





## Article

# Crisis Management and Sustainability in Tourism Industry: Obstacles and Recovery Strategies after the COVID-19 Crisis in Antalya, Türkiye

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**Abstract:** This study aims to examine how tourism enterprises can ensure their sustainability and elude the negative effects of the COVID-19 crisis via recovery strategies through semi-structured in-depth interviews, focusing on the tourism industry in Antalya, the first and most important destination in Türkiye, in terms of arrivals and nights spent. According to the findings, travel bans and quarantine measures due to the COVID-19 pandemic had devastating effects on Antalya's tourism sector. In fact, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a shortage of personnel in tourism industry, a persisting problem. In managing this crisis, businesses and the state have attempted various recovery strategies. Despite a recovery period since 2021, vulnerabilities in the national economy and increasing inflation rates since COVID-19 have triggered input and living costs. Furthermore, the Ukraine War has adversely affected the sustainability of tourism activities in Antalya. Moreover, due to new regulations regarding retirement in 2023, some middle-level managers in tourism sector have retired, leading to predictions of a potential crisis in upper-level management in the future. According to the study results, cooperation in tourism sector, public-private-university collaboration, and government support play significant roles in achieving full recovery from the crisis and ensuring sustainability in tourism sector activities. The study may contribute to the literature and help industry representatives and policymakers in terms of sustainability in tourism and crisis management recovery strategies.

**Keywords:** sustainability; tourism; crisis management; COVID-19; recovery; Türkiye; Antalya



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## 1. Introduction

Crises represent one of the foremost impediments to the sustainability of activities within the tourism industry. According to Zhong et al. [1] (p. 1), “The tourism industry is vulnerable in nature”. In recent years, the global tourism industry has experienced numerous crises and disasters, including terrorist attacks, political instability, economic downturns, biosecurity threats, and natural disasters [2]. Crises in the tourism sector create situations of instability and uncertainty, with the effects most keenly felt at the local and regional levels of tourism activities [3]. These crises lead to a decrease in tourist arrivals at destinations, resulting in reduced tourism revenues and thereby damaging the sustainability of tourism activities. Particularly affecting developing countries but generally impacting all countries, crises causing significant declines in foreign exchange earnings can lead to significant and long-term economic downturns. Such adversities can deeply and enduringly affect economies heavily reliant on tourism as a fundamental source of foreign exchange, rendering recovery more challenging.

One of the most significant crises to have shaken the entire world in recent years is the COVID-19 pandemic, which emerged at the end of 2019 and was declared a global

pandemic by the World Health Organization in March 2020 [4–8]. Concerning the transformation and change in Türkiye, the establishment of the Coronavirus Scientific Committee under the Ministry of Health on 10 January 2020, aimed at determining pandemic measures, and the acceleration of efforts to take precautions against COVID-19 in all sectors following the first case detected on 11 March 2020, can be observed [7,9,10]. Defined as one of the greatest economic shocks globally, the COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected the sustainability of tourism sector activities [5].

According to the World Travel & Tourism Council [11], “In 2019, prior to the pandemic, Travel & Tourism (including its direct, indirect, and induced impacts) accounted for 10.5% of all jobs (334 million) and 10.4% of global GDP (US\$ 10.3 trillion). Meanwhile, international visitor spending amounted to US\$ 1.91 trillion in 2019”. However, “As a result of COVID-19 and the ongoing restrictions to international mobility, the Travel & Tourism sector suffered losses of almost USD 4.5 trillion, with its global contribution to GDP declining by 49.1% compared to 2019 to reach only USD 4.7 trillion in 2020; relative to a 3.7% GDP decline of the global economy. Domestic visitor spending decreased by 45%, whilst international visitor spending fell by an unprecedented 69.4%” [12]. Similarly, the crisis precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic profoundly affected Türkiye, one of the world’s major tourism destinations.

According to WTTC [13], “Türkiye’s Travel & Tourism sector’s contribution to GDP was 11% (TRY 693.3 billion or US\$78.2 billion) in 2019, falling to just 5.1% (TRY 327.2 billion or US\$36.9 billion) in 2020, which represented a painful 52.8% loss”. In terms of international arrivals, while 31 million people came to Türkiye and spent 112 million overnights in 2019, these numbers decreased to 10 million arrivals and 33 million overnights in 2020 [14]. This led to a decrease in the number of people employed in the tourism sector, despite government supports. While 2.6 million people were working in the travel and tourism sector in Türkiye before the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of employees decreased by 18% to 2.1 million people due to the pandemic [13].

Due to its 640 km coastline along the Mediterranean Sea and its significant historical tourist centers, Antalya, the most visited province, stands out as an attractive tourism destination due to the richness of its natural and human tourism resources [15]. Moreover, Antalya has been at the top in terms of the tourism sector of Türkiye for many years. The top five tourism provinces in Türkiye between 2019 and 2023 by arrivals (domestic, foreign, and total) and nights spent (domestic, foreign, and total) are clearly shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** List of the top 5 tourism provinces in Türkiye between 2019 and 2023.

Year	Ranking	Number of Arrivals			Nights Spent		
		Foreign	Citizen	Total	Foreign	Citizen	Total
2023	1. Antalya	20,662,085	4,680,542	25,342,627	81,577,296	81,577,296	94,030,989
	2. İstanbul	9,265,769	3,946,897	13,212,666	22,372,086	7,376,332	29,748,418
	3. Muğla	3,154,134	3,154,134	5,149,488	10,813,124	5,404,405	16,217,529
	4. Ankara	511,486	2,980,263	3,491,749	1,110,597	4,889,043	5,999,640
	5. İzmir	1,153,534	2,139,496	3,293,030	2,800,265	3,986,776	6,787,041
2022	1. Antalya	19,147,515	3,939,694	23,087,209	75,667,328	10,603,223	86,270,551
	2. İstanbul	8,735,697	3,339,885	12,075,582	22,132,017	6,464,550	28,596,567
	3. Muğla	2,432,279	1,425,075	3,857,354	8,763,589	3,848,162	12,611,751
	4. İzmir	1,211,881	2,171,301	3,383,182	2,984,655	4,003,322	6,987,977
	5. Ankara	436,230	2,455,644	2,891,874	965,274	3,943,689	4,908,963
2021	1. Antalya	12,989,618	3,669,437	16,659,055	50,537,706	10,066,394	60,604,100
	2. İstanbul	5,133,272	2,791,863	7,925,135	13,346,788	5,224,575	18,571,363
	3. Muğla	1,379,852	1,538,879	2,918,731	4,234,228	3,839,175	8,073,403
	4. İzmir	625,639	1,667,223	2,292,862	1,706,740	3,255,570	4,962,310
	5. Ankara	254,034	1,771,534	2,025,568	609,844	3,000,584	3,610,428

Table 1. Cont.

Year	Ranking	Number of Arrivals			Nights Spent		
		Foreign	Citizen	Total	Foreign	Citizen	Total
2020	1. Antalya	5,835,903	2,460,169	8,296,072	21,540,134	6,333,719	27,873,853
	2. İstanbul	2,474,237	1,936,117	4,410,354	6,390,575	3,500,370	9,890,945
	3. Muğla	587,092	901,391	1,488,483	2,116,412	2,241,386	4,357,798
	4. Ankara	134,638	1,212,470	1,347,108	324,129	2,012,004	2,336,133
	5. İzmir	219,647	1,112,514	1,332,161	590,281	2,077,261	2,667,542
2019	1. Antalya	16,077,147	3,060,162	19,137,309	73,772,317	8,624,957	82,397,274
	2. İstanbul	6,885,230	3,411,940	10,297,170	17,635,904	6,297,894	23,933,798
	3. Muğla	1,987,987	988,111	2,976,098	8,038,030	2,640,976	10,679,006
	4. İzmir	1,042,479	1,769,032	2,811,511	2,752,703	3,326,959	6,079,662
	5. Ankara	450,362	2,118,229	2,568,591	932,227	3,314,211	4,246,438

Note: Accommodation statistics were compiled from Ministry of Culture and Tourism [14] and Turkish Statistical Institute [16] data.

According to accommodation statistics [14,16], Antalya managed to welcome 21 million international arrivals and 25 million total arrivals in 2023 and ranked first in Türkiye. Antalya, the province receiving the most international arrivals through tourism, has a special position among tourism destinations and was dramatically affected during the COVID-19 crisis with regards to the sustainability of the tourism sector. Despite the detrimental impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Antalya was at the top in terms of the number of arrivals and nights spent between 2019 and 2023 when compared to İstanbul, which ranked second on the list. In fact, the number of arrivals and nights spent in Antalya is two and three times more than in İstanbul, respectively.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic hindered the sustainability of tourism sector activities in Antalya, leading to the abrupt cessation of all tourism-related activities, and hotels' occupancy rates failed to meet expectations due to the pandemic. As a result of the measures taken due to the pandemic, some sectors operating in the tourism and food and beverage industries had to close, with many on the brink of closure. The occupancy rates of hotels in Antalya decreased by 46.8% in the first 7 months of 2020 compared to the same period in 2019, reaching 33.7% [17]. While the number of arrivals to Antalya in 2019 was 19 million people, it decreased dramatically to 8 million in 2020 [14]. The sudden and high decrease in visitor numbers resulted in a rapid decline in tourism revenues and employment rates. The dramatically negative effects of COVID-19 on the tourism sector have emphasized the importance of crisis management, which plays a significant role in the sustainability of tourism activities.

Studies addressing crisis management and the tourism industry in the tourism literature have predominantly focused on defining crisis management in tourism and examining the recovery process in tourism through multiple topics and methods [3,18–23]. Post-COVID-19 studies have primarily addressed the processes of post-crisis recovery in the tourism industry in general and/or specific tourism destinations [24–29]. According to Biruni [30] (p. 79), the COVID-19 pandemic “provides tourism studies with an opportunity for an unprecedented analysis of the spatiality of the phenomenon, both for highlighting some territorial pathologies generated by non-sustainable forms of tourism and for discovering the capacity of tourism resources to face the crisis and discover new functions”. Chang et al. [31] (p. 1) also assert that “It is essential to investigate how the industry will recover after COVID-19 and how the industry can be made sustainable in a dramatically changed world”. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to evaluate the negative consequences of the COVID-19 crisis on the sustainability of the tourism sector in Antalya, which holds a significant position in both global and Turkish revenue rankings of tourism industry as well as to assess the changes and transformations in tourism activities after the COVID-19 pandemic and the recovery process in the tourism industry through semi-structured interviews and from the perspective of crisis management. Ac-

According to the results of the literature review, a study addressing the sustainability and recovery strategies of Antalya tourism industry during and after COVID-19 era from a crisis management perspective by means of semi-structured in-depth interview method does not exist. Therefore, this study is expected to fill this gap in the literature. Furthermore, it is expected to contribute to raising awareness about crisis management and sustainability in tourism through an in-depth examination of crisis management in tourism during and after the COVID-19 period via semi-structured in-depth interviews with prominent sector representatives in Antalya. Therefore, the aim of this article is to address the following questions:

1. What is the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the Antalya tourism industry?
2. What are the crisis management and recovery strategies applied to manage the COVID-19 crisis?
3. What are the changes in the tourism sector after the COVID-19 crisis?
4. What is the future outlook for the Antalya tourism sector?
5. What are the opinions of tourism sector representatives regarding crisis management to ensure sustainability in tourism and develop effective recovery strategies?

The sections of this study are organized as follows: Section 2 reviews the literature regarding crisis management, tourism and sustainability. Section 3 addresses the materials and methods of the study. Section 4 demonstrates results and discussions of the study. Section 5 presents the conclusions, limitations, research directions for future research of the study.

## 2. Literature Review

Tourism activities, which people engage in to utilize their leisure time after meeting their daily necessities, are directly affected by crises that arise from both natural and human-induced factors, as they are entirely human-centered and largely based on enjoyment. According to Gurtner [3], since the beginning of this century, the global tourism industry has faced numerous crisis situations. The fragile nature of tourism makes the sector and businesses more susceptible to crises that directly or indirectly affect them. "Anticipating and preparing to deal with the threat of crises precipitated by disaster from natural and people-made catastrophes is an important challenge facing tourism" [32] (p. 249). According to Blake and Sinclair [33], demands for tourism activities are particularly sensitive to crises related to safety and health. Therefore, "In an organization or tourism destination, potential crises or disasters may be avoided by active crisis management" [34] (p. 12).

According to Peters and Pikkemaat [34] (p. 11), in terms of the tourism industry, "crisis management in tourism deals with the recognition of crisis within the destination and the recovery and rebuilding after crisis". The sustainability of tourism businesses relies on the continuity of their operations. "Since the United Nations' Earth Summit in June 1992, greater efforts are being made to apply the principles of sustainability to tourism development in order to ensure its intergenerational viability and its contribution to sustainable development" [35] (p. 700). The primary objective of sustainability in tourism is to maximize the economic benefits of tourism activities while simultaneously preserving and even enhancing social and environmental values [36]. Sustainability in tourism is closely related to the subject of crises and crisis management. According to Toubes [37] (p. 3), "Crisis management and resilience typically emerge in the discussion of tourism and sustainability".

Due to the vulnerability of tourism and its sector to crises, there has been a notable increase in crisis management research in the tourism literature over the past approximately thirty years [38]. In the early 2000s, research on crisis management in tourism primarily focused on individual events such as the September 11 attacks and economic crises [32,33]. In the last decade, studies addressing crisis management in tourism have increasingly focused on global climate change, environmental crises, and sustainability and resilience in response to environmental crises [39–41].

The dramatic impacts of crises on the sustainability of tourism activities reached unprecedented levels with the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Jones and Comfort [42], while the COVID-19 crisis brought about some short-term environmental benefits, it had a devastating impact on economies and societies globally. The crisis led to temporary and, in some cases, permanent job losses in the accommodation industry in many countries, affecting millions of people directly or indirectly employed in the tourism sector. The COVID-19 crisis has profoundly affected the sustainability of tourism activities, with more complex and long-lasting effects than other crises. According to Casal-Riberio et al. [43] (p.1), "Given the global impact of COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) on the tourism industry, crisis management has once again become a hot topic for research", and particularly in the last three years, there has been a significant increase in research aimed at understanding the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on crisis management.

During and post-COVID-19, studies focusing on tourism have predominantly addressed the impacts of COVID-19 on the tourism sector and post-pandemic recovery strategies. For example, Bhatia et al. [24] examined "tourism sustainability in the era of COVID-19" via systematic literature review; Gössling et al. [25] and Orîndaru et al. [28] assessed COVID-19 effects on tourism sustainability and tourism industry recovery after COVID-19. Ertac ve Cankan [29] studied "Creating a sustainable tourism model in North Cyprus during the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic" via in-depth interview methodology. Yeh [27] studied "tourism recovery strategy against COVID-19 pandemic" by means of in-depth interviews concluding that open communication is key to successfully combating the COVID-19 pandemic, and government-supported loans are crucial for the survival of the tourism industry.

Vu et al. [26] examined the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism sector in Vietnam and post-pandemic restoration strategies for the tourism sector using non-parametric statistical methods and in-depth interviews. The study results indicate significant decreases in visitor numbers, commercial activities, income, and employment rates in Vietnam during the post-COVID-19 period. Therefore, to enhance and sustain the tourism sector, which is one of Vietnam's significant economic sectors, reasonable and rational strategies such as creating a sustainable tourism market, diversifying and developing tourism, and revising activities focusing on digital transformation are necessary.

By its nature, the tourism industry is highly vulnerable to crises. Crisis management is crucial in tourism, as the sustainability of tourism operations is essential for the continuity of tourism businesses. On the other hand, crisis management in the tourism literature spans approximately 30 years, and the dynamics of the current period have led to the exploration of crisis management in tourism with different topics and dimensions. The devastating consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism sector have led to a significant increase in studies on crisis management, recovery, and sustainability in the tourism industry during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. This study also aims to examine how tourism businesses ensure their sustainability during the COVID-19 crisis and post-crisis recovery strategies specifically within the Antalya tourism industry.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

Crisis management encompasses efforts to develop the capacity for instant intervention before a problem turns into a disaster, striving to minimize the impact of crises and emerge from them with minimal damage, while also preparing for future crises through comprehensive and systematic planning. According to Jia et al. [44], crisis management serves as both a technique for avoiding emergencies and unforeseen situations through planning and a method for dealing with them when they arise to mitigate their disastrous consequences. The objective of crisis management is to ensure the long-term survival of companies and the continuity of their reputation [45].

The crisis management process is fundamentally divided into three stages: the crisis period, the pre-crisis period, and the post-crisis period, encompasses activities aimed at minimizing the effects of crises and, when necessary, turning crises into opportunities.

The pre-crisis period primarily focuses on prevention and preparedness, involving the identification of potential risks that could lead to a crisis and the creation of a suitable team and program for crisis management [35,46,47]. However, the prevention and preparedness stage, despite being the simplest and least costly phase of overcoming a potential crisis, is often overlooked [48]. In the preparedness and prevention phase of crises, it is very important to establish a crisis management team that meets at regular intervals and shares information and crisis management strategies before the crisis arises [35,47,49–51]. Determining the roles and areas of responsibility of the crisis management team, which is ready to take immediate action in case of crisis, is also very significant in effective crisis management. Thus, possible management confusion can be minimized by providing instant and systematic responses to crises.

The crisis period mainly consists of diagnosing the crisis, making critical decisions, and implementing them. According to Boin et al. [52], effective crisis management begins with the shared recognition that a threat requiring urgent intervention has emerged. Diagnosing the crisis in crisis management is the stage of defining its end. The critical decision-making and implementation stage, which covers the period following the diagnosis of the crisis, is crucial for managing crises more effectively and determining the extent to which crises can be successfully overcome. Therefore, managers have a great responsibility in making decisions, while company employees have a responsibility to implement the decisions in effective crisis management [52]. The choice of model and approach for crisis management depends on the organization's structure and resource capacity. According to Losemore [47], the most suitable approach to crisis management lies in plans and programming developed cumulatively considering the nature of the crisis, existing technological capabilities, environmental factors, and the capacities of all individuals involved in the organization.

The final stage of the crisis management process, the post-crisis period, encompasses recovery and returning to normality, as well as learning. The end of the crisis process and the efforts of organizations that have overcome the crisis to restore pre-crisis conditions occur during the recovery and return to normality stage. According to Sui Pheng et al. [53], during the recovery stage, organizations develop and implement tested, short- and long-term programs designed to help them continue normal business activities. Moreover, making short- and long-term planning in effective crisis management provides great advantages to organizations in getting rid of crises with minimum losses or turning the crisis into an opportunity [54,55]. According to Jaques [56], although many management models present the terms "post-crisis" and "recovery" as synonymous, the risks a post-crisis organization may face can be much greater than those during the crisis. Therefore, it is important for organizations to address crisis management comprehensively, considering their resources and capacities to minimize the risks posed by crises and perhaps even turn crises into potential opportunities. Additionally, post-crisis recovery not only concerns recovery and returning to normality but also includes management learning stages such as evaluation and process change [57]. The learning process during the post-crisis period is based on the assumption that a better understanding of the causes of crises and learning from past crises can prevent their recurrence in the future.

#### 4. Materials and Methods

This study aims to evaluate the economic and social consequences of COVID-19 from the perspective of crisis management through semi-structured in-depth interviews. The semi-structured in-depth interview method is a qualitative approach that includes a pre-prepared set of questions but allows for the emergence of subsidiary questions depending on the flow of the interview. During the interview, adherence to the sequence of questions and the manner of their expression is not strictly enforced. While participants in the interviews tend to prepare a list of predefined questions, semi-structured in-depth interviews typically evolve into conversations that offer participants the opportunity to delve into topics they consider important [58]. Semi-structured interviews stand out from

surveys and other data collection methods due to their detailed coverage, often consisting of intensive individual interviews with a small number of participants, and their ability to uncover in-depth information [59]. Semi-structured in-depth interviews are beneficial for gathering information on complex behavioral patterns, diverse perspectives, and various experiences [60,61].

The purpose of qualitative methods is to select participants who will help the researcher understand people's experiences [58]. Therefore, interviewees in semi-structured in-depth interviews are selected based on their relevant experiences related to the research topic. The aim is not breadth through representativeness, but depth through rich insights about a group of participants [62]. Selecting the study sample in semi-structured in-depth interviews involves determining the appropriate sample type among different types of sampling and selecting interviewees accordingly. The types of sampling generally used in semi-structured in-depth interviews include stratified sampling, purposive sampling, quota sampling, and snowball sampling. In this study, participants were selected through snowball sampling. In snowball sampling, researchers ask participants to introduce the researcher to other individuals who meet the criteria of the study [62]. The total number of interviewees depends on various factors such as the quantitative structure of the studied area, the feasibility of making comparisons, and the duration of the interviews.

In this study, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with senior executives working in the tourism sector in Antalya, using the snowball sampling method. The number of individuals to be interviewed semi-structured in-depth was determined as 23, depending on the type, scope, and nature of the research. Within the scope of the study, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 23 senior executives working in the tourism sector in Antalya between September 2023 and February 2024. In the study, company representatives operating in the tourism sector were coded as T1, T2, T3, T4, T5 ... T23.

The pre-prepared research questions were created within the framework of the information obtained from the literature review [3,24–29,32–43] and theoretical framework [35,44–57] of the study. Within the framework of the study questions, initially, personal information such as age, educational background, professional experiences, and titles were asked to the interviewees. Subsequently, they were asked to specify the areas of activity of their current businesses, the number of employees, and the countries where they mainly conduct tourism activities. Secondly, questions related to the basic research topic were posed to the interviewees. In this context, the interviewees were asked to evaluate the changes brought about by the COVID-19 crisis in the tourism sector in Antalya. They were also asked questions about how they did the crisis management and recovery strategies applied to manage the COVID-19 crisis. Subsequently, the interviewees were asked to evaluate the recovery process of the tourism sector after the COVID-19 crisis. Then, their views and thoughts on the future of the Antalya tourism sector were solicited. Finally, the interviewees were consulted for their comments and recommendations regarding crisis management. In this context, they were asked to share their thoughts on what constitutes effective crisis management, the roles of company managers and employees in effective crisis management, and whether it is necessary to establish a crisis management team within the organization for effective crisis management. Subsequently, the interviewees were asked whether they had made short-term, medium-term, and long-term plans regarding crisis management, their recommendations on crisis management, and whether it is necessary to establish cooperation between the public and private sectors and universities for effective crisis management. In Table 2, the list of questions asked to interviewees are clearly demonstrated.

In semi-structured in-depth interviews, extra questions were posed to the interviewees depending on the course of the interviews in addition to the predefined questions mentioned above. The interviews were conducted face-to-face or via telephone, depending on the availability of the interviewees, and lasted approximately 40–60 min. With the consent of the interviewees, the interviews were recorded using a recording device, and the important points of the interviews were noted by the interviewer depending on the course of the interview. When all the above were completed, the recordings were transcribed.

After transcribing the interviews, the data obtained from the interviews, the literature review, and the theoretical framework were evaluated in detail under subsections based on the main and additional questions within the scope of the study.

**Table 2.** Questions asked of interviewees.

Question 1	How old are you?
Question 2	What is your educational level?
Question 3	What is your job title?
Question 4	What is your company's field of activity in the tourism sector?
Question 5	How many years has your company been operating in the sector?
Question 6	How many employees does your company have?
Question 7	In which countries do you mainly carry out tourism activities?
Question 8	How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect your tourism operations?
Question 9	Could you tell us about how you managed the COVID-19 crisis and which recovery strategies you applied before, during and after the crisis?
Question 10	Did the tourism industry enter the recovery process after the COVID-19 pandemic? What kind of impact did the Ukraine War and the regulations regarding retirement have on the sustainability and recovery of Antalya tourism sector activities and crisis management?
Question 11	What are your evaluations regarding the future of Antalya tourism?
Question 12	What are your comments and recommendations regarding effective crisis management to ensure sustainability in tourism and develop effective recovery strategies?
	Additional questions about effective crisis management to ensure sustainability in tourism and develop effective recovery strategies:
	What are the characteristics of effective crisis management?
	What are the responsibilities of company executives and employees in effective crisis management?
	What do you think about establishing crisis management teams in companies to ensure effective crisis management and sustainability of activities?
	Do you have short-, medium-, and long-term plans for crisis management?
	What are your preparations about future crises and what recommendations could you give to other businesses in the sector regarding crisis management?
	Do you think cooperation between universities, government and the private sector is necessary to ensure effective crisis management?

Out of the participants in the interviews, 8 were in the age range of 41–50, 11 were in the age range of 51–60, 3 were in the age range of 61–70, and 1 was in the age range of 71–80. In terms of educational level, the interviewees predominantly consisted of university graduates. Fifteen of the interviewees had a bachelor's degree, six had a master's degree, and two had an associate's degree. In terms of professional experience, three of the interviewees had 11–20 years of experience, three had 21–30 years, ten had 31–40 years, six had 41–50 years, and one had 51–60 years of experience. In terms of titles, four of the interviewees were department managers, and nineteen were general managers.

The companies where the interviewees work show diversity in terms of the areas of activity. Twelve of the companies have been operating in the sector for 11–20 years, while eleven have been operating for 21–30 years. In terms of the number of employees, two companies employ between 80–100 people, six companies employ between 101–500 people, nine companies employ between 501–1000 people, and six companies employ over 1000 employees. In addition to these, the countries where the interviewees conduct tourism activities also show diversity. The countries where the interviewees provide services are mainly Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Middle Eastern countries, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Iran, Baltic countries, Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Romania, Austria, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Russia, and Türkiye.

## 5. Results and Discussion

### 5.1. Crisis Management and Tourism in COVID-19 Era

Crises disrupt tourist flows, tourism stability, and the sustainability of tourism businesses, creating challenges for affected regions, tourist destinations, and residents therein.



“In the COVID-19 outbreak context, some industries were seriously affected, and the T&T (travel and tourism) industry is unarguably one of those industries” [28] (p. 1). As noted by Jones and Comfort [42] (p. 3043), “While the crisis has severely damaged all sectors of the global economy, the problems in the hospitality industry have been particularly acute, and the crisis has revealed a number of major changes in the relationships between sustainability and the industry”. Within the scope of this study, while underlining the severity of the crisis, interviewees expressed that the COVID-19 pandemic had negative effects on their operational activities and financial sustainability, and they underlined that many companies, unfortunately, faced the risk of bankruptcy. For instance, T1 emphasized that crises in the tourism sector, regardless of their causes, predominantly prioritize economic sustainability over social and environmental sustainability, highlighting that the COVID-19 pandemic, initially a health crisis, translated into an economic crisis for them.

According to Jones and Comfort [42] (p. 3041), “While the COVID-19 crisis may have produced some, possibly short-term, environmental benefits, it has also had a devastating impact on economies and societies across the world”. The COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted the tourism sector, with operating hotels facing difficulties in accessing finance, while hotels awaiting the season’s opening remained closed due to the pandemic [63]. Quarantine measures implemented during the COVID-19 period led to travel restrictions, resulting in flight cancellations, accommodation demand downturns, and tour cancellations. Orîndaru et al. [28] (p. 1) assert, “As a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, most tourist destinations were forced to halt operations during 2020 due to lockdown measures and travel bans, canceled bookings, and local logistics. In conjunction, such evolution has placed tourism among the most severely impacted sectors in terms of revenue, jobs, and few available alternatives for maintaining operations during a lockdown”. In 2020, the number of tourists visiting Türkiye experienced a significant decline of approximately 69% compared to the previous year, marking a substantial loss [64]. The COVID-19 pandemic and associated measures led to intense crisis situations in the Antalya tourism sector, both globally and nationally. Similarly, T14 stated that the COVID-19 pandemic had halted tourism activities, resulting in time and cost losses for the tourism sector, while T23 highlighted the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the entire tourism sector, with most hotels closing during that period and some staff becoming unemployed.

According to Abbas et al. [65], because of COVID-19, “small commercial hoteliers were at risk of losing their property assets because they cannot receive “accommodation charges” to pay their mortgage”. For example, T17 described how their business was thriving before the COVID-19 pandemic but experienced a downturn in post-pandemic activities, noting the threat of bankruptcy faced by many businesses and the necessity for some to cease operations:

“During the COVID-19 pandemic process, we experienced almost a 70% to 80% loss. There was no need to open hotels. The number of incoming visitors to Türkiye dropped from 7–8 million to 3–4 million, sometimes even 5 million. We all went through a very serious crisis during those times. Moreover, almost all hotel lessees went bankrupt. There were serious bankruptcies happening.”

The damage inflicted on tourism by a crisis or disaster not only has serious consequences for the national economy but also threatens the livelihoods of many individuals at the destination [35]. The COVID-19 pandemic inflicted unprecedented damage on the tourism sector, resulting in substantial revenue and job losses worldwide, exacerbating sustainability issues within the tourism sector [66]. According to Çoban and Özel [67] (p. 31), in the beginning of COVID-19, “Hotels tended to force their workforce into unpaid vacations and delay office and system maintenance”. Therefore, the COVID-19 crisis, in particular, caused temporary and, in some cases, permanent job losses in the tourism industry, affecting millions of people working in the tourism and hospitality sectors [42]. “In 2020, 62 million jobs were lost, leaving just 272 million employed across the sector globally” [12]. Similarly, in Antalya, many people working in the tourism sector became unemployed during the COVID-19 period, and some experienced personnel with years of experience in

the sector retired during the pandemic. Thus, the COVID-19 crisis adversely affected not only the economic sustainability but also the social sustainability of tourism businesses. For instance, T4, who held a managerial position in a tourism agency, stated that he retired during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the crisis in the tourism sector, highlighting the effects of COVID-19 on the tourism sector and his own career: “During the COVID-19 pandemic, hotels were closed. Only 2 out of 21 hotels were open. They couldn’t operate due to the measures taken because of the pandemic. I chose to retire during that period”.

According to Yıldırım and Sayın [63], hotel managers indicated the following steps they took to manage the crisis during the COVID-19 period:

“Just waiting, trying to ensure the hygiene of all areas in the hotel, postponing the opening of the facility, taking economic measures, reducing staff or postponing new staff recruitment, continuing maintenance and repairs for the opening of their facilities, negotiating with travel agencies, exchanging views with managers of other businesses in the fight against the virus, moving reservations to future dates, and trying to keep existing staff employed.”

Similarly, when asked what policies they followed to manage the crisis during the COVID-19 period, interviewees provided different responses. For example, T22 emphasized that they were unable to manage the crisis during the COVID-19 period because tourism activities came to a complete halt. T5, on the other hand, stated that businesses and experienced managers who considered the crisis a temporary process tried to take steps to turn the COVID-19 pandemic crisis into an opportunity. T5 exemplified the policies they pursued to turn the crisis into an opportunity during the COVID-19 period:

“During the COVID-19 pandemic, management aware that this was a temporary process. For example, the inability to renovate because we couldn’t close the hotel completely. So, they kind of turned the crisis into an opportunity.”

Ensuring the sustainability of tourism activities requires travel; hence, any threat that obstructs travel may be reflected as a crisis for the tourism industry. The implementation of travel bans during the COVID-19 period also had negative effects on the aviation sector, which is highly important for tourism activities. According to Şenerol [68], governments typically impose restrictions on both domestic and international flights during pandemic periods to mitigate the effects of infectious diseases and to maintain maneuverability. Similarly, Keller [69] (p. 20), who defines the “COVID-19 pandemic as a first global-scale supply shock affecting international tourism activities”, states that “Potential visitors were among the first consumers reacting on the Corona shock by the cancellation of bookings. The setback of travel bookings started in the early stage of crisis”. T22, who holds a managerial position in a company operating in the aviation sector, described the severely negative effects of COVID-19 on their operations: “COVID-19 had serious effects on our operations. Our planes were not operating. We ceased our operational activities. There was nothing we could do”.

According to IATA [70], “The pandemic erased essentially 20 years of gains in passenger traffic in one sudden move”. In her study, Elmas Saraç [71] argues that the impacts of the pandemic on multinational companies like airlines should be categorized into short-term, medium-term, and long-term, respectively. Accordingly, in the short term, new investments were restricted, and profit shares decreased. Similarly, according to ICAO [72], the total number of passengers globally decreased by 60% compared to the previous year due to quarantine measures and travel bans implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Türkiye, the government took various facilitative regulations and provided support to minimize the losses of the civil aviation sector during the COVID-19 pandemic [73]. For example, T22, who mentioned that they were unable to manage the crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic, but worked to improve their business in the post-pandemic period, described the activities they conducted, and the government support they received to improve their business:

“In this period, all of our operations came to a halt. We didn’t manage the crisis; we simply locked the doors. The government supported companies in this regard. Because our operations came to a halt during this period, we identified areas for future development after the crisis. We adopted a more strategic perspective on our business. I give an example: a digital infrastructure change that would take a year was completed in four months because we worked with full concentration in this direction.”

Similarly, T1, a manager at another airline company, stated that they did not consider making changes to their operations in managing the crisis during this period. They continued their operations, albeit briefly, whenever flights were occasionally resumed. However, they mentioned that other companies, which were not as agile in managing the crisis, attempted to do so.

According to Carlsen and Liburd [19] (p. 266), “Tourism is often the first sector to be impacted by disasters and crises and the first sector that community leaders look towards in the recovery phase”. Therefore, in the COVID-19 crisis, “The proactive action of some governments around the world has effectively enabled the sector to save millions of jobs and livelihoods at risk through retention schemes; without which the figures would be significantly worse” [12]. According to Yeh [27] (p. 188), “government-sponsored loans are crucial to the survival of tourism industry”. Similarly, the majority of the interviewees emphasized the significant impact of government support during the COVID-19 period on continuing their businesses and alleviating their grievances. T7 mentioned being negatively affected by COVID-19 but highlighted that they did not resort to downsizing or layoffs due to the ban on layoffs in Türkiye during that period. He said:

“In this period, we did not downsize as a company. There were no layoffs. It was already prohibited in Türkiye. Because we did not employ anyone, the state paid whatever was due to our colleagues. So, there was no situation of not paying. We managed easier because we were completely shut down compared to partially closed ones.”

T20, primarily operating during the summer months, expressed feeling the crisis’s impact less than other businesses and acknowledged the significant benefit of government support during the crisis. He described their policies for managing the crisis during COVID-19:

“Since we generally do not operate at full capacity during winters, we have a certain team that works continuously. We managed our business with that team. Additionally, since the business is our own, we have no expenses other than the existing ones. Therefore, we managed the crisis in this way, carefully and cautiously, breaking even. We navigated through it.”

During the COVID-19 period, all sectors, including the tourism sector, relied heavily on government incentive packages and interventions to increase their productivity and ensure their sustainability [74]. For example, T11 stated that to overcome the crisis in the best way during the COVID-19 period, they renewed their operational activities and eliminated the renovation deficiencies, and that they tried to turn the crisis into an opportunity in order to maintain their sustainability and gain competitive advantage. T11 stated that receiving state support during this period provided great benefits in terms of not making personnel unhappy and explained what happened in this period:

“Thanks to the short-time working allowance provided by the state, the staff was not in a very difficult situation. Some businesses also contributed at different rates in order not to demotivate their staff. Some paid the difference. Some did not do anything because the staff received short-time working allowance. Each enterprise supported its personnel with the decisions taken within its own organization.”

Similarly, T6 stated that the significant negative effects of COVID-19 in the tourism sector would have created devastating effects in the sector in an unavoidable way if there were no state supports, and expressed his views:

“If it weren’t for government support, there would have been much bigger problems in the tourism sector in Antalya. There are approximately 1110 businesses in Antalya, and nearly 900 of them shut their doors when the crisis hit. They didn’t think about the employees who had been working there for years, who had families. During this period, the operators acted very ruthlessly. If the government hadn’t intervened that year, hadn’t provided support, there might have been a significant migration from Antalya. Despite that, there was still quite a migration.”

On the other hand, according to the OECD [75], “the survival of businesses throughout the tourism ecosystem is at risk without continued government support and although governments have taken impressive action to cushion the blow to tourism, to minimize job losses and to build recovery in 2021 and beyond, more needs to be done, and in a more co-ordinated way”. Similarly, T21 has stated that government support was not sufficient during this period, indicating that it did not contribute to retaining employees in any way. Additionally, T21 has expressed that there is nothing to be done to manage the crisis due to the current situation, stating that the only thing they can do is wait for the process to pass.

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented damage to the tourism sector due to travel and quarantine restrictions implemented to control the pandemic, disrupting the sustainability of tourism activities. Significant decreases in the number of tourists coming to Türkiye occurred in 2020. During this period, most hotels remained closed. Some businesses, especially those continuing tourism activities by leasing hotels, went bankrupt, while some employees retired, and others became unemployed. While a large portion of businesses could not manage the crisis, a small fraction turned the crisis into an opportunity and reviewed their operational activities and completed infrastructure deficiencies to sustain their operations after the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, with the help of government support during the COVID-19 period, sustainability in the tourism sector was ensured as much as possible.

### *5.2. Tourism Industry Recovery after COVID-19 Pandemic*

In the subsequent period, when the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic relatively diminished and the pandemic began to be controlled in 2021, some of the international and national travel restrictions started to be relaxed or lifted, leading to a resurgence in the number of tourists visiting Türkiye by approximately 100% compared to the previous year [64]. With further positive developments, many international restrictions being lifted resulted in a recovery process in the tourism sector. The interviewees stated that with the full reopening after COVID-19, the sustainability of tourism sector activities began to recover. For example, T19 expressed his views on this matter: “There was a significant demand from Europe to Türkiye after the full reopening. We experienced the advantage of this. The increase in exchange rates and currency flows naturally contributed to the businesses”. On the other hand, global and national crises following COVID-19 did not allow for the desired recovery of Antalya tourism at the expected level. The emergence of an inflationary situation in the country’s economy after COVID-19 led to a continuous increase in costs in the tourism industry, resulting in adverse effects on the economic sustainability of the tourism sector [76,77]. Furthermore, the personnel crisis has deepened since COVID-19, negatively affecting the social sustainability of the tourism sector.

“COVID-19 has caused severe economic crisis, unemployment, and disruptions for the tourism industry globally” [78] (p. 1). Due to closures in the tourism sector, people became unemployed, and since COVID-19, there have been problems finding labor in the tourism sector. In addition, after the COVID-19 period, skill shortages in the tourism sector increased as employees in the tourism sector found jobs in different sectors [75]. Similarly, the interviewees mentioned that due to closures, many tourism workers returned

to their hometowns, and since most of them found other jobs, they did not return to work in tourism after the COVID-19 pandemic. T4 provided evidence that closures due to COVID-19 resulted in a personnel shortage crisis in the future: “Since the staff became unemployed, they shifted to other sectors; most of them went to their hometowns and did not return after being unemployed for 1 or 1.5 years. The biggest issue was the non-return of the staff after they left”. Similarly, T11 stated that the COVID-19 process created a personnel shortage crisis for tourism in the future:

“When the reopening process began, there were major changes in the tourism community regarding personnel. This was due to different views formed between the staff and the employers during the closure process, new offers to the staff, or new decisions made by the business. These changes affected the staff’s job changes. As a result, there was a difficulty in finding personnel in tourism. Some of those who had returned to their hometowns did not return. Therefore, especially regional hotels had to offer higher salaries and provide more social benefits to attract staff.”

While explaining their views on tourism and hospitality industries, Penny Wan et al. [79] (p. 1) state that “The industries have a poor reputation due mainly to the low financial compensation, unsociable working hours, menial work, and limited opportunities for career progression”. This poor reputation became more rigid during the COVID-19 period. Globally, 62 million people lost their jobs only in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic [12]. Moreover, COVID-19 led to disruptions in global macroeconomic balances, resulting in inflationary situations globally. In terms of Türkiye, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated economic vulnerabilities, leading to a sudden and rapid depreciation of the currency due to rapid capital outflows [80]. These economic difficulties have also adversely affected the employment force of the tourism sector, one of Türkiye’s leading provinces, Antalya. Moreover, tourism industry’s heavy reliance on seasonal and temporary jobs rather than constant professions reduced its resilience in finding personnel for the tourism sector after COVID-19 [81,82]. T18 provided evidence that due to increased living costs in the post-COVID-19 period and the inadequacy of seasonal working conditions to cover expenses, people working in tourism were employed in different sectors and therefore faced great difficulty in finding personnel to work in tourism:

“Are there any personnel left in tourism? The biggest problem of tourism right now is personnel. Think that you and your spouse work for 6 months a year and are unemployed for 6 months; would you stay in tourism? It’s that simple. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, all qualified personnel in tourism returned to their hometowns.”

Similarly, T4 suggests:

“When I go to chain markets, I always see tourism personnel. Forty-five percent of couriers are tourism workers. They say, ‘Why should I work as a courier? I work twice as much as I do in tourism and get paid more; I have a job for 12 months.’ We couldn’t retain qualified personnel. Those coming from outside do not want to come because salaries are low in Türkiye.”

Especially “during isolation time of the COVID-19, virtual teams and jobs, regular governance, recruitment, leadership, and promotion opportunities fail to encourage, motivate, and retain employees who have re-changed their values and principles” [67]. Similarly, T19 highlighted the difficulties in finding personnel due to COVID-19 and expressed that, to meet the increased demand for tourism after COVID, they provided extra payments and improvements to personnel. T9, elaborating on his thoughts regarding this, mentioned that the rising inflation rates led to an increase in input costs, resulting in a practice of salary increases twice a year. Consequently, hotels’ profitability decreased due to salary improvements made because of the difficulty in finding personnel. He argues that “some

hotels even raised salaries two or three times a year. Consequently, hotels had to spend some of what they earned from Euros on personnel”.

In addition to the inflationary situation in national economic indicators and the personnel crisis in the tourism sector after COVID-19, the war that broke out when Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022 led to new economic and social consequences for the tourism sector in Antalya. Analyzing the tourism and culture data of Antalya Province for 2018–2022 [83], it was observed that the Russian Federation ranked first in terms of the number of visitors to Antalya and their nationalities, while Ukraine ranked high within the top ten over the previous two years. Therefore, the Ukraine War had significant effects on the sustainability of the Antalya tourism sector. The preference of people from Russia and Ukraine to own homes and rent houses instead of staying in hotels in Türkiye negatively affected the sustainability of tourism sector activities. Especially after the Ukraine War, migration movements in Antalya’s coastal areas, attracting the settled life and investment interest of Russians and Europeans, led to a significant increase in house rents and prices [84]. For example, T4 stated that the Ukraine War created a short-term advantage in terms of tourism, but over time, it evolved in a negative direction as people started buying houses in Türkiye:

“The Ukraine War had a significant impact on the hotel industry in the first three months. Hotels were fully booked in the first three months. Long-term stays in hotels were also fully booked. However, after the first three months, Russians and Ukrainians started renting and buying houses. Two families moved into one house, three families moved into one house, and so on. This situation had a negative impact on the tourism sector.”

T10 has indicated a notable decrease in the number of Ukrainian tourists due to the Ukraine War, expressing the resultant adverse effects on the sustainability of tourism activities and the economy of Antalya during this period:

“Ukrainian tourist arrivals have almost completely ceased, considering that, according to previous data, approximately 1 million Ukrainians used to visit Türkiye. That has come to a halt. Furthermore, the war has also affected the number of tourists coming from Russia. Airfare prices have increased. A significant number of people from both countries have still arrived here. Consequently, Antalya has experienced a significant economic upheaval, with rents and property prices rising. Some of these individuals have also acquired citizenship.”

After the war, there was a general increase in the number of visitors to Antalya [14]. However, when the visitors coming to Antalya were evaluated in terms of their nationality, Russia fell behind in the rankings, and Ukraine did not even rank first [64]. While T2 stated that the war had a significant negative impact on their activities since they were mainly working for the Ukrainian market at that time, T13 stated that although there was a significant increase in the number of Russians and Ukrainians coming to Antalya due to the war, this did not reflect positively on the tourism sector, and moreover, it had negative effects as he stated: “People tried to use their budgets cautiously because they didn’t know what would happen and couldn’t predict how long the war would last. Of course, such caution also contributed to the decrease in tourists”. Similarly, T14 highlighted a decrease in Ukraine’s share in tourism due to the Ukraine War, characterizing it as a significant loss for tourism overall. T8 corroborated a considerable decline in the number of tourists from Ukraine due to the Ukraine War, while T12 emphasized that the war had created substantial negative effects on tourism activities and the economy of Antalya, with these adverse effects persisting. T12 elaborated on the reasons behind the negative effects of the war on sustainability:

“The Ukraine War has significantly impacted our activities. We still feel its effects. Everything suddenly stopped. The Russian population there came to Türkiye because of the war. Unfortunately, that mass of people who came to Türkiye for vacation came as tenants, and suddenly that potential customer

disappeared. Everything skyrocketed. Rents skyrocketed, food and beverage prices skyrocketed, products you wouldn't even imagine skyrocketed to 4–5 times or even 10 times their usual prices. Their arrival in this manner has adversely affected us in every way."

The Antalya tourism sector, which began to recover after the COVID-19 crisis, remained under intense migration demand from these countries due to the Ukraine War. There was an increase in property sales to foreigners in Türkiye due to the impact of the Ukraine War in March 2022 [84]. The high demand for Antalya has caused prices to rise above normal levels at the provincial level. For example, rent increased by 1109% in Antalya between 2019 and 2023 [85]. This increase in rents naturally led to an increase in the cost of living. For instance, T7 indicated that the Ukraine War had a generally negative impact on the economy of Antalya and the tourism sectors, stating: "After the Ukraine War in 2022, the Antalya economy was severely affected. Especially in terms of economy, housing costs, namely the cost of living, increased significantly in Antalya. Due to living conditions there, now there has been a reverse migration". T2 expressed his views on the personnel shortage experienced in tourism due to the increase in rents: "People working in tourism in Antalya are insufficient to pay their rents, causing them to return to their hometowns".

T5 described the impacts of the Ukraine War on sustainability efforts and the economy of Antalya:

"Suddenly, the number of Russian guests began to increase. Since the economic situation of those coming from Ukraine was not good, they influenced the Antalya economy differently. They affected the housing market in Antalya. The war affected not only the occupancy rates of hotels in Antalya but also the apartments significantly. Many Russians and Ukrainians, aiming to sustain their lives, opted for renting apartments instead of staying in hotels. Especially global companies operating there turned to 6-month or 1-year leases. Antalya became expensive, like Miami, meaning it reached its peak."

T8 also stated that the increase in the inclination towards Antalya due to the war increased inflation throughout the province and led to a housing crisis. This is evidenced by T11's statement that after the COVID-19 pandemic, Europe's demand temporarily compensated for the absence of Russians, but in subsequent periods, the increased prices at the provincial level and foreign property purchases negatively affected tourism activities. He expressed that this situation could also affect tourism occupancy rates in the future and pose obstacles to the sustainability of tourism activities:

"Many people bought houses because of the war. Therefore, not every tourist stays in a hotel. There have been many property purchases. We know that three or four families stay in one house. Such situations have caused a decrease in the number of people staying in facilities focused on Russia and Ukraine."

Moreover, the rapid rise in jet fuel prices due to the Ukraine War has led to an increase in the total cost and the share allocated to fuel in the cost items of the civil aviation industry [86]. Similarly, T1, engaged in the aviation sector, particularly highlighted the adverse effects of the 2022 Ukraine War, especially in terms of fuel prices. T1 stated that during this period, they adopted a downsizing strategy to manage the crisis. T1 addressed the impacts of the 2022 Ukraine War on their operations and the methods they followed to resolve the crisis:

"In 2022, we decided to downsize, with half of it due to the fuel costs and the negative turn in the exchange rate, and the other half due to our inability to plan the changes in our business model correctly. For example, we experienced a fleet reduction of about 10% after these events. We decided to manage the crisis by downsizing."

As T1, T22 explained the problems caused by the Ukraine War in a sector where fuel is a significant expense:

“Especially after the war, there were significant fluctuations in fuel prices. The market has now returned to its old course, but there was a very volatile market at the beginning of the war. We dealt with this volatile market for a year. Especially if you do not hedge important items like fuel, and if you make forward sales, you can incur serious losses.”

In one study, Sezen Doğancılı [87] recommended developing promotion and marketing activities targeting domestic tourists and alternative foreign markets to mitigate the devastating impact of the Ukraine War on the tourism sector, which could not overcome the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic due to Russia and Ukraine being among the countries sending the most tourists to Türkiye. Similarly, interviewees expressed that since the crisis occurred externally, they could not intervene much in the situation. They mentioned that during this period, they tried to focus on alternative markets and attract customers by offering price discounts. For example, T9 emphasized the need to establish multiple markets to manage the crisis effectively and mentioned that they could minimize the adverse effects of the war by having multiple markets. While T23 stated that they supported their sales through the domestic market, T6 noted that the negative impact of the Ukraine War on tourism activities eased due to the positive tourism data of the previous year and shared the strategy they followed to manage the crisis in tourism operations:

“After the end of the COVID-19 pandemic and the good performance of tourism revenues in the year before the war, the effects of the war were somewhat mitigated, but of course, hotels are increasingly borrowing money. 13 million tourists were expected during the Ukraine-Russia crisis, but only 8 million arrived. On the other hand, our European market strengthened during that period. To manage the crisis, we turned to different markets and tried to ensure our sustainability.”

In addition, the interviewees in the tourism sector expressed that people who came and settled in Antalya due to the war had a negative impact on the tourism sector, but over time, they noted an increase in the return of these individuals. They anticipated that Russians and Ukrainians selling their properties and leaving Antalya would be beneficial for the sustainability of the tourism sector in the long run. Supporting the interviewees, reverse migration has started in Antalya, which has received intense immigration from both countries after the war, especially since the first months of 2024, and therefore housing prices and housing rents in the city have started to decrease between 15 and 25 percent. [88]. Likewise, T17 mentioned that according to current data, it is observed that Russians and Ukrainians are returning significantly. T20 expressed his expectations that Russians who bought properties in Antalya would return by selling their properties:

“We think Russians will sell their homes and return because if you look at the current figures compared to the price increases at that time, there are significant decreases. There has been a significant transformation in rents. I believe that the crisis related to the arrival of Russian tourists may not last in the medium to long term because I think that after selling their homes here, those people will eventually come back for vacation as before. I think tourism will continue as normal.”

While emphasizing the importance of Antalya’s economy in providing foreign currency inflows to the country, T15 pointed out that developments such as war, migration, and economic hardship had a negative impact on the Antalya economy:

“In recent times, I believe that the changing demographics due to successive migrations and wars have also affected the provincial economy. Antalya, which used to be a city where retirees could easily live, has now become uninhabitable. I think that the living conditions of even managers, including the top level, have deteriorated due to tourism personnel.”



In addition to the crisis caused by the Russian–Ukrainian War in 2022, the interviewees pointed out that the tourism sector is on the eve of a new middle management crisis due to an amendment made in 2023 to allow people over a certain age to retire early, which could create major problems for the recovery and sustainability of the tourism sector and for crisis management decisions to be taken by competent people. Prior to the amendment in 2023, the retirement age in Türkiye was 58 for women and 60 for men [89]. With the aforementioned change, anyone paying insurance premiums based on a certain number of days gained the right to retire at a much earlier age than waiting for 60/65 years. This early retirement right was granted for a certain period, and after that period ended, the previously existing age limits, namely 58/60 years, were reinstated. Currently, reaching the age of 58/60 is still mandatory for retirement. The change in the retirement conditions of those who became eligible for early retirement during this period created problems for employers in March 2023 [90].

From the employers' perspective, the enactment of this regulation and the commencement of retirement requests by individuals began to have effects, such as qualified staff shortages, severance pay, and new contracts [91]. The major problems encountered by businesses operating in the tourism sector regarding the regulation were the payment of severance pay and the threat of experiencing a shortage of qualified personnel. In order to meet the financing needs of enterprises in terms of severance pay and seniority payments, a treasury-supported credit support package was announced by the Credit Guarantee Fund [92]. However, this regulation imposed a cost burden on businesses beyond their plans. For example, the negative impacts within the company regarding this regulation were explained by T1:

“As a result of the regulation, we also had early retirees, of course. Severance pay is a serious and unexpected financial burden. Everyone truly met the conditions of the regulation in our company. The majority of the employees were around 40 years old, but no one retired from our company after earning early retirement. We only incurred a burden like severance pay; everyone continues to work in the company.”

For example, T10 stated that there was a loss of experienced personnel in the tourism sector due to the such regulation:

“This regulation created problems for employed experienced personnel. Those who retired immediately received their severance payments and left their jobs. Therefore, there was a serious decrease in the main staff, in those middle management positions. Then, with the increase in inflation and the minimum wage, they started returning to work again, but this time, they started behaving more comfortably because they had retirement pension guarantees.”

According to Vučetić [81], because of the seasonal demand of tourists for tourism destinations, the tourism industry relies on seasonal, part-time, and temporary employment rather than permanent employment. Similarly, T21 highlighted that the tourism sector relies predominantly on a workforce focused on seasonal employment, leading to managerial groups in hotels primarily comprising individuals consistently employed in these seasonal positions. T21 indicated that experienced managers within this managerial group retired due to the aforementioned regulation, resulting in a significant decrease in mid-level managers who train subordinate staff in hotels. T21 highlighted that this situation could create serious managerial problems in the future, stating: “There are no intermediate job position left in hotels. The number of individuals who could rise from intermediate positions to managerial positions has decreased significantly. Those below will have to rise without sufficient knowledge”.

In conclusion, post-COVID-19, the sustainability of the tourism industry has begun to enter a recovery phase. However, the Ukraine War, which erupted in 2022, given the significant involvement of both countries in Antalya's tourism activities, negatively impacted the sustainability and recovery of tourism activities post-pandemic. As the crisis

was externally driven, businesses had limited crisis management strategies available to manage it during this period. In order to manage the crisis and ensure their sustainability, businesses turned to domestic and alternative foreign markets and attempted to increase their attractiveness by offering price discounts.

In the post-COVID-19 period, the crisis caused by the Ukraine War on the sustainability of the Antalya tourism sector, coupled with the failure of unemployed or returning tourism workers to return to their jobs due to closures during the COVID-19 period, has led to a prolonged personnel crisis in the tourism sector. Additionally, the inflationary process experienced in the national economy post-COVID-19 has increased the cost of living for the Antalya tourism sector and tourism workers. Furthermore, due to the Ukraine War, Antalya becoming one of the temporary migration locations for Russians and Ukrainians resulted in real estate, rent, and living costs in the province far exceeding the Turkish average. These factors have further exacerbated the existing personnel crisis. While some hotels have sacrificed profitability to provide better salaries and working conditions to staff in an attempt to resolve the crisis, it has been observed that no crisis management strategy has been successful in resolving the personnel crisis. Managers have suggested the establishment of a 12-month employment model in tourism to resolve the personnel crisis.

Moreover, a regulation enacted in 2023 granting retirement rights to individuals above a certain age has created problems for businesses in terms of severance payments and the employment of qualified personnel. Furthermore, the retirement of some mid-level managers in tourism due to this regulation is expected to create future managerial problems, adversely affecting the sustainability of tourism activities.

### 5.3. Evaluations Regarding the Future of Antalya Tourism

According to data from 2023, hosting 21 million visitors from abroad, “Antalya has long been a popular travel destination for Germans, Russians, and Brits—who make up the large majority of its international arrivals” [14,93,94]. Therefore, the tourism industry in Antalya is a global attraction center and is highly conducive to development. The interviewees expressed their views and evaluations regarding the future of the Antalya tourism sector in various ways. For instance, T3 acknowledged that the tourism sector’s potential in Antalya is exceptionally high, stating that with the full utilization of Antalya’s tourism capacity, the city could rise to become one of the leading tourism destinations globally, except for the winter months. T5 foresaw a better economic position for Antalya in the future and highlighted Antalya as one of the cities with high purchasing power, akin to some cities in Europe.

On the other hand, “the tourism sector has certain characteristics that increase its vulnerability to health crises in general and to the health crisis provoked by COVID-19”. [95]. For example, T9 emphasized the vulnerability of the tourism sector to crises, exemplifying its extreme fragility against future crises like COVID-19:

“Tourism activities become sustainable after COVID-19, but the desired performance cannot be achieved. It means you have to spread 3 months of work over 12 months. The sector is very fragile against crises. For example, when a business leases a hotel, it has to make all its calculations based on three months. Currently, the entire Antalya, including chain hotels, are ready to hand over most of the hotels when a crisis like COVID-19 breaks out and goes through a difficult period for 2 years.”

T4 stated that tourism activities have become extremely fragile due to crises, making it unhealthy to make predictions about the future of tourism activities: “There were fluctuations in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, but tourism was good. Unfortunately, we do not know where we are going in tourism right now”. Furthermore, T1 expressed the fragile nature of the Antalya tourism sector against crises:

“The tourism sector is a very sensitive sector. It is very quickly affected by socio-political processes, negatively affected in parallel with adverse macroeconomic

processes worldwide. It is greatly affected by security situations such as terrorism. So, if you live in Antalya and are in the tourism sector, your job becomes even more difficult during crises.”

When T16 explained the fragile nature of tourism in the face of crises, he underlined that “Every crisis affects Türkiye. Every kind of war, every kind of crisis. Any negativity occurring anywhere in the world automatically affects tourism. That’s the disadvantage of tourism”.

Approximately 40% of the bed capacity in Türkiye and approximately 21% of licensed accommodation facilities are within the borders of Antalya province [96,97]. Besides the adverse effects of the crises, managers noted that the increasing bed capacity and the growing number of hotels have negatively affected occupancy rates and profitability over the years. They emphasized that this situation further exacerbates the existing fragility of the tourism sector in Antalya against crises and jeopardizes the sustainability of tourism activities. For example, T6 summarized the development process of tourism in Antalya:

“Tourism started in Antalya in the 1980s. The first decade of tourism went well. Good returns were made through the bed and breakfast system until 1980–1995. Management was provided by foreign managers and professionals. Until 1995, our sector, which was predominantly active in Europe, diversified with Russia’s inclusion in the sector after 1995, but the biggest problem in Antalya was our continuously increasing number of beds. On the other hand, too many hotels were built after the 2000s, and an amateur management style emerged.”

T6 also described the current situation of the tourism sector in Antalya:

“Currently, we have approximately 780 thousand beds in Antalya. There are 1116 small and large hotels, 450 of which are large. The supply-demand balance has changed. Fifteen years ago, our facilities that were full for 12 months and making good money are now not filled for 6 months and operate with a profit margin of 30–35%, decreasing from 60–70% to 35%. It’s a kind of different crisis.”

The seasonality of the tourism sector and the unskilled workforce have significant impacts on the vulnerability of tourism destinations, and these impacts have been increasing since the COVID-19 pandemic [95], while T2 explains that the future outlook for Antalya’s tourism sector is not very bright, and similarly, T13 did not see the future of Antalya’s economy in tourism as very promising. They emphasized the increasing problems in finding qualified personnel, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, T9 described the problem:

“In my early years, to work at the reception, you had to speak two, three, or four languages and compete. The most important place, for example, in the hotel at the entrance, you have to hire someone who knows five words because there is no one in the market who knows 15 words.”

T12 clarifies their inability to make plans for the future in the context of the tourism sector in Antalya, and underlines:

“When I started in this sector, when I coordinated 6–7 hotels, when I made budgets, I realized the budget with a deviation of 5–6%. As the years went by, we started to fail to achieve this. That is, because we do not have a foresight about what may happen tomorrow.”

T16 describes his thoughts on Antalya’s economy in the context of the tourism sector, stating that it is entirely dependent on occupancy rates and the number of tourists:

“In terms of tourism, if our tourist numbers increase and hotel construction is stopped, a balance can be achieved. This is the supply-demand balance. It affects both the price and the service. On the other hand, while we used to have a profit margin of 65%, it has now dropped to 35%. Both costs have increased, and income balance has decreased.”

Furthermore, interviewees noted that due to the closures after the COVID-19 pandemic, a large portion of those working in the tourism sector in Antalya returned to their hometowns. Even after tourism activities returned to their former state, most of these people did not return to work in tourism, with the high increase in prices in the province being a significant factor. For example, T4 describes the problem of finding personnel to work in the tourism sector in Antalya: “The biggest crisis in tourism these days is the personnel crisis. In 2024, hotels other than chain corporate hotels will be opened, but there will be no personnel”, and added that in order to solve the personnel crisis, improvements should be made in the working and salary conditions of the personnel, and even the comfort of the personnel should be taken into consideration.

T11 revealed that living conditions in Antalya have become expensive and explained the reasons for this: “Antalya is now like Miami in Türkiye. When you go to a market, it can be very difficult for a family to fill their bags, house rents are at very extreme points, there is no need to talk about it, in other words, Antalya has become an expensive city”. He also underlines the increase in the price of basic consumption products and especially rents in Antalya by warning that this will naturally cause migration: “Antalya has become one of the cities with high purchasing power based on the human factor of tourism. This will naturally cause migration. There will be a need for new resources in tourism”. T5 pointed out that since the cost of living in Antalya has increased, personnel employment in the tourism industry will be difficult:

“The high cost of living and the salaries in tourism not being proportional to each other will naturally lead to migration to more reasonable cities. Therefore, I believe that investments in lodgings will increase to cover this gap. Businesses will need to solve the problem of accommodating and housing people. Additionally, I think everyone will turn to technologies that reduce the human factor in the future.”

Similar to T11 and T5, T21 emphasized that the increase in costs in all sectors in the Antalya economy creates double costs in the tourism sector and added that this situation also triggers personnel employment problems:

“Costs are rising in all sectors due to the economic crisis. Since almost all sectors are involved in tourism, there is a double cost. It affects supply plus personnel. When this happens, the staff is also affected by the rise in prices. The house rent and expenses that the staff will pay with the salary they receive start to create problems. This time there are escapes from tourism.”

T21 highlighted that employers also have a share in the shift of the personnel employed in the tourism sector to different sectors and listed his thoughts and suggestions on this issue:

“Now investors say that there are no qualified personnel. Since you did not invest in them in time, people went and looked for other ways to earn money elsewhere. Investors invested only in appearance and building. They did not want to sacrifice their profits. I suggest that: investors should provide social security for the personnel and improve their salaries.”

In conclusion, Antalya stands out as one of the prominent tourism destinations on a global scale. However, there are varying sectoral opinions regarding the future of the tourism industry in Antalya. Interviewees have emphasized that Antalya’s tourism potential is much higher than its current status. On the other hand, the COVID-19 pandemic led to a crisis with destructive effects on the sustainability of tourism activities, increasing the vulnerability of Antalya’s tourism sector to crises. The reliance on seasonal tourism activities in Antalya also negatively affects the sustainability of tourism activities. Interviewees have highlighted the importance of organizing tourism activities throughout the year through alternative markets and marketing strategies to ensure sustainability and recovery in tourism.

Moreover, the continuous increase in the number of hotels and bed capacity throughout the province leads to decreases in occupancy and profit margins for hotels operating in the tourism sector, adversely affecting the sustainability and recovery of tourism activities. Interviewees have suggested that the problem of increasing hotel numbers and bed capacity can be addressed by increasing tourist numbers through various planning measures, thus preventing the need for new hotel constructions and capacity increases. Additionally, the challenges in finding qualified personnel in the tourism sector pose a potential risk to the sustainability of tourism and may lead to crises in the future.

Due to the fragile nature of tourism, successive crises in the sector and the increasing inflationary environment in the province, businesses are unable to plan due to the increase in operating and living costs. In order to solve the personnel crisis in tourism, some of the interviewees stated that the accommodation problems of the personnel should be solved, while others stated that lodging investments should be increased and the salaries and working conditions of the personnel should be improved in order to keep qualified personnel in employment.

#### *5.4. Comments and Recommendations of the Interviewees on Crisis Management*

Türkiye is facing challenges such as decreased tourism demand and revenues, as well as losses in tourism markets due to crises [18]. Therefore, it is critically important for tourism businesses and decision-makers to develop strategies for crisis management. Effective crisis management involves increasing knowledge about crises and creating plans and strategies to be implemented before, during, and after a crisis. Crisis management, as a process and management model applied in extraordinary circumstances, involves the detection and evaluation of crisis signals, as well as the implementation of necessary measures to overcome the crisis with minimal damage [98]. Reindrawati [99] defines the challenges on community participation and crisis management difficulties on tourism planning in developing countries as “lack of access to information, lack of efficient decision-making structures, lack of discussion platforms, lack of knowledge, and lack of transparency and accountability” (operational barriers), “lack of access to planning experts, weak community development, lack of budget, education, and unsuitable policy and governance” (structural limitations), and “history of colonialism, community awareness, mistrust, power disparities, unequal distribution of costs and benefits, and conflict of interests (cultural barriers)”. As a result of the interviews, it was concluded that some of the above challenges were also seen in the Turkish tourism industry especially during and after the COVID-19 process. These challenges create difficulties in effective crisis management and sustainability of tourism activities.

When asked about the characteristics of effective crisis management, the interviewees in the tourism sector provided various opinions. For example, T11 proposed his thoughts on the qualities of effective crisis management:

“Effective crisis management should involve asking the right questions and providing realistic answers. What are the right questions? Currently, we need to identify the problems. Crises don’t occur in just one area; they tend to affect multiple aspects, and thus, the scope of crisis management should be broad and inclusive.”

T10 stressed the importance of monitoring global, regional, and national developments for predicting crises and developing future-oriented strategies. On the other hand, T22 showed his views on what effective crisis management should entail:

“With a team aware of your risks, you can perform risk management; you’re no longer aiming to make money—we’re in a crisis situation, and our goal is not to make money but to control our expenses and risks by using certain tools in advance.”

T1 indicated that since he worked in the aviation sector, fuel hedging and parity hedging came directly to mind when the issue was effective crisis management:

“For example, when you say risk management, I always think of fuel hedging and parity hedging. Why do I think of parity hedges? My income is in Euros, my expenses are in Dollars, and the country I live in is TL. As such, parity is very important for me. I have to manage my risk by using options and derivative instruments.”

According to the study by Gd Demirbulat and Tetik Din [100], long-term planning for Turkish tourism emphasizes the importance of spreading tourism throughout all months, creating or diversifying various tourism activity options, and focusing on the sustainability of tourism. Therefore, effective crisis management directly impacts the sustainability of tourism activities. For example, T19 outlined the steps necessary for effective crisis management and ensuring sustainability in tourism activities:

“For crisis management, you have to consider your reputation internally and also think about the comments written online. You have to think about ensuring the satisfaction of every guest here and determine a budget accordingly, decide on market shares, and accept guests accordingly because everything is adjusted according to them. We believe that focusing solely on one nationality in our activities for sustainability is not correct.”

According Waryjas [101] (p. 1), “the essence of crisis management is cultivating the potential successes lurking among the pitfalls through careful planning, decisive execution, and good luck”. T5 defines what should be done for effective crisis management:

“In crises, it’s always necessary to set the frameworks: what is the real problem? What should we do? What contribution can we make to the staff? What contribution can we make to the hotel? How should we relate to our other colleagues? In my opinion, constant meetings are necessary to develop topics, monitor them, and search for different solutions.”

T4 emphasizes the importance of seeking alternative markets for effective crisis management, while T7 suggests that effective crisis management requires the business’s profit motive to take a secondary position. T23, discussing the significance of the domestic market in the tourism sector:

“I have always given place to the domestic market. This is an element that ensures your sustainability. Since we have an ongoing domestic market customer group, I can say that we are actually affected by the crisis periods in the lightest way. Businesses that were completely based on one or two foreign markets could not find much response from here when they suddenly turned to the domestic market in Trkiye during the crisis periods.”

In addition, the interviewees also highlighted that standardizing market prices and finding a solution to the personnel crisis are essential for effective crisis management. On the other hand, according to Santana [23], although crises are not a new phenomenon for the tourism industry, the tourism industry’s ability to deal with complex and critical situations is limited. For instance, T18 shared his thoughts: “Firstly, market prices should be standardized. Secondly, measures should be taken to address the personnel crisis. Increasing the comfort of the staff is necessary to maintain service quality”. T3, considering that crises mostly occur due to external factors, believes that firms have limited options for effective crisis management:

“Crisis management and the occurrence of crises are not within your control. The Gulf War in the 90s affected us, the economic crisis affected us, the airplane crisis affected us, the COVID-19 pandemic affected us—everything can impact the tourism sector. When you talk about crisis management, what can you do? Firstly, you immediately start laying off employees. Efforts are made to reduce costs as much as possible. Attempts are made to continue operating with lower capacities. There’s nothing else happening in crisis management.”

T8, like T3, also suggests that the options for effective crisis management are limited. He argued that although diversification efforts had been ongoing in tourism activities for years, these need to be more comprehensive, and there was a need for government support to enable holistic crisis management:

“In order to ensure effective crisis management, market diversification has been attempted for years. Almost every market exists in Türkiye. There is sports tourism, golf tourism, cycling tourism, tennis tourism. Possible diversifications are being pursued both at the national and regional levels, as much as possible. However, these efforts are not one-sided; it is not possible for businesses to carry out this marketing on their own. This requires government support with the funds allocated by the state.”

Effective crisis management and the sustainability of activities rely on open communication channels, which are considered fundamental elements in managing crises [50]. Some of the interviewees emphasized the importance of effective communication in both crisis management and sustainability of activities. For example, T13 stressed the importance of open communication and the role of managers during crisis periods:

“The manager needs to sit down with the team and clearly communicate according to the conditions of the crisis. They need to tell the truth to their staff. If it involves a salary-related issue, they also need to explain that. Additionally, the manager needs to thoroughly explain the cost-saving measures to be taken throughout the company. That’s the only way to overcome a crisis.”

Furthermore, some interviewees noted a shift in hotel ownership structures, especially after the 2000s, highlighting that in personally operated hotels, the high authority of the owners restricts what hotel managers can do regarding crisis management and sustainability. For instance, T6 expressed his thoughts on this matter:

“Because operators have become more individualized, there are no specific criteria, rules, or systems in Antalya. Everyone acts according to their own desires. Due to managerial problems, you face difficulty as a manager in planning a sustainable crisis management strategy. Unfortunately, owners just dictate what they want for the day.”

Moreover, the competencies of managers are critical in effective crisis management. Reasons such as managers taking unnecessary risks that may have large consequences, not following the developments in rival organizations in the same market, and managers’ qualifications and personality structures not being at the level to be a manager are also factors that make it difficult to manage crises effectively [102]. Similarly, some interviewees pointed out that both hotel owners and general managers are generally inadequate, thus unable to successfully manage crises. T21 expressed his views regarding the incompetence of these hotel owners and general managers:

“Today, no hotel looks at its past to plan for its future. Firstly, unfortunately, general managers are mostly inadequate. They are in positions they don’t deserve. Secondly, the majority of owners obtained their tourism business as an inheritance, so they don’t know the job and want to do things as they please. They don’t consult with others. They don’t consult with each other or their team. Therefore, any crisis cannot be effectively managed.”

Effective crisis management entails different responsibilities for company executives and employees. According to Tse et al. [103] (p. 6), “The management level is of utmost importance as many crises are caused by skewed management values, deception or misconduct”. From executives, managing the crisis within the organization by building trust, ensuring coordination and information flow, and handling the crisis calmly, transparently, and with composure are expected. On the other hand, from employees, calm and optimal implementation of preparations made for the crisis and decisions taken during the crisis

are anticipated [104]. For instance, T1 defined the duties of company executives in effective crisis management:

“Firstly, managers must be very knowledgeable about the subject. They should plan not only good times but also bad times in their field. There must be a communication network about a certain issue because a crisis can be specific to the company, or it can be a crisis that affects other companies in general. They should remain calm and rational.”

On the other hand, according to Garretsen et al. [105] “COVID-19 crisis is an opportunity for researchers, but it is obviously a curse for leaders and their organizations in the real world”. COVID-19 has confronted managers with a crisis they have never experienced before. Therefore, some interviewees noted that since crises are caused by extreme external factors, the options for managers and employees are limited. For example, T14 explained with the following sentences that during crisis periods, managers are forced to reduce employment or impose salary constraints to ensure the continuation of operations:

“During crisis periods, you are forced to reduce employment. This is not something we want because tourism is not a sustainable sector for 12 months now, it cannot be. Because it is not sustainable, there is no turnover of the incoming staff anyway. Therefore, everyone is doing their best to keep trained staff inside. But of course, sometimes salaries are frozen, sometimes they are reduced to half.”

T21 also emphasized the limited options available during crises caused by external factors, stating that these are reducing prices and saving on personnel. T8, on the other hand, stated that tourism is perceived as a discretionary consumption, and therefore, it is excessively affected by crises:

“People engage in tourism activities last, and if there is any risk or negativity involved, they postpone it. They don’t come. They stay at home or go to another country. They prefer countries that do not have this problem. Their preferences change according to whether their economic power is sufficient.”

To prevent crises, manage crises optimally, and develop effective plans and strategies for post-crisis periods, a crisis management team is needed [106]. Effective management of resources, rapid and reliable response to the crisis, and the presence of a crisis management team are critical in effective crisis management [107,108]. However, according to Çoban and Özel’s study results [67] (p. 31), “majority of the managers did not form a crisis management team, did not attach importance to crisis management training and did not create early warning systems against crisis in enterprises”. Similarly, when asked what they thought about the necessity of establishing a crisis management team in companies to ensure effective crisis management and sustainability of activities, most interviewees stated that there is no need to establish such a unit in companies. For instance, T8 expressed his views on the establishment of a crisis team in companies:

“There is no need to establish a unit based on crisis management in companies. Companies have come to these times by experiencing crises. Therefore, there is no need to employ someone for it. We all have to work within crisis processes anyway. Moreover, they don’t hire people because there will be a crisis. They are already looking at how they can work with fewer people.”

On the other hand, while some of the interviewees expressed the necessity of establishing a crisis team in companies, others emphasized that even if a crisis team is established in companies, a team operating in this field is necessary. For instance, T1, by stating that the tourism sector constantly faces various risks, provided examples to define these risks:

“A crisis management team, a working group, must certainly be established in companies. For example, in the aviation sector, you have 50 risks. There’s a safety risk, two security risks, an economic risk, if your macro data is problematic, as I



mentioned before, if you can't control your fuel and parity, there are economic crises, there are human resource risks."

T1, to cope with these risks and manage crises at an optimum level, emphasized the existence of an "emergency plan" team within their own companies, thereby underlining the imperative for crisis management teams in companies. Similarly, T4 also pointed out the necessity of having crisis management teams in companies and the importance of informing all employees about crisis management in order to conduct an effective crisis management process:

"Crisis management teams must definitely exist in companies. In fact, crisis management should even be instilled in the personnel. For example, we did this. We prepared booklets on crisis management and distributed these crisis management booklets to all employees. We know that most of them did not read it, but those who did, it was sufficient for us."

According to Lukić et al. [109] (p. 545), "the success of crisis management and the recovery of an organisation depend on the quality of functioning of the crisis management team". Similarly, T22 asserted the need to establish crisis teams in companies, especially emphasizing the increasing importance of teams based on crisis management due to the current situation in Antalya. He stressed the need for the crisis management team to be qualified: "It is beneficial to conduct crisis management with a team that is aware of what a crisis is, conscious, has experience in these processes, and even if they do not have experience, has academic knowledge. Otherwise, you will hear different opinions from everyone. Then, you cannot manage your risks because you fall into the delusion of making money".

Moreover, teamwork in crisis management is important in obtaining optimal results by transferring information correctly and providing the most accurate response to the crisis [109]. T5 articulated the importance of teamwork and open communication in crisis management:

"I particularly believe that teamwork is crucial in crisis management. The more open your communication is with your team, the quicker your feedback will be, and the more sustainable your activities will be. In my own practices, I have always preferred to exhibit transparent and clear management."

In crisis management, making plans for crises in the short, medium, and long term, and updating them according to changes and transformations occurring within the process, is beneficial for companies to manage crises at an optimal level [50]. For instance, interviewees T4 and T18 emphasized the importance of making short, medium, and long-term plans based on crisis management for the sustainability of activities, while T7 stated that they make short-term plans, not medium and long-term plans, based on crisis management. T7 explained the characteristics of their planning for crisis management:

"We do not make medium and long-term plans for crisis management because crisis management is actually the process of immediately changing your short-term old plans. What you do in the medium and long term is no longer part of that crisis management. Crisis management is only an area that causes changes in your short-term strategies in our company."

On the other hand, T3 expressed their inability to make medium- and long-term plans based on crisis management due to the spontaneous nature of crises. Similarly, T11 stated that they make momentary plans rather than short-, medium-, and long-term plans based on crisis management:

"Every business has budgets that they follow. There may be instant evaluations based on deviations in these budgets because tourism is a very flexible activity. Everything can be affected at any moment. Crises are resolved based on managers' experiences. For example, if we are talking about an economic crisis,

some decisions are shaped according to the hotel's occupancy rate. Generally, tourism already has certain paths chosen by hoteliers, so there is no need to plan too much."

Likewise, T20 explained that due to the vulnerabilities in the tourism sector and the inflationary situation in the economy, they used to make long-term plans regarding their activities, but now it is not possible: "We used to calculate not just for two years but for 15 years. Investments were made for 15 years, and our calculations were accurate. There were no problems. But, as I said, now we can't even calculate for a year. We don't have that luxury anymore". T10 also noted that despite making long-term plans due to the tourism sector's extreme vulnerability to crises, these plans never materialized:

"I used to make roughly a five-year plan regardless, but these plans never worked out. Why didn't they work out? Because crises occur very frequently in Türkiye, and consequently in tourism. You need to react to crises instantly. In Türkiye, even the chance of sticking to the budget you made for the current year is very low."

The final stage of the crisis management process is the post-crisis period, and the stages of the post-crisis period constitute the recovery, the return to normalcy, and the learning process. The learning process encompasses the experiences of organizations that have overcome the crisis, forming their crisis management strategies for the future [53,56,57]. According to Ertaş et al. [18], tourism businesses need to implement effective recovery strategies to achieve long-term success and sustainability after a crisis. When asked about the preparations for future crises and what recommendations they could give to other businesses in the sector regarding crisis management, different responses were obtained from the interviewees. For example, T7 stated his recommendations for the sector regarding crisis management:

"It is important not to confuse risk management with investment. This is the most common mistake in our sector. We use products that are overly sensitive to price fluctuations. If you do not manage your risk and take precautions, saying that I buy fuel at this price today and make ticketing accordingly, without considering the possibility of prices falling in July, then you are making a mistake."

T14 argued that the most crucial factor for businesses operating in the sector in terms of crisis management is to have strong company capital: "To be resilient against crises, your capital must be strong. If your capital is strong enough to overcome the crisis without borrowing, then there is no problem. Companies that maintain strong working capital always survive". T8 exemplified how in crisis situations, businesses' borrowing levels increase, leading some businesses to bankruptcy:

"In times of crisis and afterward, large facilities, when they cannot sustain their operations, have to resort to loans to keep their operations running. The situation is the same for agencies. This situation can eventually lead to bankruptcy for businesses."

Some of the interviewees also emphasized the need for standardization in tourism activities to ensure sustainability in tourism as a whole. "Standards are meant to improve sustainability, safety and professionalism in tourism activities, instill confidence in travellers and reduce the environmental impact" [110]. For instance, T20 suggested that base prices should be determined to prevent unfair competition in tourism, while T18 expressed his thoughts on standardizing tourism activities: "The room systems in other countries, bed and breakfast, need to be improved in our country". T22 suggested gradually moving away from the all-inclusive system, stating: "Just as we gradually entered into the all-inclusive system, we need to gradually move towards half board". T4 pointed out that the all-inclusive systems in hotels are creating a lot of waste: "One of the biggest crises is the excess production of materials. Now, tables have turned into buffets". Moreover, T4

highlighted that in the past, hotel profit margins were much higher than they are now, and this led to wrong policies, such as reducing staff:

“For instance, the all-inclusive system should have a standard. Hotel stars need to be categorized. For example, there is no standard for 7 stars in Türkiye. There is a criterion for five stars, for example, those who get 300 points get 5 stars and those who get 550 points get 5 stars. The building may be 5 stars, but how many stars is the service quality or the activities in the hotel? On one side they serve shrimps, on the other side they don’t even serve the cheapest trout. I think that not only the building but also the quality of service provided should be starred”.

T4 pointed out that in previous years, hotel profit margins were much higher than they are now, and this led to attempts to solve the situation, especially among hotel owners, through policies such as reducing staff. T18 expressed his thoughts on the effectiveness of laying off employees during crisis management:

“Reducing staff or reducing staff salaries does not overcome crises. Is downsizing necessary during crises? Maybe, but it must be done correctly. Especially during major crises, downsizing is definitely necessary for investors to save themselves. During crisis periods, instead of completely laying off people to avoid causing them distress, we prefer to keep them employed by gradually downsizing, with intervals of 15 days.”

According to the OECD [75], “While flexible policy solutions are needed to enable the tourism economy to live alongside the virus in the short to medium term, it is important to look beyond this and take steps to learn from the crisis, which has revealed gaps in government and industry preparedness and response capacity. Co-ordinated action across governments at all levels and the private sector is essential”. Similarly, the interviewees emphasized the necessity of collaboration among universities, government, and the private sector for more effective crisis management. They highlighted the importance of updated data, data-driven production and planning, and the integration of activities with technology. Most of the interviewees noted that the level of connection between the public, university, and private sectors was insufficient and emphasized the need to strengthen this connection. For instance, T3 suggested that collaboration between universities and the private sector in crisis management would be beneficial, allowing theory and practice to converge for better crisis management. On the other hand, T3 also underscored that universities are often distant from practical developments and issues in tourism. T3 recommended that professors should spend some time in the industry, perhaps as interns, to witness firsthand what is happening in the sector. T22 advocated for public–private–university collaboration in crisis management, stating “Understanding what other companies are doing during crises is not always straightforward, and such collaboration leads to better crisis resolution”. Similarly, T7 expressed his views on public–private–university collaboration in crisis management:

“The sector cannot manage crises alone. Here, both universities and the government need to provide you with healthy evaluations. It is necessary to inform and raise awareness among companies that lack awareness on this issue. Many companies fail and become unmanageable because of their weak awareness. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic was well managed in that sense. It was managed well with government support.”

In order to overcome crises with the least damage, it is extremely important that both government institutions and tourism sector companies act together and in coordination, make joint decisions, and prepare for possible crises [64]. Similarly, T19 emphasized the importance of collaborative action in crisis management to ensure sustainability in the tourism industry. He exemplified the importance of joint crisis management during the COVID-19 pandemic:

“No one can manage a crisis alone. There are definitely sub-branches to help managers manage the crisis. Declarations on what to do during a crisis were very

important in this regard. In the COVID-19 pandemic, road maps for activities were tried, failed, revised and made again. It is a very correct method to act jointly within the framework of certain road maps in managing crises effectively and ensuring sustainability in tourism.”

T15 highlighted the mutual benefits of private sector–university collaboration, not only in crisis management but also in all processes of tourism activities, emphasizing the advancement of tourism faculties in universities:

“I believe that collaborating with universities or other relevant institutions, not only for crisis management but also for all other issues, would be beneficial, especially at the local level. It doesn’t necessarily have to be a crisis. I think it would be mutually beneficial, so if there is a connection between a university and a hotel, it’s not just the hotel that benefits; it’s also a gain for the university.”

The interviewees emphasized the necessity of joint planning in the tourism sector in Antalya to ensure more predictable, transparent, and sustainable development. T7 underscored the need for long-term and well-founded planning in the economic management of Antalya, stating: “If you chase the added value of a short-term story, it becomes unmanageable. That’s what Antalya is experiencing right now”.

The interviewees also noted that tourism businesses in Antalya often operate independently from each other, negatively impacting their competitiveness and sustainability, especially during crises. According to Bonacci and Anwar [111], cooperation between different stakeholders in the tourism sector may be useful in effectively combating the crisis. Therefore, they suggested the establishment of a union or organization where stakeholders in the tourism sector can exchange ideas and collaborate during crisis moments. T11 underlined:

“There can be an economic crisis, a climatic crisis, a global crisis. In order to solve this, it is necessary to form a team and hold meetings, and it is necessary to get information from whoever your stakeholders are, whoever is knowledgeable on this subject. It is also necessary to talk to them and be constantly updated.”

According to Reindrawati [99], “Decentralizing tourism planning from the national to local level using effective legal and administrative systems is needed for the community to gain power”. Therefore, collaborative actions and common regulatory rules are of great importance for the cumulative development and sustainability of the tourism sector activities. On the other hand, T9 pointed out the lack of collaborative efforts in the tourism sector in Antalya, stating, “In Antalya, everyone sets their own rules. As a result, the law of the jungle prevails, and the strong win while the weak are crushed”. This illustrates the competitive and uncoordinated nature of the tourism industry in Antalya. Therefore, T9 stated that businesses act individually in the tourism sector in Antalya and underlined that he thought it would be very beneficial in terms of the sustainability of the sector if businesses come together and work together. Similarly, T12 criticized the disjointed actions within the hotel sector, emphasizing the importance of establishing mutual trust and making decisions collectively for the overall sustainability of the tourism sector in Antalya:

“We need to be able to make decisions collectively. It cannot be done if you always say I do it, I know it, I will do it. For this reason, we need to be able to be together, but we cannot do that either. Hoteliers need to make a joint decision. We have been experiencing this for years, we take a joint decision, we say okay, at the end of the day, everyone reads what they know, everyone does what they know”.

In conclusion, the main share of ensuring effective crisis management in the tourism industry and making sustainable plans for the future falls to the managers. Managers need to increase their knowledge and foresight about crises by following current developments on a global, regional and provincial scale. For an effective crisis management, teamwork, open communication, searching for alternative markets, always allocating quotas for the

domestic market, calculating the budget as optimally as possible, and putting the purpose of making money in the secondary plan are required. The managers who stated that a solution should be found for the personnel crisis by standardizing market prices and improving the working and salary conditions of the personnel stated that what they can do to manage the crisis is limited in reality.

In general, since crises are of external origin, the managers underlined that there is nothing much they can do to manage a crisis except downsizing, cutting costs, and dismissing personnel. In addition, the managers emphasized that after the 2000s, since the hotels became more like sole proprietorships, they had fewer and fewer rights while commenting on business and crisis management. Moreover, some managers stated that the managers in the tourism sector have become less and less qualified and therefore, crises cannot be managed at the desired level and in a sustainable manner. In order to manage crises effectively and to ensure sustainability in tourism activities, managers stated that government support in the tourism industry should be increased.

Different responses have been obtained regarding the necessity of having a crisis management team within the business to prevent crises, manage crises effectively, and develop effective recovery plans for post-crisis processes. Some of the interviewees expressed the opinion that since the sector operates within various crises of different magnitudes continuously, it is not necessary to establish a separate crisis management team within the business. On the other hand, some managers emphasized the importance of having crisis management teams within the company for managing crises more effectively and developing effective recovery strategies post-crisis.

When asked whether they have made short-term, medium-term, and long-term plans for crisis management, the majority of the interviewees predominantly from the tourism industry expressed that due to the fragility of the tourism sector, they cannot make any plans for crisis management, and even if they do, they cannot achieve any results. In terms of recommendations for the tourism sector in preparation for future crises and in the context of crisis management, managers emphasized the importance of not mixing risk management with investments, having strong capital structures in businesses and avoiding borrowing as much as possible, making optimal use of financial instruments, working with qualified managers, pursuing strategies to retain employees as much as possible, and standardizing tourism activities.

Furthermore, for effective crisis management, it is necessary for the tourism sector to continuously collaborate with universities and the public sector, or to strengthen existing collaborations. Additionally, continuous updating of tourism data and making data-driven plans and projects can contribute to more effective and sustainable tourism sector activities. Moreover, for more effective crisis management in Antalya, strengthening communication networks among tourism businesses and establishing a union that businesses can collectively contribute to, particularly during crisis periods, are necessary to ensure sustainability in the tourism industry as a whole and to implement recovery strategies optimally.

## 6. Conclusions

In this study, as a result of semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted with senior managers of tourism enterprises in Antalya, which is first in terms of the number of night spent and international visitors visiting Türkiye and thus in importance, the negativities experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic were basically the inability of most of the hotels to open due to the quarantine and travel restrictions measures taken during the COVID-19 pandemic, the closure of some businesses that complement hotel activities, especially through rental, and the fact that some of the personnel employed in tourism retired while others remained unemployed. The negativities experienced in the post-COVID-19 recovery period are the Russian–Ukrainian War that broke out in 2022, the emergence of a staffing crisis in the sector due to the fact that tourism personnel who were unemployed or settled in their hometowns during the COVID-19 period did not return to their jobs in tourism after the opening, the entry into an inflationary process

in the national economy in the post-COVID-19 period, and the fact that Antalya is a temporary migration centre for people from both countries after the Russian–Ukrainian war dramatically increased the cost of living in Antalya, and the administrative problems created and may create in the future in the payment of severance payments due to the right to retirement for people over a certain age with a regulation made in 2023.

During the COVID-19 period, while generally businesses were unable to do anything to manage the crisis, some businesses seized the opportunity to turn the crisis into an advantage by revising their operational activities and addressing infrastructure deficiencies. Crisis management and sustainability in the tourism sector during the COVID-19 period were ensured through government support. However, during the post-COVID-19 recovery period, as crises were externally sourced, businesses had limited options for crisis management decisions and recovery strategies to ensure sustainability in tourism activities. In order to manage the crisis and ensure sustainability in tourism activities after COVID-19, businesses pursued strategies such as shifting focus to domestic and alternative markets, increasing their attractiveness by offering price discounts, making improvements in employee salary and working conditions at the expense of profitability, and adopting downsizing strategies. During this period, government support has mainly consisted of providing treasury-backed credit packages to businesses for severance payments to those who gained early retirement rights.

According to the data obtained from the study, it has been concluded that there has not been a complete recovery in the tourism sector since COVID-19. The underlying reasons for the tourism sector's inability to fully recover post-COVID-19 are attributed to the pandemic exacerbating the fragility of the tourism sector. The increasing cost of living throughout the province since the pandemic, coupled with the personnel crisis that erupted due to COVID-19 and has since escalated, further exacerbates the situation. Additionally, the outbreak of the Ukraine War and the regulatory changes regarding retirement age post-COVID-19 have also contributed to the occurrence of adverse effects on the sustainability of tourism activities and crisis management.

The interviewees underlined that if the increases in rents and living costs continue and no measures are taken, there will be problems in finding labor force to work in tourism sectors in the future. In order to overcome these problems and ensure full recovery and sustainability in the tourism sector after COVID-19, state-led planning in the tourism industry can facilitate significant progress in tourism activities by preventing crises. In addition, the systematic and detailed maintenance of data flow for tourism sectors may have the effect of increasing competitive advantage and added value in tourism activities.

As a result, the COVID-19 crisis has had a high impact on the tourism sector in Antalya. Business managers and employees have a great share in the crisis management process. The most important elements in effective crisis management are openness, accurate information sharing, transparency and accountability. The potential of Antalya's tourism sectors is much higher than the existing ones. In order to ensure this, it may be effective for tourism sector stakeholders to carry out common tourism policies together and to take common steps towards crises, to overcome crises with minimum damage and to develop more sustainable recovery strategies during crisis periods. In addition, it may be beneficial for businesses in the tourism sector to further increase their knowledge on crisis management in order to get out of crises with minimum damage or to turn them into opportunities when necessary.

Finally, this study provides practical implications for tourism sector stakeholders on crisis management issues to ensure sustainability in the tourism sector during the COVID-19 crisis and its aftermath. Governments and tourism and hospitality organizations can learn from the COVID-19 crisis to better cope with future disruptive events affecting the tourism industry, and from the crisis management and recovery strategies carried out to sustain tourism activities after the crisis to deal with future crises. The findings of the study can contribute to sector representatives and policy makers to have an idea about tourism, sustainability, and crisis management issues and to make plans for future crises

in terms of addressing the issue of crisis management and sustainability in the COVID-19 and post-crisis period specific to the tourism sectors in Antalya. On the other hand, the study also has certain limitations. The study addresses the problems faced by the Antalya tourism sector in the post-COVID-19 period through semi-structured interviews from a crisis management perspective on the recovery and sustainability process of the tourism sector in the post-COVID-19 period. In fact, in terms of the number of the employees, small family enterprises with fewer than 20 are not represented in this study. Therefore, some further projects could be very useful to research the COVID-19 pandemic and crisis management in such companies. Furthermore, interviewees in this study were selected through snowball sampling. Therefore, different sampling styles such as stratified sampling, purposive sampling or quota sampling may be used in future studies. Moreover, the study findings are based on qualitative findings from semi-structured in-depth interviews. Therefore, in future studies, more in-depth evaluations can be made on the subject by comparing the challenges and recovery processes faced by different tourism destinations in the tourism sector during the COVID-19 pandemic process by using different data sets, different qualitative and quantitative methods.

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