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Bridging eastern and non-eastern Turkey: A study on the effectiveness of a tourism-based intervention

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ABSTRACT

Living in eastern versus non-eastern Turkey reflects not merely a geographical distinction but, instead, indicates the deep sociocultural disaffection between easterners and non-easterners. To address this polarity, "We are Anatolia" [*Biz Anadoluyuz*] is designed as a four-day tourism-based intervention to improve the attitudes of adolescents from eastern and non-eastern Turkey towards one other. In this project, easterners visit a non-eastern city; non-easterners, an eastern one. The visitors' tourist experiences are enriched by ensuring pre-programmed direct contact activities with inhabitants of the host city in recreational settings and by increasing the salience of common ingroup identity between visitors and hosts. The present study ($N = 1043$) evaluated the effectiveness of this project through a pre- and post-test design with a control group. The visitors' contact intentions, psychological closeness, and warmth towards the inhabitants of the host city were assessed at the first (T1) and last days of the trips (T2), as well as three months later (T3). Except for contact intentions, participants (especially non-easterners) showed a positive change from T1 to T2 and preserved that improvement in T3. However, the intervention-related changes demonstrated only small effect sizes; moreover, no difference existed between the treatment and control groups regarding their short-term gains. We discuss the potential of tourism for societal peace.

Introduction

As an integral part of tourism, host-tourist interactions have been proposed as an instrument for promoting societal peace based on the contact hypothesis (D'Amore, 1988; Zhang, Inbakaran, & Jackson, 2006). "We are Anatolia" [*Biz Anadoluyuz*] is designed as a tourism-based peace intervention to improve the attitudes of adolescents living in the eastern and non-eastern regions of Turkey towards one other. Attendants take a four-day trip from their cities of origin to another city, and intercity mobility is held either from the non-east to east direction or from the east to non-east. This project is a unique form of multimodal applied intervention since it uses more than one theoretical mechanism in prejudice reduction (Beelmann & Heinemann, 2014; Paluck, Porat, Clark, & Green, 2021). In addition to expected host-tourist interactions, two other anti-bias strategies are also incorporated into the project: (a) pre-programmed direct contact with the inhabitants of the hosting city (Allport, 1954) in several recreational contexts, and (b) social categorization following the common ingroup identity model (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; Gaertner et al., 2008).

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The deep socio-economic, ethnic, and cultural differences between the eastern and non-eastern regions of Turkey have gradually transformed geographical belonging (especially "being from the east") into a salient social category among ordinary citizens (Öncü, 2011; Peker-Dural et al., 2018; Şahin & Gülmez, 2000). The word "East" evokes an automatic association with Kurdish ethnicity (Öncü, 2011), a group which is a frequent object of negative stereotype and prejudice in Turkey (Saraçoğlu, 2010). In addition, deeply ingrained in the daily language, the phrase "Eastern people" [*Doğu insanı*] has highly undesirable connotations, such as poverty, conservatism, backwardness, clannishness, civil disobedience, and the like (Öncü, 2011). Even though the east-west dichotomy in Turkey constitutes a potential source of intergroup bias at a societal level, this particular form of polarity has been a neglected area of field intervention. In attempt to address the socio-cultural distance between residents of the eastern and non-eastern cities of Turkey, the program "We are Anatolia" has been created and implemented.

In the following sections, the potential of tourism-related contact for prejudice reduction will be covered in light of the findings from tourism literature. Next, the details of "We are Anatolia" will be presented. First, how this intervention program is designed to promote positive and rewarding intergroup relations will be covered. Second, why this project is vital at the intersection of geographical identities in Turkey will be examined. We then present our hypotheses, methodology, and results, and discuss the implications of findings for social peace in Turkey.

Tourism for peace

Allport's (1954) highly influential contact hypothesis suggests that contact between members of different groups builds positive intergroup attitudes. An intergroup contact becomes optimal when interacting parties have equal status, cooperate to reach a superordinate goal, and believe that their interaction is sanctioned by institutional authorities (Allport, 1954). Although tourism enables direct contact between the members of different nations, ethnicities, religions or social groups, touristic encounters do not generally satisfy Allport's optimal contact conditions (Berno & Ward, 2005). Yet, meeting those conditions is not a must for an intergroup contact to result in positive attitude change (Al Ramiah & Hewstone, 2013; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Familiarity with unknown others might even be powerful enough to develop liking for them (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Touristic encounters between the members of conflicting or culturally diverse communities might help people discover new positive information about the opposite party, change their negative stereotypes, and develop mutual understanding and liking about each other (Pizam, Fleischer, & Mansfeld, 2002; Tomljenovic, 2010).

There are mixed findings about the usefulness of touristic encounters in improving tourists' attitudes towards the host communities. Israeli tourists visiting Jordan (Pizam et al., 2002), Turks visiting Armenia (Günlü et al., 2015), and domestic tourists traveling to the southeastern Turkey (Çelik, 2019a) experienced improved attitudes towards the host communities following their trips. However, the German (Sirakaya-Turk, Nyaupane, & Uysal, 2014) and Greek tourists (Anastasopoulos, 1992) visiting Turkey or Israeli tourists visiting Egypt (Amir & Ben-Ari, 1985) demonstrated an increase in their post-trip prejudicial attitudes compared to their pre-trip scores. Conversely, in other studies on American tourists visiting the Soviet Union (Pizam, Jafari, & Milman, 1991) and Israeli tourists visiting Egypt (Milman, Reichel, & Pizam, 1990), visitors' attitudes towards the host society were found to remain unchanged. Commodification of host-culture, short-duration of stay, language barriers (Tomljenovic, 2010), and prolonged political and historical tensions between the interacting communities (Pizam et al., 2002) might account for those null or undesirable findings. In addition, particularly in organized mass-tourism, visitors traveling in sheltered buses are not equal to local people, so thus the traveler and host city inhabitant interactions are correspondingly limited and shallow (Farmaki, 2017; Tomljenovic, 2010). Furthermore, this inconclusive picture regarding the effectiveness of tourism in prejudice reduction might be associated with inconsistent procedures across studies in evaluating the post-trip attitude change. Many of the above-mentioned studies are inevitably quasi-experimental since tourism as a research context does not allow random assignment to experimental conditions. Even though some of those studies (e.g., Anastasopoulos, 1992; Pizam et al., 1991) utilized a pretest-posttest design with a control group, other studies adopted weaker research designs such as one group pretest-posttest design (e.g., Sirakaya-Turk et al., 2014) or a posttest only design with nonequivalent groups (Çelik, 2019a). Moreover, none of those studies report effect sizes concerning the pretest-posttest changes and the treatment-control group differences, which prevents judging the degree of change in broader populations. There are also inter-study differences in covering different components of prejudice. Stereotypes as the cognitive basis of intergroup attitudes were the commonly-addressed dependent variables in many of those studies (e.g., Anastasopoulos, 1992; Amir & Ben-Ari, 1985; Pizam et al., 1991, 2002). Only some addressed social distance (Çelik, 2019a; Yilmaz & Taşçı, 2015) and more subtle forms of bias such as the denial of discrimination (Sirakaya-Turk et al., 2014). Since we should not expect that contact would be equally influential on different facets of intergroup prejudice (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2004), the absence of an overarching standard for evaluating prejudice also seems to decrease the generalizability of findings regarding the tourism-prejudice link.

Even though host-tourist contact might work against the predictions of contact hypothesis in some contexts, its benefits seem to outweigh its disadvantages since it is an antidote to the isolation of different groups and an effective tool in raising intergroup awareness (Reisinger & Turner, 2003). In addition, when certain conditions are met, host-tourist encounters might definitely result in desirable outcomes. For example, having more frequent contact (Günlü et al., 2015; Pizam et al., 2002) and developing friendships with the members of the host community (Yilmaz & Taşçı, 2015) were associated with positive attitude change following the trips. To date, tourism has not been incorporated into a social peace project as a program component, which is particularly imposed by researchers or practitioners. In "We are Anatolia", host-tourist interactions are initiated by the Ministry of Youth and Sports of Turkish Republic; thus, this detail turns the current project into a tourism-based intervention.

"We are Anatolia" as a tourism-based intervention

Participant selection

This project is open to adolescents between 12 and 15 years of age. Equal numbers of girls and boys in groups of 40 travel in each tour program. State officials determine the visitor and host cities. In the first stage of the selection process of attendants, schools which are primarily located in socio-economically disadvantaged districts of target cities are selected according to the suggestions of provincial youth directors and provincial national education directors. Student applications are received by the principals of these schools. This project prioritizes young people who meet at least one of the following criteria: (a) socio-economic deprivation, (b) parental loss, (c) non-involvement in youth projects previously, (d) have never visited the destination cities, and (e) demonstrated success in academic, cultural, artistic, or sports activities. The attendant students are determined by the school administration. In the case of a large number of applications, lots are drawn to decide participants.

Features of intervention program

"We are Anatolia", as a tourism-based multimodal intervention, aims to improve the attitudes of adolescents from eastern and non-eastern Turkey regarding one other. It is designed by the Turkish governmental authorities based upon the recommendations of academicians and professionals in the field. The project has also several ancillary goals, such as introducing young people to the historical and natural beauties of cities that they have never seen, broadening their cultural selves, and encouraging positive youth behaviors (e.g., playing sports, volunteering).

Since the primary aim of the project is to bridge the eastern and non-eastern regions of Turkey, the visitor and host cities are determined on the basis of the geographical regions of Turkey. In consideration of socio-economic qualities and ethno-cultural structures of different geographical regions (to be covered below), the Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia Regions are considered as the east of Turkey in this project, and the remaining regions (i.e., Black Sea, Marmara, Aegean, Mediterranean, & Central Anatolia Regions) are accepted as non-eastern Turkey. Throughout the project, the residents of eastern Turkey make a four-day visit to a non-eastern city, and the non-easterners visit an eastern city. This project has been run by the Ministry of Youth and Sports since 2019 but temporarily suspended due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Intercity mobility is mostly rendered through plane travel, and visitors stay at hotels during their trips. All travel expenses are paid by the state. Visitors are guided by 4 official volunteers and 1 youth leader (aged between 18 and 25) who are affiliated with the Ministry of Youth and Sports, and 3 teachers who are affiliated with the Ministry of National Education. Activities generally held in each trip program can be compiled under the following themes: (a) visits to historical places, (b) peer contact, (c) interaction with local people, (d) introduction of the brand value of destination city, (e) social responsibility activities such as volunteering, (f) nature and environmental activities, (g) sport related activities, and (h) recreational activities (e.g., visual arts or music). In addition, daily evaluation meetings are held at the end of each tour day. In those meetings, the adolescent visitors come together at the hotel. There, amongst themselves, they are given the opportunity to express their thoughts, feelings, and problems about their travel experiences in discussions supervised by youth volunteers.

The potential of "We are Anatolia" for positive attitude change

Although "We are Anatolia" seems to be based on touristic encounters, the program also utilizes two other intervention strategies to improve the attitudes of visitors regarding inhabitants of the host city: namely, direct contact and social categorization.

The trips held in this project can be seen as an invaluable opportunity for adolescents since most cannot independently visit those cities due to their age, financial constraints, or geographical distance between the cities. As evidenced in past studies (e.g., Çelik, 2019a; Günlü et al., 2015), adolescents might discover through these trips new positive information about the host city and develop more productive attitudes about its inhabitants. However, these travel programs are similar to mass tourism organizations in some respects since visitors tour the destination cities in sheltered buses, and some trip activities are primarily sightseeing. This aspect of program design might decrease the effectiveness of the intervention.

To overcome such potential drawbacks, every trip program is enriched by direct contact experiences with the host people in joint recreational activities. The efficacy of direct contact for promoting better intergroup relations is robust (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Partaking in recreation activities has been found to facilitate positive interaction between the members of different communities (Kim, 2012). Çelik (2019b) also asserts that festivals, fairs, sports, or music events which occur in hosting cities can increase the quality of host-tourist interactions. Accordingly, certain recreational activities such as school visits, festivals, visits to famous artists of host cities, and gift exchanges with the residents of host cities have been integrated into the itinerary of each trip. Even though trip programs differ in terms of the types of recreational activities, all trips offer the opportunities for rewarding experiences with the inhabitants of the host city.

When institutional authorities support harmonious intergroup interactions, intergroup contact becomes more effective (Allport, 1954). Relatedly, aside from the content of trip activities, volunteers who accompany adolescents during the trips play a critical role in encouraging fair and tolerant visitor-host interactions. Before volunteers join the "We are Anatolia" project, these individuals enroll in an education program which includes workshops on intercultural contact and communication, the ethics of working with adolescents, leadership, and so on. Correspondingly, volunteers are expected to create and reinforce egalitarian norms as well as openness to diversity during the trips, and in this process, become role models for the adolescent travelers.

This project also uses the social categorization strategy based on the common ingroup identity model (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). When members of different groups consider themselves as belonging to a common superordinate identity such as a nation or common humanity, their biased attitudes about each other tend to diminish, and their relationships become more cooperative and forgiving (Gaertner & Dovido, 2000). In this project, the visitor and host adolescents are also encouraged to categorize themselves around an inclusive sense of "we"-ness. The salience of a common ingroup identity is strengthened via flags, emblems, t-shirts, and a unifying motto ("We are Anatolia").

The success of contact interventions depends on various prerequisites, such as Allport's contact conditions, personalized contact, prolonged interaction, and subgroup identity salience (Tausch, Kenworthy, & Hewstone, 2006). Even though various pre-programmed direct contact activities are added into the trip itineraries, the contact experiences of attendants with host inhabitants might be still superficial as this project is a short trip of four days. Moreover, since this is a state-sponsored project, an emphasis on common ingroup identity (i.e., Anatolian-ness) instead of subgroup identities is preferred. This approach might hinder the maintenance of subgroup salience in the intergroup contact settings; as a result, positive contact effects may not be generalized to the outgroup as a whole (Al Ramiah & Hewstone, 2013). Those suboptimal features of the intervention program might sabotage its own goals and therefore jeopardize its efficacy.

"We are Anatolia" at the intersection of geographical identities in Turkey

"The East" composed of Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia Regions is an exceptional territory within the boundaries of Turkey (Öncü, 2011). The large inequalities between "the East" and the other parts of the country have haunted Turkey throughout history (Şahin & Gülmez, 2000; TESEV, 2006). Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia tend to have higher levels of poverty, unemployment, insecurity, and childbirth, and lower levels of educational attainment, literacy, industrialization, human resources, as well as human development index values (TESEV, 2006; Ünal, 2008). Furthermore, Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia differ from other regions in terms of its unique ethnic and language composition. Regarding ethnicity demographics of Turkey, 83 % of the population are Turks; 14 %, Kurds; 2 %, Arab; and the remainder, other ethnicities (Koc, Hancioglu, & Cavlin, 2008). Most of the Kurdish (70 %) and Arabic populations (88 %) are concentrated in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia (Koc et al., 2008). Therefore, these two groups constitute the majority of the population in these regions (Dixon & Ergin, 2010; Koc et al., 2008). In terms of native language, most easterners identify it as Kurdish, some as Turkish, and few have Arabic as their mother tongue (Smiths & Gündüz-Hoşgör, 2003). Although the majority of those easterners with a non-Turkish mother tongue are able to speak Turkish, a significant amount (30 %) is unable to speak Turkish at all (Smiths & Gündüz-Hoşgör, 2003).

"The East" has been identified with the Kurdish ethnicity throughout history (Öncü, 2011). An increasing number of studies on nationally representative samples have evidenced Turks' prejudicial attitudes towards Kurds in Turkey (e.g., Aytaç & Çarkoğlu, 2019; Dixon & Ergin, 2010; Sarigil & Karakoc, 2016). Other studies have revealed the stereotypical perceptions of Kurds in the society as traitors, terrorists, potential criminals, beggars, disrupters of urban life, untrustworthy, dirty, and narrow-minded (Bikmen & Sunar, 2004; Saraçoğlu, 2009, 2010). Therefore, the continuous valorization of the east as an extension of Kurdishness further contributes to the preexisting hierarchies between "the East" and the remaining parts of the country (Öncü, 2011).

The large inequalities between "the East" and other regions of Turkey have made geographical belonging as a salient social category, and therefore formed and sharpened social identities along these geographical lines (Öncü, 2011; Peker-Dural et al., 2018; Şahin & Gülmez, 2000). Negative imaginaries of "the East" such as "geographically remote, backward, unchanging, pre-capitalist, underdeveloped, tribal, and rebellious" have been visible in media, popular culture, and literary works (Öncü, 2011, p. 50). It has continuously been presented as an Orientalized other (Öncü, 2011; Yılmaz, 2018). Similar metaphors can also be found in the social representations of ordinary citizens in Turkey. While eastern Turkey has been associated with traditionalism, poverty, conservatism, backwardness, terrorism, insecurity, and ongoing conflict, relatively western regions have been characterized by modernity, urbanization, and economic welfare (Peker-Dural et al., 2018; Tuzkaya et al., 2015; Yorulmaz & Hazar, 2018). This east-west dichotomy was found to be more pronounced in the social representations of the western inhabitants of Turkey (Peker-Dural et al., 2018). Furthermore, equally evident are the anxieties of non-eastern citizens (who visit eastern Turkey for occupational or touristic purposes) of encountering terrorist attacks in eastern regions (Çelik, 2019b; Duru, 2012). Therefore, living in "eastern Turkey" and "non-eastern Turkey" is now far beyond a geographical distinction; such terms indicate the presence of ostensible ingroup-outgroup formations between "easterners" and "non-easterners" (Peker-Dural et al., 2018). This duality might be best seen with the everyday, widespread use of the term "Eastern people" [*Doğu insanı*] in Turkey (Öncü, 2011). The challenges posed by the formation of these social categorizations based on geographical belonging as well as the consequential biased attitudes are the major drivers shaping the development of "We are Anatolia".

Current study

This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of "We are Anatolia" for improving the attitudes of visitors towards the residents of host cities. In doing so, we utilized a non-equivalent control group pre- and post-test design. All participants were evaluated on the study variables immediately before (T1) and at the last day of the trips (T2). There were four days from T1 to T2; the difference between the two implies the short-term impact of the intervention. We also questioned whether probable short-term benefits persisted over time; a subset of the treatment group participants was given a delayed post-test approximately three months after the trips (T3). We collected control group data in T1 and T2, but not in T3.

Attendants were expected to develop an increase in their contact intentions, psychological closeness, and warmth towards the host

city people from T1 to T2. However, the control group participants were expected to maintain their T1 scores on those indicators during T2. Regarding the long-term effect of this intervention, we hypothesized that the attendants would preserve their T2 scores in T3.

We hope this study will shed light on many critical issues in the literature. We identify six areas to which our research contributes to the discussions of tourism-related contact for prejudice reduction. First, to the best of our knowledge, host-tourist encounters have not been considered as an intervention tool in the past. Although there have been several studies evaluating the impact of tourist encounters for improving intergroup attitudes, none treated touristic trips as a pre-programmed intervention mechanism. Relatedly, the present study can provide unique empirical evidence about the potential of tourism as an intervention component. The second contribution of the study relates to its examining the impact of domestic tourism for prejudice reduction. Past studies have addressed the contributions of international tourism for peace in several forms of touristic encounters, such as educational tourism (Günlü et al., 2015), working tourism (Pizam, Uriely, & Reichel, 2000), ecotourism (Pizam et al., 2002), or organized mass-tourism (Amir & Ben-Ari, 1985; Anastasopoulos, 1992; Milman et al., 1990). However, domestic tourism can also improve intergroup relations in societies where there are social divisions based on religion, ethnicity, language, or geography (e.g., Çelik, 2019a). The present study can serve as one of the exceptions in questioning the potential of domestic tourism as a means of enhancing attitudes between the citizens of same country. The third contribution of the study relates to its addressing the long term consequences of tourist encounters. To date, only a limited number of studies (e.g., Sirakaya-Turk et al., 2014) have questioned the stability of tourism-related attitude change in the long run. The current study is also unique in evaluating the immediate and gradual impact of touristic encounters on intergroup attitudes. The fourth area of usefulness of our work is about its research design. The effectiveness of an intervention program can only be truly evaluated through effect size computations and comparisons with a control group (Al Ramiah & Hewstone, 2012). In this respect, one other strength of the present study can be its adoption of a strong research design and a rigorous analysis plan.

A fifth strength is our examination of how one's sense of geographical belonging influences intergroup relations. Given Turkey's highly polarized socio-political conjuncture, the country has always been a natural laboratory in testing intergroup implications of social identities across ethnic, religious, or ideological divides. Some commonly-addressed issues have been the Turkish-Kurdish conflict (e.g., Aytaç & Çarkoğlu, 2019; Bagci, Piyale, Karaköse, & Şen, 2018; Bilali, Çelik, & Ok, 2014; Bilali, Iqbal, & Çelik, 2018; Çelebi, Verkuyten, Köse, & Maliepaard, 2014; Dixon & Ergin, 2010), Alevi-Sunni relations (e.g., Bilali et al., 2018; Sarigil, 2018), or the social distance between the supporters and opponents of AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi – Justice and Development Party) (e.g., Bilali et al., 2018). However, only a few empirical studies (e.g., Çelik, 2019a; Peker-Dural et al., 2018) treat the residents of eastern cities as a group, and examine intergroup relations between them and the non-easterners. Therefore, one of the most important contributions of the present study could be its systematic approach in addressing how regional belonging shapes intergroup relations in Turkey.

The sixth and last contribution of the study is our testing of the effectiveness of an intervention program held in a real-world setting. Paluck et al. (2021) classified prejudice reduction interventions into two, namely, applied interventions (involving more than one theoretical mechanism for prejudice reduction, such as diversity training or multicultural education programs) and basic research interventions (addressing the efficacy of one theoretical perspective such as cognitive training or imagined contact). When we examine prejudice reduction attempts in Turkey, there are studies exemplifying the basic research interventions concerning analytical thinking (Yilmaz, Karadöller, & Sofuoglu, 2016), common ingroup categorization (Adam-Troian, Çelebi, Bonetto, Taşdemir, & Yurtbakan, 2020), standard imagined contact (Bagci, Piyale, & Ebcim, 2018; Firat & Ataca, 2020), imagined contact with friendship potential (Bagci, Piyale, Bircek, & Ebcim, 2018), and vicarious contact (Tercan et al., 2020). All those studies, except for the study by Firat and Ataca (2020), yielded highly optimistic outcomes about the usefulness of those brief interventions in reducing prejudices. However, Paluck et al. (2021) underline the need for adapting and synergizing those various forms of basic interventions in real-world settings. There are also rare examples of such multifaceted applied interventions from Turkey, such as the human library project (Bagci & Blazhenkova, 2020) and a sports-based intervention in combination with direct contact and conflict resolution training (Ekici et al., 2020). However, reliable, robust, and visible evidence about the impact of applied interventions for social peace is limited not only in Turkey, but also for the rest of the world (Paluck, 2012). Given such a scarcity, the current study has introduced a multimodal intervention exercised during touristic encounters which is an interesting real-world condition and utilized a rigorous method in testing its short and long-term effect.

Method

Participants

Participants were divided into attendants of the "We are Anatolia" (treatment group, $N = 1043$) and those individuals who were not (control group, $N = 243$).

"We are Anatolia" participants

The data of the current study was collected throughout the 2019 application year. To check whether the project was equally impactful on the inhabitants of the eastern and non-eastern cities, we deliberately selected 15 trip programs originating from the non-east to the east direction (n for non-easterners = 522; 49.42 % girls, 50.58 % boys) and 15 trips originating from the east to the non-east direction (n for easterners = 521; 47.41 % girls, 52.59 % boys). The 15 non-east originated trips represented five non-eastern geographical regions of Turkey (three trips originating from each region); 7 of them were directed towards a city in the South-eastern Anatolia Region and 8 towards a city in the Eastern Anatolia Region. The 15 east-originated trips also represented four non-eastern regions (except for the Aegean Region); 7 of them originated from a city in the Eastern Anatolia Region, and 8 of them from a

city in the Southeastern Anatolia Region. Paying attention to regional representativeness, we also reached a subset of the treatment group participants (140 non-easterners (55 % girls, 45 % boys) and 112 easterners (38.39 % girls, 61.61 % boys)) in T3 for the delayed post-test.

Participants' ages ranged from 11 to 15; the non-easterner adolescents ($M = 13.30$, $SD = 1.06$) were older than easterners ($M = 12.71$, $SD = .94$), $t(1026.27) = -9.57$, $p < .001$. Except for the two trip programs, participants' parental educational degree was assessed as an indication of their socioeconomic status. On a scale ranging from 1 = *illiterate/literate* and 5 = *university graduate*, the mean maternal and paternal education of easterners ($M = 1.95$, $SD = 1.06$) was significantly lower than that of non-easterners ($M = 3.06$, $SD = 1.20$), $t(961.75) = -15.14$, $p < .001$. The mean paternal education of easterners ($M = 2.88$, $SD = 1.20$) was also lower than that of non-easterners ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 1.21$), $t(928.63) = -7.33$, $p < .001$.

Control group participants

There are many Youth Centers located throughout Turkey, which are connected to the Ministry of Youth and Sports. Young people at different ages can register at those centers in their cities and experience certain educational and leisure-time activities there. We recruited attendants of those centers in certain cities as our control group for this study. There were 119 participants (41.18 % girls, 58.82 % boys) from eastern cities, and 124 participants (57.26 % girls, 42.74 % boys) from non-eastern cities. Those participants did not attend the "We are Anatolia" trips. However, their attitudes were probed regarding the people of a city to which a trip was arranged from their cities. They responded to the same questionnaires twice in a one-week period. We thus attained T1 and T2 data for the control group. However, we did not evaluate the control group participants in T3 due to the difficulty of accessing officials who could have helped us collect the data.

Sex distribution was equal in the treatment and control groups, $\chi^2(1) = .05$, $p > .05$. Among non-easterners, the mean age of the control group ($M = 13.23$, $SD = 1.04$) was equal to that of the treatment group ($M = 13.30$, $SD = 1.06$), $F(1, 1282) = .52$, $p > .05$. Yet, the eastern control participants ($M = 13.39$, $SD = 1.11$) were older than their treatment counterparts ($M = 12.71$, $SD = .94$), $F(1, 1282) = 45.61$, $p < .001$. Furthermore, the treatment and control groups were similar to each other regarding the participants' maternal ($F(1, 1196) = 1.44$, $p = .23$) and paternal educational status ($F(1, 1186) = 1.20$, $p = .27$).

Measures

In questioning the impact of intervention on visitor attitudes across different time points, we had three dependent variables, namely, readiness for social contact, psychological closeness, and general warmth towards the host city residents. Those specific variables were chosen to address different facets of prejudice. According to Tropp and Pettigrew (2004), there is a demarcation between affective (e.g., positive affect, negative affect, general warmth) and cognitive-evaluative components (e.g., stereotypes, social distance, intergroup beliefs) of prejudice. In this respect, our measure of contact intentions can be taken as a cognitive-evaluative indicator of intergroup attitudes, and the psychological closeness and general warmth measures as affective indicators of intergroup attitudes.

Contact intentions

Willingness to have social contact with the residents of host cities was evaluated via an adapted version of the Readiness for Social Contact Scale (Berger, Benatov, Abu-Raiya, & Tadmor, 2016). Participants' eagerness to do six different activities (e.g., bike riding, inviting him/her to share a meal) with a young person from the host city was evaluated on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all*; 6 = *very much so*). Cronbach's alphas for the scale were .88 in T1 and T2, and .89 in T3. Contact intention scores were calculated by averaging the scores on the six questions. Higher scores on this scale indicated greater readiness for social contact with the residents of host cities.

Psychological closeness

Psychological closeness felt towards the inhabitants of the host city was assessed via an adapted version of the Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS) scale by Aron, Aron, and Smollan (1992). Two separate items were developed: one item for the closeness between self and the students from the host city, and one item for the closeness between the students from one's hometown and the students from the host city. Participants were given 5 pairs of circles, each of which represented themselves (either their personal or collective self) and the students from the host city. The degree of overlap between circles varied, ranging from no overlap (indicating a lack of closeness) and nearly complete overlap (indicating high closeness). Since a high correlation existed between two items (r equals to .60 in T1, .71 in T2, and .62 in T3), we calculated a composite psychological closeness score by averaging them. Higher scores indicated greater inclusion of the host city people into the self.

Psychological warmth

Participants' warmth towards the residents of host cities was assessed via a feeling thermometer with 10-point intervals (Haddock, Zanna, & Esses, 1993), ranging from 0 (*cold feelings*) to 100 (*hot feelings*). Higher scores indicated greater warmth towards the residents of the host cities.

Procedure

Ethics approval was obtained from a local research ethics committee. Since participants were under the age of 18, parental permission forms were also collected before the study. The youth volunteers who were in charge of the trips helped us collect the

current data, and they were trained about ethical data collection procedures before the onset of the trips. Participants' names were not recorded; instead, they were given codes to match their data concerning different time points. To eliminate curious glances at one another's responses, participants were seated far enough apart. Participants were informed that participation in the study was voluntary, and their data would be kept confidential. If the youth volunteers suspected that responding to the study questions distressed the participants, the volunteers were instructed to stop the study. However, no such instances were encountered, most probably due to the fact that the questions were very general. We refrained from asking participants their ethnicity or using the term "easterners" [*Doğulular*] in the questions since it could be interpreted as discriminatory in a state-sponsored societal peace project.

Most data was collected online. For each trip program, the youth volunteers who were in charge of data collection were required to ascertain a quiet and computerized setting with internet access. Those settings were mostly the computer facilities in the hotels where the visitors stayed or in the youth centers of host cities.

Results

Analysis overview

This complex dataset was handled following these steps: (1) managing missing data and examining correlations among the study variables, (2) comparing the pre-test scores of the "We are Anatolia" participants and the control group, (3) computing effects sizes for the changes from T1 to T2, and (4) probing the long-term effect of the project.

Missing data management & Examination of correlations

There was a low level of attrition from T1 to T2. The percentage missing was lower than 1% across different trip programs and across different time points. Accordingly, the missing values were replaced with the series means of the related items. For the control group, the data emerging from different participants was included in the analysis set only when the data was existent for both T1 and T2. In the larger dataset composed of the treatment and control groups, all study variables in T1 were significantly correlated with each other ($p < .001$). Contact intentions were positively correlated with psychological warmth ($r = .41$) and closeness towards the host city residents ($r = .40$). These latter two variables were also positively correlated with each other ($r = .37$).

Comparison of the treatment and control groups at pre-test

Four separate 2 (Regional belonging: Non-easterners, Easterners) X 2 (Treatment status: Treatment, Control) factorial ANOVAs were held to compare the treatment and control group participants in terms of their baseline scores. Table 1 summarizes the means and standard deviations of the study variables in T1. Partial eta-squared values (η^2) were interpreted as effect sizes. According to Cohen (1988), η^2 values of .01, .06, and .14 represent small, medium, and large effect sizes, respectively.

The main effects of regional belonging ($F(1, 1282) = 18.39$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .01$) and of treatment status ($F(1, 1282) = 18.37$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .01$) were significant regarding contact intentions. The interaction term also yielded marginal significance, $F(1, 1282) = 3.59$, $p = .06$. Simple main effects analysis showed that there was no difference between the non-easterner treatment and control participants ($p = .10$). However, among easterners, the treatment participants had higher contact intentions towards the host city residents than the control group ($p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .01$). Additionally, there was no difference between easterners and non-easterners in the control group ($p = .18$) whereas the non-easterner treatment participants had lower levels of contact intentions than did the easterner treatment participants ($p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .04$). In examining the psychological closeness variable, the main effect of treatment status was not statistically significant, $F(1, 1282) = 3.19$, $p = .07$. But, the easterners' closeness towards non-easterners was higher than the non-easterners' closeness towards easterners, $F(1, 1282) = 33.91$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .04$. This effect was observed independent of the participants' treatment status, $F(1, 1282) = 1.41$, $p = .23$.

Regarding measurement of warmth towards the inhabitants of host city, the main effect of treatment status was not statistically significant, $F(1, 1282) = 2.69$, $p = .10$. However, the main effect of regional belonging ($F(1, 1282) = 22.03$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .02$) and the interaction term ($F(1, 1282) = 9.02$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .01$) were statistically significant. Simple main effects analysis revealed that the non-easterners' warmth towards easterners was comparable in the treatment and control groups ($p = .34$), but the easterners in the treatment group felt greater warmth towards non-easterners than did the easterners in the control group ($p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .01$). After changing the comparison dimension, we observed that there was no difference between easterners and non-easterners in the control group ($p = .35$). However, in the treatment group, easterners showed higher warmth towards the host city people than their non-easterner counterparts ($p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .06$).

Short-term impact of the intervention

We computed Pearson's correlation coefficients (r) and their confidence intervals to arrive at a conclusion about the magnitude of changes from T1 to T2. Table 1 also summarizes the t and r values, and r-related confidence intervals. According to Cohen (1992), r's of .10, .30, and .50 are considered as small, medium, and large effect sizes, respectively.

We observed only small to medium effect sizes for short-term changes in the treatment group. Regarding psychological closeness towards the host city people, the increase from T1 to T2 yielded small effect sizes for non-easterners ($r = .17$) and for all participants ($r = .14$). Similarly, non-easterners ($r = .25$) and the participants in general ($r = .16$) demonstrated an increase in their warmth towards

Table 1
Descriptive statistics concerning the pre-test and post-test scores of the treatment and control groups and the effect size estimates for the statistical analyses in relation to the study hypotheses.

Variables	Regional Belonging	Treatment Group (n for easterners = 521; n for non-easterners = 522)				Control Group (n for easterners = 124; n for non-easterners = 119)				Treatment – Control Group Difference
		Time 1 Mean (*SD*)	Time 2 Mean (*SD*)	*t* values	Pearson *r* [95% CI]	Time 1 Mean (*SD*)	Time 2 Mean (*SD*)	*t* values	Pearson *r* [95% CI]	*Z* score
Contact intentions	Easterners	5.25 (.82)	5.33 (.82)	3.05**	.07 [-.02, .15]	4.83 (1.10)	5.18 (.81)	2.95**	.11 [-.06, .28]	−.40
	Non-easterners	4.83 (.99)	4.84 (.94)	.22	.00 [-.08, .09]	4.67 (1.12)	4.74 (1.12)	.74	.03 [-.15, .21]	−.19
	Total	5.04 (.93)	5.09 (.92)	2.03*	.03 [-.03, .10]	4.75 (1.11)	4.97 (1.00)	2.78**	.08 [-.04, .21]	−.07
Psychological closeness	Easterners	3.66 (1.20)	3.91 (1.11)	5.57***	.11 [.03, .20]	3.61 (1.20)	3.40 (.10)	2.92**	.15 [-.03, .32]	−.40
	Non-easterners	3.27 (1.15)	3.62 (1.06)	8.03***	.17 [.08, .25]	3.02 (1.25)	3.22 (1.23)	1.90	.08 [-.01, .26]	.89
	Total	3.46 (1.19)	3.77 (1.10)	9.58***	.14 [.08, .20]	3.32 (1.26)	3.62 (1.18)	3.47***	.11 [-.02, .23]	.43
Psychological warmth	Easterners	81.41 (20.73)	84.58 (20.20)	3.48***	.07 [-.01, .16]	74.54 (22.71)	85.74 (16.28)	4.38***	.17 [-.01, .33]	−1.01
	Non-easterners	70.03 (20.07)	80.41 (18.78)	12.02***	.25 [.16, .33]	72.04 (21.64)	76.09 (20.97)	2.21*	.10 [-.08, .27]	1.51†
	Total	75.71 (21.18)	82.49 (19.61)	10.65***	.16 [.10, .22]	73.32 (22.18)	81.02 (19.30)	4.82***	.14 [.02, .26]	.29

Notes. SD = Standard deviation, CI = Confidence intervals. *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; † $p < .10$.

the host city residents with small effect sizes. For the treatment group, 5 of 9 confidence intervals were unreliable since they included zero or one of their bounds was close to zero. This outcome was the case for all of the confidence intervals calculated for the control group. These findings imply the absence of meaningful change in many of the study variables in both the treatment and control groups.

Applying the suggestions of Cohen and Cohen (1983), we converted *r* estimates into *z*-scores to test the significance of difference in effect sizes (Preacher, 2002). We compared the effect sizes for easterners and non-easterners to determine whether they equally benefitted from this intervention program. Non-easterners ($r = .25$) experienced a bigger change in terms of their warmth towards the host city residents than did easterners ($r = .07$), $z = 2.98$, $p < .01$. However, in relation to other constructs, the change scores of easterners and non-easterners did not differ from one other.

Additionally, in comparing effect sizes for the treatment and control groups, we only found a marginally significant difference in one instance out of 9 possible comparisons. The non-easterners in the treatment group showed a greater increase in their warmth towards the inhabitants of the host city than did the non-easterners in the control group ($z = 1.51$, $p = .06$). Thus, our hypothesis that the intervention group would demonstrate greater improvements in their attitudes towards the people of host cities more than the control group was not supported.

Long-term impact of the intervention

To evaluate the long-term impact of the present intervention, the data emerging from different time points were examined via four separate 2 (Regional belonging: Non-easterners, Easterners) X 3 (Time points: T1, T2, T3) mixed ANOVA analyses. Participants' means and standard deviations for the study variables, and the ANOVA results are shown in Table 2.

The results for contact intentions yielded neither a main effect of region ($p = .27$) nor an interaction effect between region and time ($p = .44$). In terms of examining psychological closeness towards the inhabitants of the host city, the main effect of time was significant and was qualified by an interaction effect. Simple main effects analysis showed that easterners and non-easterners did not differ from each other in terms of their psychological closeness scores in T1 and T2. However, in T3, psychological closeness of non-easterners was lower than that of easterners, $F(1, 250) = 15.12$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .06$. In addition, the non-easterners' closeness towards the people of eastern cities varied significantly across time, $F(2, 249) = 6.68$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .05$. Accordingly, their T1 scores were lower than their T2 and T3 scores. However, the difference between their T2 and T3 scores was not statistically significant. The easterners' scores at various time points also differed from one another, $F(2, 249) = 11.63$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .08$. The easterners' closeness towards the people of non-eastern cities showed an incremental pattern in time; their T1, T2, and T3 scores were statistically different from one other.

The main effect of time was significant in terms of warmth towards the host city residents. However, this effect depended on participants' regional belonging. Simple main effects analysis revealed that T1 scores of easterners were greater than those of non-easterners, $F(1, 250) = 24.69$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .09$. Similarly, T3 scores of easterners were greater than those of non-easterners, $F(1, 250) = 16.92$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .06$. However, easterners and non-easterners exhibited comparable T2 scores. Additionally, the non-

Table 2
Changes in the study variables across different time periods according to participants' living regions and the results for mixed ANOVAs.

Variables	Regional Belonging	Change in Time			Main Effect for Time	Interaction for Time x Region
		Time 1 Mean (*SD*)	Time 2 Mean (*SD*)	Time 3 Mean (*SD*)		
Contact intentions	Easterners	5.24 (.82)	5.30 (.80)	5.36 (.76)	$F(1.79, 447.2) = 1.30$ $\eta^2 = .00$	$F(1.79, 447.2) = .80$ $\eta^2 = .00$
	Non-easterners	4.70 (.99)	4.61 (1.04)	4.74 (.90)		
	Total	4.94 (.96)	4.92 (1.00)	5.01 (.89)		
Psychological closeness	Easterners	3.41 (1.23)	3.70 (1.08)	4.02 (1.00)	$F(1.90, 474.89) = 16.95^{***}$ $\eta^2 = .06$	$F(1.90, 474.89) = 3.16^{*}$ $\eta^2 = .01$
	Non-easterners	3.25 (1.26)	3.59 (1.18)	3.54 (.95)		
	Total	3.32 (1.24)	3.64 (1.13)	3.76 (1.00)		
Psychological warmth	Easterners	80.62 (20.68)	82.05 (20.23)	87.05 (17.69)	$F(2, 500) = 16.99^{***}$ $\eta^2 = .06$	$F(2, 500) = 3.60^{*}$ $\eta^2 = .01$
	Non-easterners	68.04 (19.40)	77.14 (20.99)	78.09 (16.79)		
	Total	73.63 (20.90)	79.32 (20.76)	82.07 (17.73)		

Notes. There were 112 easterners and 140 non-easterners in this subset. *SD* = Standard deviation. *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

easterners' warmth towards the people of eastern cities varied significantly across time, $F(2, 249) = 17.52$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .12$. T1 scores of non-easterners were lower than their T2 and T3 scores. However, there was no significant difference between their T2 and T3 scores. Similarly, the easterners' warmth towards the people of non-eastern cities significantly varied in time, $F(2, 249) = 4.59$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .04$. While their T1 and T2 scores were comparable, these two scores were significantly lower than their T3 scores.

Except for contact intentions, participants seemed to preserve their short-term attitude change gains in T3. According to the benchmarks provided by Cohen (1988), the results indicated small to medium effect sizes for the changes across time.

Discussion

The current study presents a highly detailed picture about the effectiveness of a tourism-based intervention targeting adolescents. Except for contact intentions, this intervention seemed to improve attitudes towards the host city residents with small to medium effect sizes in the short run. This positive impact held true especially for the non-easterners. All participants maintained their short-term gains three months after the trips. However, contrary to our expectations, almost none of those short-term improvements observed in the treatment group were higher than those observed in the control group.

Implications of geographical belonging evident in the pre-test scores

This project has been launched with a concern about socio-cultural distance between the residents of eastern and non-eastern Turkey. We expected to observe the traces of this social division in the pre-test scores. A quick glance over those scores indicates that the non-easterners' attitudes towards easterners were less positive than the easterners' attitudes towards non-easterners. However, we should note that the means of the current study variables were greater than the mid-points of the related scales, and the effect sizes concerning the east vs. non-east differences were small. In addition, we questioned participants' attitudes about the residents of specific eastern or non-eastern cities but not their general attitudes towards the "easterners". Accordingly, on the basis of current findings, it might not be suitable to conclude about the presence of negative attitudes against the eastern inhabitants in general.

Interestingly, easterners in the treatment group expressed greater contact intentions and warmth towards the host city residents than their non-easterner counterparts. However, such a difference was not observed in the control group. Trip excursions seemed to motivate easterners more than non-easterners in this project. Why this project differentially motivated participants from disparate regions might be related to the large socioeconomic differences between eastern and non-eastern Turkey (Saraçoğlu, 2010), which is also evident in the demographical data of the current study. It is likely that the eastern adolescents considered participating into this project as a lifetime experience due to their financial constraints. On the other hand, it is also quite possible that it was challenging to motivate non-easterners via an east-directed trip opportunity given the fact that non-easterners saw "the East" as less modern, developed, civilized, and secure than the relatively western regions of Turkey (Peker-Dural et al., 2018; Tuzkaya et al., 2015; Yorulmaz & Hazar, 2018).

Effectiveness of the intervention program in improving attitudes

Looking at the significance of the pre- and post-test differences in the treatment group, one can propose that this intervention program was successful in changing the attitudes of visitors regarding the inhabitants of the host city. However, the current study yielded highly negligible effect sizes for the changes in the treatment group, and those changes were not higher than the changes observed in the control group. Accordingly, this intervention program can be concluded to be ineffective in fulfilling its goals. However, this assertion might be inaccurate given the fact that the present participants were highly positive about the inhabitants of

the host city before the start of trips. Nyaupane, Teye, and Paris (2008) demonstrate that it was difficult to achieve an attitude change at the end of a touristic encounter when visitors had high expectations about host communities. Similarly, due to the operation of ceiling effect, this intervention program might have been destined to fall short of exceeding highly positive pre-trip attitudes of its attendants.

Unpreventable disparities between the interacting groups in the tourism context might have also overshadowed the success of this project. It is always difficult to establish equality in face-to-face contact given the fact that status signaling cues such as language, dress, or body language are subtly communicated between interacting parties (Amichai-Hamburger & McKenna, 2006). This phenomenon is also a highly relevant problem in touristic encounters (Tomljenovic, 2010). Moreover, tourism-related services (e.g., accommodation, food service, transportation, and guided tours) are naturally offered by the local people, and this factor also increases the salience of status difference between the visitors and host community members (Nyaupane et al., 2008; Tomljenovic, 2010).

Even though pre-programmed direct contact opportunities were added into the trip programs, host-tourist interactions in this project were still very brief and casual. This factor might also account for obtaining small effect sizes concerning the magnitude of attitude change in the current study. To increase the quality of contact, the contact experiences of visitors can be enriched by other promising peace tools, such as peer dialogue. For instance, daily evaluation meetings can be retailored as a one-shot intergroup dialogue activity wherein equal numbers of visitor and host adolescents discover their within- and between-group differences concerning their cultural identities accompanied by adult facilitators.

The current intervention yielded the most positive effect on the non-easterner participants in terms of their psychological closeness and warmth towards the host city people. Given the meta-analytical evidence that the strongest contact-prejudice relationship was evident on affect-based measures (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2004), it is understandable why we could not observe a meaningful change in their contact intentions. According to Hodson (2011), direct contact might be more beneficial for highly prejudiced individuals than for non-prejudiced individuals. Since the non-easterner participants were less positive towards the host city residents than their easterner counterparts in the present study, the impact of this project might be more visible on them. Given the fact the easterner migrants are seen as unwanted populations in the western regions of Turkey (Saraçoğlu, 2010); the current project might have provided the non-easterner attendants with positive contact opportunities with easterners (even perhaps for the first time).

What is more, this project was held in the language of the dominant group in Turkey (i.e., Turkish). However, it is well-known that non-easterners are more proficient in expressing themselves in Turkish than easterners, and easterners (especially Kurds) generally use Turkish with an ethnic accent in Turkey (Polat & Schallert, 2013). The lack of mastery in contact language might create a contact asymmetry between groups and therefore lead to intergroup anxiety for minority members (Amichai-Hamburger, Hasler, & Shani-Sherman, 2015). Similarly, the easterners' ability to properly express themselves in contact situations might have also been diminished in this project. In addition, during intercultural exchanges, the present easterner participants might have also experienced an "unwanted attention" (p. 77) due to their inescapable differences (e.g., ethnic accent), an experience which has constantly threatened young Kurds' sense of belonging, caused various of forms of exclusion, and triggered their feelings of disappointment and distress (Isci-Pembeci, 2019). In this respect, probable suboptimal contact conditions for easterners might also account for why they did not benefit from this project as much as did non-easterners.

Additionally, since the present project was designed and implemented by the Ministry of Youth and Sports of Turkish Republic, there is a merit in discussing setbacks originating from state-sponsored projects. Given the objective of improving intergroup relations between easterner and non-easterner adolescents in Turkey, a constant emphasis throughout the project was upon common ingroup identity (i.e., Anatolian-ness), intergroup similarities, and positive exchanges between groups. In consideration of the socio-political conjecture in Turkey, the main concern behind such an emphasis might be the anxiety that salience of subgroup identities might increase intergroup divisions. This reason also explains why we refrained from asking participants their ethnic identities or birthplaces. However, we would have been offering more robust implications regarding the geographical identities in Turkey if we had had more detailed demographic information about the participants.

In addressing probable setbacks of state-sponsored projects, it is also important to consider the Kurdish issue since the "East" has been constantly identified with Kurdish ethnicity (Öncü, 2011). There are three dominant conflict frameworks about the Kurdish conflict in Turkey (Çelik & Blum, 2007). A first understanding, namely, the terrorism framework, states that the conflict arises from the tension between the Turkish state and a rebellious group, PKK (Partiya Karkêren Kurdistan – Kurdistan Workers Party). The minority rights framework as a second understanding defines the conflict as one between the Turkish state and an oppressed group (i.e., Kurds) living in the southeastern Turkey. As a last understanding, the ethnic tension framework defines this conflict as one between two ethnic groups, namely, Turks and Kurds. Even though Kurds were found to perceive the conflict in the terrorism and ethnic tension frameworks rather than the minority rights perspective, they still attributed responsibility to the state for the ongoing conflict (Çelebi et al., 2014). Given the intricate relationship between Kurds and the state, some Kurdish families might have been eager to allow their children to join in the "We are Anatolia" since they perceive this project as a "responsible action" taken by the state in alleviating ethnic tension. However, it is also equally possible that some other Kurds (especially with the minority rights framework) might have been distant towards this state-sponsored project since they perceive such attempts "as 'charity', or 'gifts', of the state's paternalist policy, rather than genuine recognition of the Kurdish people and their identity" (Christofis, 2019, p. 254). Relatedly, the findings of the present study might have been negatively influenced by how participants interpreted the Kurdish conflict. Since we did not know the participants' ethnicity or the political positions of their families, it is difficult to estimate the impact of such setbacks on the present findings. Yet, given the highly positive intergroup attitude scores of the current participants, such an impact might be limited with regards to local identities. Although there are potential drawbacks of state-sponsored peace interventions in Turkey, Paluck et al. (2021) recommend researchers collaborate with large scale implementing partners (such as government initiatives or universities) since such collaborations might enable researchers to conduct larger field research, test rigorous theoretical ideas on the ground, and

reliably detect the impact of the program components. In this respect, "We are Anatolia" can be considered as a good initiative with several practical and theoretical outputs.

Certain steps can be taken in further applications of this intervention program in increasing its benefits for both easterners and non-easterners equally. Beelmann and Heinemann (2014) emphasize the benefits of actively including some elements of socio-cognitive training to complement or support direct intergroup contact, especially in interventions with elementary school children. Accordingly, prospective participants can be given brief psycho-social educations before the trips to promote empathy and openness to diversity. Additionally, short booklets about destination places, host communities, and their cultural assets can be prepared given the evidence that such informative booklets distributed to visitors before trips increase tourists' openness to novel information during trips (Amir & Ben-Ari, 1985). Those booklets can also be used a means towards vicarious contact in this project by including positive contact stories of the previous project attendants. Also, according to Rouhana and Korper (1997), intervention programs cannot be sufficiently successful unless they deal with the asymmetrical contact situations between groups. Previous studies indicate the benefits of self-efficacy trainings in coping with negative intergroup experiences for low-status group members (e.g., Banaji, Baron, Dunham, & Olson, 2008). Given this evidence, in order to counteract the negative effects of probable asymmetrical contact situations for the easterner adolescents, the project organizers can also provide easterners with self-efficacy training. Lastly, the impartiality of a third party is critical for gaining the trust of interacting groups, and, consequently, for the success of an intervention (Fisher, 1983). Since the state might not have been perceived as a sufficiently impartial agent for some of the project participants, designing this project as a neutral third-party intervention can also increase its success.

Despite the presence of various threats to positive touristic encounters, we should underline the fact that the "We are Anatolia" participants did not experience any deterioration in their pre-test scores following the trips. This finding might reflect the success of this project in overcoming the possibility of negative contact experiences during tourist encounters and warranting at least non-threatening contact setting for the participants. We hope that future program developers could benefit from the experiences of tourism in building up more harmonious societies.

Long-term impacts of the current intervention

Present findings show that all participants retained their short-term gains during T3 in terms of their psychological closeness and warmth towards the host city peoples. However, since the treatment group participants experienced negligible short term benefits (independent of and relative to the control groups) and we had no control group data for T3, our findings suffer from ruling out history or maturation effects in relation to long-term impact of the project. Yet, given the scarcity about the long-term impact of peace interventions (Berger et al., 2016), our findings are still valuable in tracing the persistency of positive impacts.

Interestingly, the T3 scores of easterners were even greater than their T2 scores. Such an incremental pattern was not observed for non-easterners. Given the prevalence of internal migration from east to west in Turkey (from rural cities to western metropolises; Saraçoğlu, 2010); compared to non-easterners, it is possible that easterners in the current sample were more impressed by the trips, and they more frequently shared their positive trip stories with others in the post-test periods. This response might explain why they showed improvements in their attitudes, even in the long run.

Limitations of the study

The current study has many caveats as well. For example, even though the amount and quality of visitor-host contact were critical in explaining the impact of touristic encounters (Günlü et al., 2015; Pizam et al., 2002), we did not address them in this study.

Our control group data represented attitudes about the residents of only one third of the hosting cities in which the trip programs were held. Therefore, we did not arrange control groups for all trips included in this study. This deficiency might have hindered us in making a healthy comparison between the treatment and control groups. Besides, even though we merged all data into two sets (east vs. non-east), our dependent variables represented the attitudes of adolescents who were living in different eastern and non-eastern cities about the residents of different eastern and non-eastern cities. This situation might have also decreased the power of the current statistical analyses.

Pearce and his colleagues (Pearce, 2010; Pearce & Packer, 2013) criticize measuring attitude change in tourists via structured questions and numerical formats. They underscore the possibility that tourists cannot develop a simple view about complex issues following their trips and therefore can fabricate answers in standard Likert-type scale questions even though they do not possess well-structured ideas. Since a great majority of the participants (95.6 %) visited the destination cities for the first time, this brief trip might not have been effective enough for them to establish well-grounded attitudes about the host city residents. The tourism researchers suggest paying attention to tourists' travel stories (e.g., contact experiences, simple observations about local people, magical trip moments) upon which they build their attitudes (Noy, 2004; Pearce, 2010; Pearce & Packer, 2013). Those travel stories are re-imagined and re-told to others many times following trips; such a repetitive re-telling transforms their direct experiences into solid data in travelers' minds, and eventually shapes their attitude positions (Pearce, 2010). Relatedly, in addition to the standardized Likert scale measures, future studies can qualitatively question the travel stories of attendants, especially in the long run. Those stories might also help researchers eliciting influential independent variables in explaining the intervention-related changes.

To conclude, on the basis of the present findings, we can underline the merit in addressing geographical identities in Turkey. Given the non-easterners' relatively less positive attitudes towards easterners, geographical identities might be acting as a potential source of intergroup bias, and thus the salient east-west dichotomy awaits another field of psycho-social interventions in Turkey. We hope future program developers can benefit from our suggestions about tourism-based interventions and apply similar interventions in other

situations or for other groups as well.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author [H.E.].

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Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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