experience, and nostalgia. Also, instead of a holistic analysis of the current situation and the opportunities or threats faced, there are scant determinations that are handled or put forward only within the scope of the study. In the present study, it was tried to contribute to the literature by means of a SWOT matrix compiled from the literature, and by revealing similarities and differences through the SWOT analyses presented, a general framework has been provided to enrich the literature by providing concrete and rich contributions to the Southern-Kurtalan Express.

As for the practical implications, the SWOT analysis of Southern-Kurtalan Express in the context of travelers provides concrete data to the marketing field, TCDD management, and the unit or units dealing with product and service development, as well as local governments, in terms of consumer-traveler perception and characteristics within the scope of train tourism. Besides, within the framework of the research limitations brought by the qualitative research, it has been reached that the Southern-Kurtalan Express has as much potential as the Eastern Express at some points and even more important at some points to become a nostalgic train line, and that it may encounter much more important opportunities as well as the risk of encountering some important threats such as loss of popularity and authenticity.

### 5.2. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Directions

The research has some limitations due to the preference of qualitative research method and performing SWOT analysis. Analytical generalization can be made in the research results because the qualitative research method focuses on shedding light on the intrinsic worlds of the participants by examining a situation, case, or phenomenon in depth. In the present study, research questions were designed to reveal the situation for Southern-Kurtalan Express and to evaluate future expectations and predictions. In other words, forming the interview questions based on the SWOT matrix points to another research limitation. In addition, instant collection, that is, cross-sectional research approach, was adopted. However, the current research limitation can be overcome by choosing a longitudinal research approach in terms of collecting data in different time periods and increasing the possibility of change, development and at the same time inclusion of much more different sample groups. The research focused on the creation of comparative SWOT analyses of the South-Kurtalan and the Eastern Express. In this respect, the current research can be extended with qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-based research methods in the context of the Van Lake Express. Because Van Lake Express is between Ankara, Kırıkkale, Kayseri, Sivas, Malatya, Elazığ, Muş, Tatvan-Bitlis (Suna and Yıldız, 2020). Unlike the cities on the Southern-Kurtalan Express line of this line, Muş and Tatvan-Bitlis are located. Various tourism attractions such as Lake Van Express, Mount Nemrut and Crater Lake Nemrut, Muş Plain, and Lake Van trips by ferry departing from Tatvan can be experienced (Saylan,

2021). Moreover, based on the current research scope, SWOT matrices for all country railways with the potential to be nostalgic train journeys or region-based SWOT matrices can be created. While there are very scant studies on South-Kurtalan Express in the literature, the main trajectory of studies on the Eastern Express consists of a very narrow context such as nostalgic features, popularization through social media, and travel experience. Regarding both railway lines, some research can be carried out based on various factors such as service quality, service elements that emphasize authenticity and nostalgia in the context of travelers, service diversification and customization, cultural, historical, architectural and gastronomy that make the train route line cities stand out for travelers, or the current negativities related to these cities from the perspective of travelers. Further, the current scarce literature can be enriched by working with important stakeholders such as local governments, tourism provincial directorates, universities, and non-governmental organizations to create alternative activities related to these two railway lines. Furthermore, most railway tourism initiatives have been developed through public financial funds, but private initiatives need to be established within the long-term tourism destination life cycle. For economic diversity in the regions, fundamental changes are required through new approaches to public-private interactions for tourism development, job creation, capacity building, networking (Peira et al., 2022). In this respect, studies can be carried out to establish new lines for tourism-oriented railway management in Turkey or to open train operations to private enterprises on existing lines.

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<b>Hakem Değerlendirmesi:</b> Dış bağımsız.	<b>Bilgilendirilmiş Onam Formu:</b> Tüm taraflar kendi rızaları ile çalışmaya dâhil olmuşlardır.
<b>Teşekkür:</b> Değerli katkılarından dolayı hakemlere teşekkür ederim.	<b>Araştırmacıların Katkı Oranı:</b> Yenal Yağmur çalışmanın %100'üne katkı sağlamıştır.
<b>Destek Bilgisi:</b> Herhangi bir kurum ve/veya kuruluştan destek alınmamıştır.	<b>Etik Kurul Onayı:</b> Siirt Üniversitesi, 14/03/2023 tarihli, 4445 Sayılı Karar
<b>Çıkar Çatışması:</b> Yazarlar arasında çıkar çatışması yoktur.	