

The Impacts of Rural Tourism on local community: Resident's Perspectives in the Halabja Governorate

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Abstract

Rural tourism has experienced considerable growth in recent decades and has become a key element in local development plans and global tourism trends. Usually, is important for diversifying the economies of rural areas, for revitalizing communities, and for the conservation of natural and cultural heritage. The current research is an exploration of The Impacts of Rural Tourism on local community from the residents' perspectives in the Halabja Governorate in KRI. This study was done by distributing a questionnaire among 100 residents in the study region. The results obtained were analyzed by descriptive statistical analysis, including means, percentages, and frequencies. The results of this study illustrate some of the socio-demographic characteristics of research participants; They were mostly male with middle-age lifespans, married, and educated mostly. As per mean measures, those perspectives that have been deemed to be the most positive towards impacts of rural tourism have been observed to be linked more with economic and social dimensions, whereas environmental aspects have had the least influence among all the others. From all that was said above, it can be concluded that rural tourism has brought positive impacts on the socio-economic, and environmental aspect of the rural residents. The researcher recommends that the local government in Halabja must formulate specific policies for rural tourism management to assess its impacts, implement protective rules for natural resources and the environment, and develop tourism programs benefiting local residents and entrepreneurs for enduring sustainability.

Keywords: *Rural Tourism, Tourism Impact, Community Development.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism has a significant role in expanding diversity, the rural economy, and the expansion of tourism in rural areas; it increases the local population's economy's sustainability and serves as the foundation for attaining sustainable development in rural areas (Nooripoor et al., 2021). Rural tourism has experienced considerable growth in recent decades and has become a key element in local development plans and global tourism trends. Usually, it is travel to non-urban destinations emphasizing local culture, scenery, and customs. This type of tourism is important for diversifying the economies of rural areas, for revitalizing communities, and for the conservation of natural and cultural heritage. It is part of a larger trend toward experiential and sustainable travel and is viewed as a means of addressing rural depopulation, encouraging small-scale entrepreneurship, and advancing more equitable development (Gedecho et al., 2025). Rural tourism differs from conventional tourism in that it is experience-driven, sparsely populated, mostly takes place in natural settings, aligns with regional activity and seasonality, and is based on the conservation of customs, culture, and heritage (Banu and Krishnamurthy, 2020). Tourism is an important source of income for rural areas with poor agricultural income. It is an effective approach to solve the imbalance of living and employment of rural residents in developed economies (Nguyen and Binh, 2022). The growth of tourism and the coming of visitors have brought new social and economic roles and opportunities to the villagers. While tourism has been a boon to rural communities in recent decades, it has also brought about a number of negative effects on the rural environment, especially in the environmental sector. Rural tourism is a subcategory of tourism and can affect a country and rural communities in a number of ways (Sadeghi and Skandar, 2023). Therefore, According to RajoviÄ and BulatoviÄ (2017), Rural tourism is one of the main prospects for developing the potential for rural areas in the larger context of the Sustainable Management and Promotion of Territory



initiatives. Rural tourism is thought to be a strategy capable of supporting the social and Local communities' and underprivileged areas' economic development in order to reduce migration and to create jobs. Also, it has the advantage of creating new opportunities for investment. It slowly evolves in sites that are not traditionally thought of as tourist destinations per se, either by the establishment of tourism-related businesses by local entrepreneurs or by tourists finding out about the region and creating a demand for tourism-related activity that entrepreneurs in the area cater to. Developing tourism in a rural area is more about looking at local suitability and acceptability than just pairing visitor demand with the local product supply. In addition, both rural and urban lives are impacted by the different effects of rural tourism. Therefore, its importance cannot be disregarded. This type of tourism enhances both the economic and social aspects of host communities by highlighting rural life and culture. It encompasses various tourism forms, such as farm tourism, agritourism, and eco-tourism. As a vital strategy for regional development, rural tourism is closely linked to the local economy. It significantly impacts the preservation of the rural population's sustainable lifestyle, promotes local culture, empowers women, reduces poverty, conserves natural resources, enhances infrastructure, embraces new work culture, and improves tourist perceptions. It plays a crucial role in developing impoverished rural areas (Singh et al., 2016). For this kind of tourism to be in the right path for the sustainable development of rural regions, in all its phases and processes, the concepts of sustainable development based on economic, social, and environmental dimensions and based on a systemic approach should be highlighted (Sadeghi and Skandar, 2023). Kurdistan Region, which is a developing region in Iraq that attracts tourists due to its potential. Therefore, to help local economies and increase jobs and expansion, the Kurdish government intends to encourage tourism throughout all four provinces. Although tourism in the Halabja area is thought to be a relatively new aspect of Kurdistan's tourism offerings, this is due to the growth of demand for vacations in rural areas and small towns dramatically in many tourist destinations across the globe in recent years. Additionally, Kurdistan boasts a pristine natural area with a wealth of stunning natural attractions and historical and religious landmarks as long as the climate is favorable. Stability, stability, and safety are prevalent in Kurdistan. Kurdistan is a place of safety, security, and stability (Altaee et al., 2017). This industry will benefit the Kurdistan Region's economic infrastructure and help diversify the region's sources of income due to its favorable climate, abundant rainfall, arable land, and alluring tourist attractions. We can attract both domestic and foreign tourists by engaging in some tourism operations in the Kurdistan Region, such as Halabja, which has large green land and tourist areas (Mohammed and Salih, 2025). This research paper has led to assessing the impact of Rural Tourism on rural community. The study's conclusions encourage us to focus further on this field to be developed. The overall goal of this study is to answer the following question: What are the (Social, Economic, and Environmental) Impacts of Rural Tourism on the local community in the Halabja Governorate in KRI from the residents' perspective?

Research Objectives:

1. Describing the Socio-demographic characteristics of residents in research area.
2. To Determine and arranging the (Social, Economic and Environmental) Impacts of Rural Tourism on local community in the Halabja Governorate in the Kurdistan Region from the residents' perspectives.

II. MATERIAL AND METHODS:

Research Methodology: This study utilized a descriptive research design. The purpose of the descriptive research design is to learn more about a population, situation, or phenomena (Sakinaa et al., 2023). The study was designed using quantitative method, to effectively achieve the objectives of the study. The use of this Study would be helpful in assessing the residents' perspectives toward the impacts of rural tourism. The research objective is to determine the (Social, Economic, and Environmental) Impacts of Rural Tourism on local community in the Halabja Governorate in KRI from the residents' perspectives.

Research Area: The research area was included some rural community which are known as tourist destination, such as (Balxe, Awesar, Sarget, Tawella, Biyara, Zalm, Ahmed Awa, Khormal, Hawar, Chawg) in the Halabja governorate.



Research Sample: The population of the research is the residents of the local community belonging to the study area. The sample size of the study residents was selected and chosen by simple random sampling. The 100 respondents that participated in the research form as the final sample.

Data Collection Techniques: Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and study subjects were informed of their rights and study purpose (Mohammed and Sakina, 2025). In this research, as a tool The questionnaire was used; it consist of two parts: The first part included the socio-demographic characteristics of participants (age, gender, education level, livelihood status, and marital status), and the last part included some items related to the resident perspective toward the social, economic, and environmental impacts of rural tourism in the Halabja Governorate/KRI, based on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1: 'strongly disagree' to 5: 'strongly agree,' and the questionnaire was reviewed and tested for its content by some experts. Operations for validity and reliability were performed after the research tool was developed. The validity of an instrument is its capacity to measure what it is intended to measure (Mohammed and Mahmood, 2022). By using Cronbach's alpha approach, the validity of statements was evaluated, which serves as an accepted standard for assessing a measurement mean's dependability and was used to evaluate the stability or reliability of the scale used in this study. The dependability score was 0.83. As a result, the questionnaire was found to have good validity and reliability. Reliability is considered adequate and appropriate if its value reaches 0.70 or higher, meaning that if the scale is given to the same individuals again under the similar circumstances and after some time, the results will be comparable, indicating that they are appropriate (Mohammed and Salih, 2025). The questionnaire is prepared for distribution and final data collecting once the paragraphs have been amended and stability and validity have been established. In the interim, data was gathered from the local people, living or working in the research area, a total of 100 Completed and functional questionnaires were gathered. Descriptive analysis such as frequency, mean, percentage were used as statistical techniques in this study.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

1. Identify the Socio-demographic characteristics of residents in research area:

From the 100 local community residents in research area, in term of age most of respondents 40% were between the ages of 32 to 43years old. Male respondents constituted 65% of the sample while 35% were women. In term of education level, out of total respondent's the 30% had a diploma degree; 28% had attended intermediate school; 24% had a high school degree; 9% had attended primary school only; 4% had either a B.Sc. degree; 3% read and writes, and finally, 2% were illiterate. According to the marital status, 35% were single, while 62% of respondents were married and 3% were divorced. In terms of livelihood status divided the respondents into three level, majority of respondent 59% had medium level of Their livelihood. As shows in TABLE 1:

TABLE 1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage%
Age	20-31	36	36%
	32-43	40	40%
	44-55	24	24%
Gender	Male	65	65%
	Female	35	35%
Educational level	Illiterate	2	2%
	Reads and writes	3	3%
	Primary	9	9%
	Intermediate	28	28%
	High school	24	24%
	Diploma	30	30%

	B.Sc.	4	4%
Marital Status	Married	62	62%
	Single	35	35%
	Divorced	3	3%
	Good	31	31%
Livelihood Statues	Medium	59	59%
	low	10	10%
	Total	100	100

2. Determine and arranging (Social, Economic, and Environment) Impacts of Rural Tourism on local community in the Halabja governorate in the Kurdistan Region from the Resident perspectives.

To clarify the Resident perspectives according to the Social, Economic, Environment Impacts of Rural Tourism, the participants were divided into three categories depending on the numerical value obtained depending on each category extent and length by respondents for each dimension (environmental, social, and economic) of rural tourism. That cleared the highest obtained numerical value was between (54-59) degree, and the lowest numerical value was (25) degree, as described in TABLE 2.

TABLE 2. Distribution of economic, social, and environmental impacts of Rural Tourism from respondents' perspectives.

No.	Dimension	Categories	Frequency	Percent %	Mean	Rank
1.	Economic Impact	Low (25-34)	12	12	2.13	1
		Medium (35-44)	63	63		
		High (45-54)	25	25		
		Std. Deviation = .597				
2.	Social Impact	Low (28 -38)	25	25	1.85	2
		Medium (39 -49)	65	65		
		High (50-59)	10	10		
		Std. Deviation = .575				
3.	Environment Impact	Low (29-37)	42	42	1.68	3
		Medium (38-46)	48	48		
		High (47-more than 53)	10	10		
		Std. Deviation = .649				
Total			100	100		

In Table (2), according to the Economic dimension, the research result revealed that the majority of resident's participant 63% fall with in the category of medium impact, followed by 25% of respondents that fall in the high impact category, and the lowest percentage of the respondents 12% fall in category of low impact. The result indicated that the economic impact of rural tourism from the resident's perspective is middle to high, around 88%, and this dimension impact is Ranked first according to resident's perspective toward rural tourism impact on local community with a mean (2.13) degree. Also, in social dimension Showed that the majority of participants 65% fall with in the category of medium impact, followed by 25% of respondents

that fall in the low category, and the lowest percentage of the respondents 10% fall in category of high impact. This result indicated that the social impact of rural tourism from the resident's perspective is middle to low, around 90%. And it ranked second with a mean (1.85) degree. Finally, according to the environmental dimension the result finding illustrated that the most of respondents 48% fall with in the category of medium impact, followed percentage of respondents 42% fall in the category of low impact, and the lowest percentage of the respondents 10% fall in category of high impact. The result showed that the environmental impact of rural tourism from the resident's perspective is middle to low, around 90%, and ranked third with a mean (1.68) degree. This is illustrated from the resident's perspective that the rural tourism had positive impact on rural community especially in economic field.

3. Arrangement the items of (Social, Economic, Environment) Impacts of Rural Tourism on Local community from the Resident perspective in the Halabja governorate/ KRI:

The impact of rural tourism, according to social, economic, and environmental dimensions, consists of 35 items, obtained by means of the items, indicating that residents in the research area are exposed to the rural tourism impact. The Items arranged according to their average mean to the participants' numbers, as appeared in TABLE 3.

TABLE 3. Ranking the items of economic, social, and environmental impact of Rural Tourism.

No.	Dimension	Items	Mean	Rank
1.	Economic Impact	Create and provides new job opportunities	4.19	1
		Tourism provides economic benefits to the people and region.	4.13	2
		Tourism is a factor in the sale of agricultural products in the region.	4.07	3
		Increasing income for rural residents.	4.01	4
		Increases funding and investment for the local economy.	3.96	5
		Diversification of resident income source	3.91	6
		Increases shopping opportunities for local goods.	3.77	7
		Leads to more investment in agricultural products.	3.72	8
		Develop of local market through Providing market channel for goods	3.52	9
		Changing resident lifestyle and livelihood.	3.24	10
		Attracting budgets and financial resources.	3.02	11
2.	Social Impact	Introduce tourists to the culture and customs of rural society	4.35	1
		Tourists coming to our area is a valuable experience.	4.11	2
		The arrival of tourists will introduce us to different cultures.	3.99	3
		Tourism has increased the number of recreational activities the region.	3.94	4
		Tourism increases the awareness of the local rural community.	3.56	5
		Encourages a range of cultural pursuits for locals	3.51	6
		Tourism has led to the emergence of various social activities	3.34	7
		Is a One of the primary causes of the community's diversity of entertainment.	3.24	8
		It is crucial for locals to engage in cultural exchanges with visitors.	3.20	9
		Tourism has an adverse effect on the customs of our society.	3.18	10
		The variety of restaurants has changed the lifestyle in the area.	3.07	11



	It contributes to the community's growing social issues (such as drug usage and crime, among others).	2.52	12
	Helps safeguard local wildlife, maintain the natural ecosystem, and conserve water.	4.22	1
	Tourism is an incentive to preserve the heritage of the region.	4.20	2
	Tourism contributes to the development of the environmental sector.	4.11	3
	Tourism destroys the natural environment.	3.70	4
	Tourism has an impact on the construction of zoos in the area.	3.43	5
3.	Has made numerous improvements to the community's ecological surroundings.	3.22	6
Environment Impact	Generates noise that disturbs local's residents.	3.10	7
	Tourism causes air pollution and congestion in public places	2.76	8
	Public services are kept at a better level.	2.63	9
	Tourism increases the amount of greenery in the region.	2.50	10
	The tourists' waste ruins the landscape's attractiveness.	2.49	11
	Decrease in trees due to tourists coming to the area.	2.37	12

So, as illustrate from above Table, to assess the rural residents Perspective of the economic impacts of rural tourism in the study area, the relative distribution of responses to items is shown, the result illustrates that the item of "Create and provide new job opportunities," with a mean score of (4.19) is ranked first. While the item of "Attracting budgets and financial resources" with a mean score of (3.02) ranked last. Also, to measure the social impact of rural tourism on rural society from the rural residents' perspective in the study area according to some items. the result revealed the item of "introduce tourists to the culture and customs of rural society" with a mean score of (4.35) is ranked first. In contrast, "contributes to the community's growing social issues (such as drug usage and crime)" with a mean score of (2.52) ranked last. Regarding the social impact of rural tourism, the results revealed that respondents believed tourism had a beneficial impact on their communities, which is supported by the participants' positive attitudes and statements that they are delighted to encounter tourists. Finally, Regarding the environmental impacts of rural tourism, the result of respondents' responses in terms of the environmental impact of rural tourism from the respondents' perspective shows that prioritization of the items is based on the answers provided, as shown in the table. The results of the perspective of resident participants in terms of environmental impacts indicate that the item of "Helps safeguard local wildlife, maintain the natural ecosystem, and conserve water" with a mean score of (4.22) ranked first. While the item of "Decrease in trees due to tourists coming to the area" with the mean score of (2.37) was ranked last. Respondents believe that it has a great impact on the community. In addition to protecting and introducing the environment to tourists, tourists have increased traffic congestion during the tourist season and noise in the area.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION:

CONCLUSIONS:

1. Regarding the Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, the result findings indicate that most of them were married, middle-aged, and educated.
2. Research results illustrate that the residents perceived the economic impact of rural tourism most favorably, followed by the social and cultural impacts of tourism positively. However, the environment was found to be the least favorable aspect of tourism impact. This implies the resident's participation was exposed to the economic impact of rural tourism favorably, followed by the social impact of rural tourism. This may be due to the fact that rural tourism involves immediate and tangible transactions that vitally play a role in creating



an economic impact on the residents' lives, such as through the income and livelihood of individuals in the study area, which leads to social impacts such as the mixing of different cultures and also introduces the rural area as a place of production and recreation for tourists. Despite economic benefits from tourism, locals remain optimistic about its potential to stimulate the local economy.

3. The result showed that the 'Create and provide new job opportunities' item is ranked first in the economic dimension. This is indicated by most of the participants economically benefiting from the impact of rural tourism exposure in obtaining jobs. this is due to the fact that rural tourism has a significant role in enhancing the economy of the rural community and local resident income.

Recommendation:

1. The local government in the Halabja governorate should develop specific policies and strategies for rural tourism management to understand the effects of rural tourism development, thus making tourism a means of sustainable development.
2. The government and local authorities should also enforce strict rules to protect the natural resources and environment of a community for long-term sustainability.
3. The KRG should create a tourist development program for the rural areas for locals and local entrepreneurs.
4. Encourage The farmers to set aside parts of their fields for tourism (Agritourism), so people can come and see the planting, growing, and harvesting of crops. This will increase the farmers' earnings without having to give up their main jobs.
5. Create a digital platform or page dedicated to the village to market seasonal and local goods to attract more visitors and make money for the locals. Rural tourism is more than just a visit; it can develop into a brand for the region's goods.

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