

OVERTOURISM IN RURAL AREAS OF TURKEY: A TALE OF TWO TOWNS

Güliz Coşkun*

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the impacts of tourism development on rural areas in Isparta, Turkey, focusing on stakeholders' perspectives in two towns. It examines the interplay between overtourism, challenges in rural tourism, and sustainable tourism development, situating these within the broader literature on tourism planning and governance. A qualitative case study approach was employed, using 27 semi-structured interviews with local residents, Government officials, private sector representatives, and academics. The findings reveal contrasting development models: a structured, top-down approach versus an uncoordinated, bottom-up model, highlighting issues such as infrastructure deficits, environmental damage, and limited local involvement. The study concludes by emphasizing the importance of long-term planning, stakeholder collaboration, and addressing governance challenges to mitigate overtourism and enhance sustainable rural tourism. These insights contribute to both theoretical understandings and practical strategies for managing rural tourism sustainably.

Keywords: Rural Tourism; Regional Development; Political Environment.

OVERTURISMO EM ÁREAS RURAIS DA TURQUIA: UM CONTO DE DUAS CIDADES

Resumo

Este estudo tem como objetivo analisar os impactos do desenvolvimento do turismo em áreas rurais em Isparta, Turquia, com foco nas perspectivas das partes interessadas em duas cidades. Ele examina a interação entre o excesso de turismo, os desafios do turismo rural e o desenvolvimento do turismo sustentável, situando esses aspectos dentro da literatura mais ampla sobre planejamento e governança do turismo. Foi empregada uma abordagem qualitativa de estudo de caso, utilizando 27 entrevistas semiestruturadas com residentes locais, funcionários do governo, representantes do setor privado e acadêmicos. Os resultados revelam modelos de desenvolvimento contrastantes: uma abordagem estruturada e de cima para baixo, em comparação com um modelo descoordenado e de baixo para cima, destacando questões como déficits de infraestrutura, danos ambientais e envolvimento local limitado. O estudo conclui enfatizando a importância do planejamento de longo prazo, da colaboração entre as partes interessadas e da resolução de desafios de governança para mitigar o excesso de turismo e aprimorar o turismo rural sustentável. Esses insights contribuem tanto para compreensões teóricas quanto para estratégias práticas de gestão do turismo rural de forma sustentável.

Palavras-chave: Turismo Rural; Desenvolvimento Regional; Política Ambiental.

EL OVERTURISMO EN LAS ZONAS RURALES DE TURQUÍA: UNA HISTORIA DE DOS CIUDADES

Resumen

Este estudio tiene como objetivo analizar los impactos del desarrollo turístico en las áreas rurales de Isparta, Turquía, centrándose en las perspectivas de los actores involucrados en dos localidades. Examina la interacción entre el exceso de turismo, los desafíos del turismo rural y el desarrollo turístico sostenible, situándolos en el contexto de la literatura más amplia sobre planificación y gobernanza del turismo. Se empleó un enfoque de estudio de caso cualitativo, utilizando 27 entrevistas semiestructuradas con residentes locales, funcionarios gubernamentales, representantes del sector privado y académicos. Los hallazgos revelan modelos de desarrollo contrastantes: un enfoque estructurado y de arriba hacia abajo frente a un modelo descoordinado y de abajo hacia arriba, destacando problemas como déficits de infraestructura, daño ambiental y limitada participación local. El estudio concluye subrayando la importancia de la planificación a largo plazo, la colaboración entre las partes interesadas y el abordaje de los desafíos de gobernanza para mitigar el exceso de turismo y mejorar el turismo rural sostenible. Estos aportes contribuyen tanto a la comprensión teórica como a estrategias prácticas para gestionar el turismo rural de manera sostenible.

Palabras clave: Turismo Rural; Desarrollo Turístico; Entorno Político.

HOW TO CITE: Coşkun, G. (2025). Overtourism in Rural Areas of Turkey: A Tale of Two Towns. *Anais Brasileiros de Estudos Turísticos*, v. 15, n. 2 (Special Issue – 1), 1 – 14, Jan./ Dez. Retrieved from: <https://periodicos.ufjf.br/index.php/abet/article/view/50105>
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15269839>

1 INTRODUCTION

The number of tourists visiting a small village in the southwestern part of Türkiye increased by 6,000% from 2016 to 2019. This rapid rise in popularity can largely be attributed to the efforts of local residents and, more significantly, social media exposure. However, this surge in tourism has highlighted numerous challenges, particularly the lack of adequate planning and infrastructure.

Both tourists and local authorities have expressed concerns about the inadequacy of services and facilities in

the area. While the visible negative impacts of tourism are evident, a significant gap exists in empirical research regarding the extent of the damage tourism has inflicted on the region. Although local residents are currently benefiting from short-term earnings, they remain largely unaware of the long-term consequences that excessive seasonal tourism may impose.

While overtourism has been widely studied in relation to well-known urban destinations such as Venice and Paris, less attention has been paid to its effects on rural areas. Historically, rural tourism has been viewed as a slow and



Licenciada por Creative Commons
4.0 / Internacional
CC BY 4.0

*PhD in Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management/Clemson University (2015). Master of Science in Tourism Management/IULM University (2010). Bachelor of Arts in Tourism Administration/ Bogazici University (2007). Associate Professor in the department of Recreation Management at Sakarya University of Applied Sciences. Visiting scholar in China, Brazil, Hungary. Editorial Board Member of World Leisure Journal. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5200-6370> [gulic@subu.edu.tr]

small-scale process, as emphasized by the UNWTO. However, rural destinations in Türkiye, like many others worldwide, are experiencing a shift towards mass tourism.

This shift has led to significant environmental and social harm, particularly in sensitive rural areas. Issues such as inadequate infrastructure, lack of accessibility, insufficient education, and corruption are common challenges faced by rural tourism globally (Fleischer & Felsenstein, 2000; McComb et al., 2017; Rid et al., 2014; Panyik et al., 2011; Su, 2011).

In Türkiye, these challenges are exacerbated, resulting in both tourist dissatisfaction and environmental degradation (Akin et al., 2015; Çakır et al., 2018; Hatipglu et al., 2016; Kişi, 2019). The unique contribution of this study lies in its focus on rural areas, examining the specific implications of overtourism in contexts that fundamentally differ from urban centers and popular tourist spots.

Existing studies on overtourism primarily address the challenges faced by popular urban destinations or islands, leaving a significant gap in understanding how mass tourism affects less developed, more rural regions. This research aims to fill this gap by examining the impact of tourism on rural communities, with a particular focus on two towns in Isparta, Türkiye, where tourism is a newly emerging phenomenon.

By comparing the outcomes of different tourism planning approaches in these two towns, this study makes a novel contribution to the existing literature on overtourism, emphasizing the importance of context-specific strategies for sustainable rural tourism development.

The theoretical gap this study addresses is the lack of comprehensive frameworks for understanding the dynamics of overtourism in rural settings. The majority of studies on overtourism focus on urban areas (Santos-Rojo, Llopis-Amorós, and García-García, 2023). Practically, it aims to offer insights into the challenges rural communities face in managing the pressures of increased tourism while striving for long-term sustainability.

This research will contribute to both the development of overtourism theory and the design of more effective, locally tailored policies for managing rural tourism. Through this approach, the study not only broadens the scope of overtourism research but also highlights the urgent need for sustainable and inclusive tourism planning in rural regions.

2 THEORETICAL REVIEW

2.1 Overtourism

Overtourism is a relatively recent concept in tourism literature, lacking a universally accepted definition. Capocchi et al. (2019) associate overtourism with three primary aspects: growth, concentration, and governance. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2018) defines overtourism as the adverse impact of tourism on a destination that excessively influences the perceived quality of life for residents and/or visitors' experiences (Duignan, 2019).

The concept of overtourism encompasses the perceptions of both hosts and guests, implying negative consequences (Goodwin, 2017), including "permanent

changes in resident's lifestyles, access to amenities and general well-being" (Milano et al., 2018, p2). Milano (2018) contends that the issues associated with overtourism are not as novel as they may appear, noting that researchers have been developing theories about tourism's negative impacts since the 1970s and 1980s.

Research on overtourism usually describes and explores the topic. Capocchi et al. (2019) identified factors that contribute, such as seasonality, disruptions, and physical impacts. Most studies focus on how residents perceive tourism. For example, Gonzales et al. (2018) and Martin et al. (2018) found that although residents in Spain see the economic benefits of tourism, they also worry about increasing living costs and displacement.

Similarly, in Seville, overtourism disrupts sustainability efforts, raises housing prices, and displaces local businesses (Jover & Díaz-Parra, 2022; Romera, Lama, & Tabales, 2023). In rural areas, such as Iranian villages, overtourism has led to social and health issues (Ghaderi, Hall, & Ryan, 2022).

Sánchez-Montañés, Romero Ojeda, and Castilla Roldán (2023) highlight that while overtourism has been explored from various angles, its impact on architecture and urban spaces in historic cities remains underexamined. Overtourism disrupts urban dynamics, altering building uses and public spaces and often disadvantaging local residents and traditional urban areas functions.

The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted some scholars to view it as an opportunity to reimagine the tourism industry, potentially fostering more sustainable and equitable practices (Netto, Oliveira, & Severini, 2020). For instance, in Barcelona, unchecked tourism has displaced residents in high-traffic neighborhoods, leading to protests (Oliveira et al., 2021; Gutiérrez, Aguilera, & Ramis, 2022). However, recent research suggests a shift in tourism management toward inclusive and sustainable models in the city (Gutiérrez, Aguilera, & Ramis, 2022).

Overtourism is often associated with urban environments, but it also affects rural and natural areas, where the lack of protests may leave these effects unnoticed (Goodwin, 2017). Social media, particularly Instagram, exacerbates the issue by driving unexpected growth in tourist numbers (Koens et al., 2018).

Policymakers emphasize the need for comprehensive city policies to address these challenges. Suggested measures include demarketing, entry limitations, seasonal restrictions, and the promotion of rural tourism to alleviate urban burdens (Butler & Dodds, 2022; Majdak & de Almeida, 2022).

Studies also highlight the environmental, economic, and social consequences of overtourism in small islands, such as Türkiye's Bozcaada and Gökçeada, including congestion and security concerns (Sunnecioglu et al., 2021). Proposed solutions like clustering techniques—networks between tourism stakeholders—aim to balance tourism growth and sustainability (Beni, 2020). These strategies represent a paradigm shift toward a sustainable tourism model that preserves local communities and environments while enhancing visitor experiences.

The literature on overtourism is relatively recent and focuses on a limited range of topics, such as influential

factors, resident perceptions, and the sustainability challenges posed by overtourism. As research expands, new themes are expected to emerge. Current themes include tourist booms, infrastructure, resident attitudes, tourist behavior, tourism management, marketing, and environmental sustainability (Insch, 2019).

Santos-Rojo, Llopis-Amorós, and García-García (2023) identify a significant post-2018 trend in research connecting overtourism with sustainability. They emphasize the growing role of governments and institutions in addressing overtourism through increased research funding. The study calls for more qualitative research and broader analysis, noting that overtourism impacts vary across cities.

While overtourism has predominantly been studied in urban and popular tourist destinations, its impact is not confined to these areas. Increasingly, rural regions are also experiencing challenges associated with tourism growth. As overtourism in urban settings drives efforts to redistribute visitor flows, rural tourism has emerged as a potential solution to alleviate the pressure on cities. However, this shift presents its own set of challenges, as rural areas often lack the infrastructure and capacity to handle significant tourist influxes.

2.2 Rural Tourism

The OECD defines a rural area as a region with a population density of 150 persons per square kilometre. According to UNWTO (2017), rural tourism is:

'Type of tourism activity in which the visitor's experience is related to a wide range of products generally linked to nature-based activities, agriculture, rural lifestyle/culture, angling and sightseeing' Rural Tourism activities take place in non-urban (rural) areas with the following characteristics: (I) low population density, (II) landscape and land-use dominated by agriculture and forestry (III) traditional social structure and lifestyle (p.11).

Rural tourism development should advance gradually and naturally to protect the environment and social fabric, as rural areas rely on peace and solitude, which mass tourism can disturb (Sharpley & Jepson, 2011). While some rural areas become popular and see an increase in visitors, this often results in environmental harm and social issues, especially in communities that do not depend on tourism for income (Fleischer & Felsenstein, 2000).

The English Tourism Council emphasizes that tourism should protect the natural and built environment, support local communities and their culture, and benefit the destination's economy (Torres-Delgado and Saarinen, 2014). With appropriate sustainable development plans, rural tourism can positively contribute to underdeveloped areas.

Examples like community-based tourism (CBT) in Brazil illustrate how tourism can promote cultural expression, environmental conservation, and local involvement when planned sustainably (de Moraes & Mendonça, 2024). Creative tourism initiatives, such as those in small cities, can also strengthen community bonds and help mitigate the negative effects of mass tourism (Bakas & Duxbury, 2018).

Residents of rural areas exhibit a relatively positive attitude toward tourism. A study conducted in rural areas of Romania revealed that residents have developed a favorable

disposition toward tourism due to the increase in their income levels following the rise of tourism activities in the region (Muresan, et al., 2016). Similarly, in rural areas of China, the development of tourism caused residents to alter their perspective on being a rural resident positively.

However, according to the authors, they gradually lose their rural identity as they transition into tourism activities to increase their earnings. Consequently, tourism poses a threat to the sustainability of rural traditions (Xue et al., 2017). In India, younger residents (18-25 years old), those with higher secondary education, and employed individuals are more likely to perceive positive impacts of sustainable rural tourism development.

The rapid and uncontrolled growth of rural tourism poses challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, environmental damage, and cultural exploitation. 'Growth often overshadowing development' (Novelli and Gebhardt, 2007, p.474). The unchecked expansion of rural tourism has led to a lack of proper planning in rural areas. Many rural regions worldwide face similar growth-related issues. 'Damaged environments, exhausted resources, corrupt local cultures, and exploited local labour are all plausible outcomes of poorly managed tourism promotion' (Fleischer and Felsenstein, 2000, 1021).

Stakeholder collaboration is crucial for effective tourism planning, but obstacles like mistrust, power imbalances, and insufficient community involvement often hinder progress (McComb et al., 2017). The host community and private sector representatives experience diminished involvement in the decision-making process, as the government dictates decisions to public and private sectors..

A lack of education among rural populations worsens these challenges, restricting their participation in tourism planning and management (Rid et al., 2014; Su, 2011). Similar issues in rural tourism have been seen worldwide. De Miranda Mendonça et al. (2024) studied community involvement in tourism development in Brazil. They argue that the absence of a clear definition of 'participation' in legislation can lead to overlooking the process of prior and informed consultation with target communities. The authors emphasize the significance of community empowerment through government engagement.

Table 1 illustrates the challenges of rural tourism on a global scale. The situation exhibits similarities across various countries. Sustainable tourism development plans aim to encourage local participation in tourism activities. However, the lack of education and knowledge among rural communities limits their involvement in these endeavors. Even when active participation occurs, certain issues arise.

For instance, in Gambia, community-owned businesses face difficulties due to untrained staff and inadequate management (Rid et al., 2014). Rural areas of China encounter comparable challenges (Su, 2011). The education of rural populations is crucial before implementing initiatives for their involvement in tourism activities. However, challenges persist globally. For instance, Scandinavian rural tourism faces innovation gaps and struggles to meet demand, risking environmental degradation (Hjalager et al., 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic further disrupted rural tourism, with recovery patterns varying based on destinations' resilience and domestic tourism uptake

(Marques, Guedes, & Bento, 2022; Vaishar & Štaštná, 2022).

In Portugal, only well-positioned rural destinations have recovered from COVID-19 (Marques, Guedes, & Bento, 2022). In the Czech Republic, while the decline in foreign tourism has had a negative economic impact on urban areas, rural regions have experienced an unexpected rise in domestic tourism (Vaishar & Štaštná, 2022).

Although negative impacts of tourism development in rural areas are more common than positive ones, the positive aspects should not be overlooked. Sustainable rural tourism requires balancing social, environmental, and economic factors. There are also successful examples of rural tourism. Bălan and Burghilea (2015) analyzed the development of tourism in a small village in Romania. According to the authors, 'It is a good example of how you can turn a small settlement, located at high altitude, to renowned tourist resort' (Bălan & Burghilea, 2015, p.281). The village exemplifies sustainable tourism development with high-quality service, thanks to the efforts of a local affluent individual. Its success is due to the involvement of local residents in tourism development activities, guided by an educated community member. The competence of locals engaged in tourism activities significantly contributes to sustainable development. Norway's strategic development of sustainability-oriented projects, emphasizing calculated actions and community empowerment, serves as another example (Mwesiumo, Halfdanarson, & Shlopak, 2022).

Table 1. Main Problems in Rural Tourism Worldwide.

Problems	Authors
The absence of appropriate knowledge and skills	McComb et al. (2017); Rid et al. (2014); Su (2011)
Lack of collaboration	McComb et al. (2017); Su (2011); Panyik et al. (2011)
Power imbalances, inadequate services	Panyik et al. (2011)
Lack of infrastructure and accessibility	McComb et al. (2017)
Lack of financing	Panyik et al. (2011); Su (2011)
Lack of trust	McComb et al. (2017); Panyik et al. (2011)
Lack of marketing strategy at local level	Panyik et al. (2011); Rid et al. (2014); Su (2011)
Environmental damage	Fleischer & Felsenstein (2000); Rid et al. (2014)
Corrupt local cultures, expanded resources, exploited local labor	Fleischer & Felsenstein (2000); Gaonkar, S. & Suktnkar (2024)
Lack of Community Involvement	Miranda Mendonça et al. (2024); Bakas & Duxbury (2018), Ertuna & Kirbas (2012)

Source: own elaboration.

While rural tourism faces universal challenges, its development and outcomes vary significantly across regions due to differing cultural, economic, and environmental contexts. Türkiye, with its diverse landscapes, rich heritage, and rural traditions, offers unique opportunities and complexities for rural tourism. Examining Türkiye's approach provides valuable insights into how rural tourism can balance

economic growth with cultural preservation and environmental sustainability

2.3 Rural Tourism in Türkiye

Several studies exist on rural tourism, particularly in the northwestern region of Türkiye, including Çanakkale (Ayhan et al., 2020; Göçer et al., 2021; Kürüm Varolgüneş et al., 2022), Zonguldak (Kisi, 2019), Kastamonu (Ertuna and Kirbas, 2012), and Bursa (Tas, et al, 2009), as well as in the southwestern region, which includes Isparta (Giray et al., 2019), Burdur (Akay, 2020), and Antalya (Güzel et al., 2021). While the majority of studies focus on western regions, several prominent cities in the central and eastern parts of Türkiye have also received attention, including Nevşehir (Tosun, 1998; Çakır, Çakır, et al., 2018), Erzurum (Davardoust and Karahan, 2021), and Diyarbakır (Akın, et al., 2015).

While rural tourism in Türkiye presents significant opportunities for economic development and cultural preservation, several challenges persist. The primary issues in rural tourism in Türkiye are similar to those observed globally. Tourism development in Türkiye began in the 1980s through governmental initiatives. The 'Tourism Encouragement Law' enabled numerous individuals to obtain substantial incentives from the government (Yarcan & Ertuna, 2002; Duman, & Tosun, 2010).

Tourism development was mainly industry-driven, with limited local participation (Tosun, 2001). Earlier, researchers suggested alternative forms of tourism to foster development in underdeveloped regions of Türkiye (Ayhan et al., 2020; Tosun and Timothy, 2001; Seckelmann, 2002). However, the rapid expansion of tourism in rural areas has caused inadequate tourism development planning in these regions.

Although there are some positive examples where local community involvement has been achieved, such as Cumalıkızık (Tas, et al, 2009), many towns in Türkiye face similar challenges as those observed worldwide. As Figure 1 illustrates, the main issues in rural tourism in Türkiye can be grouped into process-related, people-related, and place-related concerns. Process-related issues include problems related to how tourism develops, such as the rate of growth, political factors, and unfair competition (Akın, et al., 2015; Çakır, et al., 2018; Kişi, 2019).

Examples of people-related issues include inadequate education, lack of awareness, limited collaboration, and a shortage of qualified personnel in rural areas (Davardoust and Karahan, 2021; Ertuna and Kirbas, 2012; Giray et al., 2019; Hatipoglu et al., 2016; Kürüm Varolgüneş et al., 2022; Yılmaz, 2008). Structural problems, such as poor infrastructure and limited accessibility, have been identified as the most common issues in Türkiye's rural regions (Akay, 2020; Çetin, 2015; Davardoust and Karahan, 2021; Hatipoglu et al., 2016; Kişi, 2019; Kürüm Varolgüneş et al., 2022; Yılmaz, 2008).

Some researchers have also highlighted rural gentrification and the displacement of local populations as negative consequences of rural tourism (Göçer et al., 2021). These studies collectively demonstrate the growing interest in rural tourism in Türkiye and its potential to contribute to rural development. They also emphasize the importance of sustainability, appropriate land use planning, and

understanding tourist experiences in developing successful rural tourism initiatives.

Figura 1. Rural Tourism Problems in Turkey.

Process Related	People Related	Place Related
Fast growth Environmental damage Unfair competition Lack of local involvement Politics Lack of financial means	Lack of qualified staff Lack of collaboration Lack of awareness Lack of education	Inadequate infrastructure, transportation and accommodation facilities Accessibility Signage Lack of lightning Parking space

Source: own elaboration based on Akın et al., 2015; Çakır et al., 2018; Çetin, 2015; Hatipoğlu et al., 2016; Giray et al., 2019; Kişi, 2019; Yılmaz, 2008.

While it is necessary to initiate sustainable tourism development plans in Türkiye's rural areas, the rapid increase in demand will not allow for a slow development pace. Many players are involved in the tourism development process within an area, and the quality of these players will determine the success of the tourism plans. The first step towards sustainable tourism development is to analyze the situation, and the most accurate information can be gathered from the main stakeholders in the area. This study attempts to understand stakeholder perspectives on tourism development in rural areas of Türkiye.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Isparta Region

Isparta is in the northern part of the Mediterranean Region in Türkiye. The province is renowned for its roses and traditional handmade rugs (Wikipedia). The primary tourism resources in Isparta include national parks, lakes, and cultural attractions. The region also offers opportunities for cave exploration, religious tourism, skiing, plateau tourism, and ecotourism (Durgun, 2007). Kuyucak (the lavender town) and Güneykent are located in the western part of the province. The information about these two towns is summarized in Table 2.

3.2 The Data Collection Process

The qualitative research method, specifically the case study approach, was adopted for the study. The case study approach enables researchers to obtain an in-depth insight into a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Respondents were selected utilizing a snowball sampling method. The mayor of the first town was the initial interviewee, followed by individuals he recommended. The interview process concluded when the saturation point was reached; respondents began to discuss the same issues repeatedly and recommended the same individuals for interviews.

In total, 27 face-to-face semi-structured interviews of stakeholders were conducted in the Isparta region. The stakeholders were selected to represent diverse groups involved in tourism activities in the region. Therefore, the selection criteria for respondents stipulated that they should be engaged in tourism activity in the region.

These stakeholders included eight residents, seven government officials, six private sector representatives, four development agency managers, and two academics. Interview questions were formulated based on the rural tourism issues outlined in previous literature (Table 1). Examples of the questions include: 'How did tourism activities commence here?', 'How many tourists does the town receive in a season?', 'Are local people involved in tourism activities?', 'What are your thoughts on tourism projects? How do they function?', 'Is there any control mechanism to monitor these projects?', 'What are your views on carrying capacity?', 'Do you believe tourism development has a negative impact on the farms?'.

The purpose of using semi-structured interviews was to enable respondents to tell their stories from their perspectives. Following a few initial questions, respondents began discussing tourism development in the region, its impact on the community, and their involvement in tourism activities. The duration of the interviews ranged from 15 minutes to over one hour. The entire interview was recorded, except for segments that respondents preferred not to have on record. In these cases, the researcher took notes during the discussion.

3.3 Data Analyses

The main aim of the study was to present an in-depth picture of the case using narratives, tables, and figures. The patterns were identified and contextualized within the framework from the literature (Wolcott, 1994). Following the completion of the interview process, the recordings were transcribed. The initial step in analyzing the data involved creating and organizing data files. Subsequently, the researcher read through the text, made margin notes, formed initial codes, and described the text and its context.

The researcher employed a direct interpretation method, wherein "the researcher looks at a single instance and draws meaning from it. Then the researcher establishes patterns and develops naturalistic generalizations" (Creswell, 2007, 163). The researcher utilized categorical aggregation to establish themes, taking into consideration broad commonalities.

Common issues reported by each stakeholder were grouped under the same heading. Some region-specific and contextual problems also emerged from the data, such as politics and corruption. These emerging themes were integrated into existing ones. The most prevalent issues observed in rural tourism globally and in Turkey were compared with the survey results. Problems in rural tourism were summarized in Table 1.

4 RESULTS ANALYSIS

4.1 Locus and Object of study

4.1.1 Two Towns

Table 2 summarizes tourism development in two towns. Stakeholder interviews revealed that tourism development in these towns differs significantly. The Municipality initiated tourism activities in Rose Town, indicating a top-down approach with organized efforts.

Tourism has not caused environmental damage, as visitors only frequent specific areas of the town.

Conversely, in Lavender Town, tourism was initiated by local residents who invited the development agency and social media influencers to the area. Lavender gardens offer photography opportunities, leading to the town's popularity on social media because of its resemblance to Provence, France. The population of Lavender Town is significantly lower than that of Rose Town. The number of tourists visiting Lavender Town has rapidly increased due to its social media prominence.

Because of the high number of tourists, the environmental impact in Lavender town is significant. Due to the nature of the product, local residents' involvement in tourism activities is limited in Rose town. Most residents of Rose town maintain rose gardens, and during the harvest season, they have to wake early to pick the roses.

Table 2. Comparison of Two Towns

	Rose Town	Lavender Town
Tourism Development Approach	Top down	Bottom-up
Tourist Numbers	2016-21,000 2017-90,750/140,000* 2018-250,000/254,000* 2019-750,000/1,300,000*	2014-1,000 2018-50,000 (20% foreign) 2019-Under 250,000**
Inhabitants	1583	250/500 (winter/summer)
Nature of Product	Need maximum attention	Need minimal attention
Local Involvement	Only certain people	Majority of the community
Tourism Activity	Organised	Unorganised
Environmental Damage	Minimal	Medium
Project	No current project	Vision Village Project
Festival	Annual (5th in 2019)	None

Notes. *Official/real number **Estimation.

Source: own elaboration.

4.1.2 The Projects in the Region

Currently, there are no ongoing tourism projects in the region. Two projects focused on women's cooperatives were implemented in each village. In Rose Town, the cooperative received funding from the Western Development Agency (BAKA). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Anadolu Efes jointly funded the Women's Initiative in Lavender Town. Both projects aimed to integrate women into tourism activities.

Although these projects have concluded, the cooperatives remain operational. Another project in the region is the Gular Rose Research Laboratory, funded by Suleyman Demirel University. The laboratory's objective is to enhance the quality of rose products. While this project is not directly related to tourism, its focus on improving product quality indirectly contributes to the tourism sector.

Tourism Funding Institutions

Several authorities are directly related to tourism initiatives. They are:

Development Support Agencies

- BAKA-West Mediterranean Development Agency
- KDK-Agricultural and Rural Development Support Institution (65% fund to rural tourism projects)

As a result, they do not have enough time to interact with tourists. A resident of Rose Town said: 'Rose harvest is a hard process. There may not be hospitality at those times. We wake up very early. People who do not work on the farm can open a restaurant. I personally do not want tourists while I am working. They stop me to take pictures, and I cannot do my work.' In contrast, lavender harvest takes place only once a year, giving farmers more time to participate in tourism activities.

There are no organized festivals in Lavender town, and according to a local Government representative, there is a festive atmosphere in the town daily. Rose town experiences its highest influx of tourists during the yearly two-day festival. According to the residents, this is the sole opportunity for them to interact with tourists.

- KOSGEB-Small and Medium Enterprises Development Organization of Türkiye

Other Government Divisions

The Ministry of Family, Employment and Social Services

- The Ministry of Culture and Tourism
- The Ministry of Agriculture
- The Ministry of City Planning
- Isparta District Governorship
- Municipalities

Development support agencies provide funding to individuals and small enterprises for rural tourism projects. According to the secretary of BAKA, developing tourism is their primary objective. The Agricultural Rural Development Support Institution (TKDK) finances 65% of rural tourism initiatives. Funding amounts range from 5,000 euros to 500,000 euros. They support eating establishments, recreational facilities, and hotels with a maximum of 25 rooms located in rural areas.

However, TKDK disburses funds after the completion of the investment. It aims to support individuals who already possess capital for initial investment. The European Union funds both BAKA and TKDK. Conversely, the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Organization of Turkey (KOSGEB) is funded by the Turkish Government. TKDK

exclusively funds small enterprises with fewer than 250 employees.

The funds can be utilized for enterprise establishment, educational purposes, development initiatives, or attendance at international fairs. These institutions allocate funds based on a point system; consequently, individuals under 40 years of age and women are more likely to obtain funding. A manager employed by one of these agencies asserts that the funds provided for tourism development lack sustainability.

This is not a sustainable grant. We do not only give grants for tourism; we also fund public institutions for developing tourism infrastructure. This year, we plan to provide incentives to private companies, specifically SMEs. For example, you might receive a grant for tourism over five years to help grow the sector. However, this support ends after that, so it doesn't lead to sustainable development. We also carry out complementary activities such as marketing, networking, and creating brochures. These activities are separate from the grants.

Various government divisions have implemented tourism projects. Ministries, governorships, and municipalities engage in tourism activities independently.

The Ministry of City Planning and the governorship are developing a 'Vision Village' Project in Lavender town. The project aims to construct a new village for residents and utilize the village center exclusively for tourism purposes. Concurrently, the Ministry of Agriculture provides funds to local inhabitants for the establishment of tourism facilities. Municipalities collaborate with tour operators to attract tourists to the area. The Municipality in Rose Town manages all tourism activities within the town.

Interviews with stakeholders reveal that the area's tourism development challenges are consistent with those observed in other parts of the world. The most significant issue, unanimously identified by all stakeholders, is the lack of infrastructure. Particularly in Lavender Town, due to the rapid development of tourism, the number of facilities serving tourists is inadequate. Other prevalent issues stakeholders identify include political factors, insufficient education, product characteristics, service quality, carrying capacity, and lack of collaboration. Table 3 presents a comprehensive list of these challenges. The subsequent section will provide a detailed analysis of each identified problem.

Table 3. Rural Tourism Problems in the Area.

	Government	Public	Agencies	Academics	Private Sector
<i>Infrastructure</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Politics</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓
<i>Lack of Education</i>	✓		✓		✓
<i>Lack of Passion/motivation</i>	✓		✓		
<i>Packaging</i>	✓		✓		
<i>Nature of product</i>	✓	✓	✓		
<i>Lack of knowledge</i>	✓				✓
<i>No standardisation</i>	✓		✓		✓
<i>Lack of local products</i>	✓			✓	
<i>Quality of service</i>	✓	✓	✓		
<i>Lack of courage</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓
<i>Bureaucracy</i>	✓			✓	✓
<i>Environmental Damage</i>	✓				✓
<i>carrying capacity</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
<i>Signage</i>	✓	✓			
<i>Lack of collaboration/communication</i>			✓	✓	✓
<i>Lack of community involvement</i>		✓		✓	
<i>Corruption/discrimination</i>		✓			✓
<i>Language</i>		✓			

Source: own elaboration.

4.1.3 Lack of Infrastructure

The common issue that all stakeholders agree on in the area is the lack of infrastructure. A local government representative in Lavender Town highlighted the seriousness of the infrastructure problem in the village: 'Last year military came to clear the roads. We had a huge problem. It took cars 45 minutes to pass through this small village. The number of tourists was over 300,000 in 2018, and I do not know what will happen if 500,000 come.' According to officials, the number of visitors to the village was 750,000 in 2019.

Conversely, the actual number exceeded one million (personal communication). Tourism development in Rose Town is gradual and small-scale. Consequently, the infrastructure problem is not as severe. According to an academician, 'Rose Town has better infrastructure. For

example, we asked them to open a rose museum. The mayor built one, but it is small.' Even though the number of tourists Rose Town receives is not as high as in other towns, it cannot meet tourists' demands due to insufficient facilities. According to a resident, 'There is no establishment, nowhere to eat. Cleaning is important.'

There are no toilets. There are some containers, but they are limited. Facilities should be available everywhere. The infrastructure is inadequate. Tourism here is not for profit. According to a private sector representative, corruption and bureaucracy are the main challenges: 'They are good at marketing and promotion, but lack infrastructure. Bureaucracy is an obstacle.' The lack of infrastructure is a significant issue in both towns. However, the rapid growth of tourism in the area will likely have negative impacts on these vulnerable regions.

4.1.4 Carrying Capacity

These small areas have limited carrying capacity, and most stakeholders agree that Lavender Town has already exceeded its limit. The Mayor of Rose Town expresses serious concerns about carrying capacity: 'These regions lack solid infrastructure. But if you destroy the environment to expand capacity, the destination will lose its appeal.'

For example, Rose Town receives 2000 tourists per day, totaling 60-70 thousand per season. We aim to diversify our agricultural products to spread tourism more evenly throughout the year, ensuring our infrastructure can handle it. Next year, we could welcome 250,000 tourists without harming the environment. He mentioned that he intentionally limited promotional activities: 'No, we did not want to promote. If we do, tourism will develop quickly and it will harm the environment. It is best as it is now. If we increase the rose lands, we shoot a bullet in our heads.'

There is no official record of visitor numbers in the town; however, estimates suggest it is below its carrying capacity. Conversely, according to the Local Government of Lavender Town: 'I think it is already over its capacity. First-year there was only a women's cooperative, and now there are 30 establishments in the village.' An academician stated: 'Lavender town is already over it. If there is an organisation, capacity would not be a problem.' According to stakeholders, because the Municipality organized tourism development in Rose Town, the organization was better structured.

In contrast, Lavender Town lacks a municipality, and tourist numbers became unmanageable within just three years. According to a private sector representative, tourist numbers will not increase in the future. On the contrary, they will decrease: 'In 5 years, it will be at saturation point. Infrastructure is not enough; tourists are not happy. People tell us, they are not happy about lavender town.' The extension of carrying capacity has resulted in significant environmental damage in Lavender Town.

4.1.5 Environmental Damage

A farmer explained the extent of environmental damage: 'They harm a lot. We put signage but they did not care. There are 200 to 300,000 people, so even if everyone takes one, it adds up. We did not charge them for photos, but we might in the future. Unfortunately, domestic tourists cause the most damage to the gardens.' A private sector representative shared his observations during his visit to Lavender Town: 'I went to a lavender garden. Everyone can enter; there was no barrier. The guy yells 'please do not pick the lavender.' No one was listening. He was angry. I felt sorry for him'.

The lavender gardens are extensive, and there are no barriers restricting entry. The owner lacks control over garden access. In contrast, in Rose Town, the municipality leases certain gardens, and tourists are only permitted to enter these designated areas. Tour leaders provide guidelines for visitors on proper rose-picking techniques. Consequently, this town experienced no environmental damage. An academician in the agricultural department stated 'I do not think it will damage.'

Farmers can earn more money. However, this may delay the harvest, damaging the rose. The focus is not on picking it, but on smelling it, and you need to arrive early for that. Tourism development is a recent phenomenon in the area, and the community is eager for visitors. However, according to an academic, non-paying tourists may eventually become a source of irritation for residents. In the future, hostility towards tourists may arise, as no comprehensive tourism development plan has been initiated by stakeholders.

4.1.6 Local Involvement

While Lavender Town has 250 residents, Rose Town has approximately 1,500. Residents of Lavender Town are fully engaged in tourism activities. The village has food establishments and a couple of pensions. In contrast, in Rose Town, the Municipality operates tourism activities, and there are only a few eating establishments and no pensions. The lack of involvement in tourism activities among local people is attributed to resentment towards the Municipality.

A resident states: 'We do not benefit from tourism. They do not stay. Maybe some rese water. Tour company make all the money.' Another resident comments: 'The places that tours need to stop are determined by the Mayor. Tourist do not walk. The community do not like this.' A local shop owner reported that no tourist ever shop from his store. According to a local, the Mayor does not act fair: 'There is discrimination in town. For example, Mayor gives permission first, then if he had personal problem, he prevents it.'

In contrast, residents of Lavender Town express satisfaction with tourism: 'Everybody is happy about their earnings. For example, an ordinary woman makes 10 thousand per season.' According to an academician local involvement in tourism activities in this region surpasses that of most regions.

The development agency manager expressed deep concern about the lack of local involvement in tourism activities: 'Tourism is a priority right now. I wanted local involvement in tourism. I did not want my fellow residents of town to work in a hotel that some stranger runs. I wanted Aunt Hatice to serve local food in her own restaurant. I wanted family businesses to be established all over the town. People told me that it would not work, and sadly, it did not.'

There are two perspectives to every situation, and according to the Government, local people lack enthusiasm for involvement in tourism activities: 'They expect everything from Municipality. They do not want to risk anything; they want to see the results first. There is no passion.' The project manager in Lavender Town has encountered a similar challenge, and he explained how he motivated women to continue the project: 'It was hard to motivate women to continue, they wanted to see the results.'

They were sacrificing a lot, leaving their children, animals, and farms to continue their education. First, we organised a tour to Bursa. We wanted them to see the results of another Project. They got into contact with other women who had been involved in the project. We took three women to France. They observed that there was nothing that they could not do.

4.1.7 Lack of Education/Knowledge/Awareness

Lack of education is another issue identified by stakeholders. Typically, educated and qualified individuals migrate to urban areas, resulting in a limited number of young people capable of engaging in tourism activities in rural regions. A private sector representative asserts, 'It can be more quality, people who know this business must be involved. Education is a must. There need to be people who love this job, work with heart. But education is low, awareness is low. They focus on fast money, not long term benefits.' According to a development agency manager, 'People in rural areas do not know about tourism'.

They engage in tourism activities with no knowledge.' Local Government has initiated certificate programs, such as those for home rentals; however, these programs are insufficient to provide the education necessary for establishing businesses that require long-term planning. A private sector representative states that rural residents lack a clear long-term vision, focusing solely on short-term benefits.

The lack of communication between government agencies and the local community is also emphasized. A private sector representative notes a lack of awareness regarding government grants: 'There is no support from the Government. TKDK tells them they will give grants; they have difficulty communicating with the public. They open the calls, but they cannot support rural enough. The people on the field cannot make their voice heard.'

Rural residents' education is necessary for improved tourism planning. However, short-term programs are insufficient; educational activities should be ongoing. The lack of education among rural residents has resulted in a lack of standardization and low-quality service. A local tourism authority highlights the lack of service quality in Lavender Town: 'There is no planning in Lavender Town. The establishments are not professional.'

There is no price standardization. The government cannot collect any taxes from locals. We received numerous complaints about prices, but they cannot report the names because the establishments lack name tags. Local government also expresses concerns about the lack of price standardization. The government has limited control over local residents selling goods and services to tourists. The packaging for food items and cosmetics does not comply with regulations. According to a private sector representative who manages a cosmetic brand, local residents sell cosmetics on their farms and store them in direct sunlight throughout the day due to a lack of proper storage equipment. This practice leads to a decrease in product quality.

4.1.8 Politics/Corruption

The political environment in Türkiye has been extremely volatile recently. Following an unsuccessful coup attempt, numerous government officials were removed from their positions. The local government representative, a governor who was prepared to support tourism development, was dismissed due to the failed coup. He also stated that the reason for the cancellation of the rose festival was political: 'We had a court process about festivals.'

There were problems with bills. 38 people were judged and arrested, including managers and cultural authority, so we stopped for three years.' The Municipality has been organizing the Rose Festival for an extended period. However, they suspended the festival for several years. The only Rose Festival in the area was held in Rose Town for five years until the Isparta Municipality decided to reinstate the festival in 2018.

Local residents also perceive that political factors contribute to the lack of local involvement: 'It is so political. They try to support their own. There has to be a common interest. No politics. They invest in Lavender Town, the Municipality of Isparta.' Particularly in Rose Town, residents criticize the Mayor for exclusively including members of his political party in tourism activities. An additional issue is that two opposing political parties govern the Municipality of Rose Town and the central Municipality of Isparta. The conflict between these two municipalities has resulted in certain challenges in developing tourism in the area, such as insufficient funding.

Corruption is a significant concern in government-initiated programs. According to local residents, private sector representatives, local authorities, and academics, the oversight of these initiatives is inadequate. A resident states: 'There is lack of control. Some people on paper do business, to take money from Government, but actually they do not.' A local business owner expresses frustration about his inability to secure Government funding: 'Government does no control. Even if they go bankruptcy government does not care.'

I built this place from scratch that I cannot risk losing. But they do not care because it's government money.' Even a business owner who has received government funding acknowledges the lack of a control mechanism: 'They only control insurance and ongoing operation. They do not ask for the profit statement. I can sell the place. I can get a partner; I am a company.' Agency representatives disagree with the assertion of inadequate control.

They claim that the controls are rigorous. In contrast, a local government representative involved in such projects asserts that the controls in EU projects are stricter than those for the funds provided by the government. Corruption associated with these initiatives has resulted in diminished enthusiasm and motivation among local residents to engage in tourism activities.

4.1.9 Lack of Collaboration

The interviews conducted among stakeholders reveal a lack of collaboration between government units and the private sector. For instance, various authorities print multiple brochures about the region. Community members attribute this lack of collaboration to opposing political parties. A development agency representative states: 'Government has a lot of incentives. Collaboration is needed, but personal interest overcomes that.'

A private sector representative asserts that collaboration at the local level is insufficient, as it should occur at the regional level: 'The tourism is regional, so the marketing should be regional. We are an orchestra without maestro. Every town is on its own.' Academicians express

more optimism regarding this matter. According to them, the towns achieve synergy, but maintaining it proves challenging, particularly in the current political environment. The local tourism authority indicated that they would establish a commission comprising all regional stakeholders and develop a five-year tourism plan.

4.2 Discussion of the Data

This study aimed to examine stakeholder perspectives to understand the effects of rapid tourism development in Türkiye's rural regions. As previous research indicates, the main issue is not the number of tourists visiting a destination, but rather the management of tourism flows (Martin et al., 2018; UNWTO, 2018). The findings of this study show that stakeholders agree on the poor planning and management of tourism in Türkiye's rural areas.

The findings partially match previous research, which suggests that local residents in rural areas see tourism as a way to experience culture and build connections with outsiders. However, this view is mostly held by those directly involved in tourism activities, while residents who do not participate tend to be less supportive of more tourists in the area (Gonzalez et al., 2018).

In contrast, the present study reveals that residents of both towns expressed a desire for expanded tourism, irrespective of their involvement in tourism ventures. Their primary concern was not the influx of tourists but rather the direct financial benefits they personally derive from tourism. This study showed that only certain local authorities and academics can anticipate the potential negative consequences of tourism for the area.

Some respondents also stressed the importance of community empowerment and participation, consistent with previous research (Bălan & Burghilea, 2015; Mwesumo, Halfdanarson, & Shlopak, 2022; Ramaano, 2022). They underlined the role of legislation in enabling local populations to take part in tourism activities (De Miranda Mendonça et al., 2024). Some private sector representatives also mentioned a lack of knowledge about methods for engaging local communities in tourism initiatives.

The study supports previous research showing that a shortage of qualified and educated personnel in rural areas presents a significant obstacle to sustainable tourism development (McComb et al., 2017; Rid et al., 2014; Su, 2011). This shortage often hinders residents' ability to evaluate the long-term effects—both benefits and costs—of tourism. Gonzalez et al. (2018) observed that residents without formal education tend to focus on immediate financial gains from tourism, while those with higher education are more likely to expect a broader range of benefits.

These insights strengthen the argument that sustainable rural tourism development depends on effective leadership and facilitation by skilled professionals (Mwesumo, Halfdanarson, & Shlopak, 2022). In line with this view, several respondents in the current study highlighted the importance of building a well-educated and capable team to carry out tourism development initiatives in the region.

Unlike previous studies, residents not involved in tourism activities in this research did not show negative

attitudes towards tourism. They seemed aware of the potential benefits tourism could provide to their area. Earlier research pointed out that overtourism often led to opposition among residents in well-known tourist destinations worldwide, such as Venice (Goodwin, 2017; UNWTO, 2018).

However, findings from the present study indicate that despite the emerging negative impacts of overtourism, residents remain largely favorable toward tourism. The extent of these impacts has not yet reached a level sufficient to provoke widespread hostility. Literature on rural tourism also acknowledges challenges posed by overtourism, including strained infrastructure, environmental degradation, and shifts in resident attitudes (Fleischer & Felsenstein, 2000; Ghaderi, Hall, & Ryan, 2022; Hjalager et al., 2018).

Overtourism is associated with themes such as tourist influx, infrastructure and facilities, resident perceptions, destinations, tourist behavior, tourism management and marketing, and nature and environmental sustainability (Inshc, 2019). The current study has demonstrated that both towns experience problems related to overtourism. Conversely, overtourism is also defined as an excess of tourism establishments (Goodwin, 2017).

However, in this current study, it was observed that the limited number of tourism establishments created dissatisfaction among hosts and guests. Previous research in Türkiye pointed out congestion and security concerns as a result of overtourism in small islands (Sunnecioglu et al., 2021). No security issues, except for the damage done to the lavender farms, were mentioned by any stakeholder.

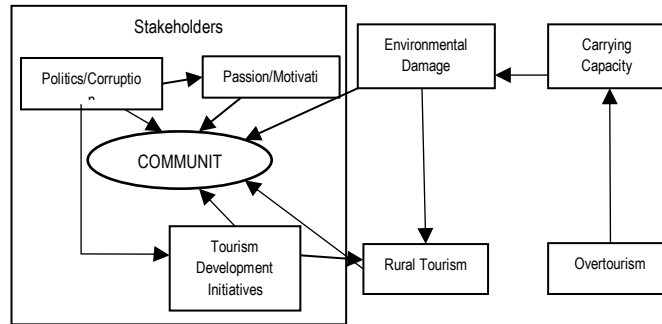
Another consequence of overtourism identified in prior research is gentrification (Koens et al., 2018; Jover & Díaz-Parra, 2022). In Lavender Town, plans to relocate residents to a newly constructed village and convert the town center solely for tourism purposes exemplify this phenomenon. Although local authorities argue that residents will benefit from improved housing conditions, the lack of choice in relocation may foster resistance in the future.

Positive examples of rural tourism development, particularly in European towns, demonstrate the potential for sustainable growth that empowers local communities and contributes to the economy (Bălan & Burghilea, 2015; Mwesumo, Halfdanarson, & Shlopak, 2022). These successful stories could serve as models for Turkish towns seeking to implement sustainable tourism strategies that balance economic development with resident well-being and community engagement.

Figure 2 summarizes the results of the study. Based on stakeholders' perspectives in the area, the problems related to rural tourism development and the consequences of overtourism are depicted in the figure. Stakeholders agree on the potential negative impacts of unplanned rural tourism development in the region. Local residents are the ones most affected by tourism development plans in the area. As Figure 2 also indicates, corruption and politics play a vital role in tourism development initiatives.

The lack of control and the selective nature of these initiatives decreased the locals' passion and motivation. On the other hand, the initiatives have given some speed to rural tourism growth, resulting in exceeding the carrying capacity and environmental damage to these sensitive areas.

Figure 2. Problems in Rural Tourism Development and the Consequences of Overtourism.



Source: own elaboration.

4.3 Implications

While overtourism research typically focuses on urban areas or world-famous tourist destinations, this study broadens the understanding of overtourism to include emerging rural destinations, emphasizing unique challenges such as infrastructure limitations, barriers to local involvement, and environmental degradation.

It provides a nuanced perspective on overtourism in rural areas, where community-driven initiatives and grassroots tourism efforts encounter distinct socio-political challenges compared to top-down urban management. The study highlights the need to tailor sustainable tourism models to suit the specific requirements of rural settings.

This involves creating frameworks that promote community empowerment, long-term planning, and governance without political interference. It supports and builds upon existing theories of stakeholder collaboration by showing that inclusive planning and fair power distribution are vital for sustainable tourism development.

The findings contribute to tourism governance literature by exploring the impact of political dynamics on tourism development in rural areas. Political interference and corruption diminished local enthusiasm and trust in tourism projects, underscoring the need for transparent governance mechanisms in tourism development models.

The findings highlight the importance of long-term strategic planning in rural tourism development. Current practices, driven by rapid and unregulated growth, have led to environmental degradation and have surpassed the carrying capacity in some areas. Stakeholders stressed that tourism initiatives should follow gradual, structured approaches with coordinated efforts between government agencies and local communities to prevent overburdening vulnerable ecosystems. Educational programs need to go beyond short-term certification.

Ongoing, comprehensive training provided by tourism educators, universities, and skilled professionals can develop a more sustainable and informed tourism industry. Creating an independent tourism committee led by qualified experts, free from political influence, is crucial. This committee would oversee development efforts, promote stakeholder collaboration, and implement sustainable practices suited to the social, economic, and environmental conditions of the region.

Fragmentation between stakeholders such as local governments, private businesses, and community members

currently hampers sustainable tourism development. Improved collaboration through shared decision-making platforms could foster greater local ownership, ensure transparency, and align objectives for balanced development. The role of development agencies and funding bodies should shift toward fostering community-led projects, promoting inclusive participation rather than top-down directives.

The excessive tourism activity in Lavender Town has demonstrated the urgent need for a carrying capacity analysis and environmental management plans to protect natural resources. Clear guidelines for tourism activities, including visitor behavior, controlled site access, and eco-friendly practices, must be implemented to prevent long-term environmental damage.

Efforts to avoid community displacement and gentrification in favor of tourism-exclusive zones are critical for preserving social sustainability and preventing resistance from local residents. Establishing effective monitoring systems for tourism activities and project outcomes will ensure accountability and inform necessary adjustments to strategies over time. Metrics such as environmental impact, community satisfaction, and tourist experiences should be assessed periodically.

4.4. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The research is confined to two rural towns in Isparta. While these case studies provide valuable context-specific insights, the findings may not be generalizable to rural areas with different cultural, environmental, or socio-economic conditions. The unique political and economic landscape of Türkiye may also limit the applicability of these results to rural tourism dynamics in other regions or countries. Data collection was conducted during the off-season, which may not fully capture peak tourism challenges or seasonal fluctuations in local perceptions.

The absence of tourists during data collection excludes visitor perspectives, which are critical for understanding the broader tourism dynamics and satisfaction levels. Although efforts were made to interview diverse stakeholders, certain groups, such as tourists, younger community members, or a broader range of academics, were underrepresented. This imbalance may have constrained the diversity of viewpoints captured concerning tourism development and management.

The reliance on qualitative case study methods provides in-depth narratives but limits the ability to compare findings or generalize across wider populations statistically. Quantitative validation of key themes, such as measuring tourism's environmental or economic impacts, remains unexplored. Stakeholder interviews relied on self-reported data, which may be influenced by personal bias, recall errors, or political considerations.

Some respondents may have exaggerated or downplayed the severity of tourism-related issues due to vested interests or incomplete information. The rapid pace of tourism development in the study regions indicates that stakeholder experiences and perceptions are likely evolving. Thus, the findings represent a snapshot in time rather than a comprehensive portrayal of long-term trends.

The volatile political environment and reported instances of corruption complicate the landscape of tourism development. Although these factors were discussed, they may not have been fully explored due to their sensitive nature and potential reluctance from stakeholders to share information candidly. Future research could address these limitations by conducting longitudinal, multi-regional studies using mixed methods to provide a broader and more comprehensive understanding of the challenges of rural tourism development.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The objective of this study was to examine stakeholder perspectives regarding the impacts of tourism development on rural areas in Isparta, Türkiye. The findings indicated that tourism-related challenges in the region, including lack of infrastructure, lack of education and awareness, environmental damage, exceeding carrying capacity, corruption, and lack of local involvement, are comparable to those observed in other rural areas globally. These issues are categorized as process-related, people-related, and place-related.

One respondent encapsulated the situation metaphorically: "Tourism here is an orchestra without a Maestro, everybody plays in their own way." It is advisable to establish a team led by a skilled leader and facilitators to assess the situation, develop sustainable tourism plans, and implement them. Furthermore, effective communication among various stakeholders in the area is essential.

The primary components for a successful tourism development plan in the region seem to be the involvement of all stakeholders, enhanced education, and effective leadership. This study revealed that rural areas worldwide face similar challenges during the developmental stages of tourism. Further region-specific research focusing on implementing solutions to these common issues is necessary for formulating effective development plans.

REFERENCES

Akay, B. (2020). Examining the rural tourism experiences of tourists in an emerging rural tourism destination: Burdur province, Turkey. *Geo Journal of Tourism and Geosites*, 29(2), 534-544.

- Akın, S., Altan, M. K., Kara, F. O., & Atsan, T. (2015). The potential of rural tourism in Turkey: the case study of Cayonu. *Pak. J. Agri. Sci*, 52(3), 853-859.
- Ayhan, Ç. K., Taşlı, T. C., Özkök, F., & Tatlı, H. (2020). Land use suitability analysis of rural tourism activities: Yenice, Turkey. *Tourism Management*, 76, 103949.
- Bakas, F. E., & Duxbury, N. (2018). Developing rural areas and small cities through creative tourism: The CREATOUR project. *Anais Brasileiros de Estudos Turísticos*, 8(3), 74-84.
- Bălan, M., & Burghilea, C. (2015). Rural tourism and its implications in the development of the Fundata village. *Procedia-Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 188, 276-281.
- Beni, M. C. (2020). Saturação e rejeição ao turismo nas destinações turísticas. *Revista Brasileira de Pesquisa em Turismo*, 14(2), 1-8.
- Butler, R. W., & Dodds, R. (2022). Overcoming overtourism: a review of failure. *Tourism Review*, 77(1), 35-53.
- Cakir, O., Evren, S., Tören, E., & Kozak, N. (2018). Utilizing the sustainable livelihoods approach to evaluate tourism development from the rural host communities' point of view: The case of Cappadocia (Turkey). *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 21(1), 7-25.
- Capocchi, A., Vallone, C., Pierotti, M., & Amaduzzi, A. (2019). Overtourism: A literature review to assess implications and future perspectives. *Sustainability*, 11(12), 3303.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage Publications.
- Cetin, M. (2015). Evaluation of the sustainable tourism potential of a protected area for landscape planning: a case study of the ancient city of Pompeipolis in Kastamonu. *International Journal of Sustainable Development & World Ecology*, 22(6), 490-495.
- Davardoust, S., & Karahan, F. (2021). Evaluation of sustainable rural tourism. The case of Uzundere district, Erzurum, Turkey. *Sustainability*, 13(18), 10218.
- de Miranda Mendonça, T. C.; Cabral, B. L. F.; Marcondes, D. de S. & de Moraes, W. V. (2024). Leis estaduais de turismo de base comunitária do Rio de Janeiro, Bahia, Minas Gerais, Goiás e Pará: uma análise do princípio da participação social. *Latin American Journal of Tourismology*, 10(Regular Issue). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14511152>.
- Duignan, M. (2019). 'Overtourism'? Understanding and managing urban tourism growth beyond perceptions: Cambridge case study: Strategies and tactics to tackle overtourism. In 'Overtourism'? *Understanding and managing urban tourism growth beyond perceptions: Case studies* (pp. 34-39). United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).
- Duman, T., & Tosun, C. (2010). Current developments in Turkish tourism. *Anatolia: An International Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 21:1, 5-9
- Durgun, A. (2007). Isparta turizminin SWOT analizi. *Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, (5), 93-109.
- Ertuna, B., & Kirbas, G. (2012). Local community involvement in rural tourism development: The case of Kastamonu, Turkey. *PASOS. Revista de Turismo y Patrimonio Cultural*, 10(2).
- Fleischer, A., & Felsenstein, D. (2000). Support for rural tourism: Does it make a difference?. *Annals of tourism research*, 27(4), 1007-1024.
- Ghaderi, Z., Hall, M. C. M., & Ryan, C. (2022). Overtourism, residents and Iranian rural villages: Voices from a developing country. *Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism*, 37, 100487.
- Gaonkar, S. & Sukthankar, S. V. (2024). A Factor-Cluster Approach in Assessing Residents' Perceptions Towards Sustainable Rural Tourism Development. *Latin American Journal of*

- Tourismology*, 10(Regular). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13629785>
- Giray, F. H., Kadakoğlu, B., Çetin, F., & Bamoi, A. G. A. (2019). Rural tourism marketing: Lavender tourism in Turkey. *Ciência Rural*, 49(2), e20180651.
- Gonzalez, V. M., Coromina, L., & Galí, N. (2018). Overtourism: Residents' perceptions of tourism impact as an indicator of resident social carrying capacity - case study of a Spanish heritage town. *Tourism Review*, 73(3), 277. doi:10.1108/TR-08-2017-0138
- Goodwin, H. (2017). The challenge of overtourism (Responsible Tourism Partnership Working Paper 4, October 2017). <http://haroldgoodwin.info/pubs/RTP'WP4Overtourism01'2017.pdf>
- Göçer, O., Shrestha, P., Boyacioglu, D., Gocer, K., & Karahan, E. (2021). Rural gentrification of the ancient city of Assos (Behramkale) in Turkey. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 87, 146-159.
- Gutiérrez, V. P., Aguilera, D. S., & Ramis, M. À. C. (2022). Políticas públicas y overtourism en destinos urbanos: Un análisis comparado entre Barcelona y Palma. *Cuadernos de turismo*, (49), 189-207.
- Güzel, Ö., Ehtiyar, R., & Ryan, C. (2021). The Success Factors of wine tourism entrepreneurship for rural areas: A thematic biographical narrative analysis in Turkey. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 84, 230-239.
- Hatipoglu, B., Alvarez, M. D., & Ertuna, B. (2016). Barriers to stakeholder involvement in the planning of sustainable tourism: The case of the Thrace region in Turkey. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 111, 306-317.
- Hjalager, A. M., Kwiatkowski, G., & Østervig Larsen, M. (2018). Innovation gaps in Scandinavian rural tourism. *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 18(1), 1-17.
- Insch, A. (2019). The challenges of over-tourism facing New Zealand: Risks and responses. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 100378.
- Jover, J., & Diaz-Parra, I. (2022). Who is the city for? Overtourism, lifestyle migration and social sustainability. *Tourism Geographies*, 24(1), 9-32.
- Kiş, N. (2019). A strategic approach to sustainable tourism development using the A'WOT hybrid method: A case study of Zonguldak, Turkey. *Sustainability*, 11(4), 964.
- Koens, K., Postma, A., & Papp, B. (2018). Is overtourism overused? Understanding the impact of tourism in a City context. *Sustainability*, 10, 4384. doi:10.3390/su10124384
- Kürüm Varolüneş, F., Çelik, F., Del Río-Rama, M. D. L. C., & Álvarez-García, J. (2022). Reassessment of sustainable rural tourism strategies after COVID-19. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 944412.
- McComb, E. J., Boyd, S., & Boluk, K. (2017). Stakeholder collaboration: A means to the success of rural tourism destinations? A critical evaluation of the existence of stakeholder collaboration within the Mourmes, Northern Ireland. *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 17(3), 286-297.
- Majdak, P., & de Almeida, A. M. M. (2022). Pre-Emptively Managing Overtourism by Promoting Rural Tourism in Low-Density Areas: Lessons from Madeira. *Sustainability*, 14(2), 757-777.
- Marques, C. P., Guedes, A., & Bento, R. (2022). Rural tourism recovery between two COVID-19 waves: The case of Portugal. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 25(6), 857-863.
- Martín Martín, J., Guaita Martínez, J., & Salinas Fernández, J. (2018). An analysis of the factors behind the citizens' attitude of rejection towards tourism in a context of overtourism and economic dependence on this activity. *Sustainability*, 10(8), 2851.
- Milano, C. (2018). Overtourism, malestar social y turismofobia. Un debate controvertido. *PASOS Revista de Turismo y Patrimonio Cultural*, 16(3), 551-564.
- Milano, C., Cheer, J. M., & Novelli, M. (2018). Overtourism: A growing global problem. *The conversation*, 18(1), 1-5.
- Muresan, I., Oroian, C., Harun, R., Arion, F., Porutiu, A., Chiciudean, G., ... & Lile, R. (2016). Residents' attitude toward sustainable rural tourism development. *Sustainability*, 8(1), 100.
- Mwesumo, D., Halfdanarson, J., & Shlopak, M. (2022). Navigating the early stages of a large sustainability-oriented rural tourism development project: Lessons from Træna, Norway. *Tourism Management*, 89, 104456.
- Netto, A. P., Oliveira, J. L. S., & Severini, V. F. (2020). Do overtourism à estagnação. Reflexões sobre a pandemia do Coronavírus eo turismo. *Cenário: Revista Interdisciplinar em Turismo e Território*, 8(14), 26-43.
- Novelli, M., & Gebhardt, K. (2007). Community based tourism in Namibia: 'Reality show' or 'window dressing'? *Current Issues in Tourism*, 10(5), 443-479.
- Oliveira, J. L. S., da Silva Neves, C. C., Netto, A. P., & Severini, V. F. (2021). Turismofobia em Barcelona: um tema (que era?) emergente: Tourismphobia in Barcelona: a theme (that was?) emerging. *Revista de Turismo Contemporâneo*, 9(3), 325-342.
- Panyik, E., Costa, C., & Rátz, T. (2011). Implementing integrated rural tourism: An event-based approach. *Tourism Management*, 32(6), 1352-1363.
- Ramaano, A. I. (2022). Geographical information systems in sustainable rural tourism and local community empowerment: A natural resources management appraisal for Musina Municipality's society. *Local Development & Society*, 1-32.
- Rid, W., Ezeuduji, I. O., & Pröbstl-Haider, U. (2014). Segmentation by motivation for rural tourism activities in The Gambia. *Tourism Management*, 40, 102-116.
- Romera, A. R., Lama, A. V., & Tabales, A. F. (2023). Overtourism en destinos urbanos: Propuesta metodológica de diagnóstico a partir de un sistema de indicadores. *Cuadernos de Turismo*, (52), 45-67.
- Sánchez-Montañés, B., Romero Ojeda, J. M., & Castilla Roldán, M. V. (2023). The impact of overtourism on architecture and urban space in historic cities: an understudied phenomenon. *Journal of Tourism Analysis: Revista de análisis turístico (JTA)*, 30 (1), 89-121.
- Santos-Rojo, C., Llopis-Amorós, M., & García-García, J. M. (2023). Overtourism and sustainability: A bibliometric study (2018–2021). *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 188, 122285.
- Seckelmann, A. (2002). Domestic tourism—a chance for regional development in Turkey? *Tourism Management*, 23(1), 85-92.
- Sharpley, R., & Jepson, D. (2011). Rural tourism: A spiritual experience? *Annals of tourism research*, 38(1), 52-71.
- Su, B. (2011). Rural tourism in China. *Tourism Management*, 32(6), 1438-1441.
- Sünnetçioğlu, S., Mercan, Ş. O., Özkök, F., & Sünnetçioğlu, A. (2021). Overtourism perception in the islands: The case of Bozcaada and Gökçeada. *Anais Brasileiros de Estudos Turísticos*.
- Tas, M., Tas, N., & Cahantimur, A. (2009). A participatory governance model for the sustainable development of Cumalikizik, a heritage site in Turkey. *Environment and Urbanization*, 21(1), 161-18
- Torres-Delgado, A., & Saarinen, J. (2014). Using indicators to assess sustainable tourism development: a review. *Tourism Geographies*, 16(1), 31-47.

- Tosun, C. (2001). Challenges of sustainable tourism development in the developing world: the case of Turkey. *Tourism Management*, 22(3), 289-303.
- Tosun, C. (1998). Roots of unsustainable tourism development at the local level: The case of Urgup in Turkey. *Tourism Management*, 19(6), 595-610.
- Tosun, C., & Timothy, D. J. (2001). Shortcomings in planning approaches to tourism development in developing countries: The case of Turkey. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 13(7), 352-35.
- Vaishar, A., & Štastná, M. (2022). Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on rural tourism in Czechia: Preliminary considerations. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 25(2), 187-191.
- Wolcott, H. F. (1994). *Transforming qualitative data: Description, analysis, and interpretation*. Sage.
- Xue, L., Kerstetter, D., & Hunt, C. (2017). Tourism development and changing rural identity in China. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 66, 170-182.
- Yılmaz, T. K. E. (2008). Şarköy-Kumbağ arasında kırsal kalkınmayı destekleyici turizmin olası rolü ve yerel halkın rolü. *Tekirdağ Ziraat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 5(2), 159-168.
- UNWTO. (2017,09 12). *Implementation of the general programme of work for 2016-2017*. <https://www.eunwto.org/doi/abs/10.18111/unwtogad.2017.1.g51w645001604517?download=true&journalCode=unwtogad>
- Yarcan, S., & Ertuna, B. (2002). What you encourage is what you get: The case of Turkish inbound international tourism. *Anatolia: An International Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 13(2), 159-183

CRediT author statement

Term	Definition	Author
Conceptualization	Ideas; formulation or evolution of overarching research goals and aims	x
Methodology	Development or design of methodology; creation of models	x
Software	Programming, software development; designing computer programs; implementation of the computer code and supporting algorithms; testing of existing code components	x
Validation	Verification, whether as a part of the activity or separate, of the overall replication/ reproducibility of results/experiments and other research outputs	x
Formal analysis	Application of statistical, mathematical, computational, or other formal techniques to analyze or synthesize study data	x
Investigation	Conducting a research and investigation process, specifically performing the experiments, or data/evidence collection	x
Resources	Provision of study materials, reagents, materials, patients, laboratory samples, animals, instrumentation, computing resources, or other analysis tools	x
Data Curation	Management activities to annotate (produce metadata), scrub data and maintain research data (including software code, where it is necessary for interpreting the data itself) for initial use and later reuse	x
Writing - Original Draft	Preparation, creation and/or presentation of the published work, specifically writing the initial draft (including substantive translation)	x
Writing - Review & Editing	Preparation, creation and/or presentation of the published work by those from the original research group, specifically critical review, commentary or revision – including pre- or post-publication stages	x
Visualization	Preparation, creation and/or presentation of the published work, specifically visualization/ data presentation	x
Supervision	Oversight and leadership responsibility for the research activity planning and execution, including mentorship external to the core team	x
Project administration	Management and coordination responsibility for the research activity planning and execution	
Funding acquisition	Acquisition of the financial support for the project leading to this publication	x

Source: reproduced from Elsevier (2022, s/p), based upon Brand et al. (2015).

Processo Editorial / Editorial Process / Proceso Editorial

Editor Chefe / Editor-in-chief / Editor Jefe: PhD Thiago D. Pimentel (UFJF).

Recebido / Received / Recibido: 17.01.2025; Revisado / Revised / Revisado: 23.04.2025 – 19.08.2025; Aprovado / Approved / Aprobado: 01.09.2025; Publicado / Published / Publicado: 04.09.2025.

Documento revisado às cegas por pares / Double-blind peer review paper / Documento revisado por pares ciegos.