

AWARENESS LEVEL OF STUDENTS TOWARDS RURAL TOURISM: A CASE STUDY FROM AZERBAIJAN STATE UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the situation of rural tourism in Azerbaijan, its impact on rural development and the rural tourism awareness levels among the students. The research was carried out with 418 students in the Agricultural Economics Department of Azerbaijan State Agricultural University in the academic year of 2018-2019. Data were analysed using SPSS 24.0 statistical software. T-test and one-way analysis of variance, Tukey test was used for the analysis of the independent samples. Research determined that there was no statistically significant difference between the age, school level and monthly total household income variables while the rural tourism awareness level of the students differed significantly according to their gender, place of residence, mother and father occupational status. Students' holiday habits were also examined in the second part and their participation in statements related to rural tourism was analysed in the third part of the research. It is concluded that Azerbaijan has rich rural tourism potential and can be an important source of income if used correctly and will increase employment opportunities. However, it has been observed that there were problems with infrastructure, transportation, promotion and financing in rural tourism and that the work of the Ministry of Tourism was insufficient. Communication and cooperation between the institutions affiliated to the Ministry were weak. Rural tourism has been accused of accelerating cultural change and environmental problems.

Key words: rural tourism, alternative tourism, Azerbaijan, university students, ecological tourism

INTRODUCTION

Tourism serves an important role in the economic development of every country. Various activities from tourism sector produce more jobs, reduce poverty and promote development in the local economy of the country. Accordingly, the rapid development of rural tourism has been observed in the most region of the world including areas in animal husbandry, folk art and historical artifacts. The unique feature of this type of tourism is that all the necessary resources for tourists are found in the countryside [3].

In rural tourism, tourists are in contact with nature for some time and have the opportunity to experience all aspects of rural life such as local people's way of living, local folklore, traditions, and rural festivals [16].

In the study carried out by European Union (EU) rural tourism is defined as "Activities

that are carried out in small settlements, including small enterprises providing accommodation, food drinks and other services to tourists whose aim is to unwind and to have a good time with the agricultural or local values" [24].

The participation rate in rural tourism is increasing year by year. Alongside, rural tourism which takes place in the countryside has started to develop in a very wide area, instead of being limited to certain seasons and activities which only promotes natural beauties [1].

In the World Tourism literature, rural tourism is described with different names, such as farm tourism, village tourism, highland tourism, agricultural tourism and eco-tourism. Rural tourism is expressed in so many different ways because of the lack of common consensus on the scope of rural tourism. [7] [16] [17].

Rural tourism can be described in a simple manner as “Type of tourism which is carried out in rural areas” [18]. According to another common definition, rural tourism is a multi-purpose journey to rural areas with relatively untouched ecosystems that directly contribute to the solution of problems in rural areas and are subject to sustainable development based management [20]. Hence, according to a more comprehensive definition “Rural tourism includes various activities, services and facilities to attract tourists to their regions in order to generate more income for the businesses put up by the farmers and villagers” [12].

Today, the ultimate goal of rural development is to improve the quality of life of rural people [6]. One of its most important duties is the economic development of the village and the countryside together with the dynamic growth of the country's economy. First of all, it is necessary to reduce the migration of the local people into the cities, especially the young population and solve the differences between the living standards of the urban and rural population. The tourism industry can contribute greatly to the development of rural areas. In fact, one of the promising areas for the development of the tourism industry is rural tourism [3][13].

Thus, internal migration is not the only reason why economies shift to rural tourism for rural development. The aim is often to attract more intense pressure on coastal tourism to rural areas or to create new opportunities by evaluating the potential of the available resource in rural areas due to the limited nature that can be offered in the coastal regions [23].

People living in rural areas normally have low incomes, poor working conditions, high unemployment rate and more seasonal jobs. The rural community has naturally increased its interest in rural tourism, which creates an additional source of income for them. The main objective here is to help balancing the distribution of revenues throughout the year among rural communities and the country's economy. Undoubtedly, the welfare of the

rural population has a positive effect on the welfare of the country [5][21].

Therefore, it is necessary to separate the negative and positive effects of rural tourism on the natural environment and examine them separately. At first, the people of the region will possibly be affected as tourism leads to the development of rural infrastructure. Furthermore, after the village lands will be open for tourism, people living in this area will exert more efforts to protect the natural environment of the land after the understanding the negative effects of a dirty environment on village tourism[22].

Rural tourism creates various socio-cultural influences in every individual and the society such as changes in value systems, personal behaviors, family relationships, common living styles, security levels, ethics, traditional ceremonies and social organization[19].

Although, positive and negative effect of tourism on nature and socio-cultural environment are factual. Rural tourism is the most supportive of nature and environment protection. In addition, preservation of nature and cultural heritage is essential for the sustainability of rural tourism [19]. In order to prevent and save the deterioration of the existing natural environment in Europe, the tourists accepted to the villages is limited to specific count and the intensity of the transitory tourist is tried to be prevented [25].

Purpose of the research

In this research, answers to the following questions will be searched.

- (i) Is the rural tourism awareness level of students significantly different from gender?
- (ii) Does the level of rural tourism awareness of students show a significant difference according to age, school level and monthly household income?
- (iii) Does the level of rural tourism awareness of students show a significant difference according to the place of residence?
- (iv) Does the level of rural tourism awareness of the students differ significantly according to the parent's occupation?
- (v) What are the existing holiday habits of students?

- (vi) What is the level of rural tourism awareness of students?
- (vii) What do students think about the impact of rural tourism on the environment and cultural structure?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this study, the questionnaire was accepted as data collection tool and the scale developed by Doğan and Üngüren was adapted in doing the hypothesis of this research [4]. There are 29 questions in the survey and the questionnaire consists of 3 sections. In the first part, demographic questions such as gender, age, school level, place of residence, parents occupation were included. The second part of the questionnaire contains 5 open-ended questions, one of which includes students' holiday habits. The last part of the questionnaire consists of 18 opinions from students' perceptions and levels of awareness about rural tourism. These opinions: 1=Strongly Disagree – 5=Strongly Agree was prepared using five-point Likert Scale. The main mass of the research is composed of the students from 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th year of the Agricultural Economics Department in the Agricultural State University of Azerbaijan.

The questionnaires were given to the students in the class and it was carried out on 19th-23rd of November 2018 under the supervision of the instructor. A total of 418 students were targeted. It was determined that 18 of the questionnaire forms obtained from the questionnaire applied to 418 students studying in the department were incomplete and incorrectly filled and therefore not taken into consideration. As a result, it was observed that 400 questionnaire forms were suitable for statistical analysis and were evaluated.

For the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's Alpha reliability value was found to be $\alpha = 0.70$ and it was accepted that the data were reliable. The data were analyzed with the help of SPSS-24 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) program.

Data analysis

Firstly, Shapiro-Wilk test was applied to determine whether the data were able to show normal distribution. When interpreting

the results, the significance level was accepted as 0.05 and the data were found to be normal ($p = 0.603$). Since the normal distribution was determined, parametric tests were preferred. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was used to analyze whether there was a statistically significant difference among the variables that are used; such as students' place of residence, school level, monthly household income, parents occupation, perceptions about rural tourism and levels of participation in expressing their (students) awareness.

Tukey HSD test was used to determine the source of this difference in the cases where there were differences in the result of the test. Independent samples t-test was applied to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between the students' gender variable with their perception of rural tourism and their level of participation in expressing their level of awareness.

The findings were evaluated at 95% confidence interval and 5% significance level.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Students' Demographic Characteristics

Table 1, gives information about the demographic characteristics of the students participating in the survey.

The gender distribution of the respondents were observed to be 61% male and 39% female.

It can also be observed that 30% of the respondents was taken in the first year, 30% in the second year, 31.25% in the third year and only 8.75% in the fourth year level.

When the distribution of students according to their places of residence was examined, it shows that 18.8% of the students reside in the village, 13.5% of them live in the town and 67.8% of them live in the city.

When we look at the age ranges of the students, 20% are 18 years old and younger, then, 40% belong to 19-20 age range, 32.5% in 20-21 age range, 23-24 age range comprises only 4.5%, while 25 years and older got the lowest contribution of only 3%.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Variables	Groups	n	%
Gender	Male	244	61
	Female	156	39
	Total	400	100
Age range	≥18	80	20
	19-20	160	40
	21-22	130	32.5
	23-24	18	4.5
	25≤	12	3
Class	Total	400	100
	1st year	120	30
	2nd year	120	30
	3rd year	125	31.25
	4th year	35	8.75
Place of residence	Total	400	100
	Village	75	18.8
	Town	54	13.5
	City	271	67.8

Source: Own Calculation.

Levels of awareness on rural tourism among students based on their gender.

In the research, the rural tourism awareness levels of the agricultural economics students were examined first in terms of gender distribution. T-test was performed in order to determine whether there was a significant difference between the two variables. According to the results of the analysis in Table 3, there was a significant difference between the respondents' gender and the level of awareness on rural tourism ($t(398) = -2.976, p = 0.003$). The rural arithmetic mean of males is ($\bar{x}=69.91$), while the female students is ($\bar{x}=72.87$). This finding shows that the level of perception and awareness of female students about rural tourism is higher than that of the male students.

Table 2. T-test analysis of gender variable and rural tourism awareness levels.

Gender	N	Mean	Std.D	df	T	Sig.
Male	244	69.91	9.60	398	-2.976	0.003*
Female	156	72.87	9.85			

*p<0.05

Source: Own Calculation.

In related literature, Çuhadar and Unalın stated in their research that there is a significant difference between the students' gender and rural participation level about the perception of rural tourism among the undergraduate tourism students ($p = 0.008 < 0.05$)[2].

In line with research of Cuhadar and Unalın, the findings of the study indicate that the levels of rural tourism awareness of the

students are differentiated according to their gender.

Levels of rural tourism awareness among students according to their age, school level and monthly household income variables.

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to determine whether there was a significant difference between rural tourism awareness levels among students with their age, school level and monthly total household income variables. The results are presented below.

Table 3. ANOVA test of the difference between the level of awareness of students towards rural tourism according to age, school level and monthly total household income variable.

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Age	Between Groups	889.25	4	222.31	2.351	0.054
	Within Groups	37349.93	395	94.56		
	Toplam	38239.18	399			
Class	Between Groups	300.62	3	100.21	1.046	0.372
	Within Groups	37938.56	396	95.80		
	Toplam	38239.18	399			
Monthly total household income	Between Groups	572.97	4	143.24	1.502	0.201
	Within Groups	37666.21	395	95.36		
	Toplam	38239.18	399			

Source: Own Calculation.

As a result of the analysis, no significant difference was found between the age ($F_{(4-395)}=2.351; p= 0.054 > 0.05$), school level ($F_{(3-396)}=1.046; p=0.372 > 0.05$) and monthly total household income ($F_{(4-395)}=2.351; p=0.201 > 0.05$) variables of the students. This finding can be interpreted that the variables do not have an effect on students' opinions and ideas about rural tourism.

Çuhadar and Unal found in their research about perception on rural tourism among Tourism undergraduate students that there was no statistically significant difference between the level of awareness and the year level they were currently attending [2]. The levels of rural tourism awareness of students do not differ according to their year level in school. The present research findings are in line with the findings of the study conducted by Cuhadar and Unal.

Levels of rural tourism awareness of the students according to their place of residency.

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine whether there was a significant difference between rural tourism awareness levels and place of residence variable of Agricultural Economics students (Table 4).

Table 4. ANOVA and Tukey test results of The level of awareness of students on rural tourism according to their place of residence.

Variables	N	\bar{X}	Std.D
(1)Village	75	68.47	9.50
(2)Town	54	74.37	10.96
(3)City	271	71.13	9.45
Total	400	71.07	9.79

	SS	Df	MS	F	Sig.	difference (Tukey)
BetweenGroups	1097.44	2	548.72	5.865	0.003*	
Within Groups	37141.74	397	93.56			1-2
Total	38239.18	399				

*p<0.05

Source: Own Calculation.

According to Table 4 ($F_{(2-397)}=5.865$, $p=0.003<0.05$), it is determined that the place of residence makes a meaningful difference in terms of students' awareness of rural tourism. Post-Hoc-Tukey test was used to determine the source of this difference. According to the results of the test, there was a significant difference between the mean scores of the students living in the village ($\bar{x}=68.47$) and those who live in town area ($\bar{x}=74.37$) in terms of their level of awareness about rural tourism. This result can be interpreted as the students residing in the town are more being conscious than those of the students residing in the village. Çuhadar and Unal also found in their study that there were no statistically significant differences between the distribution of participation of the respondents [2]. As a result, the recent findings acknowledge the study conducted by Çuhadar and Unal which showed that the level of rural tourism awareness of the students differed according to their places of residence.

Level of rural tourism awareness of the students according to the parent's occupation.

The results of ANOVA and Tukey tests was presented in Table 5, to determine whether there is a significant difference between the level of rural tourism awareness of the students from the Department of Agricultural Economics and their father's profession.

Table 5. ANOVA and Tukey test results for the difference between the fathers' occupation and the level of awareness of students towards rural tourism.

Variables	N	Mean	Std.D
(1)Farmer	37	70.03	7.53
(2)Officer	67	67.79	10.01
(3)Worker	188	71.80	9.93
(4)Artisan	60	72.00	9.01
(5)Retired	48	72.42	10.68
Total	400	71.07	9.79

Varyans kaynağı	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.	difference (Tukey)
Between Groups	999.14	4	249.79	2.649	0.033*	
Within Groups	37240.03	395	94.28			2-3
Total	38239.18	399				

*p<0.05

Source: Own Calculation.

According to the results of the Post Hoc Tukey test ($F_{(4-395)}=2.649$, $p=0.033<0.05$), it was determined that the father's occupation has a meaningful difference in terms of students' awareness about rural tourism. According to the results of the test, a significant difference was found between the students whose fathers were civil servants ($\bar{x}=67.79$) and the students whose fathers were workers ($\bar{x}=71.80$). This result can be interpreted that the students whose fathers are workers are more knowledgeable about rural tourism.

Table 6. ANOVA and Tukey test results for the difference between the mothers' occupation and the level of awareness of students towards rural tourism.

Variables	N	Mean	Std.D
(1)Housewife	223	72.26	9.67
(2) Officer	37	66.14	9.54
(3) Worker	120	71.47	9.38
(4) Artisan	8	67.00	11.81
(5) Retired	12	62.92	7.28
Total	400	71.07	9.79

	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.	difference (Tukey)
Between Groups	2163.64	4	540.91	5.923	0.001*	1-2 1-5
Within Groups	36075.54	395	91.33			2-3 2-5
Total	38239.18	399				

*p<0.05

Source: Own Calculation.

Using the same test as the previous variables, when we look upon the results ($F_{(4-395)}=5.923$, $p=0.001<0.05$), The mothers' occupation also has a meaningful difference in terms of the level of awareness of the students. According to the Tukey test, it was found that the students whose mother are housewives ($\bar{x}=72.26$) are more concious about rural tourism than those whose mother are civil servants ($\bar{x}=66.14$) and retired ($\bar{x}=62.92$). When we look at the mean result, a significant difference was found in favor of the students

whose mothers are workers ($\bar{x}=71.47$) than those whose mothers are civil servant ($\bar{x}=66.14$) and retired ($\bar{x}= 62.92$).

Current holiday habits of the students from Agricultural Economics Department

In the second part of the questionnaire, five questions were asked, one of which was open-ended, in order to understand the students' holiday making habits and their awareness about rural tourism.

The students were asked whether they do a regular holiday and 52% said yes while 48% stated they don't. Meanwhile, when the students were asked what was the important thing to do during the holiday, 41.5% answered "to relax and to have fun" and nearly a quarter (24.8%) of the respondents said "seeing new things". Then, respectively, 16% stated "to visit families and relatives", 11.3% said "to learn new cultures" and only 6.3% answered, "to adopt new hobbies". When the question on what tourism activities they have participated so far was raised, 37.8% of the respondents answered "nature tourism", 26.3% water tourism, 12.8% mentioned "agricultural-based tourism".

However, when the students were asked what are the activities they know in rural tourism, the responds' percentage was quite low. Some of the students were either had not answered or gave an incomplete respond. After the elimination of inadequate responses, the remaining answers were grouped and four categories were obtained. 43.8% of the students answered this question as for nature activities, 18% as economic activities, 8% as agricultural activities and 5% as cultural activities. Most nature activities include rural tourism activities. In fact, 43.8% of the students answered "nature activities" to the question of what are the activities of rural tourism. Indeed, Nature activities include rural tourism but are more extensive and not all activities in nature are defined as rural tourism. It is observed that the students recognized the nature activities and rural tourism as the same. In addition, rural tourism activities are perceived only as agricultural activities in villages. Almost half of the students perceive nature activities as rural

tourism activities and 8% of them anticipated it as agricultural activities.

Level of awareness on rural tourism among the students of the Department of Agricultural Economics

Table 7. Students' opinion on rural tourism and their level of participation in these statements (n=400).

Opinions	F					Average	Std.S
	1	2	3	4	5		
Qualified labor force is needed in rural tourism.	27	29	14	125	205	4.13	1.20
The development of transportation facilities in Azerbaijan is important for rural tourism.	29	28	26	139	178	4.02	1.20
Investments need to be increased in order to develop rural tourism in Azerbaijan.	44	17	16	156	167	3.96	1.27
Rural tourism can be an important source of income in Azerbaijan.	11	61	37	128	163	3.93	1.16
Azerbaijan has rich potential in the field of rural tourism.	15	49	37	169	130	3.88	1.11
Rural tourism changes the cultural structure of the people living in the region.	35	19	61	170	115	3.78	1.17
I think that rural tourism will produce more employment opportunities in Azerbaijan.	44	50	57	156	93	3.51	1.28
Financing opportunities for rural tourism are limited.	45	75	56	117	107	3.42	1.35
Through rural tourism, I believe that women living in the countryside of Azerbaijan will be strengthened.	36	40	98	177	49	3.41	1.11
Environmental problems are increasing in rural tourism-concentrated regions.	42	52	103	146	57	3.31	1.18
People and all sectors must participate in the success of rural tourism.	43	70	94	122	71	3.27	1.25
The people of Azerbaijan pay enough attention to rural tourism.	47	103	109	95	46	2.98	1.20
The presentation of the natural cultural richness of Azerbaijan is sufficient.	92	97	72	78	61	2.8	1.39
There are sufficient and effective cooperation and communication between the main organizations and units of the province for the development of rural tourism in Azerbaijan	85	157	66	68	24	2.47	1.17
Azerbaijani people are aware of rural tourism.	102	150	60	71	17	2.38	1.17
Rural tourism can only be successful through the efforts of the Ministry of Tourism.	127	130	67	29	47	2.35	1.31
There are no significant infrastructure problems in the rural tourism of Azerbaijan.	84	191	61	47	17	2.31	1.06
Specialized travel agencies dealing with the types of rural tourism are sufficient.	127	154	72	30	17	2.14	1.08

1: Strongly disagree 2: Disagree 3: Undecided 4: Agree 5: Strongly Agree

Source: Own Calculation.

One of the most important goals for Azerbaijan is to minimize the dependence of the economy on oil and to ensure the

economic development of rural areas. Hence, one of the tasks that need to be done is the development of rural tourism. There are 4,260 villages in Azerbaijan. The development of rural tourism is of great importance in the villages on the highland and foothills, in order to provide additional income to the people working in the agricultural sector. There are geographic and climatic conditions that need to be considered to develop rural tourism in many regions of the country. These regions are surrounded by high mountains, beautiful forests, mountain rivers, and waterfalls. Nature together with rich food culture makes these regions more attractive and important. However, a very small share of the current potential is used [11]. 74.8% of the students confirm that Azerbaijan has rich rural tourism potential ($\bar{x}=3.88$).

Austria is a country with an area of 83,000 square kilometers in Central Europe. The population is almost equal to the population of Azerbaijan. However, Austria's annual tourism income is over \$ 20 billion. Another example is Norway, an oil country. The country's oil production is twice than Azerbaijan. However, their annual income from tourism is over \$ 6 billion. According to Norwegian scientists, the income provided by a tourist to the state is higher than the income from 3 tons of oil sales. Generally, tourism and one of its type "rural tourism" potential can be an important source of income for Azerbaijan in the future. As a sign of being aware of this situation, the students showed a participation rate of 72.8% ($\bar{x}=3.93$).

There are several approaches to the development of rural tourism in the regions. One of them is the activities carried out by the local people for the development of rural tourism without any support from the government. However, it is not legally and economically possible for these services provided by the local people to be met by the state. Rural tourism cannot be a profitable area unless basic infrastructure problems are solved. The second and most realistic option is the implementation of state programs and investments for rural tourism in addition to private enterprises for the development of this

area. Such issues can only be solved by the state not by any individuals and it require large investment. [9]. 80.8% of the students agreed in the idea of increasing investments for the development of rural tourism ($\bar{x}=3.96$). This high compliance is an indicator of the fact that students agree that rural tourism investments are a very important factor in the development of rural tourism.

Financing opportunities should be provided for rural tourism investments. In Azerbaijan, participation in the statement that the financing opportunities required for the development of rural tourism are limited is high ($\bar{x}=3.42$). Students believe that these funding opportunities are insufficient due to the economic situation of Azerbaijan. This belief also manifests itself in students' high participation in this question.

The transport system is an important factor for the country's tourism sector. In Azerbaijan, the transportation network usually connects the big cities to one another and is insufficient to connect the rural areas to one another. More effort is needed to solve the transportation problem. 79.3% of the students thought that the advanced transport system was important for rural tourism ($\bar{x}= 4.02$). The high level of participation of students in this statement is an indicator of the awareness of these problems in the transportation area and the fact that transportation is an indispensable part of rural tourism.

The purpose of rural tourism is to increase the welfare level of the villages, to reduce unemployment and to ensure the work of women and young people in rural areas. Unemployment in the countryside, especially among women and youth are still a huge problem. About 50% of the population in Azerbaijan lives in villages. The percentage of students who think that the development of rural tourism will increase the employment opportunities of the country in the future is 62.3% ($\bar{x}= 3.51$).

It is very important to have educational institutions which will train qualified labor force for rural tourism in the country and to give lessons about rural tourism in these institutions and to prepare rural tourism

component for the future. In order to ensure the preparation of highly qualified experts for the tourism sector, the Azerbaijan Tourism Institute was established with the decision 13th of February 2006. Every year, more than 200 students are graduating from Azerbaijan Tourism Institute. In addition to the Institute, there is also Mingachevir Tourism College and Baku Tourism Vocational School. In addition, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the Azerbaijan Tourism Association organize periodic training courses for those working in the tourism sector. 82.6% of the students agreed in the idea that they need qualified labor force for the development of rural tourism which gives tourism education in Azerbaijan ($\bar{x}=4.13$).

Rural tourism activities are an important opportunity for female labor force. The widespread nature of home production and handicraft production in rural tourism creates income opportunities for women [10]. More than half of the students (%56.6) agreed in this idea ($\bar{x}=3.41$). While 24.5% were undecided.

64.3% of the students did not agree to the idea that the work of the Ministry of Tourism was sufficient to contribute to the development of rural tourism and to contribute to the country's economy ($\bar{x}=2.35$), and they did not take part in the idea that rural tourism would not develop with the operation of a single institution ($\bar{x}=3.27$). In addition to single state institutions, private airlines, special education institutions related to rural tourism etc. can be used for the development of rural tourism and contribution to the national economy, the students think that these idea would contribute in the private sector.

60.6% of the students did not agree with the idea that there is cooperation and necessary communication between the basic institutions of the region in terms of development of rural tourism ($\bar{x}=2.47$). This high rate is a reflection of not having the necessary cooperation and communication between the organizations and units related to rural tourism in Azerbaijan.

Tourism agencies have an important place in the development of tourism. Tourism agencies often send tourists abroad, but they are weak

in attracting foreign tourists to the country. While sending tourists abroad is important, the development of domestic tourism is a should also be prioritized. The students were aware of this situation and showed that there was a sufficient number of specialized travel agencies dealing with the types of rural tourism ($\bar{x}=2.14$).

One of the important factors of tourism is advertising and promotion. Advertising is an important factor affecting the country's demand in the national and international tourism market. Countries that have a say in international tourism invest heavily in advertising and promotional activities in order to preserve their image. The Ministry of Tourism participates in more than twenty international tourism fairs in the world's leading countries each year with fifty pieces of visual and printed media products produced in nine languages, each of which is about the richness of the country's tourism potential in order to promote the historical, touristic and cultural values of Azerbaijan and to increase its market share [14]. Nevertheless, the students showed low participation in the expression "the introduction of the natural and cultural wealth of Azerbaijan is sufficient" ($\bar{x}=2.80$). This shows that the studies carried out in Turkey or abroad have not been perceived as sufficient and are still insufficient. These activities may indeed be inadequate, or the relevant units may not be able to tell the public what they are doing.

Rural tourism development infrastructure is very important. For this purpose, the state should establish appropriate communication (Internet, telephone infrastructure), accommodation, transportation (land, air and railway transportation facilities), regional transport, urban-rural communication connections and other infrastructures necessary for the development of rural areas. 68.8% of the students did not agree with the idea that there are no significant infrastructure problems in the rural tourism of Azerbaijan ($\bar{x}=2.31$). They think that there are infrastructure problems related to rural tourism in Azerbaijan and the related institutions should take concrete steps.

In order to improve rural tourism and to achieve good results in this direction, it is necessary to raise the awareness of the rural population of the country. In developed countries, regular training are frequently given. In Azerbaijan, steps have been taken in this regard. With the support of the Youth Foundation, the project "Promoting rural tourism among young families" was initiated. The aim of the project is to organize conferences and seminars in the regions of Azerbaijan which have the potential for rural tourism and to raise awareness of local people [8]. Nevertheless, 63% of respondents have not agreed to the idea that the Azerbaijani people were conscious of rural tourism ($\bar{x}=2.38$). This finding can be interpreted as the promotion of rural tourism in Azerbaijan is not sufficient and a large part of the population is ignorant about it. In this respect, relevant organizations should make advertising campaigns and public awareness in this direction.

The opinion of the students of the Department of Agricultural Economics about the impact of rural tourism on the environment and cultural structure.

The idea that rural tourism is not developed enough in Azerbaijan and the lack of investments in this field may have a negative impact on the cultural structure of rural tourism. As a result of the friendship between the tourists visiting rural areas and the local people, there are changes in the education, tradition and culinary culture of the local people. These changes can be positive if they are slow and manipulative, but can lead to cultural degeneration if they are fast and unstructured. However, cultural tourism structures that are present in the areas where tourism will be made are being protected and restored by the tourism sector, thru these, the forgotten customs and traditions can be revived. [15]. Despite all the positive aspects, 71.3% of the students exhibited a more negative attitude and believed that rural tourism could change the cultural structure of the local population negatively. This high participation can be an indication that students cannot fully understand the dynamics of the

society and cannot fully establish rural tourism in their minds. Otherwise, it is expected that a conscious local people will not lose their social values with provided education; and strong private sector and government support ($\bar{x}=3.78$). In connection with this statement, students were worried that environmental problems would increase in rural areas and half of the students (50.8%) agreed in the statement that unplanned and unorganized rural activities would cause environmental problems ($\bar{x}=3.31$). While a quarter of the respondents (25.8%) have stayed undecided regarding this idea.

CONCLUSIONS

This research was carried out in order to examine the awareness levels of the students studying in the Department of agricultural economics of Azerbaijan State University. The effects of the students' gender, place of residence, school level, and parents profession on rural tourism awareness levels were examined. Participation rates were measured in terms of determining their level of awareness and perceptions on rural tourism. There were significant differences between students' gender, place of residence, and professional status of their parents based on their views on rural tourism. However, no statistically significant difference was found between the age, monthly total household income and class variables according to the level of rural tourism awareness that the students' possessed. In the last part of the study, which evaluation of students' perceptions and awareness about rural tourism were examined, the following important results are found.

The students showed high participation in the idea that Azerbaijan has rich rural tourism potential. Given the geographical location and climate conditions of Azerbaijan, this high turnout is expected. But they have come to the conclusion that this rich potential has inadequate promotion process. In recent years, Ministry of tourism has carried out numerous studies on promoting these awareness. The fact that students are unaware of this, may be such studies have been carried out in recent

years and courses related on rural tourism are not given. Students agree that one of the necessary conditions that needs development on rural tourism are infrastructural problems and necessary investments should be made by the government to eliminate them. However, they believe that financing opportunities in this area are not enough and limited. They emphasize that the work of the Ministry of tourism alone will not be sufficient in order for rural tourism to grow and contribute to the economy of the country, and that the people and all sector of the community should be united regarding this issue. Moreover, they also think that the development of rural tourism and the inadequacy of promotion are related to the inadequate number of travel agencies which operates in related areas and working inefficiently with the desired activity (advertising, promotion, awareness, etc.). in long run, it is believed that this type of tourism can have negative effects on the cultural changes and environmental problems in the lands where rural tourism activities take place.

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