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### Residents' Attitude Toward Tourism Development in Bestansur Village

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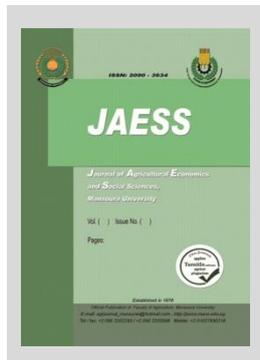
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#### ABSTRACT

Tourism is perceived as an important development opportunity for the rural communities by Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Kurdistan region of Iraq. This study was conducted aiming to determine the resident's attitude and perception toward increasing holiday-makers' visit and tourism development opportunities in Bestansur village, Kurdistan region of Iraq. In this study structured designed questionnaires were filled in face to face with 70 residents of Bestansur village. The results of this study have shown that the residents of Bestansur perceive the impact of tourism less negatively and more highly support sustainable development in their village. Furthermore, tourism was seen as a source of income generator and opportunity of improving well-being of the local community by the residents of Bestansur village. These prospects will create a big support of the local community in building future sustainable tourism strategies and development in the region.

**Keywords:** Rural tourism, Residents' attitude, Rural heritage, Bestansur Village

#### INTRODUCTION

It is clear that, rural areas are going through a period of changings and transformations in terms of their social, economic, functional, territorial and identity structures. This transition involves the introduction of new opportunities and having new social structure in society such as tourism and leisure activities. On the other hand, modern urban people have desire to rurality peaceful lifestyle, as well as, feeling connected to rural life. Consequently, this desire of experiencing the rural areas are increasingly perceived as tourism destination as a place for leisure activities, which are concerned by rural people (Rodrigues and Virtudes, 2019). It has been found that the major elements of rural tourism development beside the natural landscape of the areas, are heritages, traditional foods, distinctive culture and customs as well as welcoming from rural people that connected to transformation and redefining local identity. These recent demands of the holiday-makers on visiting rural areas, are integrated and has led to identifying of new local identities in these areas. Therefore, it has been found that the local residents could have important role to represent component that constitutes the destination and influences the future tourism destination development and their perception must be taken into consideration, utterly (Besiere, 1998).

The promotion of tourism is to local participation in decisions and enterprises, actively, which is the characteristic of developing this field (Okech, *et al.*, 2012). The relationship between community satisfaction and tourism development analyzed previous studies and showed that the level of satisfaction related to tourist activity in the area is not high, the community still supports it when it is considered promising for future development for people who live rural areas. The residents' support for tourist activity is connected also to their perceptions of economic,

environmental and socio-cultural factors. Positive impact on those factors indicate high support from the people who live in local community, that is why it is important to relocate between all factors and motivations to tourism structure in areas which is concerned to be the tourism place (Muresan *et al.*, 2016).

It has been showing that the primary objective of the heritage is to take care of the historical properties and maintaining them in good status as pristine as possible, mentioning the target of financial solvency and public access entrance into the decision-making process as a secondary objective. By other words, the heritage objectives tend to focusing on comprising a conservation goal with financial and public access constraints, this has been cared by the countries which have long history to maintaining heritages and relocated the enhance sector of tourism (Kadi *et al.*, 2014).

It has been found that one of the most important elements to impact tourism is heritages which develop social and economic structure, since it brings a lot of visitors to see human history in this area. For instance, heritages in Kermanshah city (Iran) has attract many tourists and increase the rate of visitors to knowledge about human history (Mohammadi *et al.*, 2010).

Kurdistan region, north of Iraq is known for its beautiful landscape, historical nature, social culture background, language and mores, ancient human settlement sites which have motivate many local and foreign tourists (Guttman, 2014; Catalani *et al.*, 2018).

A heritage site was found in Bestansur and recognized as one of the world's earliest built settlements in the world. In this heritage site founded buildings are constructed of mud-bricks dated to 7700 to 7100 BC, the Early Neolithic period. This archeological evidence

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represents the earliest stages of village farming life, a major milestone in human history. Which makes this village one of the most important places for the tourists to visit (UNESCO, 2017; Kopanias, et al., 2015). Finding this archeological evidence in the village is great opportunity to develop tourism industry in the region as an emerging tourism destination to attract local and international tourists. The main objectives of this study were to study the opportunities for sustainable tourism development in Bestansur village and determine the residents' attitudes toward tourism development options in their village and tourism development options.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Study location:**

This study was conducted in Bestansur village, where located in the Zagros foothills on the edge of the Shahrazor Plain (Coordinates: 35°22'58.6"N 45°38'39.2"E), 35 km southeast of Sulaimaniyah city, Kurdistan Regional Government, Iraq. this village has a high protentional for tourism due to beautiful landscape and an archeological heritage site which represents the earliest stages human life.

**Data collection:**

A quantitative survey was used in order to examine the locals' attitude and perception about tourism development in their village. Samples were collected randomly using simple random sampling SRS method. The data collection was carried out in December 2019. The questionnaires were filled in face-to-face interviews with 83 rural residents whom representing their families to a proportional stratified random sample of adults and young ages started from 16 years old in the end 70 questionnaires were validated based on their response rate. The questionnaire was indicating the villagers' opinion on the prospects of increasing visitors to their village and opportunities of tourism development in their village. The questionnaire included questions regarding: Demographics characteristics of the respondents; acceptance of specific tourism development options rated, based on Likert, on 5-point scales (1 = not acceptable, to 5 = extremely acceptable), and; resident attitudes toward tourism measured with some attitude statements using 5-point scales based on Likert (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The list of tourism development options was developed based on input of individual's investments, private companies' investments and government projects.

Based on the respondents' inability to rate statement due to they been illiterate or undereducated, most of the respondents were asked the questions openly to give their opinions then their opinions were converted to the Likert 5 points scale by the researchers.

**Data Analysis:**

The collected data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS ver.25). Descriptive analysis was used to test the significance of the villagers' perceptions in relation to sustainable tourism development in Bestansur. One -way ANOVA analysis was used to show the residents' expectation to the perceived impacts of tourism within different socio-demographic characteristics (sex, age and educational background) of the local residents.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Table (1) shows the profile of the respondents regarding socio-demographic and socio-economic characteristics. The respondents were 50% male and 50% female, aged between 16 to 55 years old and over. The respondents were illiterate or can only read and write (27.1%) or holding technical institute diploma degree

(20%). Most of them were farming as a main occupation (58.6%) while 38.6% working in non-farming sectors.

**Table 1. Socio-demographic profile of respondents**

| Variables              | Category           | Frequencies | percentage |
|------------------------|--------------------|-------------|------------|
| Gender                 | Female             | 35          | 50         |
|                        | Male               | 35          | 50         |
|                        | Total              | 70          | 100        |
| Age                    | 16-25              | 20          | 28.6       |
|                        | 26-35              | 17          | 24.3       |
|                        | 36-45              | 17          | 24.3       |
|                        | 46-55              | 9           | 12.9       |
|                        | Over 55            | 7           | 10         |
|                        | Total              | 70          | 100        |
| Marital statues        | Married            | 45          | 67.1       |
|                        | Single             | 15          | 21.4       |
|                        | others             | 10          | 11.4       |
|                        | Total              | 70          | 100        |
| Educational Background | Illiterate         | 19          | 27.1       |
|                        | Primary School     | 9           | 12.9       |
|                        | Secondary school   | 15          | 21.4       |
|                        | High school        | 9           | 12.9       |
|                        | Diploma Degree     | 14          | 20         |
|                        | Bachelor Degree    | 4           | 5.7        |
|                        | Total              | 70          | 100        |
| Occupation             | Farming sector     | 41          | 58.6       |
|                        | Non-farming sector | 27          | 38.6       |
|                        | No answer          | 2           | 2.9        |
|                        | Total              | 70          | 100        |

The respondents were questioned about their agricultural activities Mostly small-scale ranching and poultry (mostly, goose and chicken) 58% and cereal production (mostly, rice, wheat and barley) and horticulture (mostly, Okra) 32%. The arable lands 50% owned lands 45% Miri lands which belongs to government, 5% renting or sharing arable lands yearly. The main source of the irrigation water comes from the Bestansur lake which is also summer resort for the tourists who visit Bestansur.

In order to study the villagers perspective on the habitually attributes that ,so far, have attracted tourists to Bestansur village, the respondents were questioned about what they think there village is famous for, in their response 25% of the respondents answered the Heritage site recently found in their village, 24% answered their village is famous for agricultural products, mainly cereals (specifically rice) and ranching and poultry (especially goose) due to having a clean lake in their village, 5.7% Natural landscape (Bestansur lake), 5.7% culture and hospitality, but 38.6% of the respondents did not answer this question or saying they do not know (Table 2). It is stated by the respondents that goose and rice are produced with clean water from the Bestansur lake which gives certainty to their customers and visitors.

**Table 2. The sources of the village fame**

| Attributes                 | Frequency | Percent |
|----------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Heritage                   | 18        | 25.7    |
| Culture                    | 4         | 5.7     |
| Lake and Natural landscape | 4         | 5.7     |
| Agriculture                | 17        | 24.3    |
| No answer                  | 27        | 38.6    |
| Total                      | 70        | 100.0   |

Respondents were asked about their connection to their village 58.6% answered Bestansur is where their ancestors born and would like to continue living there 28.6% found the place quiet and beautiful but 7.1% responded having no choice to live elsewhere and if they get better

opportunity they would leave and 5.7% of the respondents responded the village is the source of their income through farming (Table 3). Some of the respondents stated that, so far, all the residents of Bestansur are original residents and they have not allowed any other people not from the village to build or buy houses in Bestansur village.

**Table 3. Respondents' connection to their village**

| Statement                              | Frequency | Percent |
|--|-----------|---------|
| Ancestors were born here               | 40        | 58.6    |
| A beautiful and relaxing place to live | 20        | 28.6    |
| Source of income                       | 4         | 5.7     |
| Do not have another choice             | 5         | 7.1     |
| Total                                  | 70        | 100.0   |

The respondents mostly (90%) were willing to tourism development in Bestansur and only 10% of them were not willing to for some specific reasons. Despite the fact that the percentage of younger age respondents were relatively higher than older ages but no significant differences were seen among the range of respondents age groups nor sex nor educational level (P = 0.05) (Table 4).

**Table 4. Would you like your village to be a tourism area?**

|       | Frequency | Percent |
|-------|-----------|---------|
| Yes   | 63        | 90.0    |
| No    | 7         | 10.0    |
| Total | 70        | 100.0   |

The knowledge of the respondents was evaluated regarding the historical heritage site using 5-point scales based on Likert (1 = Nothing, 2= little, 3= Some, 4= a lot and 5 = quite a lot). which recently discovered in Bestansur as recognized by UNESCO (2017) as one the earliest stages of village farming life and a major milestone in human history. Most of the respondents had a very basic information on the heritage site while a few respondents had broader knowledge on the history of Bestansur site and curiosity on learning more (Table 5).

**Table 5. Knowledge of the respondents on the heritage site**

| Statement                      | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--------------------------------|------|----------------|
| Knowledge on the heritage site | 2.56 | 1.22           |

To investigate the local's interest for the heritage sites in the village, the respondents were asked on their frequent visit to the historical sites. Table 6 shows the frequency of the residents' visit to the heritage site in Bestansur. The frequent of more than one visit were higher (55.7%) than once (20%) or never (17%).

**Table 6. Number of visits to the heritage site by the villagers**

| Site visit     | Frequency | No. of the Respondents | Percentage |
|----------------|-----------|------------------------|------------|
| More than once | 39        | 55.7                   |            |
| Once           | 14        | 20                     |            |
| Never          | 17        | 24.3                   |            |
| Total          | 70        | 100                    |            |

Table 7 indicate the attributes recommended by the villagers to attract the holiday makers in Bestabsur. Respondents had multiple choice to recommend the attributes for tourism. The mostly recommended attributes were Natural landscape (81.4%) and Historical heritage site (53 respondents, 75.7%) to attract the holiday makers.

**Table 7. Bestansur Village Attributes recommended by the villagers to attracting tourists**

| Attributes            | Natural Scenery and Landscape | Culture and Tradition | Local Agricultural Products | The Historical Heritage Site |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Number of Respondents | 57                            | 4                     | 2                           | 53                           |
| %                     | 81.4                          | 5.7                   | 2.9                         | 75.7                         |

Table (8) shows the respondents' satisfaction with the contemporary facilities and situations of the village and the villagers' opinions and ambitious target for attracting tourists to Bestansur. Respondents were having the eagerness to advertise for their village (Mean = 3.37), and considering their village a safe and secure place to visit (mean = 3.76) and residents are hospitable and welcoming to the visitors ( mean = 3.74). Information acquisition is regarded as the starting point in the tourist decision-making process in choosing their tourist destination attractions (Cho, *et al.*, 2014). The respondents were welcoming investors to build hotels and restaurants in their village (mean = 3.83) with the condition of providing job opportunity to the locals. On the other hand, the respondents believed that the healthcare facilities (mean = 2.94) and roads to their farms and by-roads and pavements in the village and other roads to the sightseeing areas (mean = 2.01) do not meet their needs and visitors need. The most important tourism problems in this area were refer to infrastructural subjects, similar rural tourism development constraints were mentioned in neighbor countries (Azimi, 2015). The respondents responded that private companies have not had role in tourism investment in Bestansur.

**Table 8. Opportunities of tourism development in Bestansur Village**

| Statement  | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--|------|----------------|
| Advertising for the village  | 3.37 | 1.06           |
| Security and Safety  | 3.76 | 0.63           |
| Villagers' Hospitality   | 3.74 | 0.70           |
| Villagers' acceptance of building hotels and restaurants                                       | 3.83 | 1.41           |
| Healthcare facilities  | 2.94 | 1.03           |
| Road and transportation  | 2.01 | 0.60           |
| Villagers opinion on the role of private companies in tourism development in Bestansur village | 1.39 | 1.29           |

The eagerness of the respondents to get actively involved in the process of tourism development. If they get credit from either bank or government, they would like to start guesthouse and other hospitality services (65%). They believe that tourism create a better market for their local products (18.6%) some of them were planning to open shops and markets (15.7%), some of the respondents were requiring subsidy for their small projects (Table 9).

**Table 9. Eagerness of the villagers to manipulate tourism in their village**

| Statements  | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|-----------|------------|
| Providing Guesthouse and other hospitality services Service | 46        | 65.7       |
| Selling Agricultural Products                               | 13        | 18.6       |
| Opening Shops and Markets                                   | 11        | 15.7       |
| Total   | 70        | 100        |

Table 10 indicated the residents' perception on sustainable tourism development in this area. The Bestansur

residents believed that development of tourism will generally have a positive impact on the development of the village economically (mean = 3.6) and socio-culturally (mean = 3.7). Relatively, less negative impact were perceived from the residents toward rural tourism development in Bestansur. The results of this study are similar to those of Muresan *et al.* (2016).

**Table 10. The influence of the respondents on the perceived impacts for sustainable tourism development**

| Factors                | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|------------------------|------|----------------|
| Economic Factors       | 3.6  | 0.66           |
| Socio-cultural Factors | 3.7  | 0.50           |
| Environmental factors  | 3.2  | 0.89           |

The rural residents expected that the increase of touristic activity will have a positive impact on the improvement and development of their local economic (mean = 3.4) and positive impact on their income (mean = 3.8) due to the increase of new job opportunities (mean = 4), marketing opportunities for local products (mean = 3.9) and attract tourism investment opportunities (mean = 3.2).

Tourism development was seen as a positive factor in socio-cultural development. The Bestansur residents agree that the development of tourism in their village improves their village's image as a tourism destination (mean = 3.9), and local community living standard (mean = 3.8) as well as enhancing opportunity for social exchange and strengthen local value (mean = 3.8) with less concern on the negative impacts of tourism development on local tradition (mean = 2.8). Meanwhile, the rural residents perceive the development of tourism as a factor that improves public infrastructure, the quality of services and the renovation and protection of the cultural values of the rural community (mean = 4.1). whereas, they also had concerns on rising Insecurity and conflicts (mean = 4.3), so they were recommending to open a police station in the village in this regard. The impacts of tourism development on the natural landscape and environment (mean = 3.2) were perceived as being negative regarding the increase in disposed garbage (mean = 3.2) and negative impact on the natural landscape, while less concern on the loss of their agricultural farms (mean = 2.7) due to tourism development. These results are vital for assuring sustainable development of Bestansur village (Table 11).

**Table 11. Residents Attitude and perception on tourism development impacts in Bestansur**

| Factors  | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--|------|----------------|
| <b>Economic Factors</b>  |      |                |
| Positive impact on income  | 3.8  | 0.67           |
| Create new job opportunities                                       | 4.0  | 0.73           |
| Attract investment opportunities                                   | 3.2  | 1.29           |
| Improve local economy  | 3.4  | 0.68           |
| Improve Marketing opportunities for the local products             | 3.9  | 0.7            |
| <b>Socio-cultural Factors</b>                                      |      |                |
| Improve destination image  | 3.9  | 0.30           |
| Improve public infrastructure and protection of Heritage sites     | 4.1  | 1.03           |
| Negative impact on local tradition                                 | 2.8  | 1.23           |
| Improve local community living standard                            | 3.8  | 0.30           |
| Enhance opportunity for social exchange and Strengthen local value | 3.8  | 0.70           |
| Concerns on rising Insecurity and conflicts                        | 4.3  | 0.63           |
| <b>Environmental factors</b>                                       |      |                |
| Tourism increase the garbage disposal                              | 3.2  | 1.24           |
| Loss of agricultural fields  | 2.7  | 1.23           |
| Negative impact on natural landscape                               | 3.8  | 1.41           |

The ANOVA analysis was carried out to examine the influence of sex, age and education level on the perceived impacts and the support for future sustainable tourism development regarding economic benefits, socio-cultural and environmental impacts (Table 12,13 and 14).

**Table 12. The influence of gender on the perceived impacts and the support for future sustainable tourism development**

| Sex    |                | Economic Factor | Socio-Cultural Factor | Environmental Factor |
|--------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Male   | Mean           | 3.5             | 3.8                   | 3.3                  |
|        | Std. Deviation | 0.7             | 0.5                   | 0.8                  |
| Female | Mean           | 3.7             | 3.7                   | 3.2                  |
|        | Std. Deviation | 0.59            | 0.45                  | 0.91                 |
| ANOVA  | F Value        | 0.966           | 1.234                 | 0.331                |
|        | P Value        | 0.329           | 0.271                 | 0.567                |

\*Significant Level 95% (P>0.05)

**Table 13. The influence of age groups on the perceived impacts and the support for future sustainable tourism development**

| Age     |                | Economic factor | Socio-Cultural Factor | Environmental Factor |
|---------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 15-25   | Mean           | 3.5             | 3.8                   | 3.1                  |
|         | Std. Deviation | 0.78            | 0.60                  | 0.91                 |
| 26-35   | Mean           | 3.7             | 3.7                   | 3.5                  |
|         | Std. Deviation | 0.61            | 0.49                  | 1.01                 |
| 36-45   | Mean           | 3.6             | 3.7                   | 3.3                  |
|         | Std. Deviation | 0.60            | 0.50                  | 0.85                 |
| 46-55   | Mean           | 3.6             | 3.8                   | 3.1                  |
|         | Std. Deviation | 0.70            | 0.45                  | 0.83                 |
| over 55 | Mean           | 3.8             | 3.7                   | 3.2                  |
|         | Std. Deviation | 0.59            | 0.37                  | 0.83                 |
| ANOVA   | F Value        | 0.365           | 0.099                 | 0.632                |
|         | P Value        | 0.830           | 0.982                 | 0.642                |

\*Significant Level 95% (P>0.05)

**Table 14. The influence of educational level on the perceived impacts and the support for future sustainable tourism development**

| Education        |                | Economic factor | Socio-Cultural Factor | Environmental Factor |
|------------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Illiterate       | Mean           | 3.7             | 3.7                   | 3.8                  |
|                  | Std. Deviation | 0.66            | 0.45                  | 0.84                 |
| Primary School   | Mean           | 3.6             | 3.3                   | 3.7                  |
|                  | Std. Deviation | 0.75            | 0.50                  | 0.85                 |
| Secondary School | Mean           | 3.6             | 4.0                   | 3.2                  |
|                  | Std. Deviation | 0.78            | 0.55                  | 0.90                 |
| High School      | Mean           | 3.7             | 3.9                   | 2.7                  |
|                  | Std. Deviation | 0.80            | 0.44                  | 0.56                 |
| Diploma          | Mean           | 3.6             | 3.7                   | 2.8                  |
|                  | Std. Deviation | 0.48            | 0.44                  | 0.76                 |
| Bachelor Degree  | Mean           | 3.6             | 3.5                   | 2.7                  |
|                  | Std. Deviation | 0.50            | 0.29                  | 0.89                 |
| ANOVA            | F Value        | 0.070           | 2.788                 | 3.853                |
|                  | P Value        | 0.996           | 0.024                 | 0.004                |

\*Significant Level 95% (P>0.05)

The results in Table 12 and 13 show no significant differences between either male and female or different age groups in their support for tourism development (P> 0.05). these findings were different from some other studies which showed that that older residents less positive and possibly resists changes in economically and socially due to their

conservative thinking (Bagri and Kala, 2015). While the results in Table 14 illustrate that the higher educational level have differ significantly regarding environmental and socio-cultural impacts of tourism development and in their concern on negative impacts of tourism development on environment and support for sustainable tourism development compared with lower educational level (p value = 0.004, and p Value = 0.024 respectively). the respondents with higher educational level are more aware of sustainable tourism development importance (Blešić, 2014; Okech, *et al.*, 2012).

These results may assist tourism planners and policy makers to predict residents' attitude toward tourism development regarding accommodation (mainly, guesthouse and hotels) and other hospitality services in the villages, based on the fact recommended by other studies that with the higher positive perception of environmental, economic and socio-cultural impacts of tourism, there will be more residents support tourism development in their area (Meimand, *et al.*, 2017). As, Tourism is perceived as an important development opportunity for the rural communities by Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Kurdistan region of Iraq (Harun, 2018).

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the results in this study indicate that that impacts of tourism are relatively perceived positively as a source of new job, an income generator and opportunity and well-being improvement of the local community by the residents of Bestansur village. These perceived economical, socio-cultural and infrastructure benefits have created the higher the support of the local community in building future tourism strategies and sustainable tourism development in this area. This study can help the tourism planners and policymakers in Kurdistan Regional Government for future tourism development plans, enhancing sustainable tourism development and reducing negative impacts of contemporary tourism in the region.

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## سلوك السكان قرية بستانسور تجاه التنمية السياحية

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السياحة تعتبر فرصة مهمة لتنمية المجتمعات الريفية من قبل حكومة إقليم كردستان العراق و سياستهم في التنمية السياحية الريفية المستدامة. لذا أجريت هذه الدراسة بهدف تحديد سلوك و توقعات سكان قرية بستانسور تجاه زيادة زيارة السياح الى قريتهم و فرص التنمية السياحية بعد استكشاف التراث التاريخي العريق في هذه القرية. هذه الدراسة أجريت عن طريق ملء استبيانات و جها لوجه مع 70 اشخاص من سكان قرية بستانسور. و أظهرت نتائج هذه الدراسة أن سكان هذه قرية يعتبرون السياحة بأنها سيكون لها تأثيرات أقل سلبياً على قريتهم و سيكون أكثر دعماً للتنمية المستدامة في قريتهم. علاوة على ذلك ، كانوا يرون السياحة كمصدر لتوليد الدخل لهم و فرصة لتحسين رفاهية لمجتمعهم المحلي. هذه استنتاجات ستخلق دعماً كبيراً في بناء استراتيجيات السياحة المستقبلية و التنمية المستدامة في هذه المنطقة.