

# **The Impacts of COVID-19 on the Education Tourism: Case of Famagusta**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examined the impacts of COVID-19 on educational tourism in Famagusta, in North Cyprus. The study used qualitative approach to achieve understanding of the subject matter. Data was obtained via face-to-face and online semi-structured interviews from direct tourism stakeholders. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to collect data from participants. Famagusta is one of biggest towns in North Cyprus, with its great potential for international tourism. But the city mainly runs on educational tourism and its main revenues come from students.

Findings of this study clearly demonstrate that COVID-19 outbreak negatively affected direct and indirect educational tourism stakeholders. Although number of registered students did not decrease in Famagusta, city`s economic, social and cultural life has been impacted. Findings of this study also present the overview of general perceptions of participants regarding the future of educational tourism in Famagusta.

**Keywords:** Educational Tourism, COVID-19 Impacts, Famagusta

## ÖZ

Bu çalışmada COVID-19 virüsünün Kuzey Kıbrısın Gazimağusa şehri örneğinde eğitim turizmine olan etkisi incelenmiştir. Çalışma, konunun anlaşılmasını sağlamak için nitel bir yaklaşım kullanmıştır. Veriler yüz-yüze veya çevrimici görüşmeler yoluyla Gazimağusada faaliyyet gösteren doğrudan eğitim turizmi ile ilgili kişilerden toplanmaktadır. Verilerin toplanmasında amaçlı örnekleme stratejisi kullanılmıştır. Gazimağusa, uluslararası turizm için büyük potansiyeli ile Kuzey Kıbrıs'ın en büyük şehirlerinden biridir. Ancak şehir ağırlıklı olarak eğitim turizmi ile meşhurdur ve ana geliri öğrencilerden gelmektedir.

Bu çalışmanın bulguları, COVID-19 salgınının eğitim turizmi paydaşlarını doğrudan ve dolaylı olarak olumsuz etkilediğini açıkça göstermektedir. Gazimağusa'da kayıtlı öğrenci sayısı azalmasa da şehrin ekonomik, sosyal ve kültürel hayatı etkilenmiştir. Bu çalışmanın bulguları, katılımcıların Gazimağusa'daki eğitim turizminin geleceğine ilişkin genel algılarına da genel bir bakış sunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Eğitim Turizmi, COVID-19 Etkileri, Gazimağusa

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my parents for their endless love, support and encouragement. My father, Teyyub Asgarov and my mother Faxire Qambarova who became the victim of ruthless COVID-19 virus in 2020.

If there is a single person most responsible for who I am today and the things that I have achieved in the world, large or small, it was you, Mother.

May Allah bless your soul in eternal peace.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	iii
ÖZ .....	iv
DEDICATION .....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT .....	vi
LIST OF TABLES .....	ix
1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.2 North Cyprus Tourism.....	3
2 LITERATURE REVIEW.....	10
2.1 Introduction .....	10
2.2 Education Tourism .....	10
2.3.1 Background of COVID-19.....	13
2.3.2 Impacts of COVID-19 .....	13
2.3.2.1 Environmental Impacts .....	13
2.3.2.2 Economic Impact .....	15
2.3.2.4 Lifestyle Impact of COVID-19.....	21
2.3.2.5 Impacts on Tourism Industry.....	23
2.3.2.6 Impacts on Education Tourism .....	26
2.5 Education Tourism in Famagusta.....	29
2.5.1 Impacts of Education Tourism in Famagusta .....	29
2.5.1.1 Economic .....	30
2.5.1.2 Employment.....	32
2.5.1.3 Cultural Change .....	34
3 METHODOLOGY.....	37
3.1 Research Design .....	37

3.2 Descriptive Research .....	39
3.3 Sampling Methods.....	40
4 DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS .....	44
4.1 Understanding of Educational Tourism and its Importance in Famagusta .....	44
4.2 Advantages and Disadvantages of Education Tourism .....	45
4.3 Effects of COVID-19 on Education Tourism in Famagusta .....	47
4.3.1 Economic Effects .....	48
4.3.2 Socio-cultural Effects .....	50
4.4 Future of Education Tourism in Famagusta .....	52
5 CONCLUSION .....	54
5.1 Conclusion.....	54
5.2 Implications .....	56
5.3 Limitations.....	58
5.4 Recommendations .....	58
REFERENCES.....	60
APPENDIX.....	81

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1: Interviewees names, affiliation and job titles.....	41
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# Chapter 1

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents background information about TRNC, its history and present situation, as well as provides aims and objectives to this study. Furthermore, it gives overview of the roadmap the researcher follows in order to evaluate the impact of COVID-19 on educational tourism in Famagusta, significance of the study and contribution to the subject matter.

### 1.1 North Cyprus History

Cyprus is the one of the biggest islands in Mediterranean sea with an area of 9,251 square kilometers. Geographically, in the north, Kyrenia (Besparmak) Mountains extend parallel to the northern coastline and Troodos Mountains, which are placed in the south and southwest portion of the island. Between two ranges, the Mesaoir Plain lies and extends to the Famagusta bay in the east (Britannica, 2021).

The Cyprus Island has been invaded and governed by different nations and empires throughout the history and each has left its own architectural and cultural traces behind. The island was under British governance until 1960 treaty that made Cyprus independent, while Britain, Greece and Turkey guaranteed the independence of the new republic. According to the treaty, Greek and Turkish Cypriots have been recognized as equal partners of the new republic. However, internationally, Republic of Cyprus is the only member of the UN. However, in 1963, Greek Cypriots, aiming for enosis (union with Greece), proposed new amendments to the constitution, which

reducing Turkish community`s rights over state-wide decisions and degrading them to a minority group. These and other intercommunal issues led to conflicts and eventually deadly massacre of 1963 in which many Turkish Cypriots were victims of. Greek Cypriots seized the full power, removed all Turkish Cypriots from administration and ex parte accepted the new proposed changes to the Constitution. At this point, UN Security Council stepped into the matter and adopted the resolution 186 in which UN Peace Keeping Forces was established in result in Cyprus. Following these events, Turkish Cypriots built their own administration in order to organize their own affairs, nevertheless, the period between 1963 and 1974 was clearly full of fear, insecurity and isolation for the Turkish Community. On 15 July 1974, the Greek Military forces, together with nationalist organization EOKA, tried to organize *coup d'état* to achieve enosis. As a result of this intervention, then-current president Makarios was overthrown and both Greek and Turkish Cypriots were killed. Subsequently, locations of Turkish Cypriots were sieged by Greek military guards and their massacre was imminent. On 20 July 1974, Turkey sent its army immediately to exercise its rights of intervention, according to the 1960 Treaty, in order to remove the threat of further massacres, aiming to protect the Turkish community. Within 3 days, the junta fell and democratic government took over (Britannica, 2021). In 1975, Vienna Agreement was signed and according to the treaty, turkish and greek communities transferred to north and south side, respectively, under the supervision of the UN.

With Turkey controlling the one-third part of the island, talks with Greek Cypriots returned no results and in November 1983, Rauf Denktash proclaimed the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) and Turkey is the only country in the world that recognized its independence. Whereas, the government in the south side is called The

Republic of Cyprus and it is the only internationally recognized government on the island.

## **1.2 North Cyprus Tourism**

TRNC has an area of 3,355 square kilometres and the capital city Nicosia is shared by both governments. Estimated population is 350,000 and official language is Turkish. TRNC exercises most of its governmental functions in the state, although defence and some of its foreign interests are monitored by Turkey. Its economy is more impacted by Turkey`s economy rather than by global economic changes. Although there has been a constant growth in recent years, it is still largely dependent on financial aid from Turkey. Main source of income comes tourism, trade and education sectors.

Tourism sector is a significant benefactor to the GDP. Altınay and others (2005) state that Cyprus is a small island that functions and gains income on service industry. Başaran (2016) states that being a small state on an island, the country mainly focused on tourism and hospitality sectors. According to State Planning Office (2015), North Cyprus has pristine and unexplored landscapes, with its hospitable people, convenience of vacation opportunities all year long with the sunny weather, pristine beaches, and rich environmental, historical and cultural heritage. After 1974, Turkish Cypriots started to create their own regulations and they accepted Development Plan Periods. One of the decisions was to improve tourism development. It was necessary; because the country was transitioning from production-based industry to the service-based industry, concentrating on tourism and education services. Katırcıoğlu (2007) states that important targets regarding tourism development were; bringing in more tourists to the country, lengthening average stay duration in facilities, boosting

revenues, developing internal tourism, planning and carrying out powerful marketing activities, increase bed capacity and creating educational programs on tourism and etc.

North Cyprus is in the process of becoming one of the new destinations for mainly European tourists. In 2004, Green Line Regulations allowed EU tourists to cross freely into the North side. Ever since, number of tourists and lodging establishments increased year by year. According to TRNC Statistical Yearbook (2019), 1,749,949 people visited North Cyprus and there were 164 lodging facilities established with a number of 25,821 bed capacity in 2019. Establishments included 13 one-star hotels, 21 two-star hotels, 16 three-star hotels, 5 four-star hotels, 22 five-star hotels, 8 boutique hotels, 25 touristic bungalows, 28 tourist guest-houses and so on. Majority of tourists came from Turkey (1.358.465), Germany (49,913), United Kingdom (28,578), Iran (19,086), Russia (16,521) and African Countries (14,749) were the other countries that generated tourist visits after Turkey. 969.6 million dollars of net tourism revenue was generated which met 65 percent of trade balance of the country. Katircioğlu (2010) dictates that the tourism sector also faces great difficulties in attracting international tourists because of problems such as the lack of direct flights to North Cyprus and high transportation costs. Even though there are two airports in TRNC, Ercan and Geçitkale Airport, none of them are internationally recognized and can only accept flights via Turkey`s airports. Embargoes from South Cyprus have also contributed negatively on the tourism sector, as it did in the other industries. In order to stimulate tourist arrivals, casinos and legalized gambling centers were opened in the 1980s. However, this also contributed badly on the tourism sector, because it decreases the average staying period of incoming tourists. One of the other problems is the lack of qualified and skilled workforce which stems from poor hiring practises and shortage of local employees. Main reasons behind recent developments in tourism sector were the

results of dynamic advertising and huge amount of incentives by Turkey (Şafaklı, 2010). It is worth mentioning that in TRNC, criminality has been kept a lowest rate and the country is politically stable (Esenyel, 2016). However, some factors still contribute to the instability, such as lack of image and tourism master plan, no direct flights, need for improved public transport, limited infrastructure and so on.

Higher education services or educational tourism has grown rapidly over the past few years. According to UNESCO, an internationally mobile student is an individual “who has physically crossed an international border between two countries to participate in educational activities in a destination country, where the destination country is different from his or her country of origin”. McGladdery (2017) states that the international standart on the subject of educational tourism is based on Ritchie`s (2003) segmentation model and many researchers have built their regarding theories on the basis of his research. But Pine and Gilmore (HBR, 1998) introduce the concept of the “Experience Economy” as the next stage and in this concept, it is explained that countries go through different stages of development; extraction of source materials, then moving to industry-level production phase, afterwards creation of services industry and finally the beginning of the phase called “unique experiences”, which is more central to today`s educational tourism concept. The advantages of study-abroad programs benefit both the host country and the students. Erasmus Impact Study (2014) reports that students with international studying experience feel more confident and their future career paths are influenced by the skills acquired during that period. Companies are also willing to hire candidates who studied at foreign universities when they return their home countries. In TRNC, the number of universities is increasing as more higher educational institutions emerge. There are currently 22 physical or digital universities that offer bachelor degree which lasts four years (TRNC Ministry of

National Education and Culture (MNEC)). Creating so many universities on a small country is mainly due to economic gains. Being on an isolated and non-recognized country, higher education seemed to be a logical answer.

People in TRNC recognized the fact that the more student numbers are, the more economic gains the country will acquire, because non-recognition of the island highly damaged the tourism sector. (Arslan & Guven, 2017). Main universities in North Cyprus include: Eastern Mediterranean University, being the oldest and biggest university on the island (opened in 1979), Girne American University (opened in 1985), Near East University (opened in 1988), European University of Lefke (opened in 1989), Cyprus International University (opened in 1997), a branch of highly reputable Turkish university, Middle East Technical University (opened in 2002). In 2019-2020, total number of students were 103,748 people. Majority of them being from Turkey (50,286), the rest divides between other countries (41,219) and TRNC based students (12,243) (TRNC MNEC Statistics).

Katircioğlu (2010) states that by 1990s, need for higher education services significantly increased in the island, because of Turkish and also African and Middle Eastern students, due to advertising activities there. Students comprise almost 20 percent of all population in the island (State Planning Office, 2013). Having internationally recognized higher educational institutions has a huge beneficial impact on country's reputation. According to Çavuşoğlu (2016), economy in TRNC is primarily supported by service sector and human capital is at the center in this sector. The country has a potential to become a knowledge economy with its academically inclined individuals.

It is also the most important factor in bringing foreign exchange to the island considering the decline of Turkish lira and the existence of insufficient exports. It creates more jobs within university and outside the campuses. Educational tourism not only strengthens the existing sectors, it also generates opportunities for new businesses, such as stationery shops, tech shops and restaurants. Rezapouraghdam (2018) shares that in Famagusta, where EMU is located, city`s economy is almost fully dependent on students. On summer and winter breaks, students leave and locals` profitability level drastically decreases, which is a negative issue on touristic destinations.

Quality assurance activities regarding the level of higher education in North Cyprus have been implemented to some extent. In 1999, Twenty-nine European Countries` education ministers signed the Bologna Declaration, which the purpose was to improve and promote European Higher Education system (EHEA, 2009) (Silman et al., 2012). Although North Cyprus is not the part of EU, adaptation to EU`s higher education systems and regulation started in 2005. Adali (2008) states that Higher Education Planning, Evaluation, Accreditation and Coordination Council (YODAK), maximizes its attempts to advance the higher education in TRNC to European standarts and become a member of Erasmus University Center (EUC) and European Network for Quality Assurance (ENQA). Although, this has not successfully accomplished yet.

### **1.3 Aim of the Study and Research Objectives**

The aim of this study is to investigate the impacts caused by COVID-19 virus on the education tourism in Famagusta, North Cyprus since WHO announced it as a global pandemic on 11 March 2020.

The objectives of this study are:

1. Identifying the effects, advantages and disadvantages of educational tourism in North Cyprus and Famagusta.
2. Identifying the background and effects of COVID-19 pandemic on a global scale.
3. Identifying possible social, cultural and economic effects of COVID-19 epidemic on educational tourism in Famagusta.
4. Identifying how EMU and other universities in Famagusta responded to challenges this pandemic has brought along.

This present study consists of five chapters. First chapter is the overall introduction to North Cyprus, its tourism and education and importance of the topic.

Second chapter reviews the relevant literature regarding COVID-19 pandemic, its impacts on different aspects of humanity, tourism industry and specifically educational tourism in North Cyprus. A brief background on recent pandemic will be introduced and discussed in detail. Being one of the forms of international tourism, education tourism will also be examined and its economic, social and cultural impact on Famagusta will be considered.

Third chapter introduces the methodology and methods which are used in this research. Qualitative approach and semi-structured interviews are considered.

The fourth chapter describes the findings of the interview analysis. The aim is to analyse the overall impact of education tourism on Famagusta, effects of COVID-19 pandemic on education tourism in general and future of pandemic that reshaping it.

The fifth chapter summarizes the findings, provides conclusions and make recommendations for future studies.

## Chapter 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter briefly reviews education tourism and background of COVID-19 pandemic, then follows on with the section discussing the economic, social and cultural impacts of pandemic on education tourism in Famagusta.

#### 2.2 Education Tourism

Educational tourism is not a new topic and has been researched as a part of tourism since 1990s. However, there are still issues relating to its exact definition and economic contribution to host countries.

Educational tourism, as an idea, refers to common notions, such as tourism, formal or informal learning, leisure-travel activities and etc. Yet precise characteristics have not been determined. Numerous definitions can be identified in different findings. According to Kalinowski & Weiler (1992), it varies and depends on different interests of travellers, such as learning about different cultures and languages, interests in music or folklore, consideration of preserving the environment, discovering historic places and so on. Gibson (1994) states that, “Educational tourists (students, adults, and seniors) are those respondents who indicated that they took part in study tours or who attended workshops to learn new skills or improve existing ones while on vacation.”

Ritchie (2003) referring to Kaul (1985) points out that one of the predecessors to today`s educational tourists was initially British aristocrats who travelled the whole

European continent for educational purposes during 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century and this process was called *Grand Tour*. Travel for education while travelling was the sign of high status and powerful aristocracy.

The current definitions for educational tourism range from “general interest in learning while travelling” at one end to “purposeful learning and travel” at the other end (Ritchie, 2003). Ritchie (2003) brought “tourism first – education first” dichotomy to the literature, discussing that first category of travellers (tourism first) would participate in guided tours or programmes, which may be organized informally or formally, while second category travellers (education first) would be the tourists who intentionally attend distinct educational training courses or institutions. Sie and others (2016) describe educational tourism as an informal trip involving recreation time and travelling to other places which takes at least 24 hours. It is considered informal learning process and based on the idea of “learning while travelling”. This includes excursions for adults and children during school holidays. They do not encompass the idea of college and university studies in this category, rather call them as “formal learning. In contrast, Pitman and others (2011) define educational tourism as a type of visitor experience towards strict learning process which involves intellectual and engaged procedure. Education is at the center of this concept.

Economically, students who enrolled in study programmes abroad have a considerable impact on the host countries. According to Global Migration Indicators (2018), “in 2016, there were over 4.8 million international students, up from 2 million in 2000. More than half of these were enrolled in educational programmes in six countries: The United States of America, the United Kingdom, Australia, France, Germany and the Russian Federation. Prominent sending countries of international students include

China, India, Germany, South Korea, Nigeria, France, Saudi Arabia and several Central Asian countries.” (UNESCO, 2018). The economic value is undeniable. According to NAFSA`s findings (2020), “in the U.S, during the academic year 2019-2020, 1,075,496 international students contributed \$38.7 billion dollars and supported 415,996 jobs to the economy.” This was 60 percent increase compared to last decade statistics, which number of students in the U.S was 669,391 in 2008. The reasons for this dramatic increase include; huge economies like China and India cannot fulfil the rising demand for college education and wealthier middle class in those countries can now afford to pay for their children`s education in foreign countries. Another reason is that the USA institutions are actively promoted by the government (Fisher, 2009).

The more countries try to gain a favourable position in the global trade economy, the more they compete for bringing in remarkable and self-financed students. First, having international students mean the university environment is culturally and academically more diverse, thus number of talented people increase. Students, aside from acquiring knowledge, interact with local and foreign people and thus enrich their experiences and contribute to their personal growth. Secondly, they play an important role in the economy. Host countries utilize students` expenditures on accommodation, food, clothing, entertainment and recreational activities, not to mention tuition fees and charging more on international students than the local citizens.

### **2.3 COVID-19 Pandemic**

The COVID-19 pandemic, also known as the coronavirus pandemic, is an ongoing global pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). The virus was first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, China. The World Health

Organization declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern regarding COVID-19 on 30 January 2020, and later declared a pandemic on 11 March 2020. As of 30 May 2021, more than 169 million cases have been confirmed, with more than 3.53 million confirmed deaths attributed to COVID-19, making it one of the deadliest pandemics in history.

### **2.3.1 Background of COVID-19**

In December, 2019, a new type of coronavirus was detected in China causing severe respiratory pneumonia. Then the virus causing the infection has been named as severe acute respiratory syndrome-coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). The virus is spreading and infecting people on a daily basis all over the globe and currently, there are several vaccines made available to prevent and slow down infection among people. Kooraki and others (2020) state that coronaviruses are a type of RNA can infect a huge variety of animals as well.

The original host of the novel coronavirus has not been detected, but it is 95percent similar to bat coronaviruses in China (Cevik et al., 2020). CDC mentions that this family of viruses infect many animals, including cats, camels, bats, cows and etc. There are other types of coronaviruses, such as SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) and MERS (Middle East respiratory syndrome) which happened during early 2000s and have much higher killing rates than COVID-19.

### **2.3.2 Impacts of COVID-19**

In this section, we will explore impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on different aspects of our daily lives on a global scale and on education tourism in Famagusta.

#### **2.3.2.1 Environmental Impacts**

The pandemic has affected lots of industries and caused environmental and logistical problems. When WHO declared the fast spreading rate of COVID-19, citizens around

the globe urged to be home as much as possible. In Wuhan city, the amount of medical trash on a single day (24 February, 2020) was 200 tons, which was four times larger than a waste establishment can handle per day (Saadat et al., 2020). Medical trash has a tremendously bad effect on people who are directly in contact with it. Cleaners, garbage collectors and medical personnel can get infected with the virus and help spreading it quickly. Although governments implemented quarantine measures, these type of workers are usually exception to these measures, so they can walk freely in public or hospitals and still infect others. Additionally, not only this newly emerged virus is the threat, they are also susceptible to different pathogens, such as Hepatitis B and others.

Therefore, waste companies are strictly working in the medical centres to make sure that the facilities are clean and virus-free as early as possible (Bashir et al., 2020). As COVID-19 outbreak happened, millions of people started wearing masks at once, daily or couple of times a day, also used hand sanitizers and gloves, thus amount of trash multiplied and it eventually polluted the environment. Saadat and others (2020) share that, medical trash had already caused pollution in Hong Kong where the virus infection started in January 2020. According to an NGO in Soko Islands, huge number of thrown-away single-use masks took up almost 100 meters' area from the beach. While these remain in the ocean and land resources, animal habitat will eat them by mistake and it will lead to their death (Hellewell et al., 2020).

COVID-19 had a substantial impact on the environment in a very short term. After the initial struggle to implement measures to fight the virus, China limited international arrivals to the country. In Italy, the most severe travel restrictions have been placed since WWII. In London, people were asked to stay indoors and public places have

been shut down. In March 2020, several European countries closed down international and domestic flights. Governments around the world introduced lockdown measures and social distancing. Gautam (2020) states that in result, closures in transportation and industrial areas, as well as businesses have caused a considerable decrease in greenhouse gas emissions. Reductions in coal usage in China dropped by 40 percent and greenhouse gas emissions declined by 25 percent. Knowland and others (2020) mention that, according to NASA`s satellite images to assess the pandemic`s effect on air quality, NO<sub>2</sub>, SO<sub>2</sub> and other air pollutants in Korea, China, Spain and the USA have decreased by 20-38 percent compared to the same period in 2019.

Zowalaty and others (2020) stated that this pandemic is the first global disaster that harmed health of the population and economies all around the world, but it also set the example of restrictions of production and travel can dramatically improve air quality and decrease carbon emissions which will strengthen the environmental health. However, environmental advocates claim that continuation of industrial activities will presumably increase the bad environmental impacts again (Bernauer and Slowey 2020). It is imperative to put environment protection laws into action to guarantee long-term environmental health.

#### **2.3.2.2 Economic Impact**

McKibbin and Fernando (2020) shared that in a strongly connected and integrated world, the effects of the disease beyond mortality and morbidity (those who are unable to work for a period of time) has become apparent since the outbreak. As Chinese factories slowed down the productions, global supply chains have experienced interruptions. Companies which depend on materials and supplies from China underwent contractions in productions. Delayings and interruption in global transport systems have caused less economic transactions. It is important to mention the panic

in consumer usage of the necessary products which also created abnormality in the markets.

According to IMF's World Economic Outlook report (WEO April 2021), the recession caused by the pandemic is so worse that can be compared to the recession of the end of the World War Second. Furthermore, the outcomes will probably be long lasting. It is not certain to say what the medium-terms cost are going to be, but mostly developing countries will feel the economic pain. IMF calculates that the world GDP will be 3 percent lower in three years compared to no-COVID scenario. According to Maital and Barzani (2020), supply-and-demand research can be useful in determining the macroeconomic impact of COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic might affect the global economy in three ways, according to Deloitte: by directly affecting production (supply), by causing supply chain and market disruption (supply), and by its financial impact on enterprises and markets (primarily, demand) (Deloitte, 2020). COVID-19's initial primary influence is on the supply side. Factory closures in China and elsewhere resulted in a decline in macroeconomic supply of goods and services, causing the global economy to shift from "lower output to higher prices," a phenomenon known as 'stagflation.' A demand-side response to a contraction (e.g., the Central Bank's lower interest rates) to increase demand will exacerbate inflation while having only a minor impact on output and employment, especially if the supply curve (which is also a cost curve) is price-insensitive in the short term due to the inability to find alternative sources. It is worth noting that the second-round effects of a global epidemic will lead to substantial demand contractions.

Consumers will decrease spending when supply-side interruptions close factories and places of work, lowering GDP, increasing unemployment, and contributing to

increased prices. Some of it will be temporary, meaning that when the pandemic is about to be finished, people will increase their spending, for instance on their vacations and travellings.

However, part of the demand will be gone permanently, lowering global economic development in the long run. (Maital and Barzani, 2020). Maital (2019) also claimed that since 2009, there has been an enormous increase in credit and that raises a question: why there is no observed inflation even though there are huge piles of money? It was mostly due to gigantic production capacity of China, along with online supply of goods, thus delivering goods and meeting demand without lifting the prices.

According to PWC report (2021), the COVID-19 pandemic has already guided in a slew of challenges for US industrial manufacturers, particularly those that rely on workers who cannot do their tasks remotely. According to a recent survey by the National Association of Manufacturers, around 80percent of manufacturers expect the pandemic to have a financial impact on their business (NAM, 2020). Some major industrial companies have closed facilities and are mulling the extent of layoffs to help curb the spread of the virus, as well as for economic reasons. Clearly, the manufacturing sector, which employs some 13 million workers in the US, is poised to be hit hard during this outbreak, primarily for two reasons: First, many manufacturing jobs are on-site and cannot be carried out remotely. Second, slowed economic activity has reduced demand for industrial products in the US and globally.

According to WHO (2020), millions of agricultural workers, both salaried and self-employed, face high levels of working poverty, hunger, and bad health on a regular basis, and suffer from a lack of safety and labor protection, as well as other forms of

abuse, while feeding the globe. With poor and irregular incomes and a lack of social assistance, many of them are compelled to continue working often in hazardous situations, endangering themselves and their families. Furthermore, they may resort to negative coping strategies such as asset dispersal, predatory lending, or child labor, when facing income losses. Collivignarelli and others (2020) indicate that, according to socioeconomic and demographic factors, the virus does not affect everybody similarly. Data credibility is serious matter, because it is not easy to understand why pandemics affects different socio-economic groups differently. Messner (2020) dictates that the virus has particularly impacted poor areas. Research has shown that areas with lower income are more likely get infected than the ones with higher income. COVID-19 had and still has disruptive effects on the economy, how long its impact will stay remains unclear. However, private organizations are optimistic for 2021. The IMF's forecast is for global growth of 5.2 percent in 2021, erasing the effects of a projected 4.4 decline in 2020. For the United States, Consensus Forecasts—an average of several mostly private forecasts—predicts that after a 3.5percent decline this year, GDP will grow 4 percent in 2021 and 3percent in 2022, thus raising incomes well above their pre-COVID level; forecasts for other major economies follow a similar pattern (IMF, 2021). The McKinsey Global Survey (March 2021) indicates that respondents are more optimistic about the economy and corporate prospects than they have been since the crisis began—and on some fronts, than they have been in several years. Despite this, low demand continues to jeopardize corporate growth, and the pandemic remains the greatest threat to growth in the countries of the respondents.

### **2.3.2.3 Health Impact of COVID-19**

People with COVID-19 have reported a wide range of symptoms, according to the CDC's website, ranging from minor symptoms to severe illness. Symptoms may

appear 2-14 days after viral exposure. Symptoms can range from moderate to severe, including fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath or trouble breathing, fatigue, and so on. Although most people with COVID-19 get better within weeks after becoming ill, some people develop post-COVID symptoms. More than four weeks after being infected with the virus that causes COVID-19, people might experience new, returning, or persistent health problems known as post-COVID disorders. Even those who had no symptoms when they were infected can develop post-COVID symptoms. Over different periods of time, these conditions can have different types and combinations of health problems. CDC and researchers from across the world are striving to learn more about COVID-19's short and long-term health effects.

Apart from physical illness and its symptoms, this pandemic and its effects on people's daily lives have had a negative impact on their health (Khan et al., 2020). Stress and concern about catching the virus, combined with job losses, child care loss, and the devastating death of loved ones due to COVID-19 are just a few ways that the pandemic may be affecting mental health (Kearney et al., 2020). Transmission fear of the virus has contributed to psychiatric symptoms, such as stress, depression and other mental illnesses. (Shigemura et al. 2020). Research has shown that social distancing, never-ending quarantines, and wrong information, especially on social media are among factors that cause frustration, loneliness and discontent. Kawohl and Nordt (2020) reports unexpected and sudden closures of businesses, industries and urban-level shutdown affected people's mental health, because so many people went through financial hardships and even unemployment which increased emotional issues. During the first several months of the coronavirus pandemic, the percentage of U.S. adults who reported anxiety and stress related to the virus had a negative influence on their mental health increased from approximately 32percent percent in March 2020

to almost 53 percent in July 2020. Number of domestic violence cases has also risen up during lockdown measures. Those who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 may also experience significant psychological stress and discomfort.

In addition, individuals who confirmed of having the virus may also go through psychological pressure and discomfort (Li et al. 2020). Also, COVID-19 victims` families are more susceptible to mental distress (Khan et al., 2020). Healthcare Personnel are among the most vulnerable population groups, because of being in the frontline of battling the infectious patients, thus experiencing extreme stress of catching the virus and fear of becoming the source of infection for their close friends and family. Excessive working shifts and sleep disturbance, shortage of personnel, thus increased risk of exposure to COVID-19 patients intensifies fear and may lead to serious mental illnesses. To fight this, hospitals should be ventilated and need to create physical spaces for healthcare workers to isolate after shifts. For their mental health issues, counseling and therapy services should be provided.

Students have been affected badly in terms of mental health, because of strict isolation procedures, which caused the closures of schools, colleges and universities all around the globe (Cao et al. 2020). Students who study abroad experience this in a deeply manner. Constant fear of infection and not being able see their loved ones again for unknown time periods affected them psychologically. Cao and others (2020) indicated that 24.9 percent of 7143 medical college students (aged 19–25 years) experienced anxiety as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak (0.9 percent experiencing severe anxiety, 2.7 percent moderate anxiety, and 21.3 percent mild anxiety).For college students, cancellation of events such as exchanges, ceremonies and concerts, in short, lack of social life contributed poorly to their morale. Some of the students became

unemployed due to closures of businesses (Lee, 2020). For students who do not have access to the internet or do not own a laptop, the abrupt move from face-to-face teaching to online education has become a barrier. This can create a sort of mental strain on those people, as they are not able attend the classes.

Javed and others (2020) discuss that children who suddenly got away from friends and school because of the outbreak, have many questions about what happened and seek answers from parents. Response to stress among parents and children differ mostly. Anxiety, distress, and social isolation are all experiences that children have, and these can have short to long-term effects on their brains. Frequent crying and unpleasant behavior, increased sadness, depression, or concern are all common signs. Older people are also susceptible to the newly emerged virus as results of having a poor defense mechanism and other health issues. This also includes social distancing from friends and families, which has severe effects on their mental health.

#### **2.3.2.4 Lifestyle Impact of COVID-19**

As governments introduced lockdown and social distancing measures to prevent infections, millions of people stayed home and isolated themselves. While this is a calculated move to slow the number of infected people by governments, this is a huge change in people`s lifestyles, specifically for those who live in big and dynamic cities. Restrictions likely resulted in reduced physical activities, modified eating habits, increased or decreased smoking, alcohol consumption, strained family relationships and etc. Avoiding outdoor activities increased the use of electronic media at home.

Although the majority of the research have focused on COVID-19's psychological effects, some authors have researched about its impact on lifestyles. According to Journal of Medical Internet Research (2020), online survey has been conducted in

China and after the outbreak of COVID-19, it was discovered that unhealthy lifestyle behaviors were observed among the Chinese people. For instance, almost 40 percent of the individuals had passive recreational physical exercise and approximately 90 percent had higher screen times. Furthermore, around 30 percent and 60 percent of the participants, respectively, ate vegetables and fruits less than 5 times each week. However, it is unclear if similar lifestyle patterns will exist during or after the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, more research is needed to determine the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on lifestyle choices (Hu et al., 2020).

Bennett and others (2020) discussed that lockdowns had adverse effects on eating habits all over Europe and around the globe. Negative effects are closely related to bad lifestyle resultings, such as mental health problems, decreased physical activities and gaining weight. In short or long periods of time, these will considerably impact the health of the population.

During the initial months of the COVID-19 outbreak, stress, more leisure time, and monotony may have led to a spike in the volume of daily cigarette consumption. Researchers questioned 291 smokers about their tobacco use patterns before and during the pandemic's early months, including how often they consumed cigarettes, why their patterns modified, and if they considered quitting. Stress, increased free time, and boredom account for almost a third of smokers' increased use (Yingst, J.M., et al., 2021). In Italy, “increased number of cigarettes per day among smokers (from 10.9 to 12.7 cigarettes per day), resulting in an overall percent increase by 9.1 percent during the lockdown in Italy. An increase has been also observed in the prevalence of e-cigarette (from 8.1 percent to 9.1 percent) and HTP users (from 4.0 percent to 4.5 percent)” (Odone et al., 2020).

### **2.3.2.5 Impacts on Tourism Industry**

Gursoy and Chi (2020) stated that due to the pandemic, economies all around the globe collapsed almost overnight (UNWTO, 2020). It has brought an unparalleled challenge to the tourism industry. Lockdowns, social distancing and travelling restrictions decreased the demand and it forced so many businesses to temporarily close down (Bartik et al., 2020). Restaurants were asked to carry out their operations as take-out deliveries. Imposed lockdowns and curfews which ordered people to stay home as much as possible led to sharp decline of incoming hotel visitors and thus their revenues fell.

In 2019, it has been reported that tourism industry continued to be a significant contributor to the world economy. It contributed 9.3 trillion US dollars to the global economy, with a direct contribution of 2.9 trillion US dollars. The Deloitte Fall 2020 issue discusses that exponential reduction in personal and business travel has put a tremendous strain on the hotel industry, leading to lower occupancy and revenue per available room. In May 2020, compared to May 2019, the global lockdown imposed to combat the pandemic resulted in a 98 percent drop in international travelers. Between January and May, there was 56 percent decline in visitor arrivals worldwide. This equates to a loss of 300 million tourists and US\$320 billion in international tourism receipts, which is more than three times the loss experienced during the global economic crisis of 2009. Oversupply, declining hotel rates, negative consumer sentiment, travel restrictions, and the postponement of key global events all pose substantial challenges to industry stakeholders, resulting in a slew of operational and financial issues. Hotel owners have consequently been forced to cut expenses by implementing measures such as reduced workforce and/or pay, forced leave, unpaid leave, and complete or partial hotel closures.

All over the world, the pandemic affected practically all parts of hospitality industry. Cancellation of events and concerts, shut down hotels impacted other parts of the chain, for instance, catering and laundry services (Gössling et al., 2020). Restaurants were forced to close as well, however in certain countries, a shift to take-away/delivery services allowed them to stay open. Restaurants were only allowed to continue operations under delivery/takeaway model. Airport companies took a big hit, some undergoing severe bankruptcies and other applying for state aid worth millions of dollars (Gössling et al., 2020).

According to McKinsey and Company (2020c), “jobs in the hotel and food services sector account for almost 20 percent of all vulnerable occupations in the United States.”, i.e. jobs that are subject to furlough, layoffs, or being unable to work as a result of social distancing. In terms of actual numbers this definition accounts for a lower estimate of 10.5 million sector workers and a higher estimate of 12.6 million in the accommodation and food services sector.”

With these figures mentioned above, many service workers are in a complicated situation. In addition, workers in accommodation and food sector usually have the lowest earnings and in a pandemic situation it already creates substantial disparities in annual salaries. The developing COVID-19 problem has caused a substantial drop in tourism activity across the world, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean, according to International Trade Series (ECLAC, 2020). Tourist arrivals in Mexico and its three sub-regions increased by about 10 percent each year between 2016 and early 2020. However, as the pandemic spread throughout the region and an increasing number of countries closed their borders in March, tourist arrivals plummeted by more than half in March and nearly all in April.

Today, in the midst of the worldwide catastrophe brought on by the pandemic's spread, there is a serious issue of how to keep touristic cities and places appealing. The primary issue with the resumption of global tourist flows, according to Pashkus and others (2021), will be a rapid reduction in the income of citizens in countries suffering from the pandemic's development. These are also the countries where the pandemic is widespread, with a large number of cases and deaths recorded. The economic crisis caused a major reduction in the income of a large portion of the population, and first and foremost, the income of residents of the largest cities, which formerly formed the foundation of the tourist influx from these countries, was affected.

Aref (2020) mentioned that countries have already started mitigating restrictions and reopening borders for potential incoming visitors. Although many countries still recommend delaying international travel for safety purposes, popular touristic places have already started accepting tourists. The UNWTO Panel of Tourism Experts estimates that international tourism will be resurrected by the second half of 2021, based on the assumption of a gradual turnaround of the pandemic, the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines, major improvements in traveler optimism, and a major lifting of travel bans by the middle of the year.

Practitioners and policymakers, as well as those in the tourist sector, must develop crisis-ready plans to combat both the current and future pandemic crises. To accomplish so, they will need to get enough empirical knowledge on the COVID-19 virus's nature. So far, not much have been learned and unfortunately, scenarios developed by these policy-makers underestimates the dangerous effects of current pandemic. Kirby (2020) points out that central banks are anticipating fast tightening,

citing the significant drop in sovereign bond yields throughout the world. Various countries provide a variety of economic assistance initiatives.

The pandemic will have long-term repercussions for the tourism sector. Estimated effects are not totally calculated and are far beyond than already experienced pandemic crises. Future crises need to be handled properly and to do so, policy makers have to prepare contingency plans. In order to minimize the pandemic effects of COVID-19 on the tourism industry, global countries need to cooperate rather than compete to overcome issues and revive the industry.

### **2.3.2.6 Impacts on Education Tourism**

Tourism and related industries have been disrupted by the pandemic (Jamal & Budke, 2020). The media and academic studies have examined and analyzed the pandemic's effects on the tourism industry. Although, there are not enough information about impact of the virus on the education tourism (Tiwari et al., 2020). According to OECD (2020) report, “the global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic severely affected higher education as universities closed their premises and countries shut their borders in response to lockdown measures. The crisis has affected the continuity of learning and the delivery of course material, the safety and legal status of international students in their host countries, and students’ perception of the value of their degree.”

International students were particularly badly affected at the start of the lockdown as they had to wait and figure out what sorts of developments regarding the pandemic are going to happen. Some countries, such as Canada or the United Kingdom, have mitigated visa procedures, or allowed students to stay on campus (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2020). Universities and colleges have to use technological technologies to ensure educational continuity despite all of the closures;

online education as a substitute for face-to-face education method. However, some universities lagged behind due to being inexperienced or lacked technology and they needed some time to adjust to newly-developed situation.

Examinations were also negatively affected, testing the students` learning process has disrupted and this also caused stress among them. Despite the fact that several colleges offered online courses prior to the pandemic, just a few students saw it as a viable alternative to face-to-face education. In the United States, for example, just 13 percent of first-cycle tertiary students were exclusively enrolled in distance education courses in 2017 (NCES, 2019). Reopening of universities and colleges for next academic years are not certain yet and travel will remain restricted, even though vaccination processes have already begun in most countries, students will have to deal with the reality of acquiring education through online classes.

A rising number of debates on the future of internationalisation of education have taken place before the current global health crisis, according to Mok and others (2020), particularly when people begin to doubt the value and benefits of international education. Various groups of global higher education stakeholders realize the pandemic's significant influences on international higher education and, in particular, international student mobility.

For the COVID-19 pandemic's specific effects on international higher education and student mobility, Marginson (2020a) stated that the pandemic's negative impact on student mobility will cause significant financial hardship for universities and countries that rely on international students' tuition. Furthermore, as incoming international students become less and less, education sector will turn into buyers` market. Because

the pandemic affected different and regions unevenly, student flow will be different as well. According to the Graduate Management Admission Council survey (2020) of prospective international students considering enrolling in a graduate management programme in 2021, two out of three (71 percent) were not changing their original plans. However, 17 percent were willing to consider a business school closer to home and 14 percent were willing to adopt online learning. The data shows that there is a rise in adoption of online classes among prospective international students. According to Yildirim and others (2021), well-known academicians from all across the world have produced online learning materials. Higher-level symposiums can be accessed by everybody in the globe via digital media. International students are able to take use of these services. Support for higher education through the online system will create more flexible academic visit opportunities.

It is obvious that pandemic has severely affected higher education sectors all over the world, but overall, it was not affected as badly as tourism industry, because it transitioned into new systems to ensure continuity of classes and its survival. Although online education platforms, virtual universities that were created by institutions, most students tend to experience international student life and being open to new experiences and connecting with other cultures. University campuses are not just educational centres, they are locations that students live their social experiences. Buildings and other campus facilities contribute to the idea of university and create links between students and universities. In addition, some departments, such as engineering, medical and tourism classes need face-to-face education methods, as online classes will not be enough to acquire the skills needed for the profession. In summary, even after the pandemic is over, hybrid methods of teaching will be present for the upcoming years.

## **2.5 Education Tourism in Famagusta**

In Famagusta, educational tourism play a vital role in city`s social, economic and cultural life. Within a first glance, it is not hard to realize that it is the city of students. Currently, there are five universities in the city. Eastern Mediterranean University, being the first and “state-trust” university on the island (established in 1979), Istanbul Technical University TRNC Education-Research Campus (founded in 2011), Cyprus West University (founded in 2015), University of City Island (founded in 2016) and European Leadership University (founded in 2017). Eastern Mediterranean University (MU) is a globally recognized state university with 1100 academics from 35 countries and 17500 students from 110 countries, including African, Middle Eastern, and Middle Asian countries. EMU has provided outstanding education through 108 undergraduate and school programs, as well as 96 postgraduate and doctorate degree programs, which are offered by 12 faculties, four schools, and the English Preparatory School (EMU, 2021). Other universities also provide programs leading to BA, MA, and PHD degrees through faculties of education, arts and sciences, engineering, law, and so on. Tourism and hospitality program has first been established in EMU in 1992, but it still considered relatively new compared to other programmes.

### **2.5.1 Impacts of Education Tourism in Famagusta**

EMU has a tremendous impact on Famagusta`s overall development. Özşen (2012), during his interviews with locals, mentioned that before EMU, Famagusta was a city with small population. Majority of the people lived in the walled city and most stores and restaurants were non-existent. But now the city hosts many international students and their families who stay with them for temporary travel purposes. The economic, employment, and socio-cultural effects of educational tourism in Famagusta are investigated in this research. Each of them will be examined in the sections that follow.

### **2.5.1.1 Economic**

After the establishment of EMU, with more students coming in, the city has started seeing its economic benefits. According to TRNC Situation Analysis Report (2003), educational tourism particularly affected job sector in Famagusta through direct and indirect ways. According to Rezapouraghdam et al. (2018), most local citizens considered educational tourism and international students to be among the main pillars of economic development. More incoming students led to an increase in the number of shops, cafes, restaurants, houses and dormitories, pet stores, sport centres, travel agents, tour operators, hotels, places of amusement and entertainment, clothing shops, home design accessories, technological equipment stores, furniture stores, petrol stations, car and motorbike rentals, hairdressers, stationary shops and so on. Özşen (2012) stated that there was a huge improvement in the construction industry. More houses were constructed and rented out to students and teachers. Even the dead areas of Famagusta, for instance like Tuzla, which is not recommended once for construction because of drainage issues, were actively used to meet intense housing demands by incoming students. As a result, renting prices increased every year and local Cypriots, who owns most houses and construction companies hugely benefit from that. In addition, students` other expenditures, such as entertainment, clothing and stationery expenditures increased, because a) four-year undergrad students want to have the full university experience. Compared to Turkey, Cyprus is more free in terms of party environment, more internationally diverse and safer place for both genders b) University departments require more books for the classes and their prices have noticeably increased over the past few years.

Rezapouraghdam et al. (2018) discussed that Banking and Insurance sector in Famagusta has been greatly influenced by international students. New businesses are

opened up every year in the construction, food and tourism sector and they need loans and to be properly insured, which is profitable for banks and insurance companies.

Additionally, students directly impact the economic situation of the banks by using:

- a) Money transfer (paying tuition fees and monthly allowances from students` parents)
- b) Saving accounts (some students bring full cash amount, so they deposit into savings accounts)
- c) Currency Exchange. Dollar Conversion to Turkish Lira.

Economic wheelhouse of Famagusta are private businesses, which are directly or indirectly related to educational tourism. Private sector is mainly involved with service sector, such as restaurants, pubs, bars, fast food locations, bet offices, pharmacies, sport centres, clinics etc. It is observed that as more business units being in operation, governmental tax revenues increased. Local government also charges students for a number of services, for instance resident permits and driving licenses. (TRNC Department of Immigration). There is a particular development in the field of municipality, police and health services following the benefits of educational tourism. Many clinics have been built in villages and small settlements to provide an easy access for locals and students.

A number of positive economic impacts on local residents have been mentioned, although the negative impacts cannot be overlooked. Students` high demands for housing drastically increased the rental prices. Rezapouraghdam et al. (2018) state that, discussing it with one of his interviewee, who says that there was a huge increase in property prices because of the growing demand for renting houses due to the existence of EMU.

Another interesting point is that since Famagusta is mainly a student city, during winter/summer breaks, economy is severely impacted by students` leave and is purely in the hands of tourist visitors. Most shops, clothing stores, cafes and pubs are considerably affected by foreign students` summer departures.

Dramatic surges in Turkish lira affected the economy badly. Food, accommodation and other services dramatically have gone up and universities started to ask for fees paid in dollars, which is a big problem for students from Turkey, as they lose a huge amount of money during conversion. This, amongst other reasons, discourage them from applying to Cyprus universities. That is a major problem for the island, because new Turkish students spend more and contribute more to the economy.

#### **2.5.1.2 Employment**

Educational tourism in Famagusta created new job opportunities directly or indirectly for local citizens. According to Mogul (2009) findings, educational tourism, according to the majority of residents (51.1percent), has led to more work opportunities. Rezapouraghdam et al. (2018) mentioned that, according to many interviewees, some sectors, such as dry cleaning and laundry services, tech services and photocopying emerged due to direct impact of educational tourism. With more dormitories being built in the campus to accommodate increasing number of students, locals are involved as construction workers, painters, electricians, plumbers and etc. There is also an increased demand for cleaners and gardeners for these structures.

Indirectly, jobs mainly were provided by the construction and service. Many residences were built or converted into apartments and rented out to students and teachers. There was also an increase in demand for the household goods sector, as students renting a home needed to purchase all of the items they need. Jobs in service

sector, such as restaurants, pubs, cafes, shops, stationery shops, barbershops, hairdressers etc. require higher numbers of labour, thus more young men and women were recruited. Malls and shopping centres have grown exponentially, since combined buying power of students and local residents increased.

In Famagusta, educational tourism had also an indirect impact on the traditional job structure. (Mogul, 2009). Before EMU was established, most of local men residents worked as farmers, shop owners, employed in government and women residents worked as hairdressers, nurses or teachers and largely as housewives raising their children at home. Through development of educational tourism, their work lives have been changed. Small family businesses turned into huge family-run holdings and organizations. Service and real estate industry started thriving, thus more job opportunities emerged and it enabled more women to get employed and more economical power and decrease men`s authority in the family.

Having more international students in the city, it has become essential for local residents to learn English as a communication tool. According to Aliyeva (2015), most of the stores outside school, real estate agents, land lords, taxi drivers, and other people whose professions involve dealing with foreign national students can speak English. Students who are local residents play an important role in attracting foreign students to local businesses as well. Another participant to Aliyeva`s study (2015) mentioned her mother`s hairdresser shop and having only local customers, then after her entrance to EMU, she was able attract her foreign national friends to her mother`s business.

Although most residents believe there was an increase in job opportunities, however in many working places, foreign students were hired as part time or full time

employees, thus decreasing chances of local residents getting employed. According to the analysis made by Besim and Jenkins (2006) for the labor market in North Cyprus, it has shown that informal sector is a large proportion of labor market in North Cyprus. The findings indicate that informal employment is between 35 to 40 percent of the total labor force. Foreign students offer cheaper labour and on summer or winter breaks, they do not go back to their countries because of steep flight rates. They get employed in almost all sectors and fields, but mainly in construction sites, cafes, restaurants, hotels and pubs do not object to work long hours.

### **2.5.1.3 Cultural Change**

Educational tourism highly affected the cultural aspect of life in Famagusta. Glasson et al., (1995) state that changes in locals` daily life are affected by socio-cultural impacts, but alterations in people`s beliefs and norms are changed by cultural impacts. Before EMU, Famagusta was a small harbour city where Turkish Cypriots lived together as a close-knit community. Most members of the community were familiar with one another and there was a high level of mutual aid and solidarity among society. One of interviewees in Özşen`s (2012) study states that “Human relationships were much stronger before. If there was wedding or a funeral, people would help their neighbour”. With more students coming in, population increased. People`s lifestyles and jobs have changed and sped up. More restaurants and cafes opened up and community members started to arrange meetings outside instead of traditionally going to each other`s houses. In addition, more people got involved with jobs in service sector and started working longer hours. Thus socializing at home and closeness level decreased. Increased financial wealth is another reason for the reduction in the level of socializing among society's members. Local people opened cafes and restaurants based on the students` demands, their income went up and this increase of financial

income caused the degradation in family relations. As university got more culturally diverse, the level of cultural clash or conflict increased. Before EMU, local people knew one another and were connected. Students from all over the Middle East and Africa came to the island and local residents were exposed to people with different language, tradition and religion. Local people felt more disturbed and started to put distance between themselves and students. The amount of noise and actions coming from students with different backgrounds disrupted the quite life of peaceful local Cypriots. Loud and ill-behaved students caused resentment among locals against themselves.

With arrival of students, many apartments were constructed and houses converted into apartments to meet the increased housing demands, so they started living near local residents. Disturbance of night parties and rumbles at night caused big conflicts. Now, most locals prefer to live suburban areas as most of the apartments were rented out to foreign students.

Other reasons for complaints among local people was with the increase of students, alcohol and drug usage, crime and theft rates gone up. Petty crimes, such as damaging rented property, not paying bills on time and housing pets without permission of the owners led to question the reliability of foreign nationals. Eating habits were also influenced by foreign student environment. Before the arrival of students, fast food culture in Famagusta was almost non-existent. There were a few restaurants that families gathered and celebrated special occasions. Now, lots of fast food places and stands have been set up in many locations around the city to meet demands by students. Aside from negative changes in socio-cultural life, majority of the residents in Mogul's (2009) study also stated that, educational tourism have allowed locals to interact with

different cultures and traditions. Aliyeva (2015) mentioned that one of her participants said “talking, texting and studying with a foreign national friend causes to learn global language better and earlier”. Local students communicate with foreign nationals almost on a daily basis and acquire knowledge about their countries and lifestyles, it enables them to boost their self-esteem and more chances to become a valuable citizen in an increasingly globalized world. Although these connections may lead to getting married to foreign nationals and eventually having their traditions and culture to affect the host country, instead of fighting it back, local residents choose to embrace the change.

Rezapouraghdam (2013) illustrates that the direct communication between the residents and educational tourists have broadened their language skills. Most local residents, who deal with students constantly, such as property owners, shop owners, taxi drivers, stationery shop workers, and restaurant or cafe owners are able to speak English on an acceptable level. Having close communication with foreign students enabled them quickly to get the grasp of or upgrade their English. As a result of these constant relationships, most locals learned key phrases and expressions of educational tourists as part of their customer relationship strategies.

EMU has greatly influenced and helped locals to have more interest in artistic events. Annual Spring Festivals which EMU organizes and invites major musical artists known internationally, theatre and plays, university clubs organizing different activities are among positive cultural contributions.

## Chapter 3

### METHODOLOGY

In this part of the study, research methodology will be discussed. It gives information about the type of methodology that is used in the study, the methods and the research process, data collection and sampling techniques.

#### 3.1 Research Design

In designing their studies, researchers use either qualitative or quantitative methods. The differences between these two paradigms are related to a number of factors, including the formation of knowledge and process of research. However, the difference is most often used to refer to the data collection process and the way data is recorded and analyzed.

Jackson et al. (2007) argue that there are important distinctions between method and methodology. The term "method" refers to how data is gathered, whereas "methodology" refers to the identification and use of the best strategy for solving a theoretical or practical problem. Key differences between method and methodology are as following: Method concerns with how data is obtained, whereas methodology refers to finding the best possible approach to address a practical issue (Kaplan, 1964). Qualitative research analyzes data from direct fieldwork observations, in-depth and open-ended interviews, and written documents. It tries to comprehend a given research problem or issue through the eyes of the people who live in the area. Qualitative research is especially helpful in obtaining culturally specific information on a

population's values, viewpoints, habits, and social settings (Mack et al., 2005). Quantitative research, on the other hand, is a type of research that collects numerical data and analyzes it using mathematical based methods to describe the phenomenon (Creswell, 1994). Silverman (2016) describes qualitative method as a research type that finds out about other people`s experiences. Thomson (2008) considers that there is a fine distinction between quantitative and qualitative research methods: quantitative studies frequently focus on measuring the components of a problem, whereas qualitative studies want to create a picture that encompasses the entire image.

Qualitative research methods require that the researcher delve deeply into the subject or phenomenon being studied. The qualitative researcher counts on the interviewees to provide detailed responses to questions asked (Jackson et al., 2007). In quantitative research, which is steady and static, huge amount of statistical data can be collected from certain number of people to draw a mathematical analysis using formulas and depicting a result that is generalized to a certain group of population. However, in qualitative method, researcher rather tries to gain more insight to a problem by asking open-ended questions on a particular topic, capturing their thoughts and feeling and obtaining general information. If the researcher thinks that respondents do not provide enough information or the answer is ambiguous, he/she can proceed to ask the follow-up questions until the responses ensure detailed information, but in quantitative method which is more structured, this is highly unlikely to happen. Additionally, quantitative method may not require the researcher to have a direct contact with the respondent, as postal questionnaires can be used (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Whereas in qualitative method, researcher fully participates in the process, doing the interviews face-to-face or in the light of COVID-19 regulations, through online meetings. The purpose of this study is to investigate the social, cultural and economic impacts of

newly emerged COVID-19 on educational tourism in Famagusta, thus qualitative research method is more appropriate since it collects rich and complex data, as opposed to crispness and clarity that quantitative data provides (Taylor, 2006). Even though it is deemed appropriate for this study, qualitative method has their own weaknesses. Regarding the research method, there is a concern of generalization due to taking responses from smaller sample (Harry & Lipsky, 2014; Thompson, 2011). Moreover, qualitative research can be time-consuming and labor-intensive, as researcher has to conduct multiple interviews, which can be difficult to arrange, considering the lockdown the COVID-19 imposed on people. Additionally, it requires proficient interviewers to successfully perform the data assembly from the participants (ACAPS, 2012). In addition, analysis and interpretation of the data takes up much more time than quantitative method. Hulme (2007) mentions one of the weaknesses as it is complicated to showcase the hardships with data collection.

In conclusion, qualitative method has been chosen for this study because of its flexibility and it provides rich and holistic picture of detailed processes that are affecting peoples` lives. It enables researchers to find out the ideas of different groups of people to explore different aspects of their communities (Choy, 2014).

### **3.2 Descriptive Research**

Descriptive research does not merely fit into qualitative or quantitative, it can be used in both methods (AECT, 2001). The terms qualitative research and descriptive research are frequently interchanged. (Nassaji, 2015). But the distinction should be pointed out. The goal of descriptive research is to define a phenomenon and finding out “what is”, whereas qualitative research contains a broader range and is a more holistic approach. Bradshaw et al. (2016) argue that the qualitative description design

is especially useful when information is needed directly from those who are experiencing the phenomenon under study and when time and resources are constrained. Observation and survey tools are often used to obtain data. Surveys include questionnaires, personal interviews (online or face-to-face) etc. The goal of surveys is to ask questions and obtain information from a group of informants that relates to a certain context. In this study, researcher mainly chose online or face-to-face semi-structured interviews as a qualitative descriptive data collection technique.

### **3.3 Sampling Methods**

Sampling in research is to select a certain number of respondents from a population in order to determine parameters and characteristics for the purpose of research. Two major types of sampling are used in the literature: probability and non-probability samplings which are also divided into several sub-types. Thompson (1999) discussed that quantitative studies use sampling techniques based on probability theory. Every member of the population has an equal and non-zero chance of being chosen for the research sample in probability sampling. Non-probability sampling techniques are used by qualitative researchers as the foundation for their studies, because they would rather identify specific groups of people who either have characteristics or live in circumstances relevant to the social phenomenon under investigation than interviewing a random sample of the population. “A sample of participants or cases does not need to be representative, or random, but a clear rationale is needed for the inclusion of some cases or individuals rather than others (Thompson, 1999).” Marshall (1996) discusses that selecting a random sample from a population is not the most effective method to understand the complicated problems regarding to human behavior, but it provides an opportunity to generalize results. “Non-probability sampling has 4 main types: Quota sampling, snowball sampling, convenience

sampling and purposive or judgmental sampling (Taherdoost, 2016).” For this study, purposive sampling method will be used, which is the most common sampling technique (Marshall, 1996). “Purposive or judgmental sampling is a strategy in which particular settings persons or events are selected deliberately in order to provide important information that cannot be obtained from other choices (Maxwell, 1996).” The reason behind using a purposive method is that researcher presumes, based on their perspective on a particular topic, they might have a unique and important view on the event being studied (Mason 2002; Trost 1986). In order to assess the impacts of COVID-19 in Famagusta, best people who can give an adequate information related to the subject matter are people who involved in education sector, therefore a group of local and foreign instructors from different universities in Famagusta (Eastern Mediterranean University, Ada Kent University, Cyprus West University and Istanbul Technical University TRNC) were selected. Thirteen (13) interviewees are summarized in the following table:

Table 3.1: Interviewees names, affiliation and job titles

<b>Participant Name</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>	<b>Job Titles</b>
Participant 13	Eastern Mediterranean University	Academician
Participant 12	Eastern Mediterranean University	Academician
Participant 11	Ada Kent University	Academician
Participant 10	Cyprus West University	Academician
Participant 9	Cyprus West University	Academician
Participant 8	Eastern Mediterranean University	Academician
Participant 7	Eastern Mediterranean University	Academician
Participant 6	Eastern Mediterranean University	Academician
Participant 5	Eastern Mediterranean University	Academician
Participant 4	Eastern Mediterranean University	Academician
Participant 3	Istanbul Technical University, North Cyprus	Academician
Participant 2	Istanbul Technical University, North Cyprus	Academician
Participant 1	Eastern Mediterranean University	Academician

### **3.4 Data Collection Techniques**

This study uses qualitative method, data were essentially collected through semi-structured interviews, either face-to-face or online through Microsoft Teams videoconferencing application. According to Dunn (2005), semi-structured interviewing has a degree of pre-defined order, but yet allows for flexibility in how questions are addressed by the interviewer. It allows researcher to ask questions and get open responses instead of “yes” or “no” answers. According to Harrell and Bradley (2009), this type of investigation gathers detailed information in a conversational style. When researcher wishes to go deeply into a topic and fully comprehend the answers provided, semi-structured interviews are frequently used. If asked questions are not clear by interviewees, they may ask for further clarification. In a similar way, if researcher does not get enough feedback on questions, researcher may seek for further explanation or ask more questions.

### **3.5 Research Questioning Process**

Thirteen (13) academicians who are currently enrolled and working from different universities in Famagusta were interviewed. Each interview took approximately 30 minutes to accomplish. Participants were interviewed in their working environment or through Microsoft Teams videoconferencing application. Since it is a qualitative research method, it requires communication, interviewing and interpretation skills. It is a common practice in semi-structured to provide a simple survey to collect basic information about participants (Valentino, 2005). Types of questions in semi-structured interviews include “grand-tour” and “mini-tour” questions. Typically, interviews begins with ‘Grand-tour’ questions, which aims to seek general perspective of respondents` experiences. Respondents are asked to answer some questions they are familiar with. The main advantage of the question is that it gets interviewees talking,

but in a focused way. (Leech, 2002). ‘Mini-tour’ questions ask about specific elements and are often used to follow up after a grand tour questions. It is used to obtain more information related to the subject matter. At the end of the interview, if there is not enough time left, the interviewer needs to decide if he/she has to skip some questions to meet the schedule, ask the interviewee for more time or request another follow-up meeting.

Respondents` voices were recorded with their consent and transcribed using ‘Microsoft Word’ application for data analysis. The researcher used English and Turkish for the interviews. Interviews conducted in Turkish were translated to English afterwards. Confidentiality of participants` identity, obtained information and its exclusive use for the study were assured to them beforehand. During the interviews, personal information have been collected by asking participants to identify themselves. As mentioned, total of thirteen (13) interviews have been conducted during the timeframe of March and May 2021. Despite many challenges, such as COVID-19 lockdown measures during April, participants` avoiding face-to-face interviews, and timing issues due to academicians` time shortages because of teaching online classes, originally aimed goal of conducting thirteen (13) interviews have been successfully achieved.

## Chapter 4

### DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This chapter will provide a detailed analysis and findings that have been through the interviews, in accordance with the findings of the literature review for this study.

As mentioned, thirteen (13) semi-structured interviews were organized to gather information. Approximately, eleven (11) questions were asked from different academicians from three (3) universities: Eastern Mediterranean University, Cyprus West University and Ada Kent University. For the sake of confidentiality, participants` names are not used in this study, instead they were named Participant 1 through 13. The interviews were conducted as twelve (12) face-to-face meetings and one (1) online, through Microsoft Teams videoconferencing application. Three (3) of participants were female and the other ten (10) were male. Three (3) of the participants were foreign instructors, the other eight (8) were native Turkish Cypriots.

#### **4.1 Understanding of Educational Tourism and its Importance in Famagusta**

The researcher asked about the definition of educational tourism from participants. All of them had clear understanding of what educational tourism is: those who travel abroad for educational purposes for a longer period of time.

All participants agree on the fact that educational tourism is very important for Famagusta and for the whole island. Participant 1 pointed out “Education tourism is

the lifeblood of Famagusta. If we exclude education tourism from Famagusta, the whole Famagusta economy will collapse”. Participant 4 had following to say:

“In almost many island countries in the world, tourism is dominant. Their economy is mainly based on tourism. Why is that? Because the industry is almost absent in most of them. If you look at a wide area from mining enterprises to oil infrastructure, etc. there is no production style. Production is mainly based on tourism there. Therefore, if we talk about Cyprus, educational tourism is extremely important, especially for the domestic TRNC. Because it has a significant contribution to the country.”

According to Participant 7, back in 1980s, Turkey strategically established universities on the island and in Famagusta, so the economy be less dependent from European Union, because people used to make money by exporting goods to EU. Other participants acknowledged the economic benefits, but they also mentioned the socio-cultural importance, such as blending of different cultures, socialization, local Cypriots communicating with foreign student, creating network etc.

#### **4.2 Advantages and Disadvantages of Education Tourism**

All participants agreed that educational tourism has several advantages and disadvantages. They all acknowledge the economic impact it created on the island. Advantages include direct economic benefits to the universities and its indirect beneficiaries, such as local restaurants, bars, markets and clothing stores, tech stores, cleaning services and so on. surviving on students expenditures. Housing industry depends on students as they rent houses yearly and pay bills, which contributes to the economy. According to Participant 3, “country earns a great profit, because of the students bringing foreign currency”, which mitigates the downfall effect the Turkish lira has created. Other participants are convinced that the families, relatives and friends of students come and visit the country because of them, thus creating a multiplier effect. Increased number of students also improved other parts of the city livelihood.

Participant 1 mentioned that “Water distribution and lightings have been provided to many different parts of the city”. Participant 7 pointed out the importance of having students as:

“They have all kinds of advantages politically, but there is a special situation for Northern Cyprus, which is that Cyprus has a political conflict. As the Greek side and the Turkish side, in this case, there is a political benefit to the existence of Northern Cyprus and the presence of Turks here, if you can please the students here.”

All of the participants mentioned the positive impact of social and cultural activities, getting to know different cultures and people, learning new languages and backgrounds etc. Universities hold annual cultural events, such as spring festivals and Orientation weeks, where each country showcases its culture, such as food, dresses and cultural dance movements and it affects people perspectives very much.

Participant 1 had this to say:

“When you think of Famagusta 20 years ago, there were only two or three restaurants, one or two bars, one or two cafes, one or two social entertainment venues, three or five events. But now, due to educational tourism, the number of all these socio-cultural events has increased tenfold. The number of restaurants increased 100 times; the number of bars increased 50 times. And very importantly, it enabled Famagusta to gain socio-cultural wealth.”

Students create a network of friends from different countries, they spend time with one another and it brings them closer. One of the participant even comments on the fact that “maybe I have never been to Azerbaijan, but today I have perhaps more than a thousand Azerbaijani acquaintances. How do I know this? I know from the students who come here. What does that do? That affects my point of view”. (Participant 6) Despite all the positive impact it brings with, participants also indicated the negative sides of educational tourism, such as increased pollution, alcohol and drug incident, theft, illegal activities, unemployment and social disruption. Participant 5 explains that

“if destinations are not prepared properly, international students in high numbers might apply pressure on the infrastructure on the facilities which might affect the residence and the host community”. Other participants confirm the statement, participant 1 adding that:

“The stress rate increased due to the crowded city. Our parents used to tell us that we would sleep without locking the door of our house. We used to sleep with the windows open. There are so many different nationalities now that theft, drugs, a whole host of other crimes and illegal activities have increased because of this.”

Unemployment rates among locals have also increased, because businesses use cheap student labor and pay less amount for longer work hours, which is fine for students, but also unacceptable for local Cypriots, because they demand higher salaries and job insurance. Some participants consider these negative effects as minor cultural clashes, as foreign students who come to the island are not informed of certain rules and regulations, such as traffic being on the left. One of the participants' hints at the importance of educating the sellers, taxis and property owners, because even if the service at the university is great, the rest disrupts the promotional effect. Municipality, police and the university should be involved more in the process of controlling and easing the problems. (Participant 7).

In conclusion, all participants consider more advantages than disadvantages of educational tourism and they believe it is highly important on city`s economic and socio-cultural life.

### **4.3 Effects of COVID-19 on Education Tourism in Famagusta**

As stated in the literature, COVID-19 has had a significant impact on hospitality and tourism education, which is provided by universities and entails close connection with

the tourism sector (Ye and Law, 2020). When pandemic outbreak happened, TRNC, like other countries closed its borders to all incoming and outgoing visitors, from March 2020 to May 2020. The entry was strictly controlled and visitors were only allowed in special cases. Malls, hotels, restaurants, bars, pubs have been closed temporarily. Curfews and lockdown have been imposed, which all residents had to obey to. Those who did not comply with the rules have been punished with fines. Newly registered students were not allowed to come to the island, because air travel was suspended. Housing industry and dormitories have been badly affected because new students could not come in and some students had to go back home to be safer with their families. Revenues of hotels have dropped enormously and some hotels were converted into quarantine hotels for infected patients. Analysis of responses from all participants confirm the aforementioned statements. In the following sections, researcher will refer to participants` responses in detail regarding the economic and socio-cultural effect of COVID-19 on Famagusta.

#### **4.3.1 Economic Effects**

All of the participants agree on the fact that, despite the destructive impact COVID-19 has created on different industries, higher education sector did not lose income because of transitioning to online system. Students who did not have to stay in the island, thus with not spending money on accommodation, food and other services, they were able to pay their semester fees, since the expenses reduced. Participant 1 stated:

“I never expected anything like this. We asked the student why? So how come they came more. For example, all students who could not pay their money in the past were able to pay this semester. They told us professor, we do not give dormitory money, and we do not pay the house rent. We asked those who did not come, not what happened here. We have no living costs. We had more money for tuition because our expenses were reduced. So a weird thing happened.”

TRNC Ministry of National Education and Culture statistics actually confirm the statement above. 2020-2021 statistics indicate the total number of registered students for the whole island as 103,110, while the number of students for 2019-2020 period was 103,748, showing almost no decline (TRNC MNEC, 2021).

Universities survived because of distance learning method, although other ancillary beneficiaries have been badly affected. One of the participant stated that “In Famagusta, mostly the tradesmen suffered because of COVID-19. The business of taxi drivers has stopped. Hotels, rent-a-car companies, restaurants, entertainment venues, discos, bars, shopkeepers, they all fell victim. So if we talk about education tourism, after students did not come TRNC, at least in the first semester of the 2020-2021 academic year, it caused huge losses in the fall period.” Participant 12 had following to add:

“In Famagusta, 95 percent are small businesses. Cafes, restaurants, hamburger shops and so on. Small tradesmen experienced a great difficulty with COVID-19, where the flow of students stopped. I am sure that due to the economic crisis in their country, a certain part of our foreign students who are here before COVID-19 could not come. Since it causes a global economic crisis, this COVID-19 is from African countries, Iran, Azerbaijan, Turkey, etc. the whole world is experiencing this economic crisis. The economic crisis in the countries where our students are flowing has decreased in the financial support of our students who stay here and do not return. Indeed, the economy has experienced a great difficulty in that regard.”

Some of the businesses have been closed permanently in the process, because of ongoing curfews on weekends and lockdown which happened again in late December 2020 through February 2021. Participant 8 confirms that by saying “Some of them even closed their shops, because when we talk about Famagusta it means students. If there is no student, there will be no customers enough to operate their organizations and their expenses, because those cafes used to be full when the

students were coming to the Famagusta”. Participant 7 makes an interesting point by adding the following statement:

“If you remember before last year, from April till July 1, we were living and working comfortably in our bars, cafes and barbers, with 0 Corona cases for 2 months, 1 week. However, when the tourism and gambling industry said that they want customers and there was no quarantine for two weeks, they killed the universities. Therefore, the virus did not kill us. In other words, when the largest sectors persistently received customers, the second largest sector, the universities, unfortunately, were badly affected.”

In summary, economic impacts of COVID-19 on higher education sector was minimal, but other indirect beneficiaries were devastatingly affected.

#### **4.3.2 Socio-cultural Effects**

During the pandemic, socio-cultural life in Famagusta have been paralyzed. People were forced to stay in their houses and dormitories, only allowed outside for specific needs, such as grocery and pharmacy shopping. Social distancing measures have been implemented. Many events, social and cultural activities, concerts were cancelled, including the annual EMU Spring Festival and others. An abrupt loss of social life, fear of contracting virus anytime mentally devastated people and they were afraid of meeting others. This whole situation generated a severe degree of anxiety both for the locals and the guests of Famagusta. One of the participants brings up the following:

“Many universities organize their own spring festivals here every year. Alternatively, artistic works related to sand are done on the beach. There were colour festivals. There were fairs here, tulip festival or orange festival. Various artists came to these events. Most of these festivals, which were held for students, were not held because there were no students due to COVID-19. Since it could not be done, the rate of social-cultural activity has decreased. “(Participant 11)

According to Participant 2,

“Everything was postponed because of COVID-19. Activities are suspended. Many things that required a large crowd of people in terms of social distance have been cancelled. Apart from that, we also have students who are affected negatively.”

City's overall look and feel is also impacted by less and less students shown up in the streets. Participant 9 mentions that:

“The absence of students is really being felt, so it is really affecting. I mean you can pass by and you could see that at this time of the year in summer, which is high season in North Cyprus, everywhere should be full of people, restaurants, cafes, the seaside, the beaches, the university itself. But everywhere is empty now and it is really affecting people's morale.”

Some interviewees point out positive sides of curfews and lockdowns, as there are less cars outside, which contributes to cleaner air, less crime and theft incidents, because there are less people wandering outside. According to Participant 13:

“I could not make a good observation in terms of crime rates, but it must have dropped. In other words, whether fighting or bickering, such big incidents have decreased. Because the population of students decreased. However, once again, there have been certain events in the news in the last three to four months in this period. But as before, I haven't heard of a lot of student-driven events. Yes, it has decreased.”

COVID-19 has largely affected socio-cultural interactions between students. Every fall or spring semester, orientation weeks and cultural nights were organized by universities to involve newcomers more into student and campus life. Participant 8 indicated that:

“We used to have some activities, you know organizations we called cultural nights of the countries. Like Cultural Night of Nigeria, Cultural Night of Azerbaijan and we could find chance to know their cultures and students had the chance to get to know each other, also knowing their culture, knowing their way of eating their food, their music, and their folks. However, since COVID-19 appeared, students could not find this chance and actually, it has directly affected social, cultural dimension of the students. So it is another drawback, it is another you know, negative side of COVID-19 on students unfortunately. Since students could not come to the Famagusta, they could not have a chance to know the other students' culture, unfortunately.”

Findings from responses of participants clearly show that Famagusta's socio-cultural life is almost non-existent without students, as they comprise half of the population

and now, due to the pandemic situation, it is going through a very difficult period. At the moment of writing the thesis, although city`s social life is slowly getting back to its former state because of less cases and vaccination, it will take a while to revert back to what it was before pandemic.

#### **4.4 Future of Education Tourism in Famagusta**

Researcher asked participants about their thoughts on the future of education tourism in Famagusta for the next or following years. Almost all participants are optimistic about the possibility of everything returning back to normal state after pandemic is over, even though it will take some time. Participant 1 had following to say:

“I believe that after the pandemic it will return to its old position again. Why, now, you see, Europe has experienced such a strong pandemic. Germany, Spain and Italy had difficult situations. If you ask me, they will get better gradually in our opinion. Because their losses are large, their rules will be more.”

One of the goals of this study was to find out the balance between online and face-to-face education in Famagusta. Online education certainly was in effect long before the pandemic and it was possible to acquire diplomas and certificates from different universities all around the world. But the pandemic forcefully made it number one priority for universities around the globe to sustain the education and keep it alive. However, in some fields of study, online education is just not sufficient enough and face-to-face education is necessary to gain needed skills, such as engineering, cooking classes, medical departments and so on. Participant 11 stated that:

“It could be something like this, there was already online education around the world before COVID-19, and certificates could be obtained from Harvard University. In a way, the pandemic made it possible for the whole world to hear this. For example, if I want to sit here and get a certificate from Harvard, yes, I will study online. From the point of view of Famagusta, our students can continue their education at their university in Famagusta, if they are online next term. It can also be in the form of a hybrid. It is more important for our students who have applied courses. Because we cannot teach a dentist how to make a dental prosthesis by distance education. Practice is essential.”

Participant 4 noted the following:

“Our solution is to go to face-to-face education. Learning by noticing the perception in their eyes and feeling whether they understand the lesson or not, on the contrary, seeing our students enjoy their lessons in the classroom or at work in the kitchens or laboratories are good aspects of the face-to-face education. I hope in the future it will begin to take shape and we will return to our good old happy days.”

Participants emphasized the good sides, such as starting of vaccinations and treatment and having less number of cases in Famagusta that could positively contribute to comeback of students to the city. Participant 9 mentioned the following:

“We have victims, we have positive cases every day, but the number of victims and death has been really low compared to other countries in the world. Therefore, I think once the vaccination and treatment is over after a few months, hopefully students can come back. I see the future very positive and I think because of the exchange rate of here which is Turkish Lira and is very less compared to other exchange rates. Students will come back and we will have the regular life like before. I hope. I'm optimistic.”

Participant 7 had an interesting insight into the future of educational tourism in Famagusta and emphasized the distinction between education and tourism sector, saying:

“You have to keep the distance between the hotel and university business. Of course, hoteliers will want to employ students to hire cheap workers. The students will also want to work in hotels so that they can earn some money. The main problem is there. Because as I said, with the start of tourism, we have increased in COVID-19. So as I said, the number one sector killed the number two sector. But now there are vaccines. There should be no panic in schools. But if tourists will come here, they could bring mutations. Therefore, we are safe in schools, it is necessary to give confidence to the students that we will not be infected by an epidemic. How will you do this, you will somehow say to the student that the students working in the hotel must not have contact with the school. For example, you will work at the hotel for 4-5 months, but you will stay there. You will not stay in Famagusta.” In summary, respondents largely anticipated that success will be regenerated in education tourism in Famagusta and overall island if necessary precautions are taken in 2021 and following years. Online classes will be not be halted, they will rather coexist with face-to-face education as preferred methods for some departments in Famagusta universities.

## Chapter 5

### CONCLUSION

The aim of this research is to investigate the economic, social and cultural impacts of COVID-19 on educational tourism in Famagusta. This chapter aims to discuss the drawn conclusions from this study and presents implications, limitations and necessity for any further research.

#### 5.1 Conclusion

The results of this study are consistent with information presented in existing literature regarding the effects of COVID-19 on global tourism and educational tourism. As shown in this research, international and educational tourism are vital for Famagusta. While the city has enough resources for main tourism opportunities, such as beautiful beaches, pure sea water, suitable climate and enough sunlight, educational tourism is number one source of income for locals of the city. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the economic, social and cultural impact of COVID-19 on educational tourism in Famagusta, with a focus on the city as a case study.

Currently, the virus is still in full force and clearly impacts every aspect of our mankind's life. The same effects have also been felt in Famagusta to an unimaginably painful extent. In the first few months of imposed lockdown, many businesses shut down temporarily and some of them, a while later, permanently. Locals and students were forced to stay in their homes, dormitories, and curfews have been imposed. People who broke the rules have been immensely fined. Business activities have

declined drastically. Many local and foreign workers have lost their jobs or paid less due to decreased work hours. The streets were almost empty as people were told stay inside as much as possible.

While Famagusta did not have many death cases reported, people`s lives were impacted. The effects of COVID-19 have been hugely felt in tourism industry, as mid-size and small businesses have ceased operations and many of them could not reopen after the measures were lifted by the government. Fourteen days of quarantine period and its expenses being put on the incoming travelers also negatively affected them. All of these factors put a lot of strain on the businesses, while many of them have not terminated the contracts with their employees, they have shortened the work hours and cut salaries. Some employees have entirely left the tourism industry and chose to be employed in unrelated sectors. Hotels were closed for some time periods and some of them were turned into quarantine hotels. Loss of students has severely impacted housing industry in Famagusta, as many students left the island to be with their families in their home countries for an unknown period. Grocery stores, clothing stores, hairdressers, cafes, restaurants, pubs experienced a huge decline in sale, because of customers being mostly consisting of students.

However, not all businesses were negatively impacted by the virus, as universities were not badly affected. According to official statistics by TRNC National Education and Culture, number of students before and after pandemic so far report almost no losses. This was due to universities transitioning into online education. In Famagusta, especially EMU had the quickest response to the pandemic as providing online classes for existing and newly registered students. Another reason was that, according to the participants, students did not have to pay accommodation and other fees, since most

of them went back into their countries and new students did not have to come to Famagusta, this allowed them to pay the tuition fees and study online.

In terms of socio-cultural perspective, due to imposed lockdowns and curfews, interactions reduced among people and staying indoors for longer periods of time caused stress and mental issues. Residents avoided meeting with other people because of infection. Many events and gatherings were postponed or cancelled, seeing the city empty and loss of social life affected people`s mood negatively. On the other hand, it was argued that having less people outside caused less cars being driven, therefore contributing to cleaner air. Also, incident rates, such as crime, theft and fighting rates have decreased, which was a positive side effect of happenings.

## **5.2 Implications**

There are a few implications that can be obtained from this study. It is important to point out that the pandemic is going to last for a while and it still poses a real threat to economies and industries all over the globe. New variants of virus will emerge over time and global measures need to be taken to mitigate the effects. As global efforts will not be enough to contain the fast spread of virus, governments should place control systems and increase vaccination rates among their people.

Currently, vaccination process have begun and TRNC ranks higher in terms of its speed among EU countries. Although this will allow a lot more visitors and students to enter the country without 14 days quarantine period, it will take longer to revive the industry due to economic recovery process. New students and travellers should not enter the island without vaccination passports and their health should be monitored. In addition, the new variants of the virus are spreading and vaccines may not be as

effective as it seems. So, in all sorts of establishments, employees should be regularly tested. With all the precautions are taken, cleaning and disinfection policies need to be priority.

Universities in Famagusta, in this tough period of time, should adhere to all precautions and take necessary measures to help the government to keep numbers low. Facilities should be cleaned and disinfected on a daily basis. Students should be strongly advised to use hand sanitizers or alcohol for protection and wear masks in close contact. It is necessary, because the half of the population will be students and they will interact with other people in different places, such as hotels, shops, etc. Health facilities in campuses should be strengthened. Psychological help should be provided to mentally strained students to help them overcome their issues. With face-to-face education is reduced and online education on the rise, EMU and other universities in Famagusta face a huge competition and need to keep up with the current standarts of teaching and materials, considering the fact that online classes and tutorials all over the internet are far more qualified and cheaper these days. While students mainly come to Cyprus and its universities for its student-oriented lifestyle and getting to know other cultures, pandemic severely affected the families in target countries and they may not be eager to send their children or pay for their considerably expensive education fees.

Despite the fact that the pandemic has prompted widespread concern, the virus's impact on people's lives in Famagusta has been less severe than in other countries. As a result, it is critical to raise extra awareness among local residents about the importance of taking all preventive measures properly in order to keep the number of cases low.

### **5.3 Limitations**

A few limitations have emerged during this study. For instance, some participants did not speak English, therefore interviews had to be taken in Turkish and translated to English afterwards. In order to prevent miscommunication, researcher asked follow-up questions to clarify, but some interpretations might be biased. Another limitation was during the interview process, as researcher intended to conduct the interviews between during March and early April, however due to the imposed lockdown and curfew in April 2021, this was not case. Most participants were not available due to being academicians and occupied with online teaching and also avoiding face-to-face meetings fearing possible contraction of the virus, the researcher concluded the interviews by mid-May period. Most participants were not available, because some of them were academicians and occupied with online teaching. Besides, in the background of increasing COVID-19 cases, they avoided face-to-face meetings for some period of time. Other participants refused meetings citing the reason of being unwilling to comment on the subject.

It was also impossible to collect information from more participants, because of government restrictions and travel-related issues, as some of them live in farther locations. Although alternative data collection methods may be valuable, this study focused solely on qualitative methods. Future studies could use other research methods, such as the mixed and quantitative methods, if more statistical data is available.

### **5.4 Recommendations**

Data collection is limited to the city of Famagusta, so the results cannot be generalized to other cities of TRNC. As time progresses, there will be more statistical data, which

will enable researchers to delve deeper into the impact of the virus in the island. Other studies should be taken to assess the impact of COVID-19 in other cities, such as Kyrenia, Guzelyurt and Nicosia. It is recommended to collect data from other universities and target groups.

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## **APPENDIX**

## **Sample Interview Questions**

- 1) Could you briefly describe what educational tourism is?
- 2) Could you briefly talk about the importance of education and tourism?
- 3) What are the advantages and disadvantages of educational tourism, in general and for the city of Famagusta?
- 4) What are the effects of COVID-19 on education tourism in general?
- 5) What are the effects of COVID-19 on education tourism in Famagusta?
- 6) What do you think are the economic effects of the COVID-19 outbreak on education tourism in Famagusta?
- 7) What do you think are the socio-cultural effects of the COVID-19 outbreak on education tourism in Famagusta?
- 8) How do you think the future of education tourism in Famagusta will be shaped after the epidemic? So how does educational tourism will take on?
- 9) Do you think education tourism will be successful again in Famagusta after the pandemic?
- 10) What do you think will emerge in education tourism in Famagusta in the post-pandemic period? What trends will emerge? For example, will online education continue again as an example?