



SWOT ANALYSIS OF HALFETI'S RURAL TOURISM POTENTIAL IN THE CONTEXT OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Halfeti district, located in the southeast of Turkey, is a destination area with tourism potential with its natural beauties, ruins reflecting historical, religious and cultural heritage, and endemic plant and animal existence. With the Birecik dam starting to collect water, the flooded rural settlement areas have become interesting and the tourism destination value of Halfeti district has further increased. Halfeti's tourism value continues to increase day by day after it was included in the Cittaslow network in 2013. Local community, who earned income only through animal and plant production in the past, have gone into rural tourism activities with these changes in Halfeti district, and Halfeti has taken a special place among rural tourism destination areas today. In this study, the rural tourism potential of Halfeti district was investigated in the context of rural development. In the study, SWOT analysis was conducted using primary data. As a result of the SWOT analysis, it was determined that the strengths of Halfeti district in terms of rural tourism potential are greater than its weaknesses. In addition, suggestions are offered for using Halfeti's rural tourism potential in ensuring rural development.



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I. INTRODUCTION

The countries' struggle for full political independence, which started after the Second World War and continues today, essentially turns into a struggle for economic development. In order to win the battle successfully, countries have sought development policies appropriate to their structural situation, potential and internal dynamics. [1]–[4]. In the same period, it was thought that structural transformation and development was only possible with the support of political power or governments. [1], [5], [6]. Today, development has become an approach that includes positive change not only in the economic sense but also in the social, cultural and political sense. The development is essentially that is provided the improvement positively as materially and morally in social life by the change of the political, social, cultural and economic structure. In this way, there will ultimately be a positive change in the level of social welfare [7], [8].

The part of development that concerns rural life is referred to as "rural development". Rural living area is all the village

settlements within the borders of a country. and people living in these settlements constitute the rural population [9]. The qualifications determined by the State Planning Organization of the Republic of Türkiye (SPO) are very important in understanding the characteristics of rural areas and the rural population. According to SPO, these places that "economic activities are predominantly based on the evaluation of natural resources; face-to-face relationships are relatively more common, living rules are largely shaped by traditions and customs; technical and technological developments and economic, social and cultural developments occur more slowly and delayed" are rural areas. [10].

Development in rural living areas, or simply rural development is "the process of combining the efforts of small communities to improve their economic, social and cultural conditions with the efforts of the state in this regard, integrating these communities into the whole nation and ensuring their full contribution to national development efforts" [11], [12]. At the same time, rural development are whole of efforts towards to increase the income and welfare levels of rural communities by

enabling them to produce in a way that will change positively their socio-economic, political and cultural structure, to eliminate existing inequalities and to establish a physical and social infrastructure in rural areas that is similar to urban areas. However, it is important that these efforts ensure sustainability. For this reason, the environmental, sociological and economic sustainability of rural living areas must be guaranteed. Therefore, activities for rural development should be planned within this framework [13]-[16].

Rural development is also of great importance for the general development of countries. Because approximately 70% of the world's poor population lives in rural areas. For this reason, rural development efforts and policies to be implemented to eliminate rural poverty will indirectly bring about the development of the country [17]-[22].

In this study, primarily the relationship between rural development and rural tourism is discussed. In this context, the rural tourism potential of Halfeti district of Şanlıurfa province in the context of rural development was investigated, a SWOT analysis was made regarding this potential and suggestions were offered.

II. THEORETICAL REFERENCE

II.1 TOURISM AND RURAL TOURISM

Primitive man traveled for protection, to hunt for food and clothing, and to satisfy his sense of curiosity. This travel process was sometimes short distances and sometimes long distances [23]. These travels are activities that correspond to today's tourism concept. Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that tourism is one of the first activities that are mandatory to meet the needs of human beings.

If we were to make a general definition, tourism is the travel and return of people to some sights in a circular motion for business or entertainment purposes [24], [25]. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) considers and defines the concept of tourism as a way of going on holiday. According to the definition, tourism includes activities where a person travels and stays in a place outside his/her normal environment for business, pleasure, visiting friends and relatives or for other purposes, and goes to another place of his/her choice for a period not exceeding one year [26]. Today, tourism has grown significantly both economically and socially [23], [27]. In recent years, the fastest growing economic sector in most countries has been the services sector. In some of these countries, the share of the travel and tourism sector in the services sector has reached a significant level. [23], [28], [29].

The development of tourism, in a way, depends on the diversity of tourism supply. The emergence of different demands of those participating in international tourism movements, especially in recent years, is due to the great diversity of tourism supply [30]. The main markets for tourism activities are those with highly developed and urbanized areas. Many living in these areas want to escape modern urban and suburban environments and visit simpler, less developed areas [31]. Recently, tourists' interest has begun to focus on alternative tourism types rather than sea, sand and sun-oriented tourism [30]. People find solutions to problems such as monotony, decrease in human relations, and melancholy caused by urban life by participating in aggregate or alternative tourism activities, where they can have the opportunity to live in a different environment for a short time and even fulfill their longing for rural life [32]. Rural tourism offers an ideal alternative for tourists who are in such search [31], [33].

Seeing the natural beauties of rural areas, meeting with people from different cultures, participating in activities specific to the rural area, and integrating with nature and the environment constitute the scope of rural tourism, which is one of the alternative tourism types. Rural tourism is defined as a type of tourism in which people go to a rural settlement in order to relax in natural environments and be together with different cultures, stay there and watch or participate in activities specific to that region [34]-[36].

The term rural tourism has a wide range and covers all entertainment and recreation activities in rural areas. According to [37], rural tourism includes orchards, farms, culture, life, scenic areas, religious activities, food and air tourism in rural areas [37]. Rural tourism has dimensions of rural production, rural life and rural ecology. Production dimension agricultural activity-oriented tourism (agro tourism or hobby agricultural activities); the life dimension includes rural cultural activities (cultural and historical tourism, museum tourism) and the ecological dimension includes nature-oriented recreational activities (nature tourism, agro-tourism, green or eco tourism) [38].

[39] defined rural tourism as the act of leaving the urban environment and traveling to rural areas. The purpose of doing this is to discover and enjoy the natural beauties, agricultural diversity, history and cultural richness of small towns; is to get away from the pressure of urban life in order to have pleasant experiences and improve the quality of life [26], [39]. According to [31], rural tourism requires location in rural areas, functionally rural businesses and institutions established on a rural scale, and a lifestyle with a traditional character; there must be situations that represent a complex form in terms of rural environment, economy, history and location [31]. According to [40], rural tourism is functionally rural and offers tourists opportunities to directly experience, have fun and learn about unique cultural, natural and historical attractions and activities offered by rural local communities in cooperation with businesses and the public to provide socio-economic benefits without destroying the environment [40].

II.2 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RURAL TOURISM AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Tourism has direct impacts on national income for all tourist destinations. It creates business opportunities, industries and various investments to serve and elevate the performance and culture of nations, while also offering the opportunity to promote their history, civilization and traditions. As the leading international organization in the field of tourism, UNWTO promotes tourism as a driver of economic growth, inclusive development and environmental sustainability [26].

The century we live in is marked by rural development-oriented approaches that encourage quality, diverse, innovative and environmentally friendly production, contribute to the living standards of producers and contribute to the development of the rural economy. Rural development activates and develops non-agricultural sectors by providing direct added value and income increase to production. In this context, the rural tourism sector is one of the strongest investment areas with the highest potential and claim [41]. There is a direct relationship between rural development and rural tourism. Rural tourism is a symbol of success in non-agricultural diversification in rural areas [42].

Rural tourism is seen as an important element in terms of diversifying the rural economy, creating a new perspective for the people living in rural areas, increasing job opportunities, balancing the income level, preventing migration in rural areas, creating

finance for the protection of nature and ensuring regional development. Successful rural tourism practices enable local people, especially those engaged in agriculture, to earn additional income, increase their level of welfare and share their cultural riches. [43]–[45].

The development of tourist destinations is done by taking into account the tourist attraction potential of the region. In development, the local community is considered an active subject, not a passive one. Therefore, the local community is the organizer and actor in the destination where tourism activities are carried out. This makes the local community an integral part of rural tourism with different cultural characteristics [46]. According to [47], there are five reasons why policy makers and implementers should intervene in the development of rural tourism; these are the protection of potentially attractive areas, modernization of supply structures, marketing, education and expansion of opportunities for participation in rural tourism [47], [48]. If these elements are provided by policy makers and implementers, the probability of success in social development through rural tourism, and therefore in rural development, which is the main goal, is much higher.

II.3 RURAL TOURISM POTENTIAL OF HALFETİ

Halfeti, which is affiliated with Şanlıurfa province, is a district approximately 120 km away from Şanlıurfa city center and approximately 90 km away from Gaziantep city center. Today, Halfeti district has two separate settlements, old and new. With the start of water collection in Birecik Dam in 2000, the old Halfeti, which was established in a plain area, was flooded. Therefore, the old Halfeti settlement area was moved to the new Halfeti district, which was established in the area known as Kara Otlak (Figure 1) [49]–[51].

The main source of income of Halfeti district until 2000 was agricultural activities. After this date, since some of the agricultural areas were submerged under the dam waters, there was a decrease in agricultural activities and agriculture-based economic income [49], [52]. Although agriculture and animal husbandry still constitute the economic life in the district, the natural beauties, cultural and historical sites of the old Halfeti settlement area, which is under water, have led to the emergence of active rural tourism activities today [25], [49], [52]. Today, tourism activities, which started with boat trips in the old Halfeti settlement area, are expanding the range of products and services in the name of rural tourism with the inclusion of different social and cultural activities day by day. The natural, historical and cultural values that Halfeti has and that can contribute to its rural tourism potential are discussed separately below and brief information about them is given.



Figure 1: Halfeti.
Source: [51].

The "Cittaslow" movement, initiated in 1999 by Paolo Saturnini, mayor of Greve, Chianti, Italy, emerged as an alternative movement against the excessive consumption, disrespect for natural resources and unsustainable growth models of capitalist societies created by the Industrial Revolution.. Today, it has become a wide network including 291 cities in 33 countries. 22 cities in Türkiye are included in the Cittaslow network, and Halfeti's participation in the Citaslow network took place in 2013. Halfeti is the ninth city in Türkiye to join the Cittaslow network and is the only city in the Southeastern Anatolia Region (Figure 2-3) [53]–[57].



Figure 2: Cittaslow Halfeti 1.
Source: [53].



Figure 3: Cittaslow Halfeti 2.
Source: [56].

After collecting water for the Birecik Dam, many rural settlements and buildings on the banks of the Euphrates River in Halfeti rural area were flooded. Savaşan Village, Çekem Village and Eren Village in Halfeti are examples of these. When these residential areas were flooded, very different and interesting images emerged. Today, trips to these areas are organized by boats departing from Halfeti. Visitors take photographs in these areas with interesting views. Additionally, cafes and restaurants run by local people living in these areas offer services to visitors. On the other hand, recreation areas have been created so that people who come in groups can rest and picnic in these areas. (Figure 4-5) [25], [58].



Figure 4: The Savaşan Village of Halfeti District 1.
Source:[58].



Figure 5: The Savaşan Village of Halfeti District 2.
Source:[58].



Figure 6: Rumkale 1.
Source: [58].

Rumkale, which is on the route of boat trips organized in Halfeti, is at the intersection of the Euphrates River and the Merziman Stream. It is located on a high hill surrounded by a steep rocky structure. Rumkale was built on an area of approximately 3500 square meters with cut stones in harmony with nature. Rumkale, built with a rectangular plan, has seven bastions carved by human hands and many battlements-shaped windows in the north. The architectural ruins in Rumkale have Late Roman and Mediaeval character. Among the structures that can be seen in the

castle today are St. Nerses Church, Barşavma Monastery, many building ruins, water cisterns, wells and moats. This settlement plays an important role in the history of Christianity, as Yohannes, one of the apostles of Jesus, came to Rumkale, settled there and spread the Christianity religion here during the Roman Period. Today, Rumkale has taken the form of a peninsula surrounded by water after the Birecik Dam became operational and retained water (Figure 6-7) [59], [60].



Figure 7: Rumkale 2.
Source: [59].

The suspension bridge, known as The Halfeti Neck among local people, was built by the Halfeti District Governorate. The completion date of the bridge is 2012. The suspension bridge connects Rüştiye neighborhood, formerly known as old Halfeti, and Başbostan neighborhood. The suspension bridge provides the opportunity to walk to the old cemetery area, pistachio gardens, water sports center and floating pool facilities, which were previously accessible by boat. The bridge located at the entrance of Değirmendere Valley is also a place frequently used by photographers and those who want to take photos. (Figure 8) [61].



Figure 8: The Halfeti Neck.
Source: [61].

Located in the old settlement area of Halfeti district, the Ulu Mosque was built in 1844 and has the characteristics of the Ottoman architecture of its period. As the Birecik Dam became active, 40 cm of the mosque was submerged in 2002 [62]. With this feature, the Ulu Mosque has found its place in the list of places to see and visit in Halfeti (Figure 9).



Figure 9: The Grand Mosque.
Source: [61].

The Kantarma Inn, dating back to the Roman Period of the fifth-sixth century AD, located in Kalkan Village on the Yukarı Göklü-Yaylak road in Halfeti district, is a registered cultural heritage. This historical building remains has survived today with four round arches ordered in three rows parallel to each other in the north-south direction. It has a mixed type and rectangular architecture. The absence of a cooker, manger or similar elements indicating that the building was an inn makes it difficult to state a definitive opinion about its nature, but it brings to mind that it may have been a granary. Properly cut large stones were used in the building ruins, which had no decorative elements other than the molding on the pillar capitals (Figure 10) [61], [63].



Figure 10: Kantarma Inn.
Source: [61].

Nurhut Church, located in the north of Gürkuyu (Nurhut) village in Halfeti district center, is a building that dates back to the fifth-sixth century AD and is one of our (Byzantine) registered cultural heritage. The church was built of ashlar stone work and has a rectangular plan in the east-west direction. On the west-facing entrance façade, there is a rectangular entrance door of which surrounding decorated with moldings, with a plain lintel. A holy rood motif is engraved in a circular rosette in the middle of the lintel. A relieving arch was made on the lintel by carving a single block of stone. There are three round-arched and rectangular-shaped windows on this frontal. It is understood that the building with a triangular pediment above the windows is covered with a roof. The moulding apse arch on the eastern frontal of the building is still standing, but its wall has been destroyed. It is understood

from the foundation traces that the apse was round (Figure 11) [61], [63].



Figure 11: Nurhut Church.
Source: [61].

Değirmendere Stream, located within the borders of Halfeti, rises from the mountains above old Halfeti and flows into the Euphrates River. Değirmendere Valley; It covers an area of approximately two kilometers on the flow path of the Değirmendere Stream and northeast of Halfeti. The valley is home to many endemic plant and living species. It also has a very suitable structure for hiking routes. There are many natural pools, historical water channels, grain mills and hand-carved or naturally formed caves on the walking route (Figure 12-13) [64], [65].



Figure 12: Değirmendere Valley.
Source: [64].



Figure 13: Değirmendere hand carved caves.
Source: [65].

Halfeti Black Rose, which is also known by names such as "Arabic bride, Arabic beauty, Arabic girl, Mesopotamian rose, Flat rose", is an endemic rose variety that grows only in Halfeti in the world. Although the rose is completely black, it is a scented rose that can also have a dark red color close to black. The origin of Black Rose dates back to the French rose breeder Guillot in 1859. Black Rose, grown by Guillot, "14. Louis" is a type of rose. However, there is no definitive information about how it came to Türkiye, especially Halfeti [49], [66]–[68]. Another feature of Black Rose is that when it is taken both as branches and seeds to a place other than Halfeti, its color changes and loses its properties. This is a situation that identifies Black Rose and Halfeti. Therefore, it is used extensively by the local people in the promotion of Halfeti and becomes an source of income (Figure 14).



Figure 14: Halfeti Black Rose (*R. Odorata Louis XIV*).
Source: [68].

The Euphrates turtle is an endemic species that lives in the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers and their tributaries in Turkey. They generally feed by consuming aquatic animals. The areas around the Euphrates River and the islands close to the shore are important habitats for the Euphrates turtle. The species is evaluated as endangered (EN) according to the criteria of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) (Figure 15) [61], [69].



Figure 15 Euphrates Turtle (*Rafetus euphraticus*).
Source: [61].

The Desert Varan (*V. griseus*) is an animal distinguished by its size. Its length exceeds 1 meter (130 cm). Color may vary depending on habitat. The dorsal side is yellowish-orange grey. The neck is quite long compared to the body. Its mouth has strong teeth and a long split tongue. In other words, their tongues are long and forked, like a snake's tongue, and they also perform the function of smelling with their tongues. When they feel in danger, they can inflate their neck sacs to scare the other animal. Capturing, killing or harming the species is strictly prohibited. The Desert Varan species Conservation Action Plan has been prepared by the General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks and monitoring efforts are continuing. Şanlıurfa Birecik Steppes, which is one of the most natural areas of Turkey's steppe ecosystems and provides shelter for many endemic animal species, has also been declared a Wildlife Development Area and contributes to the protection of the species (Figure 16) [61], [70].



Figure 16: Desert Varan (*V. griseus*).
Source: [61].

Located on the banks of the Euphrates River, Halfeti is located in a rich basin for bird watchers and photographers in terms of bird diversity. The bald ibis (*Geronticus eremita*) is among the most well-known species of these birds in the world (Figure 17). Bald Ibis is a species considered extinct in nature in Turkey. Production is carried out at the Bald Ibis Breeding Station in Birecik, Şanlıurfa, and as of 2021, there are 278 individuals in the production station. Bald ibises, which are released during the breeding period, are taken back into cages in July [61], [71].



Figure 17: Bald Ibis (*Geronticus eremita*).
Source: [61].

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this study, it is aimed to determine the rural tourism potential of Halfeti district in the context of rural development. In this context, literature review was made on Halfeti district and individual interviews and observations were made in Halfeti district, which is the research area, to determine the current situation. The main material of the study consists of primary data. Formal interview forms were used to collect primary data. Interviews were conducted with local people, local businesses, employees of public institutions operating in the district and individuals visiting for touristic purposes. No sample calculation was made for the interviews, and as many individuals as possible from all walks of life were reached by using the convenience sampling method. A total of 79 people were interviewed in the field, including 21 local people, 13 local business owners, 8 public institution employees and 37 tourists. Within the framework of the information obtained, the rural tourism potential of Halfeti district was revealed by SWOT analysis.

SWOT analysis is a strategic technique used to determine the strengths and weaknesses of an issue and the opportunities and threats to be encountered. SWOT analysis guides to identify these four characteristics and thus develop a more comprehensive awareness of the situation, which helps in strategic decision making [72], [73]. The SWOT method was originally developed for business and industry. However, today it is used in the same way in society, health, development, tourism, education and even personal development studies. [72]. SWOT analysis regarding tourism destination areas; It aims to determine and develop the ability to plan for the use of the resource values of the area, to produce strategies, to organize areas and uses, and even to ensure sustainability [73]–[75].

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The SWOT analysis results prepared using primary data obtained from field studies are given in Table 1.

Table 1: SWOT analysis results.

Strengths	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Halfeti becoming a member of Cittaslow, • The region has an unspoilt natural appearance, • The part of the area under the dam water has a different and interesting appearance, • Having a culture and structure suitable for nature tourism, • The presence of many valuable historical and religious ruins in the area (Rumkale, St. Nerses Church, Barşavma Monastery, Norhut Church, Kantarma Inn and Ulu Mosque, etc.),Endemik türler açısından (bitki ve hayvan) önemli bir tabiat alanına sahip olması, • Local people are hospitable and willing to engage in rural tourism activities, • Various festivals (fruit-food festival, water sports festival, fragrance festival) and feasts started to be held, • A department that trains qualified personnel for the tourism sector is active in the field within Harran University. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In recent years, interest in rural tourism has begun to increase as an alternative to traditional tourism. • Increasing the quality of the rural workforce by improving the professional knowledge and skills of individuals employed in rural tourism through different training programs, • Rural tourism creates a source of income for those living in the district, • Making planned and more professional investments by using support, incentives and grants from national and international institutions for rural tourism investments, • Minimizing the income and development gap between rural and urban areas, • Eliminating the physical infrastructure deficiency of rural areas, • Ensuring socio-economic development of the district by preventing migration to cities, • Increasing the foreign exchange earnings of the area and therefore the country, thanks to tourists coming from abroad.
Weakness	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local people do not have sufficient knowledge and equipment regarding the development of rural tourism, • The investment budget and promotion for the development of rural tourism in the district is not at the desired level, • Failure to make regular plans for the active use of rural tourism areas, • Tent and caravan camping areas are not active, • Environmental pollution due to lack of personnel for cleaning public places such as picnic and excursion areas, • Tourists do not find the service quality and prices offered by different businesses to be standard, • Continuing migration from district to city and/or abroad, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The socio-cultural structure of the tourist area begins to deteriorate over time, • Buildings built or likely to be built in the surrounding area are not constructed in accordance with the architectural structure of the area, • Natural beauties are under threat due to excessive visitor demand, • Insufficiency of qualified personnel due to the increase in rural tourism potential and the migration of the young population, • Traditional culture weakens and/or begins to deteriorate over time,

Source: Authors, (2024).

Looking at the SWOT analysis results, it can be said that the strengths of Halfeti district in terms of rural tourism potential are greater than its weaknesses. When the strengths are examined, we can say that Halfeti's being a member of Cittaslow and having an unspoiled natural appearance despite a part of the district being flooded are its strongest aspects in terms of rural tourism. The fact

that the district has an unspoilt natural appearance makes the region more attractive and significantly affects the number of tourists coming to visit. Being the district a member of Cittaslow makes it known in the national and international arena. The presence of many valuable historical and religious ruins in the area offers tourists who visit the region the opportunity to see different tourist

attractions. The presence of Halfeti Vocational High School affiliated with Harran University here, the activities actively carried out by the Department of Tourism, Travel and Entertainment Services at the school, and the organization of various festivals and organizations together with various public institutions and civil society organizations contribute to tourism. Halfeti Ulu Mosque and Savaşan Village Mosque, located in the old town center, created a different appearance after being flooded after the Birecik Dam was built, offering tourists the opportunity to see both the natural view and the flooded areas with boat tours lasting about an hour. In addition to this, the endemic plant and animal species that grow and live only in this area in Turkey make the region very attractive for tourists. The fact that the local people are hospitable and willing to engage in rural tourism activities is one of the strengths of the district regarding its rural tourism potential. The strengths that emerged as a result of the analysis show that the rural tourism potential and therefore the rural development potential of Halfeti district is quite high.

When the weaknesses of rural tourism in the district are examined; the fact that the local people do not have sufficient knowledge and equipment in terms of the development of rural tourism may cause them not to be able to use the tourism potential of the district efficiently and to establish positive relationships with the visitors, and this situation negatively affects rural tourism and rural development. There is not enough investment budget allocated for the development of rural tourism in the district. Investments made individually have not professional quality and proceed in an unplanned manner. In addition, it can be said that the promotion of the district is not carried out at the desired level by both the local government and the relevant institutions. Considering that the majority of the visitors interviewed in the field research had visited the district before and brought their relatives to show them around; It is concluded that Halfeti district is not sufficiently promoted as a tourism area. Failure to adequately promote the natural, cultural and historical values of Halfeti district in terms of rural tourism prevents the desired number of visitors from being reached. In addition, the lack of creation of destinations and activity areas, which are very important in rural tourism, such as tent and caravan camping areas, water sports, mountain bike trails and nature hiking trails, negatively affects the number of visitors. This situation causes those who visit Halfeti district to be content with day trips and not to stay. Due to the lack of planning for the development of rural tourism, sufficient personnel employment in the area could not be provided. Therefore, serious problems arise regarding the cleanliness of the area. In addition, due to the unprofessional management approach, there is no standard practice in the service quality and prices offered. This situation was frequently mentioned by visitors during field studies. Lack of planning and professionalism restricts the rural tourism service period in Halfeti district to certain periods, that is, causes businesses to close, especially in winter. However, the greatest success of rural tourism activities can be measured by their spread to all periods of the year. It is a type of activity that must be continuous. Since rural tourism activities are intermittent and seasonal, the businesses in the region operate without continuity, causing the young population to migrate from the district.

When the opportunities in terms of rural tourism potential are examined, the increasing interest in rural tourism as an alternative to traditional tourism in recent years will increase the number of tourism activities in the district and increase the importance given to tourism activities. The fact that rural tourism creates a new source of income for the local people living in the district, will increase the quality in the service sector and enable

the work done to become a professional profession. Today, investment supports and grants for the development of rural tourism are an important implementation for sustainable development and rural development. There are many national and international public institutions and civil society organizations that provide this support and grants. If local people benefit from these supports and grants, it will ensure that rural tourism investments in Halfeti district are made more planned and professionally. Thus, steps will be taken towards sustainable local development goals, which is one of the most important issues in rural development. Thanks to the investments made for the development of rural tourism in Halfeti district, the lack of physical infrastructure will be eliminated, the development gap between rural and urban areas will be minimized, and migration to cities will decrease due to the socio-economic development of the local people. Therefore, the rural development goals aimed at both local and national levels will be achieved.

The most important threat that Halfeti district faces in terms of rural tourism potential is the deterioration of the socio-cultural structure of the region over time. At the same time, with the increasing tourism potential, it is inevitable that construction in the area will increase. If the buildings built or planned to be built in the area are not constructed in accordance with the architectural structure of the area, it will disrupt the natural structure of Halfeti district in terms of rural tourism and thus negatively affect its attractiveness. When excessive visitor demand is added to this situation, there will be a danger for the natural environment where endemic plants and animals live. Unpreventable young population migration is a threat that reveals the problem of supplying qualified personnel and negatively affects the rural tourism potential of Halfeti district. Finally, the threat of the traditional culture weakening and/or deteriorating over time, which is inevitable for rural tourism areas, is also valid in Halfeti district.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Halfeti district is a destination area with tourism potential with its natural beauties, ruins reflecting historical, religious and cultural heritage, and endemic plant and animal existence. With the Birecik dam starting to collect water, the flooded rural residential areas have become interesting and the tourism destination value of Halfeti district has further increased. Since Halfeti was included in the Cittaslow network in 2013, its tourism value continues to increase day by day. Local people, who earned income only through animal and plant production in the past, started rural tourism activities with these changes in Halfeti district, and Halfeti has found a special place among rural tourism destination areas today.

In this study, the rural tourism potential of Halfeti district was investigated within the framework of rural development and its current situation was revealed with SWOT analysis. As a result of the SWOT analysis, what needs to be done to ensure rural development by using rural tourism opportunities in Halfeti district is stated below.

Local people in the district and tourist business owners, most of whom are local people, are very pleased with tourism activities and having part in these activities. However, they do not have sufficient experience and knowledge in the tourism-related service sector. For this reason, local people and business owners should be informed about rural development and rural tourism, and rural tourism should be developed by creating various training programs in cooperation with local governments and universities.

Although the number of accommodation establishments serving in the district is sufficient, it has been determined that some facilities built in recent years are not suitable for the natural and architectural structure of the region, and local people and visitors are quite disturbed in this regard. The most important threats that arise in rural tourism areas are the deterioration of the local texture, natural beauties and culture and their disappearance over time. Authorized units need to be sensitive about this issue and fulfill their responsibilities without loss of time.

Tourists who come to visit the district meet their accommodation needs in nearby provinces such as Şanlıurfa and Gaziantep after day trips. The most important reason for this situation is that the service quality and service range of local accommodation facilities are not at the desired level and the guests think that the prices they pay for the service received are high. Accommodation facilities need professional support in order to increase their service quality and make a difference in the services provided. In this regard, support can be obtained from local governments and the relevant unit of the university operating in the district.

Individuals who want to stay in rural areas are individuals who want to be alone with nature and want to get away from the noise of the city and traditional tourism activities. These individuals like to meet their accommodation needs in tents or caravan camping areas instead of hotels or hostels. In Halfeti district, there is no active camping area with prepared infrastructure (electricity, drinking water, waste water disposal area, etc.), security ensured and to meet the need for alternative accommodation. The existence of such a camping area will increase the number of days of stay of visitors, practicability of tourism activities also in the winter months and the recognition of the district. For this reason, especially the local government and security forces need to take an active role in the camping area and make plans for this purpose.

Although there are active efforts to promote Halfeti district in visual media, it is not enough. Nowadays, social media is much more active and impressive, especially in the promotion of tourism areas. Today, many tour companies organize trips to Halfeti district, and many websites offer accommodation opportunities. However, promotion on social media can be much more effective than these promotional activities. In this regard, local administrations and responsible units should receive support from social media experts (instagram, twitter, you tube, etc.) who engage in national and international activities. This support can be both more cost-effective and more effective than visual media channels.

The most important issue that should not be ignored in rural tourism activities and rural development efforts is the protection of the natural structure and environment. During the field studies, the most common complaints from visitors were about the deterioration of the natural structure and the pollution of the environment. Local governments have a great responsibility to prevent the natural structure from being damaged. On the other hand, due to the large size of the destination area, the number of personnel providing environmental cleaning services is insufficient. Since increasing the number of personnel requires an additional cost for local governments, it may be considered to charge a representative destination area entrance fee to cover this cost. The collected fee will be able to provide a budget for both increasing the number of personnel and carrying out infrastructure works that will not damage the natural structure in the destination area.

On the other hand, visitor density can be prevented by ensuring that only visitors whose main purpose is to visit and stay

can enter the area. Today, with a similar practice in many countries, financing has been provided both for the protection of rural tourism destination areas and for investments to increase the value of these areas.

As a result, rural tourism has an important place in ensuring rural development in Halfeti district. There are sufficient resources for rural tourism and therefore rural development. In order to use these resources efficiently, the threats revealed in the SWOT analysis must be eliminated and appropriate solutions must be produced for the weaknesses. While making plans and programs for regional tourism, the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats in the SWOT analysis should be taken into account.

VI. AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

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