



## Potential of Rural Tourism and Ecotourism and SWOT Analysis: Case of Başkale (Van, Turkey) and Its Surroundings

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### Abstract

Rural tourism is an activity performed in natural and cultural areas. This activity; while providing experiences to the participants, it also increases the socio-economical welfare of the residents and provides financial gains for the preservation of natural and cultural areas. These outstanding areas popular with their natural and cultural features have started to use for rural tourism purposes. Rural areas have a strong recreational potential thanks to the number and variety of their cultural and natural landscape elements. Başkale (Van) County and its surroundings have important potential for rural tourism with their natural and cultural assets. This study attempted to determine the rural tourism potential of Başkale County of Van (Turkey) that has a rich history and natural resources in Eastern Anatolia. Using SWOT analysis, strengths and weaknesses and also opportunities and threats were examined. It was determined that Başkale with its unique cultural and historical resources has a potential for the development of rural tourism. However, rural tourism was underdeveloped because of the residents' lack of consciousness, inadequate budget, lack of entrepreneurs and inefficient promotional activities. It was seen that rural tourism should be considered as a tool for rural development.

**Keywords:** Rural Tourism, Cultural Tourism, Ecotourism, Nature Tourism, Başkale.

### Kırsal Turizm ve Ekoturizm Potansiyeli ve SWOT Analizi: Başkale (Van) ve Yakın Çevresi Örneği

#### Öz

Kırsal turizm, doğal ve kültürel alanlara yönelik yapılan bir etkinliktir. Bu etkinlik; bir yandan katılımcılara bilgi veren deneyimler sağlarken, diğer yandan yerel halkın sosyo-ekonomik refahını geliştirmekte ve doğal ve kültürel alanların korunması için ekonomik faydalar sağlamaktadır. Doğal ve kültürel özellikleri ile öne çıkan bölgelerimiz, kırsal turizm için kullanılmaya başlanmıştır. Kırsal alanlar, kültürel ve doğal peyzaj elemanlarının sayısı ve çeşitliliği nedeniyle güçlü bir rekreasyonel potansiyele sahiptir. Başkale (Van) İlçesi ve yakın çevresi el değmemiş doğal güzellikleri ve kültürel yapısı ile kırsal turizm için önemli bir potansiyele sahiptir. Bu çalışmada; Doğu Anadolu'da zengin bir geçmişe ve doğal kaynakları sahip olan Van ili Başkale ilçesinin kırsal turizm potansiyeli belirlenmeye çalışılmıştır. SWOT analizi yapılarak güçlü ve zayıf yönler ile sahip olduğu fırsatlar ve olası tehditler ortaya konulmuştur. Çalışmada, kültürel ve tarihi yönlerden nadir güzelliklere sahip olan Başkale'nin, kırsal turizmde uygun bir potansiyelinin olduğu belirlenmiştir. Bununla birlikte, kırsal kesimde yaşayan halkın yetersiz bilinç düzeyine sahip olması, bütçe eksikliği, tanıtım ve girişim yetersizliği nedeniyle kırsal turizmin gelişmediği sonucuna ulaşılmıştır. Kırsal kalkınmanın sağlanmasında kırsal turizmin önemli bir araç olarak dikkate alınması gerektiği görülmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kırsal Turizm, Kültür Turizmi, Ekoturizm, Doğa Turizmi, Başkale.

## INTRODUCTION

Rural tourism is a type of tourism that merges with rural culture, natural environment and agriculture. It can easily be integrated with other tourism types (Soykan, 2006). Rural tourism activities are carried out by using intense agricultural activities as a supply source for tourism (Uçar et al., 2012). These tourism activities can be carried out in places with different traits like cities, wilderness, coastal areas, highlands, mountains, archeological areas, villages, lakesides and riversides, underground water sources, caves, forests, deserts, religious places and islands (Mansuroğlu and Dağ, 2016; Karafakı and Yazgan, 2012). Rural tourism is a kind of tourism activity that aims to contribute to the finance of the regions with low population and areas that have been deserted as a result of economical troubles. It is also a way to prevent immigration. The Notion of "Rural Tourism" and the meaning of the word "rural" is directly understood as "rural areas" in our country. So it is considered the same as highland tourism, hunting tourism, cave tourism, ecotourism, outdoor nature sports tourism and rural tourism. Even though this is not incorrect, the real aim of rural tourism is to stay in a village, a farm or a mountain hut etc. This way, one can get accustomed to rural culture and spend the holiday by socializing in it. Thus, it needs to be said that there are differences in terms of purpose and activities (Soykan, 2003). By moving the community of people to the areas that has low population but are suitable for rural tourism, it can be prevented for these areas to be left inactive. Preserving the pride and identity of the local culture and trying to revive it are indicators of cultural development brought upon by tourism in rural areas (Kızılaslan and Ünal, 2013). In rural tourism, interest towards natural living and agricultural values are the main starting points. Activities aimed at rural areas can be enriched by benefiting from local aspects. Some examples may be introducing local agriculture, stockbreeding or handicrafts to the lodgers or day trippers. Culture tours or hiking, picnic, sports activities, animation shows, various courses, festivals and fairs, special activities and services designed for children or the elders will also draw the tourist attention (Koroğlu and Koroğlu, 2006).

Ecotourism on the other hand, can be reviewed in two parts as active and potential tourism activities. Potential tourism activity examples are; bird and butterfly watching, wilderness watching, trekking (hiking), landscape viewing and botanical tourism (Orhan et al., 2010; Gülgün et al., 2014 ). Active tourism examples may be; religious tourism activities, activities on water, picnics, festivals and fairs.

Within the scope of this study, natural and cultural landscape and its elements in Başkale (Van) county of Eastern Anatolia Region are reviewed. The aim of the study is to present different alternatives to the ecotourism and rural tourism areas that can be valuable to the existing potential of Başkale and its immediate surroundings. Also, the present state of this area is planned to be determined with a SWOT analysis. Aside from that, there is the possibility of Başkale becoming a mass tourism center with future investments. So, with an approach based on tourism planning, it is aimed to utilize the existing natural, social and cultural traits and values. The goal of this plan is to have a sustainable environment.

## MATERIAL and METHOD

### Material

The research area is the Başkale county which is located within the borders of Van city. Başkale is a mountain region with high altitude and it's located in the Upper Euphrates Area, between 38°2'51" Northern latitude and 44°0'54" Western longitude. Its surface area is 2.599 km<sup>2</sup> and the elevation from sea level is 2.400 meters. It has a continental climate so the average snowy day count is 140. It is located in the southeast of Van and the distance between Van and Başkale is 120 km. It is established among the foothills of İspiriz Mountain. To the north, there is Özalp which is a part of Van. To the east, there is the Turkey-Iran border. To the south, we see Yüksekova that is a part of Hakkâri and to the west, there is Gürpınar which is also a part of Van (Figure 1).

When the history of Başkale county is reviewed; during the time of Urartians, it was a settlement known as Adamma. Armenians named it Adamakert. Later, Başkale became a borderland between Romans and Parthians. In 3rd century AD, it was controlled by Sasanians and in 6th century AD, the control was gained by Byzantines. After the arab invasion in 645, it was controlled by Armenian seignory. Then it was under the command of Ahlatşah seignory in 1100s and later it was attacked by Mongols in 1245. After a short period of time under the command of local lords, Timur gained command of the region in 1386 and then it was Karakoyunlus who commanded the county. At the beginning of 16th century, this command moved to Safavids. It was the 16th century, in the era of Suleyman the Magnificent, when the absolute control of Başkale region belonged to Ottoman Empire. This region was once known as Kotur-Elbak and at the end of 19th century, it was behind the borders of Elbak township of Hakkari sanjak which was a part of Van province. The name of the township was changed to Başkale after the establishment of new Turkish Republic.

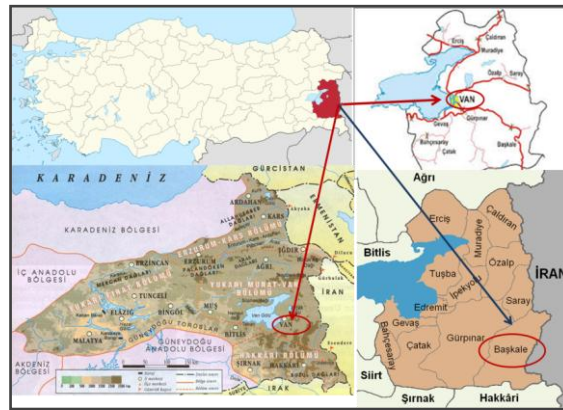


Figure 1. Geographical Location of Başkale County

Resource: Anonymous, 2016a.

When the socioeconomic aspects of the research area is reviewed, it is seen that there are 62 quarters and 70 hamlets including Center District and Albayrak District. There are 70 hamlets, big or small. The center has 4 quarters. They are Çarşı, Tepebaşı, Yeni Mahalle and Hafızıye (Kale) quarters (Figure 1).

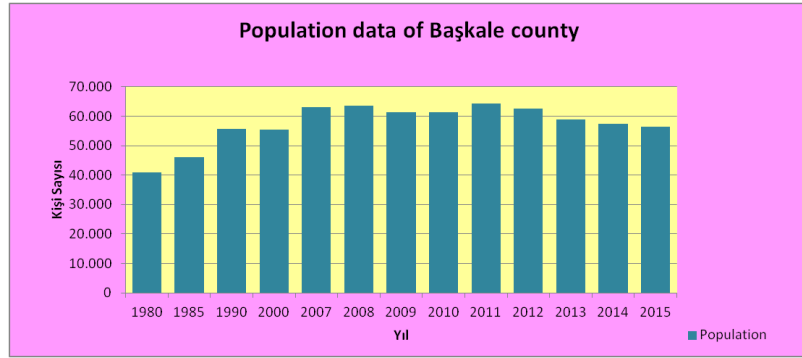


Figure 2. Population of Başkale County

The reasons behind Başkale being chosen as the research area are the county's historical, cultural and natural aspects together with having the suitable potential for rural tourism. It is foreseen that the means of living will also improve as an effect of tourism. There are also natural, cultural and socioeconomic studies in Başkale county carried out by Ministry of Labor, Ministry of Environment and Urbanization, Directorate General for Nature Conservation and National Parks, Governorship of Van, District Governorship of Başkale, Eastern Anatolia Development Agency and Van Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism.

### Method

The first step in the research was to determine the landscape potential of Başkale and the next step was to have a SWOT analysis which had recently been used in planning studies, problem describing and solving, strategizing and making analytical decisions (Yumuk and İnan, 2005; Zoller and Bruynis, 2007; Dyson, 2004). In order to effectively put the ecotourism potential into use, the resources are evaluated by the SWOT analysis and their suitability were determined in light of the expectations. After designating the criteria of SWOT analysis, these criteria are analyzed in correlation with each other by using a SWOT matrix.

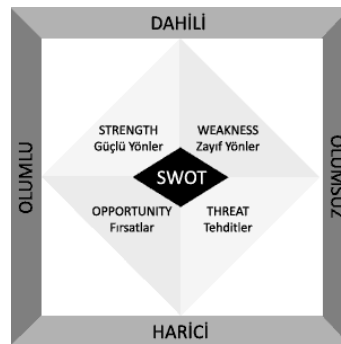


Figure 3. SWOT analysis

Resource: Anonymous, 2016b

## FINDINGS

Başkale county and its surroundings have high potential for various alternative tourism movements thanks to the rich history, genuine natural beauty and cultural aspects. Başkale also has a big potential for rural tourism -which is a part of ecotourism- thanks to its location. However, the resources for rural tourism are not being used effectively and this potential is not actually known in other cities than the city of Van. In addition to this, ecotourism activities trigger rural tourism and help revive the rural areas. Table 1 shows the ecotourism and/or rural tourism types that are carried out in Başkale and its immediate surroundings.

**Table 1.** Ecotourism and Rural Tourism Activities in Başkale and Its Surroundings.

Knowledg Based Activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Botanic tourism</li> <li>2. Nature Photography</li> <li>3. Geotourism</li> <li>4. Event tourism</li> <li>5. Traditions</li> <li>6. Cultural tourism</li> <li>7. Cave tourism</li> <li>8. Gastronomy tourism</li> <li>9. Religious tourism</li> </ol>
Relaxation-Based Activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Relaxation Tourism</li> <li>2. Thermal tourism</li> <li>3. Plateu tourism</li> </ol>

### Informative Activities

#### Botanical Tourism

Başkale is in the southeast of Van and the distance between two places is 120 km. It is established among the foothills of Mount İspiriz. The average snow day count is 140 and the average daily temperature is 5,8oC. *Fritillaria imperialis* plant grows naturally in areas of Hakkari with high altitude. *Fritillaria imperialis* (Reverse Tulip) is one of the oldest ornamental plants in history and it is a bulbous plant. It had been the topic of many legends and it is considered to be the symbol of sorrow for many religions and cultures. It was an exclusive flower for the Ottoman lands until the end of 19th century. Reverse Tulip is an endemic plant that belongs to the Anatolian geography. Its farming area should have an altitude of 1.000 – 3.000 meters. There are usually no trees on the mountains. There are mainly moors on the lands of the county. Yet when you look at the lands of the city, there are mostly meadows and leas. The herbs in the local herby cheese are also naturally growing ones. Plants that grow in the region like *Nasturtium officinale* R. Br. (Brassicaceae)-Tere, *Lilium paniculatum* L. subsp. *Paniculatum* (Liliaceae) Sirmo, *Allium aucheri* Boiss. (Liliaceae) Sirmo, Sirim, *Allium scorodoprasum* (L.) (Liliaceae) Çatlanguş, *Allium schoenoprasum* L. (Liliaceae) Sirmo, Sirik, *Eremurus spectabilis* Bieb. (Liliaceae) Çiriş; can be added to food. There are other plants that grow in the area like *Ziziphora clinopodioides* Lam. (Lamiaceae) Keklikotu,

Kekikotu, *Thymus kotschyanus* Boiss, et Hohen, var. *glabrescens* Boiss, (Lamiaceae) Catır, Zater, *Ferula rigidula*, *Ferula orientalis* L. DC. (Apiaceae) Heliz, *Carum carvi* L. (Apiaceae), Teasel. These are all exclusive to the region and are important for botanical tourism.

### **Nature Photography**

For people who are into photography, attractive aspects of the nature and local, natural settings are always precious. Asides from Başkale being rich in flora, it is also known that it has various physical natural traits. A few interesting examples are Akçalı travertine and Vanadokya fairy chimneys.

### **Geotourism**

After 19 km of Karacasu brook junction which can be reached after Başkale county center; there are travertine fields 1,5 km far from Akçalı village and the altitude of these fields are around 2.400 – 2.500 meters. These Akçalı travertines are still evolving and they are already considered to be a part of the natural heritage of Van.

### **Events**

Nedirof Highland Spring Festival was organized in 2009 by Van Başkale Municipality and local people came together together in Değirmen Stream. In 2012, between the 1st and 4th of July on Nedirok highland, 1st Keledoş Festival was held and there was a competition for making a local food called keldoş.

### **Traditions**

Başkale county is very rich in traditions. Some good examples can be wedding traditions, ballads (“Evimizde duman tüter”, “zap suyu derin akar” etc.), dance music (Bablekan, Basso, Dingo, Gülizar, Gerzani, Hedli, Hır-Hır, Havesor, Havcan, Heypeyda, Gaz-Gaz, Kelekvan, Kersi, Kırsanı, Larilla, Lorke, Lizan, Meyrokı, Mendo, Meş, Nure, Neve, Nare, Papure) and garments (fistan etc.). In weddings, men wear felst (keçe), cones (külâh) or caps (takke) on their heads. On top of these, they wrap epal, cemedani or poşi. On their bodies, they wear long sleeved, collarless undergarments, on top of that, şal şepik and cemedani. After that, they put on their vests (kerik) and then wrap lavendi or multicolored sashes. On their feet, they wear inlaid or plain cotton socks and put sandals (reşik or çarık) on. Men also use shoulder straps (hamayıl), silver tobacco cases and silver or normal watch chains. Women wear kofi (ağvan) wrapped around their heads. They also wear tepelik and in some places alınlık. On top of these, they tie poşi or kesrevan. On their bodies, they wear t-shirts or tank tops. They also wear underpants starting from their waists and going down to their ankles. On top of these, they wear fistan, mehmer velvet and kras – entari (loose robe). On these, they wear vests and in some places aprons. Sashes are wrapped around their waists on top of these. When necessary, armbands are also used. If the lady wears a tied armband it means that she is married. If the armband is untied, it means she is single. On their feet, they wear inlaid or plain cotton socks. Then they put on harik, reşik or yemeni. Women also use golden or niello worked silver belts, jewelry on their arms, necks, ears or fingers, golden heb, jewelry garnished with beads or etc.,

inlaid jewelry pouches and they also put on make-up. Rug weaving is also a local tradition that survived until today. Harmala seed is also popular and it grows on mountains or in cemeteries. They are harvested when they are green. There is a piece of garment called buk and it is made by using materials like thread, needle, wood and fabric. Another thing about harmala seeds is that they are used in decorating houses and stores. They are given various forms by stringing and function as ornaments to be used in houses. They are also used as incense against the evil eye.

### **Cultural Tourism**

Kelekom bridge of the county is located over Zap Brook which is to 700 meters west of the 25th km of the Başkale-Hakkari state highway. When the overall architectural structure and the material of the bridge is compared to the other bridges of the region, it is guessed that it was built during the time of Seljuk Empire. The bridge was repaired in 1655 BC by Hüsrev Bey who was one of the Abbasi generals and after that, the inscription was placed on it. Behind the county borders there are Pizan castle and Hoşaf castle. Pizan Castle is in the Başkale, in Pizan (Örenkale) village and unfortunately it is in ruins. Pizan Castle is a structure consisting of a palace, a mosque, a warehouse, a cellar, castle walls and bastions. The castle mosque was built in 1653. The south and west walls and the bastions on the southwest corner are partly intact. The other bastions, palace inside the walls, the other mosque, the warehouse and the cellars are completely in ruins.

### **Cave Tourism**

In Yavuzlar village, there are fairy chimneys together with many tunnels and caves. Yavuzlar village has a 33 km distance to the county center. The fairy chimneys were formed by the corrosion of the rain and wind over the rocks sprayed out of the volcanic Yiğit Mountain. The fairy chimneys are called "Vanadokya" by the local people and there are many domestic and foreign tourists each year -especially in summer time- visiting the area. In recent years, many long tunnels and caves that were formed by the rain fall have also been popular attractions.

### **Gastronomy Tourism**

There are many local foods (Keledoş, germav, sengeser, asphodel roast, kavuf, etc.), herby cheese, rhubarb plant which only grows on mountains during spring time and village bread (tandır bread) that can be counted as significant examples.

### **Religious Tourism**

There had been many different civilizations that chose Başkale and its surroundings as their home. Kurds, Turks, Armenians and Jews all lived together in this county. Thus, it is rich in faith tourism opportunities. When you look at the recent history, Abdülhakim Arvâsî Üçışık who was an important scholar for the public that lived during the final stages of Ottoman and early years of Turkey, was born in Başkale. Works of Abdülhakîm Arvâsî, Râbita-i Şerife and Er Riyâdü't Tasavvufiye, were simplified and published by Necip Fazıl Kısakürek. There is a mosque in the county in his name.

St. Bartholomeus Church that is located in Albayrak Village which is within the borders of Başkale, is one of the rare Christian buildings of the area. This church overlooking the Zap Valley from a hill and the jamatun (square hall attached to the western entrance of a church) were built at the same time. When the architectural aspects and the decoration are assessed, it is thought that the building date was around 13th and 14th centuries. Detailed renovations were carried out on the building later on 1647-1655, 1760 and 1877. Another church is Soradır Church. It is located in the Yanal Village of Başkale. The church was built in the name of St. Ejmiacin and the construction date is estimated to be around 7th and 9th centuries. It is a long building towards east and west, its yard is covered with a ribbed dome which is formed by two sets of opposing arches. The dome is reflected to the outside by an elevated square shaped pulley which has beveled corners (Figure 3; Figure 4).

### **Recreational Activities**

#### **Leisure Tourism**

Leisure tourism (or recreational tourism) can be described as the people working in the cities going on vacation in order to take a break from the noisy, crowded environments and the air pollution. Leisure tourism involves many different types of tourism because a lot of them have relaxing effects (Kızılarşlan and Ünal, 2013). Leisure tourism consists of health (thermal, hot spring, spa) tourism, tent camp tourism and camper (trailer) tourism. Of the above-mentioned types of tourism, Başkale county has hot spring.

#### **Thermal Tourism**

Tandoğan quarter has a distance of 15 km from Başkale. There are Kelekom hot springs that came down from Armenians and Jews which are important for county's hot spring tourism. Citizens from surrounding cities and counties make one-day trips to visit these springs. They are especially preferred by people who have skin problems or joint disorders. Yet these hot springs are neglected and this negatively affects the tourism. Kelekom hot springs consist of a 2 km area with erupting healing water sources in 6 different spots and they have a potential of contributing to the rural tourism of the region together with becoming an income source for the local people, if they are turned into a facility.

#### **Valley Tourism**

Livestock farming is the main income source of the people living in Başkale county. Especially by sheep farming, they trade livestock in domestic and foreign markets. Plant production is not common due to the unsuitable weather conditions. The land suitable for vegetative production is scarce and the climate is rough. The most important agricultural products are wheat, barley and potato. Valleys are important for Başkale county in terms of livestock breeding. In summer, Nedirok Valley and other valleys with high altitude, receive migrants from various areas of the region. These migrants that come from Siirt, Batman and Mardin, earn their keep by livestock



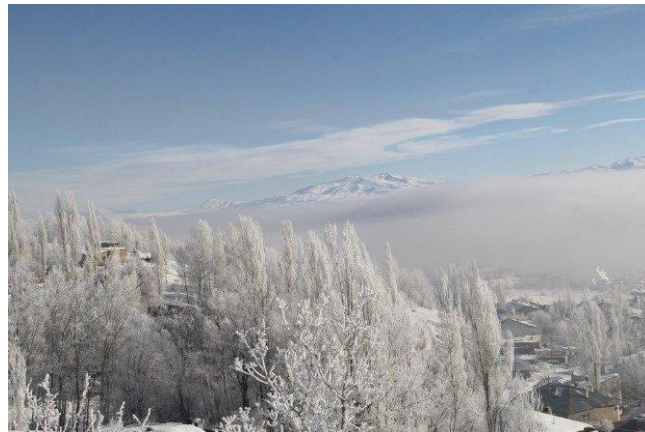
farming on the chilly valleys of the county. Kuşdağı village and Kocaköy valley are the other valleys of Başkale county.

### SWOT Analysis

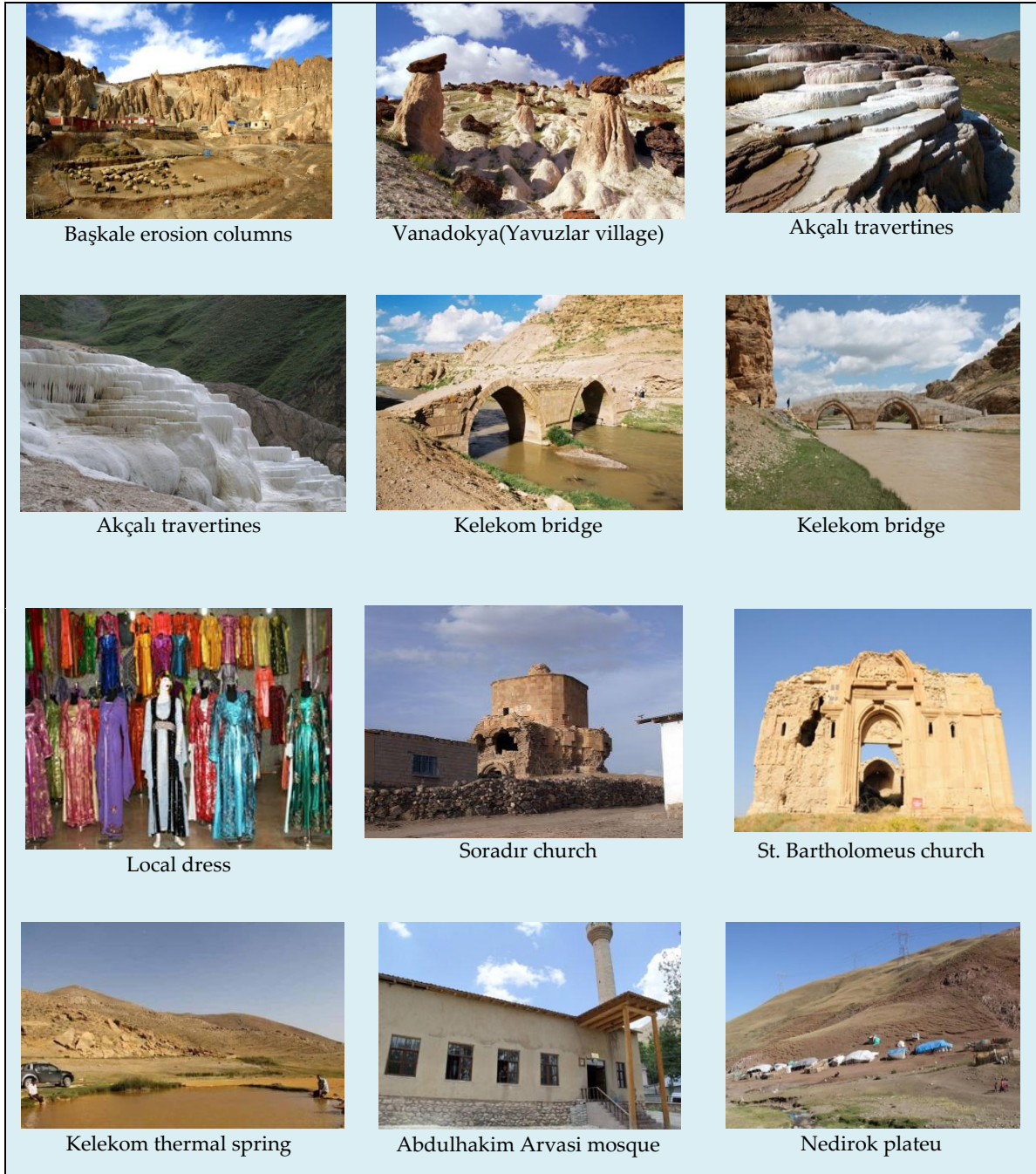
Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Historical importance for being home for many different civilizations.</li> <li>❖ Natural formations of the region (Fairy chimneys, travertines, etc.) Trekking, mountain climbing and paragliding opportunities of its mountains.</li> <li>❖ Hot springs.</li> <li>❖ Existence of Great Zab, opportunity for water sports as a result of being rich in rivers.</li> <li>❖ Asides from traditions, there is also a rich culture of local food.</li> <li>❖ Existence of handicrafts specific to the region.</li> <li>❖ Existence of cave tourism and geomorphologic formations.</li> <li>❖ Picnic spots (Valleys).</li> <li>❖ Rural areas being suitable for recreational activities.</li> <li>❖ Rural areas suitable for setting up ecological farms.</li> <li>❖ Generally having the necessary infrastructure and area characteristics for tourism types based on nature tourism.</li> <li>❖ Being rich in history and heritage.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ As the maintenance and publicity of the SPAs are lacking, they are not known either locally or internationally.</li> <li>❖ Lack of awareness about rural tourism and ecotourism.</li> <li>❖ Lack of adequate planning on rural tourism by local and national administrations.</li> <li>❖ Not paying attention to preserving historical areas.</li> <li>❖ As many of the historical places are not restored or decorated, they are not open to visitors and are completely unknown to people.</li> <li>❖ Not putting the Great Zab in spotlight for boosting tourism.</li> <li>❖ Lack of organization and attempt for building ecological farms in order to develop rural tourism and/or ecotourism.</li> <li>❖ Not organizing enough fairs and activities to promote local products, handicrafts, foods etc. specific to the county.</li> <li>❖ Migration of people to the places where tourism sector in most active.</li> <li>❖ Lack of accommodation and transportation organization for the places with rural tourism and/or ecotourism potential.</li> <li>❖ The long distance between picnic spots and city center. Thus, these places being harder to reach for visitors, especially in winter.</li> <li>❖ Lack of employment studies for the youth living in rural areas.</li> <li>❖ Inadequate rehabilitation works.</li> <li>❖ Being unaware of the rich natural resources.</li> <li>❖ Not benefiting from natural resources enough.</li> <li>❖ Being unable to prevent migration from rural areas to the city.</li> <li>❖ Lack of rural planning.</li> </ul>

### SWOT Analysis (continued)

Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ New employment chances can be created in areas that are thought to have ecotourism potential.</li><li>❖ Rural tourism and ecotourism having potential for the good of Başkale nationwide and internationally.</li><li>❖ Rural tourism and ecotourism being alternative income sources for the locals.</li><li>❖ Visitors coming for rural tourism and ecotourism also provide local people with chances to socialize, resulting in the advancement of social structure of the county.</li><li>❖ There are many institutions that provide support, incentive and donations for rural tourism and ecotourism investments.</li><li>❖ Raising the workforce of the people living in rural areas employed in rural tourism and ecotourism activities, by enlisting them in training programs.</li><li>❖ Securing the women's place in families and society with the help of creating job opportunities by the revival of ecotourism and rural tourism.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ Environmental pollution.</li><li>❖ Environmental problems resulting from the irresponsible use of natural areas. Rise in the damage to wildlife and endemic plant potential.</li><li>❖ Excessive damage to the historical areas as a result of not turning all of them into protected sites.</li><li>❖ Areas that have the potential to be used for rural tourism and ecotourism standing idle.</li><li>❖ As the migration rate to the cities rise, it becomes harder to find young people to work in ecotourism activities. This is also a negative effect for landscape observation areas.</li><li>❖ Unprofessionally conducted agricultural activities, livestock farming and as a result of them, overgrazing.</li></ul>



**Figure 4.** Winter View from Başkale County.



**Figure 5.** Historical and Natural Resources of Başkale County

### CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

There are many rural tourism/ecotourism alternatives for Başkale. Başkale is quite rich in natural resources and values. Public's abstention should be lowered to minimum. Studies about ecotourism and rural tourism should be increased for raising awareness and incentivizing investments.

It is believed that after the studies towards advancing education and social means show results, people will tend to be looking at tourism as a way of income and this will raise the security and welfare of the living standards.

Especially Başkale and its immediate surroundings have amazing vistas with rivers, seasonal hills that can be seen in spring time, small plateaus and plants that can only be seen in these lands. The scenery created by the fairy chimneys in Başkale is extraordinary. Support from the government is needed to protect the houses around the fairy chimneys from the possible damage of the wind. Also, an inn should be constructed with architectural heritage of the region and it should be used as a viewing place for the fairy chimneys. This inn should also introduce local foods and cultural aspects to the visitors. This opportunity will specially be a different and important income source for the local people who are mainly working in livestock breeding. Travertines of Başkale which are actually scarce in the rest of Turkey, can be considered to be of great value in terms of promoting tourism. Vistas and natural landscaping views that can be encountered throughout the region from different perspectives, could be considered to have great value specific to Başkale. Thus, it can be said that Başkale has great alternatives and riches for ecotourism, recreation minded photography and landscape viewing activities. All these beauties and privileges should be considered as important factors that will advance the tourism sector of the region.

The restoration of the historical artifacts in Başkale county should be a priority. One of the most important details that needs to be taken care of is the desertion of the historically important buildings. Especially St. Bartholomeus Church of the 13th – 14th century and Soradır Church of the 7th – 9th century are about to fall down.

The results of the SWOT analysis conducted as a part of the study are as follows: Education is the corner stone of the public. The possibilities are few but the natural beauties are splendid and unique. Specially the places that are going to be built for accommodation should be in harmony with region's architectural style. However, as Ekinçi (1998) points out in his study, transportation is just as important as accommodation. It should not be within the characteristics of ecotourism to build big structures with multi stories (Ekinçi, 1998). It is an important fact that ugly buildings will negatively affect the natural vistas of the region. The buildings that are going to be constructed need to be in compliance with natural rural surroundings, traditional construction culture and building architecture. With contributions from Eastern Anatolia Development Agency, Van Directorate of Food, Agriculture and Livestock and Başkale Directorate of Food, Agriculture and Livestock; study groups of experts should investigate the dynamics of the region for improving the rural tourism in order to reveal the details of this and present methods. Accordingly, all the institutions and organizations in Van (District Governorship, Municipality, University, Eastern Anatolia Development Agency, Non-Governmental Organizations, Chambers, Local Authorities, etc.) should work in coordination and determine strategies and programs for rural tourism and ecotourism. This study will serve as an important source that will lead the way for future plans and studies which are going to be based on ecotourism.

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