

An Evaluation of Ecotourism Potentials of Rumkale Archaeological Region

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Author CKS designed the study, wrote the protocol, wrote the first draft of the manuscript and managed literature searches. Author YK managed the analyses of the study, performed the statistical analysis and literature searches. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

In this study, the Rumkale Archaeological Region and its vicinity located in Gaziantep City, Turkey, were examined in terms of potential value for ecotourism activities. The region has high historical reputation and natural beauty which avails magnificent structures for visitors. In examining the ecotourism potential of Rumkale Archaeological Region, a standard questionnaire form was designed and administered to respondents who came on visit to this region. The study revealed that majority of respondents (70%) has heard of Rumkale's reputation from friends. It also realized that visitors mostly tripped to Rumkale Archaeological Region in order to access the natural beauty and archaeological features. With regard to activity of interest undertaken by visitors to the area, their preferences centered on doing nature walks, trekking/hiking and seeing archaeological residues including historic structures. It also came to the fore that lack of accommodation and difficulties with transportation to the region has negatively affected development of ecotourism activities in this area. Rumkale and its vicinity was scored by visitors according to its suitability for ecotourism activities and in this regard it was revealed that 85% of the respondents ranked this region as suitable for nature walks (trekking/hiking), followed by field photography (73%) and trips to historical and archaeological sites (70%) in that order of importance. After the detailed

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examination of Rumkale Region and analyzing information from visitors, it is therefore reasonably to conclude and suggest that the Rumkale Archaeological Region and its environs have high potentials for ecotourism and if careful planning is done, these potentials can be tapped for socio-economic development of the area.

Keywords: Rumkale archeological region; ecotourism; hiking/trekking; nature; Birecik dam.

1. INTRODUCTION

In these days, the ecotourism have become important issue considering the natural environment and better understanding of the natural quality worldwide. However, it is usually thinking to visiting relatively undisturbed natural areas, intended as a low-impact and alternative to conventional tourism activities.

The term of ecotourism derived from the Greek words *oikos* (house) and *logos* [1,2]. However, in the modern sense, the concept of ecotourism was introduced for the first time by Lascurain in the 1980s. The ecotourism should be defined as '*ecotourism typically involves travel to destinations where undisturbed natural areas with specific scientific objectives and made to enjoy travel with sightseeing, wildlife and natural vegetation*' [3]. As understanding from definition, ecotourism is intended to offer tourists insight into the impact of human beings on the environment, and to a greater appreciation of our natural habitats.

In recent years, ecotourism activities have begun to increasing importance on the city and region plans worldwide. Since the 1980s, ecotourism has been considered an important endeavor by environmentalists. These increasing interest on nature and cultural resources resulting the first ecotourism conference and exhibition fair (World Ecotour'97) organized in the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil [4]. Since this first international organization, a number of national and international activities regarding ecotourism have been organized in worldwide.

In general, ecotourism deals with living parts of the natural environments. It is typically focuses on socially responsible travel and environmental sustainability. It has been considered to be a kind of tourism activities that improve the local population's socio-economic conditions, generating income and employment for people. However, it has also regarded as an approach to supports and development opportunities to regions [5]. It has led to utilize more environmentally friendly methods to use energy

efficiently [6,7]. Tourism companies have organized some travel activities to specially protect regions or forest areas usually called '*ecotourism*'. However, the quantity and quality of these activities is not fully understood by local administrates [2,8].

Rumkale and its vicinity have very rich historical and archaeological value, special architecture heritage and natural beauty. It has become to important place where locating between Şanlıurfa and Gaziantep cities after Birecik dam holding water in that area. However, Rumkale has still less known area even very rich historical heritage not only from Turkish period but also Roman and other historical periods. Hence, due to its historical reputations, these area has already established protection zone and registered as important archaeological region in Turkey.

Recently, a study conducted by Claudia Mato from Università Ca'Foscari Venezia, Italy. In this research, the Rumkale region examined in context of architectural art and historical heritage. The title of that study as '*Hromkla e Sis: la struttura del controllo religioso e politico delle Cilicia armena*' [9]. Ozmen et al. [10] proposed that Christ's Johannes come and settle to Rumkale for the establishment and spread Christianity during the Roman period. This settlement believed to play an important role in the history of Christianity. However, it was also believed that a Bible hide one of cave in Rumkale region by Johannes but later a copy of that bible taken to Beirut.

Rumkale and its vicinity have already established first and third degree registered Archeological Region where located in Gaziantep city, Turkey. However, there are a number of archeological residues and historical structure still located in that region. Moreover, Rumkale has very rich biodiversity and natural beauty along with archeological structures. The Euphrates basin have created various reflections and support aesthetic appearance of region. Accordingly, the Rumkale and vicinity have been examined in detail for determining current status, scientific

analysis and suitability on ecotourism activities. Hence, Rumkale's demands, priorities and trends were identified in a detailed manner. This investigation would be appropriate and considered for base information for ecotourism activities in that area. This aspect of the work, the region's ecotourism potential have been determined.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Materials

The material of this study was Rumkale Archaeological Region where located within the borders of Nizip town and Gaziantep city, Turkey. There are two main gate (east and west) available to enter these region. However, east entrance is based on Euphrates and west entrance is based on Merzimen creek. The Birecik dam which is one of the largest dam in Turkey, was built in period of 1993 to 2000. Since, Birecik dam have started to keep water (since 2000), many recreational areas and archeological structures have been under the dam lake today. Hence, the Rumkale's environments have become surrounded by waters. At present, the Rumkale archeological region looks like a peninsula that located on a hill and surrounded to cliffs and waters. Fig. 1 shows general view of the Rumkale and vicinity at the present time.

2.1.1 Historical and cultural structure of the research field

A number of historic buildings have located in Rumkale archaeological region. Fig. 2 shows some of important historic residues. Some of the important structures have explained in below.

2.1.1.1 Castle

Castle is about 120 m x 230 m in size, has been seriously damaged. East, north and west walls are surrounded by high cliffs (Figs. 2A and B). The steep slopes rising from the banks of the Euphrates and Merzimen stream and created an outer wall. In north side, upper of Euphrates river, there is a ditch with the size of 90 m x 30 m x 20 m (Fig. 2E) [11,12].

2.1.1.2 Halfeti village church

The church has two parts with the rectangular structure, was built with stones and size of 5.50

m x 17.0 m m in east-west direction. Both parts have cover a flat roof (Fig. 2C) [11,15].

2.1.1.3 Saint Nerses church

This church was built by Saint Nerses in 1173 AD. When Richard Peacock visited that area in 18'th century, he reported that a small but beautiful church was built with "Gothic" style. However, this church was once used as a mosque in the Islamic period (Fig. 2F) [15].

2.1.1.4 Barşavma monastery

This monastery has considered as Yakubu Saint Barşavma Monastery. It was believed that Yakubiye's people lived in that area and built this Monastery in 13'th century (Fig. 2G) [11].

2.1.1.5 Cistern-wells

It is located in the area that close to the castle entrance. The cistern is surrounded by metal railings for security purposes (Fig. 2H). Cisterns can be reached from bottom with the stone stairways [13].

However, some civil architectural structures have also examined in region. Moreover, it was realized that many of the resident's houses was built in 19'th century, especially next to castle's east side. It appears to be formed by the sloping terrain and half of the floors lower to basements [13].

2.2 Methods

A number of stages have followed to examine Rumkale Archeological Region in view of Landscape Architecture major. These stages are; literature review, data collection, face to face survey, and detailed region observations. However, research subjects were created by scanning domestic and foreign sources related to Rumkale and its vicinity. A conceptual framework of the research and analysis has also been done related to the research subject. A standard questionnaires prepared and applied to visitors by face-to face approaches. Hence, in the date of 04.12.2015, a private sport club members of 33 people participated to the walk Duraklı-Rumkale hiking event. This group was chosen to be our face to face questionnaire survey target group. A total of 15 questions were asked to visitors, with a standard questionnaire procedure. At the end of the questionnaire, respondents had speak freely and gave suggestions about the subject area. Each questionnaire was planned to

complete in about 10-15 minutes. These survey and face to face questionnaire performed in order to determine the ecotourism potential in the Rumkale region. The SPSS 13.0 (Statistical Program for the Social Science) program was

used to analyze collected data. In addition, a detailed observations was made and taken photos during the visit of research area. Fig. 3 shows slope and elevation map of Rumkale Archeological Region.

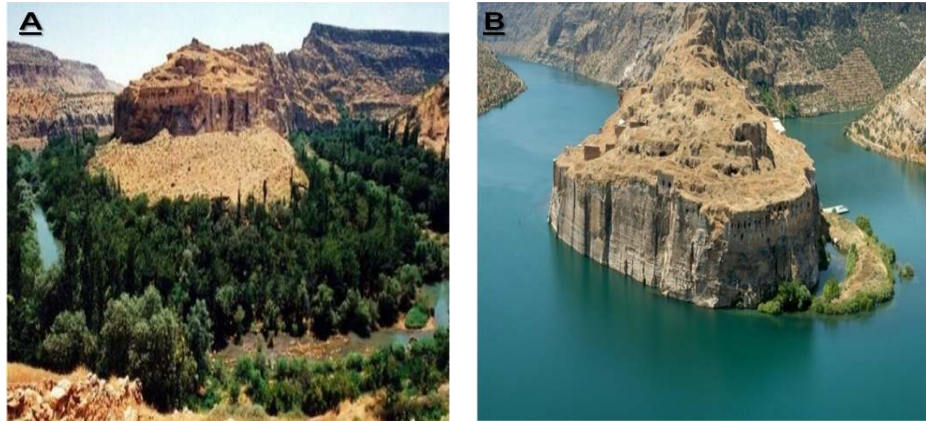


Fig. 1. The general view of Rumkale archeological region
(A: Before Birecik dam built; B: After the Birecik dam built [13])



Fig. 2. Some important archeological structures in Rumkale region
(A: Rumkale castle, B: East-north side of castle, C and D: Some archeological residues at Esat side, E: Ditch, F: St. Nerses Church, G: Barşavma monastery, H: Cistern; I: D01 gate, J: D02 sign, K: B01 gate, L: B03 gate) [13,14]

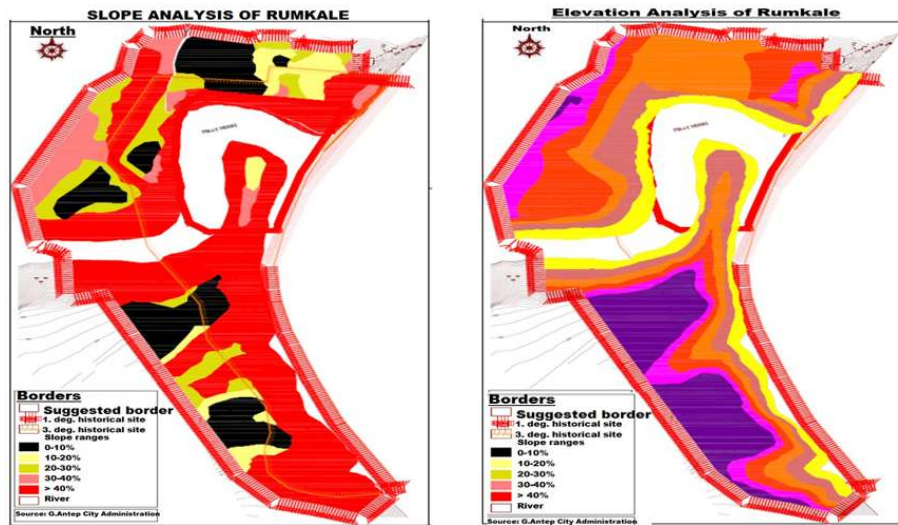


Fig. 3. Slope and elevation properties of Rumkale archeological region [14]

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings in the study are given below under two subtitle (part). In first part of results contains survey responds. The second parts contains the detailed description and evaluation of research area in view of Landscape Architecture major for determining ecotourism potential.

3.1 Survey Results

The general personnel and demographic information of the participants' is shown in Fig. 4. A total of 33 individuals, 14 (42%) female and 19 (58%) male total of 33 respondents participated in the survey. It is noteworthy that majority of participants were between

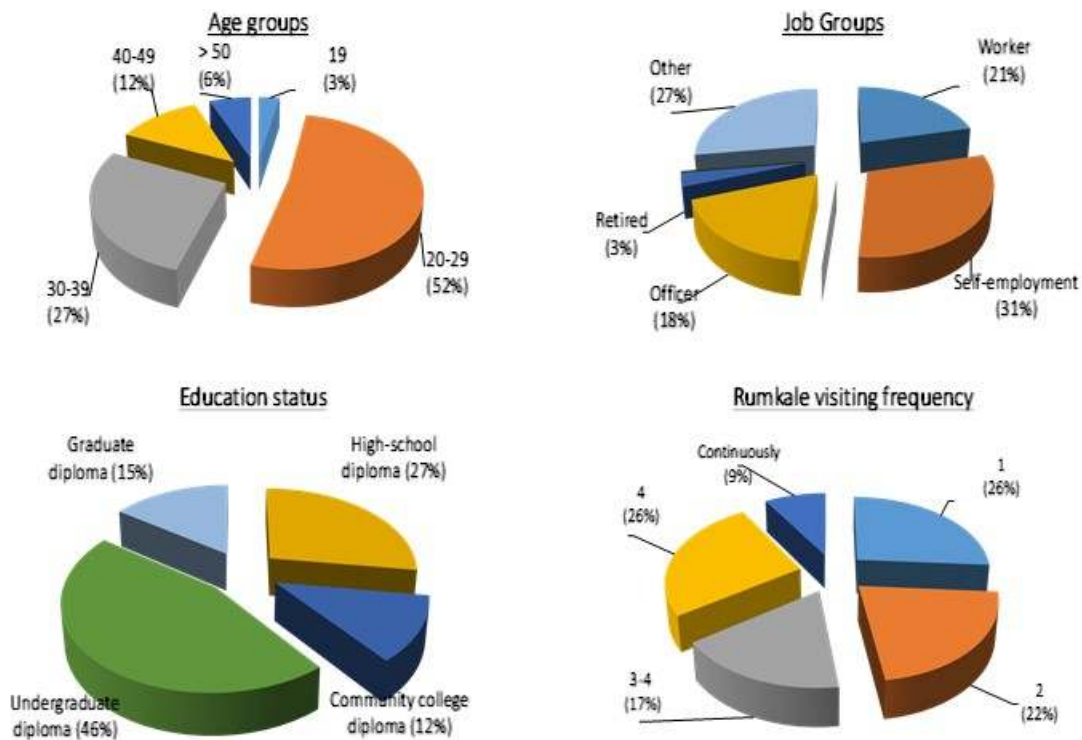


Fig. 4. General demographic characteristics of responders

20 to 29 years old (52%). However, when examining the marital status: majority of participants (79%) were single and lesser extent married (21%). Moreover, 31% of participants had a self-employed job but only 3% (1 person) found to be retired. It was realized that the majority of respondents were found to be university graduates (46%). Furthermore, there were no any participants who graduated from elementary or secondary schools. These are very useful information and needs to evaluate Rumkale and its vicinity at least high school graduate responders. It was found that the majority of respondents (70%) expressed they had visited to Rumkale at least once in before whereas 30% of responders have visited to Rumkale at first time. The 26% of responders stated to visit Rumkale region at least four times.

After the determining general personnel information of the responders, further questions were arisen regarding visit specification of Rumkale Region. For that reason, a number of question applied to participants. The answer of those questions is summarized in Table 1. More than half of responders stated that they heard Rumkale at first time from their friends followed by from books, brochures or magazines. Only one participants stated that he heard it from the conference or symposium.

However, majority of participants (25 people) were preferred to see natural beauty in Rumkale Region. They reported that the see of the archaeological and historical structure was the second most preferred feature for these area.

It was also found that all the participants (100%, 33 people) were choice hiking activities followed by historic site visit (20 people) in that region. However, it is important to note that none of the participants were chosen to see wildlife habitat monitoring in Rumkale that is very important ecotourism activity worldwide.

The question of *'which damaging behaviors of Rumkale and its surroundings'* asked to responders. The majority of participants (30 people) respond that the most damaging behaviors of visitors come from irregular disposal of waste followed by the destruction of vegetation (8 people). In addition, the use of alcohols during visiting time, absence of security and lack of reinforcement were also important damaging behavior to the Rumkale and its vicinity.

For collect further information regarding on negative factors hindering development of tourism activity in Rumkale, additional question directed to participants. The responders expressed as the most negative factor was absence of eating/drinking and accommodation facilities (19 people) followed by transportation difficulties (16 people). However, inadequate guidance, lack of security and infrastructure facilities are also among the negative factors for Rumkale' tourism potential (Table 1).

After determining participant's opinion on Rumkale archeological region further questions were arisen to collect information on the concept of ecotourism practices. The participants respond to those questions are summarized in Table 2.

The majority of respondents defined the concept of ecotourism as *"it is an environmentally friendly tourism"* (22 people) followed by *"it describe the nature and teaches practical tourism"* (19 people), *"Tours and activities that are related to tourism and nature"*, (16 people), in order of importance.

However, participants were requested to rank in order of priority of ecotourism activities that contribute to the Rumkale Region. The majority of respondents (58%) stated that's ecotourism may important *'economic'* contribution to region.

The question of *'which kind of activity could be considered for the evaluation of ecotourism'*, asked participants in order to determine ecotourism preferences by participants. It was realized that most of the participants were preferred *'hiking'* followed by *'mountain climbing'* (19 people), *'historical and archeological trips'* (16 people) and *'photography'* (16 people), in order of importance.

For determining ecotourism potential of Rumkale Region and find out the appropriate ecotourism activities, some questions were directed to participants. It was requested to rank *'suitable ecotourism activities'* in three categories (suitable, partial suitable and non-suitable).

The assessment of Rumkale Archeological Region for ecotourism activities is given in Table 3. It has realized that the majority of responders (28 person, 85%), rate as most suitable activities are; *trekking and hiking* followed by *photography* (73%), *historical and archeological trips* (70%), in that order, respectively. However, participants had negative expressing (not suitable) for

thermal tourism, bungee jumping, and paragliding and jeep safari in region (Table 3).

security and necessary basic facilities in Rumkale and its surroundings.

Finally, the question of 'whether or not participants want to participate if ecotourism activities held in Rumkale' was directed to participants. It is noteworthy that the most of participants express as *not participate* (85%), while less extent (15%) wish to *participate*. For determining 'why majority of participants do not want to participate ecotourism activities in Rumkale if held in future', they expressed as; transportation difficulties to area and absence of

3.2 The Potential Ecotourism Activities for Rumkale and its Surroundings

After collecting detailed information's (survey data and region examination), on Rumkale Archeological site, the following ecotourism activities have thought to be potentially suitable and should be consider in future plans. Fig. 5. shows ecotourism map of Rumkale and its vicinity.

Table 1. Opinion of participants on Rumkale historic site

Directed questions to participants	Respond of participants	Count
Where and how yours first heard Rumkale	Friends	19
	Books, brochure or magazines	9
	Media (TV, radio)	7
	Family members	3
	Tourism information centers	1
	Fair, symposium, conferences	1
	Other	10
The reason for choosing to come to Rumkale	To see natural beauty	25
	To see archeological and historic buildings	18
	Escape from crowded city centers	6
	To see reputation	3
	To see conventional architecture style and structure	3
	To see specific fauna and flora	2
Which activity you are mostly choice in Rumkale	Hiking/trekking	33
	Historic site and structures inspection	20
	Photography	17
	Boat tour	15
	Plant inspection	6
	Eating	6
	Other	6
Damaging behaviors of Rumkale and its surroundings	Irregular disposal of garbage	30
	Destruction of vegetation	8
	Water contamination	6
	Noise pollution	5
	Interfere to wildlife	1
	Excessive and improper fishing	1
	The cultural conflict	1
	Other	6
Negative factors hindering the development of tourism activity in Rumkale	The lack of accommodation	19
	The difficulty of transportation	16
	The lack of restaurant, cafe, and services	13
	Inadequate guidance	10
	Lack of security	9
	The lack of infrastructure facilities	7
	Perspective of local people to tourists	6
Failure of weekend visitors carrying capacity	4	

Table 2. Tendency and opinion on the concept of ecotourism of participants for Rumkale Region

Directed questions to participants	Respond of participants	Count
Definition of ecotourism	Environmentally friendly	22
	Describing the nature and teaches practical tourism	19
	Tours and activities that are related to tourism and nature	16
	Tourism is providing escape and relief from stress	13
	It is tourism that allows you to get to know different cultures and traditions	9
	Protect the environment and tourism which contribute to the welfare of local people	8
	It is a tourism of sports activities can be performed	7
	It is a tourist practices that offers simple and straightforward possibilities	4
	Offering a fashionable and expensive travel tourism	1
	Other	1
The effects of ecotourism events on area	Economical	19
	Preservation and development of cultural values	6
	Develop social relationships	4
	Promoting and increasing the prestige of the region	2
	Protection and development of flora and fauna	1
	The development of tourism sub-sectors	1
The kind of ecotourism activity	Hiking/trekking	22
	Mountain climbing	19
	Photography	16
	Historical and archeological trips	16
	Scuba diving	15
	Plant observation	15
	Caving	14
	Bicycle trip	11
	Camping	10
	Wildlife observation	10
	Bird observation	9
	Paragliding	9
	Canoe - rafting	7
	Horse trip	7
	Winter tourism	7
	Adventure and sports tourism	7
	Agriculture and farm tourism	6
	Balloon tourism	5
	Hunting	5
	Sportive fishing	4
Orienteering (direction finding)	4	

3.2.1 Hiking (trekking)

Rumkale and its surroundings have very interesting natural beauty. The Duraklı village-Çulluk stream-Merzimen stream-Rumkale path looks like very suitable trails for *hiking/trekking* activities. This path is about 14 km long and take up to approximately 8 hours to complete, have along at the north-south direction by the direction of the mountains elongation. When the trail is complete, it can be switched from the other side

of Rumkale to Halfeti by boat and provided to access transport vehicles. The following trails could be considered for daily hiking around Rumkale regions;

- Halfeti – Değirmen creek canyon trial,
- Ehneş – Derbent – Kamışlı trial,
- Kuzuyatağı – Rumkale trial.

It is noteworthy to note that the best time for trekking activities in this regions are the spring

and fall seasons. Because this area has very hot *hiking/trekking* is not suitable to conducts due to climate during summer and at this climate, health of participants.

Table 3. Assessment of Rumkale Region for ecotourism activities

Ecotourism activity	Suitable	Partially suitable	Non suitable
Hiking/trekking	28	5	---
Photography	24	5	4
Historical and archeological trips	23	7	3
Plant observation	20	11	2
Camping / caravan tourism	20	11	2
Adventure and sports tourism	18	13	2
Mountain / Rock climbing	17	13	3
Wildlife observation	17	14	2
Cave tourism	15	15	3
Sportive fishing	15	15	3
Bicycle trip	14	12	7
Yacht tours	13	13	7
Orienteering (direction finding)	13	16	4
Bird watching	12	17	4
Horseback trekking	12	18	3
Surfing/sailing	11	9	13
Events	11	13	9
Faith tourism	11	12	10
Scuba diving	9	14	10
Jeep safari	8	10	15
Paragliding	8	6	19
Hunting	5	17	11
Bungee jumping	5	2	26
Winter tourism	2	21	10
Thermal tourism	2	4	27



Source: Barlas İmar Planlama Müş. Ltd. Şti

Fig. 5. Rumkale and its vicinity's ecotourism map [14]

3.2.2 Bird watching

A number of bird species have been identified in Rumkale region. Some of the bird species has reported in this regions; blackbirds, partridges, arab nightingale, red falcon, humming bird, sand grouse, striped eurasian scoops owl, pygmy cormorants, night heron, gallinule. However, along with Euphrates river basin and Birecik dam area are found to be the most suitable place to observe those bird species. Moreover, the striped eurasian scoops owl is very important endangered owl species and under protection all over Europe. In addition, these region looks like very suitable places for owl species and offers very high potential for watching to them.

3.2.3 Horseback trekking

The mountainous parts of Rumkale and its vicinity have realized to be very suitable for *horse trekking*. The horseback trekking can be performed on a daily basis with various routing. If visitors like to ride horse, they should be rented that horses near villages with accomplished by making accommodations.

3.2.4 Botanical tourism

Rumkale region looks like low forest and plant habitats due to its climate specification. However, due its specific location, the Iran-Turan origin plant diversity and endemic plants offer potential to visitors and may be an attractive location for botanical tourism. Moreover, the botanical tourism would be organized according to the blossoming period of plants. Hence, indigenous and special plants should be protected and not allow to collect them.

3.2.5 Faith tourism

Rumkale region has rich church and worship places. Saint Nerses church and Barşavma Monastery, Rock church are some of the important places in terms of *faith tourism*. However, Jesus' apostles Johannes lived in that area and spread the Christian faith during the Roman period. It was believed that Johannes store a copy of Bible in a cave. Hence, Rumkale, has reputations for the Christian world. This information good enough to make a famous place for ecotourism activities.

3.2.6 Castle visit

Due to ongoing restoration works in the castle, it is subject to get permission from the Gaziantep

provincial culture and tourism directorate to close look up those structures. However, when the restoration work is completed, the boats from Yavuzeli and Halfeti through the castle's east and west piers will be reach. It is clear that when the restoration is complete, this castle may service very high historical heritage to visitors.

3.2.7 Scuba diving

After the complete of Birecik dam in 2000, some of the important structures (homes, mosques, buildings, etc.) remain under water. It may be interesting to see that structures under water. Hence, take an inventory study of buildings submerged under water or to observe these structures has become potential for diving tourism.

3.2.8 Historical/ archaeological tourism

The Rumkale region and lower Euphrates river basin corridor have already established as first and third degree archaeological site region. The Saint Nerses Church, Barşavma Monastery have established to be first degree archaeological sites whereas caves and homes have established as third degree archaeological site. These archeological residues and heritages may create important potential for ecotourism activities that see all those in original place.

3.2.9 Water sports tourism

Halfeti coast looks like very suitable for water sports. However, the water sport activities should be conducted in summer but when temperature is not disturbing level to visitors.

3.2.10 Nature photography

Euphrates river basin reflects different, rich biodiversity, a number of historical and archaeological structures. Those reflects high potential for nature photography activities. It was realized that many scenic spot for nature photography is available in the study area.

3.2.11 Eco-gastronomy tourism

Rumkale is located between Gaziantep and Şanlıurfa provinces where one of the richest national delicacies, in Turkey. This makes Rumkale to be very suitable for the *eco-gastronomic tourism*. Halfeti where located in this vicinity and member of the township has been identified as the appropriate fields. The local

products could be prepared with organic slow food philosophy and trade, will provide an economic contribution to the local people as to revive the *eco-gastronomi* tourism.

4. CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

Rumkale and its vicinity has very rich natural resources and protection issue should be balance with the cultural landscape value and met all interest groups in the use of ecotourism. Sustainable ecotourism development in a planned manner will help the local people to earn income next resource conservation value.

Rumkale archeological site and its vicinity is located in drinking water basin that subject to environmental conservation plans. However, tourists coming to the region tend to travel the castle with motor boats. But currently these boats have not professionally conducted. This is very important issue for security. Moreover, there is no any standard pier to berth boats. In addition, there is need of modern treatment facilities for visitors such as; eating, drinking, resting and accommodation and other needs. Without these modern facilities, it is significant threat for development and plan of area.

This area has serious elevations steps and slope and limited access to historical residues. In particular, a major problem at the point of provision of access. Currently at weekends, approximately 100 vehicles come to Rumkale daily. However, even there are no any modern parking lots and organized parking facilities. In addition there is no any access to shore of river with cars. So the transportation and parking of vehicles is important issue for this area.

Many of the structures located on area is waiting idle condition, but many of them have serious damage and suffered from environmental conditions. Some of the structures have the danger of collapse. In the field, many mysteries involved because of the absence of any excavations. As mention in above, these area have already hosted various civilizations. However, some randomly laid technical infrastructure elements causes a negative scenic view. For visitors, the lack of short-term accommodation and recreational facilities negatively affects the visitors. Some of the amateur services provided and supplied in an uncontrolled manner.

Because of the located in the middle of two different administrative boundaries, each administration's request to take applications procedure their own projects. Hence the absence of long-term and emerge plans are the major problem in the production of sustainable projects. The most important issue when looking at the field of infrastructure problems, due to the Euphrates river located at the edge of the basin, it appears some waste throw to river. In addition, especially during late night, the lack of night lighting is also problems.

For the Christian world, this area should be one of the most important religious centers today. But it is an absence of good infrastructure and lacking the service quality. Although, the region has very rich cultural, historical, natural and archaeological potential, the uncompleted conservation plan can assessed for failure to adequately implemented and not help development of area. Further research in the field must be done to create based on the current activity calendar flora and fauna potential. The activity calendar should be include;

- The period in which the blossoming of plants,
- Bird watching time,
- Appropriate activities for nature walks for suitable months.

However, Rumkale sustainable ecotourism and bird watching activities looks like emerging issues and the Euphrates river basin will converse the natural texture of the bird observatory equipment's should be done. Especially during motor boats working time, bird's migration time, loud music should not be allowed in that area.

Well planning for archaeological sites are important for the protection necessary to minimize the problems in these areas. Therefore, different disciplines such as; sociologists, archaeologists, architects, landscape architects, urban planners, civil engineers, should be worked together in that plans.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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