

Research Article

Study on the Perception of the Local Community Towards the Economic Development of a Locality Through Tourism

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Abstract

Tourism is a complex sector that revitalizes other sectors such as transport, trade or communications. For a locality, development through tourism would generate income, attract investors and create new jobs. Development through tourism is an opportunity for economic and social revitalization of the city. The paper aims to identify the opportunities for economic development through tourism of a small or medium-sized locality in Romania and determine the perception of the local community towards such a development direction. For this purpose, a quantitative market research was conducted. The results obtained reveal that the community's attitude is positive regarding this type of development.

Key Words: Local Community, Tourism Development, Locality, Quantitative Research

Introduction

Tourism is a sector with a complex profile and multiple implications in all areas of life. From an economic point of view, both globally and locally, it is an important branch that is constantly evolving. Tourism is of vital economic, cultural, and social importance, offering realistic prospects for inclusive and sustainable development [1]. Tourism is also a sector whose effects are multiplier and have a significant impact on the formation of the city's economy. Moreover, this development also stimulates the development of other industries such as transport, trade, construction, public catering units, and also in solving social problems, such as reducing unemployment and developing intercultural communication.

Thus, tourism is an opportunity for a locality to develop, grow, and attract investors, who in turn generate income and investments. The tourism sector is a dynamic, stimulating sector that determines the development of related services such as transport, trade, communications, and education. This paper aims to identify opportunities for economic development through tourism in a small or medium-sized locality and determine the population's perception of this development direction.

Literature Review

As has been found in many studies, small and medium-sized cities manage to preserve their historical and cultural heritage much better due to awareness of the importance of tourism for

their own development. Tourism contributes to a large extent to ensuring the consumption of the population, along with education, training, and trade. In the structure of the economic mechanism, it plays an active role in the development and modernization of the economy of society. In countries with a well-established tourism tradition, such as Greece, Italy, and Austria, tourism's contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP) reaches a proportion of 15-20% [2].

Tourism offers many benefits, primarily economic, but the increasing trend of travel produces incalculable damage to the environment, heritage, and lifestyle of residents of tourist destinations. In this regard, the population must be made aware of environmental protection, the consumption of sustainable products, and the preservation of tourism in destinations. Studies have shown that consumers from the younger generations are more prone to sustainable attitudes. In order to protect the natural, social, and cultural heritage, but also to meet the needs of tourists, forms of sustainable development have emerged [1]. Sustainable development is a concept that brings well-being and satisfies needs in the short, medium, and especially in the long term. The goal of sustainable tourism development is to maintain a high level of tourist satisfaction, increase their awareness of the principles of sustainability, and promote best tourism practices.

The current stage of development of small towns is increasing, with leisure becoming a determining factor. The progress in

economic and social development has led to changes in terms of leisure time, the duration of stay, and even the structure of tourist destinations. In other words, an increase in the availability of time for the population is highlighted, affirming tourism as one of the primary ways of utilizing leisure time.

The complex system of the tourism industry at the municipal level comprises many interconnected elements, including central authorities, regional authorities, businesses, municipalities, and the population. Central authorities develop the regulatory framework of the tourism industry, create the infrastructure conducive to the development of the tourism sector, implement central tourism development programs, ensure the protection of nature and cultural and historical monuments of national importance, and assist in the process of regional co-financing.

The regional authority is responsible for the implementation of regional tourism development programs, developing infrastructure, creating a favorable environment for doing business, and co-financing the development of local tourism [3,4]. The municipal authority implements tourism development programs, improves the local environment, stimulates and improves entrepreneurship in the field of tourism, and preserves local culture. Businesses can invest in the development of the city's tourism sector, engage in charitable activities, and offer sponsorships [5]. Regional authorities are given special importance, playing a crucial role in creating favorable conditions for tourism, which leads to the progressive development of the tourism industry. In order for this progressive development to be possible, effective management is essential. At the local level, such an approach is impossible without the cooperation of state and local authorities and tourism enterprises. Joint and coordinated actions will ensure effective work both collectively and individually [6,7]. Partnerships between authorities and enterprises in the tourism industry should focus on the efficient management of the tourism market, rationally use tourism resources, and increase the tourist attractiveness of the region [8].

Local tourism governance can be defined as a decision-making system, the functioning of a network composed of various parties, including local administration, private companies, and academic organizations, for the purpose of local tourism revitalization. Many scholars have suggested numerous classification systems regarding the standards and characteristics of the governance structure. They were reduced to four components: participation, partnership, institutionalization, and support system [9].

The Principles Underlying Sustainable Tourism Development are

- minimizing the impact of tourism activity on the natural environment;
- minimizing the negative impact of tourism activities on the local community, maximizing economic benefits at the local community level;
- minimizing the negative impact on the culture, traditions, and customs of the local community;
- educating, training, and informing tourists to obtain attitudes regarding its negative impact.

These principles aim to achieve ecological sustainability and contribute to maintaining the state of conservation and

development of forms of tourism that do not disrupt the daily life of the population of the tourist destination, maintain the authenticity and individuality of the local culture, and pay attention to protected areas [10,11]. Also, the active participation of the local population as a key factor in local development through key elements such as tourism infrastructure, accommodation structures, and public catering units can contribute to sustainable development.

The cultural competence of citizens undoubtedly has a significant impact on tourism. Tourists avoid traveling to unsafe or conflict areas, as well as those with harsh environments, a risk of natural disasters, and other dangers. The tourism industry requires the improvement of natural and cultural resources, as well as adaptation [12,13]. The physical environment, attractions, accommodation, services, and behavior determine how visitors experience their visit. Concepts such as quality assurance and eco-labeling are developed. Thus, Murphy argues that the problem of happiness felt by local hosts can be overcome through a more balanced approach to management planning, a greater emphasis on interrelational structure, and a greater balance in decision-making [14,15]. This approach is based on the growing awareness of tourism's dependence on the host community, hence the emergence of the concept of community industry [16].

Research Methodology

The purpose of the work is to identify the opportunities for economic development through tourism of a small or medium-sized locality and determine the perception of the local community towards such a development direction. Such a development approach is also updated to the needs of society because it has moved from the idea of industrial development to the idea of sustainable and environmentally friendly development.

The Specific Objectives were the Following

- Identifying the extent to which the population knows the concept of development through tourism; Identifying promotional actions;
- Identifying sectors where emphasis should be placed as the basis for a prosperous tourism development;
- Identifying the benefits brought by tourism development.

The researched population consisted of people from Romania over the age of 18 who reside in small and medium-sized localities (with fewer than 200,000 inhabitants), regardless of profession, gender, income level, or educational background. The data were collected between 10.04.2025 and 10.05.2025.

Non-random sampling was used. For this research, electronic surveys were used as a data collection method, with the questionnaire being transmitted online, through social networks. The final sample included 560 people. Following the centralization of the results and demographic data, it was observed that 63.6% of the respondents are female, while the share of male respondents is 35.7%. In a close connection with the gender of those interviewed is their age. Thus, the largest share among the respondents is people between 45 and 65 years old (31.4%), followed by those aged between 26 and 35 years old (23.6%).

Results and Discussion

The most important results of the research are presented on the four specific objectives that were considered.

Identifying the Extent to which the Population Knows the Concept of Development Through Tourism

The research revealed that 63.6% of all respondents know the concept of local development through tourism, while 25.7% know this idea very well. The share of respondents who do not know the concept is relatively small, 10.7%. In this case, we observe that among the surveyed subjects, a specialized public can be identified, who know the notion of tourism development. The public plays a significant role in the development process. The community plays an important role, both in decision-making and in terms of sustainability, as tourism is dependent on it.

Respondents consider tourism development beneficial for the community and the city. They chose the development of infrastructure and the development of basic tourism services, such as restaurants and hotels, as factors favoring the local tourism development process. For sustainable development, community involvement must be extensive. A host community dissatisfied and disturbed by a flow of tourists is reflected in the tourist-community relationship, resulting in adverse and lasting effects. A percentage of 70.2% of respondents consider the economic development of their locality through tourism to be opportune. At the opposite pole, we find the share of those who do not find it opportune, with a percentage of 2.1%. Thus, the attitude of the locals is positive, which also shows their desire for involvement, as the community is the backbone of tourism development.

Tourism has a complex profile and multiple implications in all branches of life; it acts as a dynamizing element of the global system. As seen in the study by Baltezarevic (2022) entitled “The Role of Travel Influencers in Sustainable Tourism Development”, tourism is of vital economic, cultural, and social importance; it offers realistic perspectives for inclusive and sustainable development [1].

Identifying Promotional Actions

Possible promotional actions are festivals, mountain trails, or organizing competitions. Their promotion should take place both online and offline, by creating suggestive brochures, which should have sufficient information but be concise and aesthetically attractive. To promote a locality, it is necessary to identify its strengths and promote them in order to attract visitors and investors. Respondents identified as the most important assets of a locality that should be promoted: the cultural and historical heritage of the locality (19.29%), natural attractions located in or near the locality (18.57%), tourist infrastructure (accommodation spaces, restaurants, etc.) (12.14%), active and adventure tourism (mountain trails, adventure parks, water or mountain sports, etc.) (12.86%), relaxation and wellness tourism (spa centers, thermal baths, etc.) (12.86%), local specificity and authenticity (local gastronomy, local traditions, authentic lifestyle, traditional crafts and handicrafts, etc.) (14.29%) and events (exhibitions, festivals, etc.) (9.99%) (figure1).

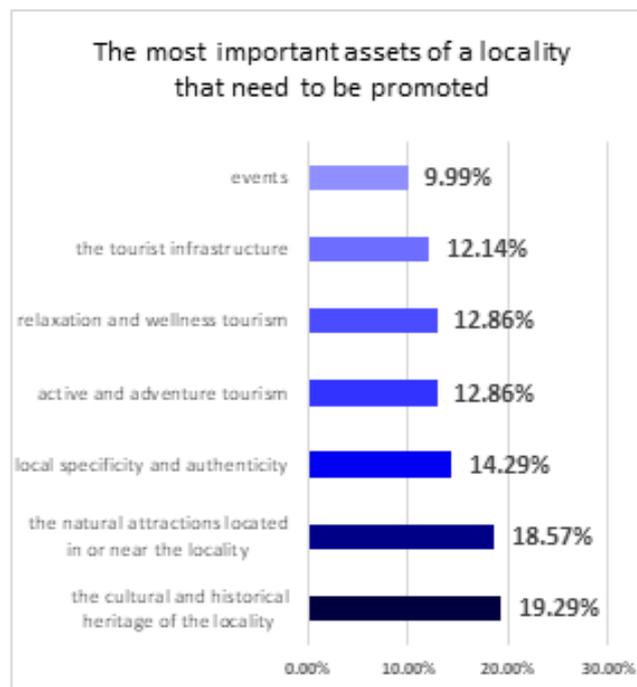


Figure 1: The most important assets of a locality that need to be promoted

Source: Author’s own research

Although online promotion has gained momentum in recent years, offline promotional actions should not be neglected. A locality can emerge from anonymity by promoting both through brochures (37.9%) and festivals (62.9%). Brochures are the most effective methods of attracting attention through a lot of information in a small text on a small page. Colors must be carefully chosen because they are the easiest for the human eye to perceive. Their advantage is direct interaction with the tourist

and the possibility of forming a relationship, which contributes to the choice of a destination. Within these brochures, a series of tourist attractions around the city can be integrated, which are proposed as a promotional action by the subjects. Within the brochure, the suitability of attractions for a broad age segment can be highlighted.

Festivals play an important role in the promotion process,

to create notoriety, establish partnerships, and foster close relationships with other partners. These attract a large number of tourists to the town. Tourists interact with the community, and can allocate amounts to buy various handicrafts or culinary dishes offered by local producers.

Among the actions proposed by the subjects, the idea of promoting the city through sports, by organizing handball, football, or tennis matches, camps, and competitions, was also highlighted. Through such sports events, a series of income would be generated by renting accommodation spaces, serving meals, and fees paid to take part in the training camp.

Identifying Sectors Where Emphasis Should be Placed as a Basis for a Prosperous Tourism Development

Tourism development comes with the development of other sectors. Respondents consider that a higher level of infrastructure development is necessary (75.7%) for the development of tourism. In many studies, infrastructure plays a primary role,

being included in the tourist offer. The list of necessary factors continues with the establishment of a tourist information center (52.9%). This information center has the role of representing the city, promoting the surrounding tourist attractions, and providing information on local hotel and catering services. It is observed that the catering sector, especially restaurants (25%), is considered by respondents as a necessary factor for the development of tourism. Catering units are important, and a local gastronomic identity can be created in order to attract tourists.

Identifying the Benefits Brought by Tourism Development

The benefits produced by tourism development are multiple, and the subjects demonstrated that they know these advantages. Among the most mentioned benefits by the respondents were: improving the quality of life, generating new jobs, increasing employee training, and, last but not least, creating new income in the local budget.

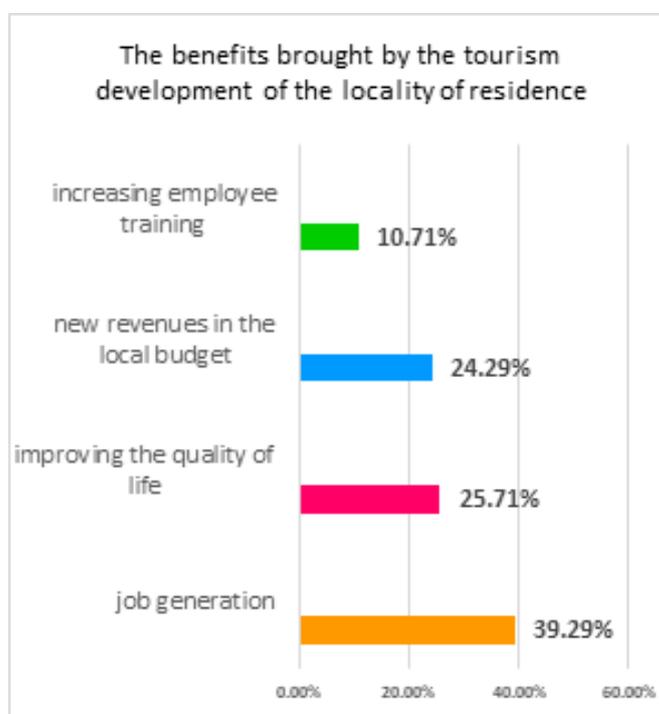


Figure 2: The benefits brought by the tourism development of the locality of residence

Source: Own research

Thus, in Figure 2, it can be seen that 39.29% of the respondents consider generating jobs essential, 25.71% consider improving the quality of life very important, and 24.29% view tourism development in the locality as a source of financing for the local budget. A greater flow of tourists leads to the need to increase accommodation capacity, to increase the public catering sector, and to the development of many other sectors. Thus, new jobs are generated. Revenues also have an impact on the local budget, which in turn raises the quality of life and standard of living for the city's inhabitants. The positive impact of the city's development is directly reflected in the well-being of the inhabitants. The revenues brought to the city hall contribute to the city's prosperity. These closely related benefits can be seen as a chain with well-knit and interconnected links.

Conclusion

The accelerated development process of both society and technology has necessitated the reorientation and conception of new development strategies tailored to this current situation. Thus, the idea of developing a locality through tourism and community involvement was adopted. Tourism is a source of prosperity for locals, for the community, a key factor for infrastructure development, a source of generating new jobs, and it also stimulates other areas of activity, such as transport, trade, etc., but also a way to improve the quality of life, to reduce unemployment. As we will see, community does not only mean the basic meaning, which designates the geographical area to which it belongs, but has become more than that. The idea has been adopted in which the community creates a genuine tourism brand, an overall image of the tourist destination. The

tourism sector is in a relationship of dependence with the host community.

Tourism development has become a sustainable and necessary development strategy nowadays, whether we are talking about a city, a village, or a region. The free time of each person has increased in proportion to the desire for knowledge. Development opportunities through tourism are common among small and medium-sized cities that desire growth. The host community plays a significant role, and the analysis revealed a positive attitude towards this type of development.

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