

## EVALUATION OF RURAL TOURISM IN TERMS OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT WITH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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### Abstract

*Rural tourism provides an environment where rural people meet different cultures, prevents immigration to already crowded city centers, becomes an element of rural development, creates income diversity and protects the environment as well as natural, cultural and historical aspects of regions. The aim of this study is to examine effects of COVID-19 pandemic on rural tourism-potential and rural planning using Cizre District, Turkey, which incorporates distinct geographical, cultural and historical elements in a rural environment. Data were collected using primary and secondary sources in the region. SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis was used to analyze data which shows an increase in migration to rural causing environmental pollution. Positive effects include increase in commerce and housing demand strengthening the economy following normalization. Findings should help to review and improve sustainable planning and policy strategies supporting new economical environment in rural. The development strategies need to focus on rural and urban being partners rather than rivals.*

**Key words:** rural, tourism, covid-19, development, sustainability

### INTRODUCTION

Investigating relationship between the environment and cultural heritage in terms of tourism has been increasingly attracting researcher's interests [34, 20, 21, 14]. At the same time, tourists have been demanding more sophisticated and economical options from the tourism sector in general. As the sector tries to become more competitive to meet the demand, traditional 3S (sea, sand, sun) concepts appear to be insufficient, and efforts to develop new concepts are required. This results in increasing efforts by the tourism companies to meet demand, and new tourism concepts such as rural tourism, ecotourism, nature tourism, health tourism, geotourism [15] and faith tourism have already emerged [30]. These emerging concepts take their strength from incorporation of elements of a more peaceful, calm and natural environment. Even with the emerging versatile concepts, tourists seek additional specific areas of enjoyment that include local authenticity and genuine aspects to complement their 3S visits. These specific

areas or components are expected to enrich their visit and may include gastronomy, folklore, and faith aspects that are unique and different from those found in common destinations. Such areas with genuine, unique, authentic aspects became more important for tourists and locals as well; because economical activities around tourism help locals to prosper, and interactions with people of various backgrounds enrich their knowledge, appreciation, and acceptance of cultures that are usually different than theirs. These areas offering such opportunities are generally located outside (but not necessarily far from) areas of traditional 3S destinations, mainly in rural areas, where out migration, youth/women unemployment, and sub-standard infrastructures are generally main concerns for local population [28, 31]. Although all types of tourism are supposed to be sustainable, the 3S model has lost its sustainability in the current situation. This situation can make rural tourism more popular. More recently, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic (SARS-CoV-2: violent acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus-2)

event which has emerged since December 2019 and currently continues affecting the world's population, tourists and general public alike have started to be interested in calmer natural places for their tourism activities and divert their attention to places away from regularly crowded places that pose high risk from the virus. The size of population affected from the pandemic keeps accumulating. The total number of Covid cases in the world is 526 million and the number of deaths is 6.28 million in total, until May 23, 2022 [37]. In those days the large urban population feel helpless with so many compulsory (and necessary) restrictions in their lives. It can be anticipated that the interest in local and rural places will grow further due to recently emerging factors such as the pandemic, environmental pollution and the climate change. This change and transformation can offer new opportunities in the planning of rural areas.

Rural tourism contributes to rural development as well. It could generate a significant source of income for those living in small villages or settlements with very small income, insufficient to sustain their livelihood from agricultural activities. For those people income would have been further reduced as a result of the current pandemic.

The pandemic adversely affected many small-scale fresh fruit and vegetable growers, restaurants, and grocers. For example, community markets were allowed to operate within restricted hours and restriction were put in place for people's movement affecting personnel operating these markets. The only way of accessing fresh food during pandemic is to provide conditions for the small producers, and farmers in villages or cities, to market their products in local markets at an equitable price [26, 5].

The South Eastern Turkey is a mostly rural region of Turkey that has unique characteristic features. Its history goes back to 4000BC, it has a site believed to be Noah's Tomb, and it has a deep and rich culture with traditional and modern elements; including aspects of gastronomy, languages, religion, and hand crafts. The region also has been gaining more attention with the discovery of nearby Göbekli

Tepe [40]; but many unique localities, like the Cizre District, in the neighbourhood of Göbekli Tepe are yet to be discovered by the general tourist population. The Cizre District (Map 1) is a settlement with low socio-economic characteristics, under-developed in terms of infrastructure and industry, and has a multicultural society. It comes forefront within South-Eastern Turkey with its authentic culture, encompassing unique elements such as geographical features (e.g., Tigris River and tributaries), history (sites from pre-history to present), gastronomy (various ethnic foods), folklore and faith (e.g., cultural life affected from various religions). Together, these and a 12-month favourable climate (summers sunny and hot, winters mild and rainy) should make the region a favourable destination for rural tourism.

This study was aimed to explore various characteristic of the Cizre district and assess their pre-, current, and post-pandemic potential for rural tourism and economy of district. SWOT analysis technique is used in the assessment. SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) is a tool widely used by managers and experts in strategic planning [46]. The study uses Cizre as a case study with ideas and approaches being applicable to many areas of the world in local or a more regional scale.



Map 1. Location-Cizre District, Turkey  
Source: created by the author, 2021.

## Rural Tourism and local development within Pandemic

### *Rural Tourism*

Rural tourism can be defined as visits to rural areas where travellers can have authentic,

unique experiences by interacting with local people and their lifestyles [28, 30, 31]. It is a type of tourism that is both intertwined with rural areas and based on natural resources; and can be easily integrated with other types of tourism [43]. Visits to rural areas are for a short time, and can be done at various times of the year and generally in many seasons [8]; allowing rural tourism activities to be done alone or as complementary or extension to the 3S (Sun Sea and Sand) type activities. Generally, rural tourism is perceived as a form of tourism that exhibits rural life, art, culture and nature of rural areas [24]. It encompasses all aspects of touristic activities taking place outside the urban areas.

Participants in rural tourism are usually middle-aged people, middle-income group of highly educated and professionals. In addition, due to the increasing prevalence of various sporting activities in rural areas, it also makes young people interested in rural tourism even if not directly. There are even pedagogical farms where only children are accepted in some European countries [43].

Specifically rural tourism have the following characteristics [43, 16, 12]:

- can be done in all seasons, perceived to be healthy with fresh and clean environment
- is a balance element in the geographical distribution of tourism
- can be integrated into many types of tourism
- recreational activities in rural tourism are very diverse and unique
- the tourist profile of rural tourism is different
- contributes to the protection of the natural environment and cultural heritage
- serves the concept of sustainable tourism
- is an important tool for the promotion of a country
- is a type of tourism based on environment, people and natural life
- authenticity stands out
- is integrated and developed with local people
- preserves the diversity of agricultural and animal products intertwined with village life
- economic, environmental, social and cultural goals are pursued in rural tourism

- envisages improving employment opportunities for the local population

Rural tourism is seen as an important factor in diversifying the rural economy [31] creating a new perspective for the people living in rural areas, balancing the income level and preventing migration in rural areas, protecting nature and providing regional development. Successful rural tourism practices allow local people engaged in agriculture to earn additional income, increase their wealth and share their cultural wealth [3] and rural tourism will only be able to meet expectations and benefit the local population only if properly integrated with the local economy [11, 31] and reveals the spirit of unity and entrepreneurship [32].

Despite the broad scope of rural tourism with respect to touristic opportunities and practices, it has long been recognised that the fundamental attraction of the countryside as a tourist destination lies in what is often referred to as a sense of rurality [2, 13, 23, 27, 48, 29]. In other words, tourists are not only influenced by rural areas' physical characteristics and their inner qualities such as open-space, fresh air or peace and quiet; they are also influenced by what the countryside represents [29]. Rural areas are also seen as alternative settlement areas and facilities; such as entertainment facilities, leisure time activity centers, or as second homes. These developments are closely linked to redefinition of the rural identity. They reflect new traditions, new interpretations, encouragement of social demands, and a cultural interest in wider population to what is rural and local [9].

#### ***COVID 19 and rural tourism***

COVID 19 hit the urban centers the most as compared to the rural areas; both because of the size of population and the proximity of population enabling the spread of the highly infectious disease. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) recently reported 130 million people are being threatened with harsher poverty due to COVID 19. The study indicated that the pandemic hits poor the most. Among those groups being severely affected are migrants, women, or small

establishments employing disadvantages people such as low income family members, and traditional tourism in general [44, 42].

The rural regions, specifically regions with harsh climate and rugged geography, are very vulnerable to many risks as well. A study by Ali et.al. (2020) [1] undertaken in rural and mountainous region of Pakistan showed that 78% of participants are in financial uncertainty, 64% experienced income reduction, 6% lost their jobs, and 25% of participants are afraid of losing their jobs. The researchers conclude that rural population engaged in rural tourism and agriculture have been adversely affected and their income reduced as a result of pandemic coupled with the change in climate [1]. However, relatively larger open space and scarce population in rural still allowed many recreational facilities and less chance of coming into contact a virus carrier especially if done in small groups. Rural houses, tents and caravans, rural motels, rural pensions and rented rooms, relatives and acquaintances, being the normal forms of accommodation for rural tourism participants, helped to decrease the contacts when compared to urban facilities. According to a survey conducted in Czechia by the Institute for Politics and Society in June 2020 [47], people want more rural activities (more second housing, cycling, hiking, natural monument visits, water sports and camping). All these elements indicate the rural tourism to be a more important income generating activity during (and after) the pandemic for the development of the rural areas and their natural habitats. It is stated in many studies that rural tourism attracts more attention after the pandemic [33, 38, 39]

#### ***Development policies***

The conditions created with the current pandemic, explained in the previous sections call for a review of development policies with a view that integrates urban and rural jointly as a sustainable system. In connection with globalization, the pandemic created a general anti-urban feeling among the general population. It caused an increase in the existing polarization between pure and clean rural areas against dirty, dangerous, and crowded cities [10]. An integrated system

should show a clear interdependency of the regions and alleviate the negative sentiments. Thus, the development strategies need to focus on rural and urban being partners rather than rivals.

Development policies must be sustainability based and intend to increase economic activity of the region to increase employment, decrease poverty, rehabilitate the environment and improve the overall health of the population. The policies should be developed such that they can be implemented at suitable cost, help to increase income, and can be implemented rapidly and effectively [7].

The development policies should also consider that there could be certain negative effects; which may include environmental pollution and destruction of nature, increase in socio-cultural pressures, the formation of accommodation problems, foreign investors 'taking over' the region, excessive visitor traffic, excessive vehicle and traffic density, garbage, waste, and environmental pollution [18]. In order to minimize the negative impacts that may occur with rural tourism, it is of utmost importance that rural tourism activities are organized in a way that does not harm the environment and rural life.

In this respect, rural tourism can be a tool for the development of rural areas and for raising the economic level of the region. In this study, it is aimed to investigate the Cizre district of Turkey's relatively undeveloped Southeast Region for its potential of rural tourism.

#### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The study area of Cizre District is located in the South-Eastern region of Turkey. Data were collected using primary and secondary sources in the region. The geographical, environmental, cultural, agricultural and economical, gastronomy, historical and religious aspects of the district were considered in the investigation.

SWOT analysis was used to reveal the rural tourism potential of Cizre district and to in versatile evaluate its contribution to the development of the region.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS****Characteristics of the Cizre district contributing to its tourism potential*****Geography***

Cizre is located in the historically fertile South-Eastern Turkey with various geographical features that can attract tourists of all interest groups. The presence of the Göbekli Tepe archaeological site, recognized as the world's oldest temple and included the World Heritage List, adds to all. Discovered only recently it is an eye-opener for many reasons; specifically for its 12,000 years history, thus its importance in human history and development [40]. Its importance for Cizre is that this popular tourist destination is only 323 km away from the Cizre District and Cizre is one of the beneficiary of extended visits to Göbekli Tepe, thus additional opportunity for Cizre to promote more local features of her own. Specific geographical features of Cizre includes unique nature and river landscapes, streams, mountains, historical and cultural values within the rural areas that have important resources for tourism. Hunting is possible, wildlife of the mountainous areas is rich with species such as partridge, rabbit and quail. The local cuisine and local handicrafts of Cizre district are rich enough to add the strength to the implementation of rural tourism. Also the villages of the district provide agricultural products and Tigris River and its tributaries allows rafting and nature walks along its shores.

***Culture***

Heritage, whether it be an object, monument, inherited skill or symbolic representation, must be considered as an identity marker and distinguishing feature of a social group. Heritage is often a subjective element because it is directly related to a collective social memory, "a combination of recollections recognized by a given group" [6].

Cultural and social identity of a given community is preserved in collective social memory through more or less ritualized circumstances. The common heritage appears as a ritual code. It is recognized as a unifying sign or remembered as a common setting in a

designated area. Tourism permits participation in consumption and celebration of a series of local rites, including numerous events set up to show off heritage riches, allowing the tourist social and cultural integration in the local group by absorbing and reproducing cultural codes [9].

People have always known how to make up technical, socio-economic and symbolic solutions using heritage components. Heritage is therefore no longer considered solely as a link between past and present, but also as a reservoir of meaning necessary to understand the world: a resource in order to elaborate alterity. Dressing based on culture specific dressing is a component of cultural heritage.

**Clothing & Ornaments in the Cizre District:** Local clothing is called "şalşapik". In the past, fermi was worn. The old men wore baggy jackets, vests and helmets. Suits became more of the trend only after 1970s. Therefore it is still highly likely to observe people with colorful traditional clothing and ornaments while relaxing in common grounds of the general Cizre district. **Literature/legend Memu Zin:** Memu Zin is a poetic love story between Mem and Zin which is a legend in the region. There is also a book written by Kurdish writer Ahmed-i Hani in 1692 that is considered to be epos of Kurdish literature. The book has been translated to many languages including Turkish, Farsi, Arabic, French, and Russian. Today, the presumed resting place of the Memu Zin is visited by locals and tourists alike. The story has become an oral legend as well; with even non-educated ones in the region recite it from memory [41].

***Agriculture and Economy***

Agriculture forms the basis of rural life to sustain. However unfavourable climate and poor soil conditions, specifically in rough geographical areas, may restrict the extent of the agriculture. In those conditions any rural tourism income may be the savour for local inhabitants. More favourable areas can offer additional organic and local varieties that can attract visitors' attention. In the Cizre District high temperatures and poor soil conditions are disadvantages for extensive traditional farming. Certain endemic flower varieties allow specially-flavoured honey production.

Trade and service sectors take the first place in business and working life in the Cizre district. This is followed by agriculture and animal husbandry sector [19]. The presence of rich lignite and asphalted deposits and the high potential of using solar energy is helpful for organic production. The low labor costs and favourable climate makes most of the district's agricultural areas suitable for greenhouse type cultivation [35]. Rural areas have various endemic plant species. There is little use of pesticides and synthetic fertilizers in the district. Many traditional handicrafts, such as Tinsmithing are well practiced in the Cizre district.

### **Gastronomy**

Gastronomy is an essential component of enjoyment for the travellers. Eating during holidays is a fun activity and a fundamental part of rural tourism. Because it is culturally related, both the food and the act of preparing the food during rural tourism can be associated with a special social status and a special cultural system. Eating habits form the basis of a collective identity and therefore indicate the diversity [9].

Awareness about food is changing as well. The popularity of food with a country touch and natural products has been increasing. Black bread or bread baked in brick ovens, fresh farm products are cooked and prepared right at the farm buffets and meats are from the village animals at a reasonable price are a few examples that are usually found in high-priced restaurants if in non-rural environments. At one side, the mistrust in industrial food products is growing due to real and/or imagined side effects of chemicals and colouring additives. On the other side, marketing professionals sometimes use terms generously which makes the consumers to believe that they are getting fresh farm products, which in fact are mass produced in industrial facilities [9].

Visitor are usually curious about local food. Cizre has its own special tastes that are displayed in various dishes. Cizre food culture is among the richest in the region with its roots dating back to Babylonian and Gudi Empires. According to Adullah Yasin's book called "Botan Food Culture", there are 357

food and beverage types including 17 unique and famous dishes, 48 meat/breads, 112 vegetable dishes, 29 soups, 47 desserts, 48 pies, wraps and breakfast, 16 salads and garnish, 12 pickles, 28 bread types unique to Cizre District. A typical "Cizre Menu" may include one or more of the following genuine Cizre dishes: Kuliçe, Katkidifsi, Fireyidin, Mahmilatik, Sorbidev, Kutlık, Mumbardolması, Perdepilav, Şipşipe, Meyre (Mehir), and Brinzer.

### **History**

Cizre has many historical sites, passed on from different centuries of her past that worth visiting. One of the most outstanding and visible of these is the ship-shaped, 360-room citadel with walls wrapping the city. Other historical sites include Birca Belek built attached to the citadel in 1596 on shores of the Tigris River, various Medreses (old high school/university) dating 15 century, and a military compound from late Ottoman Era [41].

There are also older sites dating back to 4000BC. Among them: The **Finik Site** which has a palace, dungeon, cistern, carved rock reliefs, and many settlement areas and many cave houses; **Kasrik Site** on 6km north of Cizre; **Şah Site** on northwest of Cizre in the Çağlayan Village that has scattered historical localities of Düşe, Çeko, Hirabe, Kayser, and Hird castle; **Babil Site** on South-West of Cizre in the Kebele Village where a statue belonging to Assyrian Kings was found in 1992 and currently on display in Ankara Anatolian Civilization Museum; and **Bazebde Site** on 2km east of Cizre on shores of the Tigris River with ruins of a settlement and a bridge from early historical era [41].

### **Religious sites**

Cizre has many mosques, churches, and other religious sites and structures dating back many centuries. One of them, the Cizre Ulu Cami dating back to the seventh century AD has a peculiar iron gate with silver motifs and copper figures. One such figure, known as the Dragons of Cizre is an outstanding art work that has international reputation. The Dragons of Cizre were rebuilt by Al-Cezeri in XII. Century using scraping technique. They were made of bronze as knockers of the inner door

of the Great Mosque of Cizre. Two sphinx dragons, winged creatures have almond-shaped eyes, pointed ears, and displayed to bite each other's wings. Two dragoons are to represent two rivers in the Cizre area: One to represent Tigris River and the other the Euphrates River; with the lion's head in the middle to represent the people of Cizre, and eagles in the lower section to symbolize the military power. One of these door knocker from the gate of the Great Mosque of Cizre was smuggled to Denmark in 1969 while the other is on display at the İstanbul Turkish Islamic Works Museum [17]. Other outstanding religious sites include a site believed to be Noah's resting place (Noah's Mosque), Mecdiyye, Mushafireş, Mir Abdal (1437), Ş. Said and Meydan Mosques. The Noah's Mosque containing Prophet Noah's tumb, named after Noah's of the great flood times, is located at the top of the Dagkapi neighbourhood, at a point where the Tigris River's floods could hardly reach. The

tomb is on the lower basement. It was restored by the Noah Nebih Mosque Building and Living Society (NNMBL) and Şırnak Governorship [41].

**SWOT analysis**

One of the most effective way of presenting the current status and objectives of a sector, an activity, or an enterprise is to perform SWOT analysis by persons who are knowledgeable about it [4]. SWOT Analysis is a method used to identify the strengths and weaknesses of an industry, an activity and an enterprise and to identify the opportunity-threats arising from the external environment. Therefore, it is necessary to reveal the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in terms of rural tourism and to make plans and programs accordingly [36].

The following isa SWOT analysis of rural tourism potential of Cizre District in terms of its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats presented in Tables 1 to 4 respectively.

**Strengths** are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The identified strengths of Cizre in terms of rural tourism

Items/Characteristics	Pre-Covid19 (Base case)	Post-Covid19 (Potential condition once Covid19 is over)
Availability of an unspoiled nature, clean environment, perceived healthy living and long life expectancy	✓	✓
Hospitality of the people	✓	Hesitancy in face to face communication due to the Pandemic experiences
Richness of local food variety, the presence of crafts and traditional motifs (birth, death, wedding costumes) and the importance practiced customs and traditions	✓	✓
Easy access to the Tigris banks, fishing in the Tigris river Tigris River being suitable for water sports	✓	✓
Availability of river transportation between Iraq and Anatolia	✓	Increases in the post-pandemic period
Providing land transportation link to Şırnak, Hakkari and Siirt provinces	✓	Increases in the post-pandemic period
Favourable climate to rural tourism throughout the year; tourism can be done 12 months a year in terms of climate	✓	✓
Having a rich food culture; the richness of local food variety, the continuity of local clothing, the presence of crafts and traditional motifs (birth, death, wedding, etc.) and special customs and traditions	✓	✓
Organizing various festivals, and shows and increasing the number of activities	✓	Weakens for some time after the Pandemic
Being close to a natural area which has important attraction for endemic species	✓	Getting stronger due to pandemic
Having a lively commercial life and being located centrally in the region, closer to the city center than other districts	✓	Increased commercial life, increased housing demand, increasing prices
Opportunity to settle in rural, low-cost housing	✓	Increasing potential
Providing opportunities for many ecotourism and/or rural tourism activities due to the moderate nature of its people	✓	Increasing potential
Being located very close to Kasrik Pass and Habur border crossing	✓	Increased due to incoming population
Having mountains (Gabar and Cudi) suitable for hunting, trekking and other sports	✓	Increased due to incoming population
Employment	✓	Increased due to increased activities and economy

Source: created by the author, 2021.

**Weaknesses** are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The weaknesses of Cizre in terms of rural tourism

Items/Characteristics	Pre-Covid19 (Base case)	Post-Covid19 (Potential condition once Covid19 is over)
Inadequate marketing of Cizre in terms of culture and tourism	✓	Potentially strengthens as in-coming migration increases.
Lack of knowledge about the importance of preserving the historical and natural beauties among the local people and the lack of awareness of rural tourism	✓	Potentially strengthens as the locals see economic benefit for themselves and interest increases
Indifference of local governments to benefits of tourism	✓	Potential cooperation with the experience of the pandemic
Inadequate shopping centers and entertainment venues in the district	✓	Potentially improvement
Lack of entrepreneurial culture in terms of rural tourism	✓	Potential improvement
Insufficient touristic tours and promotion in terms of rural tourism	✓	Potential improvement
Lack of rural planning and financial problems	✓	
Lack of promotion of the Tigris River for tourism	✓	Potential improvement

Source: created by the author, 2021

**Opportunities** are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The opportunities of Cizre in terms of rural tourism

Items/Characteristics	Pre-Covid19 (Base case)	Post-Covid19 (Potential condition once Covid19 is over)
A Vocational School located in Cizre district of Şimşak University	✓	Increasing enrolment, increase of young and active population.
Increasing migration to the district and increasing population	✓	Further strengthened. (increased population; especially with the return of old residents)
Increased housing	✓	Strengthened.
Presence of an airport in the district	✓	Further strengthened. Potential increase of air travellers
Support by the Dicle Development Agency	✓	Further strengthened
City hospital to be built in the district	-	✓
Having rich lignite and asphalt deposits and the possibility of utilizing solar energy	✓	Increases
Favourable conditions for greenhouse cultivation in most of the district's agricultural areas	✓	Increases
Establishment of Cizre Hydro Electric Dam and Power generator	✓	Strengthens (More energy would be needed for new activities)
Being suitable for cattle feed and cattle husbandry	✓	Strengthens. (Returning population engage in agricultural)

Source: created by the author, 2021.

**Threats** are reflected in Table 4.

Table 4. The threats of Cizre in terms of rural tourism

Items/Characteristics	Pre-Covid19 (Base case)	Post-Covid19 (Potential condition once Covid19 is over)
Cultural pressure - risk of corruption, contamination and erosion of regional cultural values	-	Increases
Terrorism incidents in the district, political and economic instability	✓	Neutral or decreases
Limited job opportunities in the district and the decrease in the young population	✓	Increases. High potential to be removed as a threat and becomes an opportunity.
Excessive visitor traffic	✓	Increases
Damage to natural beauty due to intense interest	-	Increases
Pollution of Tigris River	-	Increases
Environmental pollution: Garbage, waste	-	Increases
Danger to wildlife: partridge, wild goat, etc. due to over-hunting and danger of extinction	-	Neutral

Source: created by the author, 2021

Covid-19 changed the global environment for all sectors; including tourism. As pointed out by Higgins-Desbiolles (2020) [25], the

pandemic provides an opportunity to “rethink and reorganise the tourism sector towards sustainable development”. There are several



factors to be considered in this desire to reorganize such as the increase of crowds, both in rural and around the neighbourhoods in the urban centers that creates negative emotional responses towards tourism, and that proximity to crowded neighbourhoods resulting an elevated stress levels [22]. This is in agreement with the negative reaction towards crowds in rural areas and shows itself among weaknesses for rural area development in this study. Thus, it will be prudent to state that conditions created with the current pandemic supports for a call for a review of development policies with a view which integrates urban and rural jointly as a sustainable system. Rural tourism stands out as an important component of this new rethinking and reorganization. Rural tourism provides an environment where rural people meet different cultures, prevents immigration to already crowded city centers, becomes an element of rural development, creates income diversity and protects the environment as well as natural, cultural and historical aspects of regions. The success of rural tourism in fulfilling these elements would reflect directly on countries abilities to reduce growing financial burden on them caused by Covid-19 pandemic. The subject of this study, the Cizre District, has potentials in geographical, cultural, agricultural, economical, historical and religious dimensions that affect overall outcome of touristic activities. Each of these areas are being affected by the pandemic. However, rural tourism offers an opportunity for the development of the region. The region is generally a poor rural area. Rural tourism can be a source of income for the poor people living in the region and negatively affected by Covid. In a survey conducted by UNESCO it was shown that the effects of the crisis on World Heritage properties may continue in the months to come. According to the survey, "90% of countries with World Heritage properties had closed or partially closed them and respondents to this survey still reported an average figure of 71% closure of sites in February 2021 [45]. These findings also reflect a situation where the tourism need to rethink and reorganize and sites like Cizre with its multi-faceted touristic opportunities

could gain importance in such a reorganized touristic scheme. This study shows that alongside with an increase in commerce and housing demand strengthening the economy following normalization, there could be negative effects of incorporating rural tourism in this system such as potential increase of pollution extending to rural. More research is needed to investigate integrated, comprehensive and sustainable tourism incorporating rural and urban based tourism with after-Covid data. Such investigations need to put more emphasis on monitoring the projected effects of events such as COVID-19 for a full-scale economic and social assessment of tourism. The case studies such as the one presented here provides valuable data for various aspects of benchmarking and monitoring. The situation may show similarities for other developing countries. Rural tourism in the Cizre region may show some changes after Covid. More cautious behaviours may occur in face-to-face relations in tourism after the pandemic.

If people make a habit of keeping their distance, it will damage the relations of hospitality in tourism (Hospitality of the people). Massive crowds and large-scale festivals that bring more people together will be less organized. Maybe this situation will make it more common to organize festivals with smaller communities. Escaping from the city centers will also be able to carry commercial relations to more rural areas. Houses around the city, which are close to the countryside, will be in greater demand. Activities and sportive activities in the countryside will be diversified. This interest will enable rural people to recognize the natural beauties of the region and rural tourism potential and increase local entrepreneurship. Young and active population will be able to stay in the countryside instead of migrating to the city, and reduce unemployment by turning to economic entrepreneurship. On the other hand, better food demand can be a new application for the people of the region who can develop organic agriculture. With rural tourism, the service sector (restaurant, accommodation, etc.) will be strengthened in

the region. Besides all these, there may undoubtedly be a terrorist risk and security problem in the region. On the other hand, the interest of people may lead to the pollution of the region, and the culture may be eroded.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Corona virus (COVID-19) pandemic and global recession caused by the pandemic is the most serious crises since the end of World War II. Most of countries in the world had a ready imported SARS-CoV-2 (violent acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus-2) disease and now trying to cope with its economic and societal effects. This study shows that although the tourism activities and its overall economy slowed during Covid 19 in general, the rural tourism remains lesser affected or potentially beneficiary due to scarce population and open natural space of rural.

A pre-pandemic threat for rural development areas such as Cizre district was the limited job opportunities in the district and the decrease in the young population because of continues migration to urban centres. This out migration trend appears to reverse, thus becoming a potential strength for such regions after Pandemic. Similarly several aspects which were weakness in the SWOT analyses prior to pandemic shift to become opportunities due to changes brought about by the pandemic. These new conditions have potential to foster economic development sought after in rural areas. Sustainable rural tourism is also important for sustainable production, sustainable consumption and sustainable society. Sustainable rural tourism is very important to protect and develop rural settlements and thus strengthen their territorial integrity. As in the example of Cizre, the cultural, historical and natural wealth of the region can be turned into an advantage for rural development with rural tourism in the development of poor regions with limited income sources. The study also shows that there can be an increase in migration to rural causing environmental pollution. This sends a signal to planners and policy makers to review and improve sustainable planning and policy strategies in a comprehensive way to support

the new economical environment in rural. The development strategies also need to focus on rural and urban being partners rather than rivals.

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