

RESIDENTS' PERCEPTION OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE HUNEDOARA AREA

SLUSARIUC GABRIELA CORINA

University of Petrosani

e-mail:ellashusariuc@gmail.com

Abstract

It has long been proven that tourism is a dynamizer of the economic and social life of an area. However, the development of tourism has brought with it major benefits as well as disadvantages for residents. The objective of this study is to analyze residents' perceptions regarding changes in their quality of life and the impact of tourism on the community. By examining local attitudes and responses, the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how tourism development influences everyday life in the Hunedoara area and to identify both the perceived benefits and challenges associated with it.

Key words: residents, development, tourism, environment.

JEL Classification: F68, L83.

I. INTRODUCTION

The spectacular development of tourism over the last decade has brought numerous benefits to society in general, tourists, businesses in the hospitality and tourism industry, governments, and local administrative units, as well as to tourist areas and their communities (Minciu, 2004; Slusariuc, 2015).

The positive effects of tourism have increasingly attracted the attention of researchers in the field, with tourism's growing importance as a distinct economic sector (Minciu, 2004). Today, tourism is a significant activity, a primary component of economic and social life for an increasing number of countries worldwide (Slusariuc, 2015). Most societies focus on the profits derived from tourism, but efforts to maintain high-quality tourism have become increasingly demanding in recent years due to warnings from various experts (Baker & Thomson, 2017).

However, recent studies and market realities have increasingly highlighted the negative impacts of tourism, especially on local communities, the environment, and residents' daily lives (Jafari, 2017; Sautter & Leisen, 2001). In this context, climate change places significant pressure on the tourism sector, altering environmental and socio-economic conditions that influence tourist behavior and the attractiveness of destinations (UNWTO, 2021).

Tourism can, on one hand, contribute to the destruction of natural ecosystems, while on the other, it can play an important role in protecting areas of ecological interest (Becken, 2017). The environmental impact of tourism has become an extremely popular topic, harshly criticized by those observing how natural changes influence the daily lives of local populations (Gössling, 2002; Hall & Lew, 2009).

This study aims to analyze residents' perceptions of tourism development in the Hunedoara area, focusing on its economic, social, cultural, and environmental impacts. By understanding local attitudes and concerns, the research seeks to inform strategies that promote responsible tourism development, ensuring that the benefits of tourism are maximized while mitigating its adverse effects.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Residents' perceptions of tourism development play a crucial role in shaping the sustainability of tourism initiatives. Studies indicate that positive perceptions are often linked to economic benefits, such as job creation and increased income, while negative perceptions may arise from issues like overcrowding and environmental degradation (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011; Liasidou et al., 2023).

For instance, a study by Alrwajfah et al. (2019) in the Petra region of Jordan found that residents' satisfaction with tourism development was influenced by factors such as employment opportunities and infrastructure improvements. Similarly, Rasoolimanesh et al. (2017) highlighted the importance of community factors in shaping residents' support for World Heritage Site inscription and sustainable tourism development.

The economic impacts of tourism are multifaceted, encompassing both positive and negative aspects. Positive economic impacts include job creation, increased income, and the stimulation of local businesses (Lindberg et al., 1997). Conversely, negative economic impacts may involve inflation, increased cost of living, and economic dependency on tourism (Mbaiwa, 2005).

A study by Lindberg et al. (1997) emphasized the importance of assessing the social impacts of tourism to understand its economic implications fully. Additionally, Banga et al. (2022) explored the relationship between tourism development, economic growth of region and environmental quality, suggesting that sustainable tourism practices can enhance economic benefits while mitigating negative environmental impacts.

Tourism can lead to significant social and cultural changes in host communities. Positive social impacts may include cultural exchange and the preservation of heritage, while negative impacts can involve cultural commodification and social inequality (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011).

Research by Liasidou et al. (2023) indicated that residents in rural areas perceive both positive and negative social impacts of tourism, including changes in community dynamics and cultural identity. Similarly, Garau-Vadell et al. (2014) found that residents' perceptions of tourism impacts on island destinations vary, with some communities experiencing cultural enrichment and others facing challenges related to cultural preservation.

The environmental impacts of tourism are a growing concern, particularly in ecologically sensitive areas. Negative environmental impacts include habitat destruction, pollution, and resource depletion, while positive impacts may involve environmental awareness and conservation efforts (Gössling, 2002; Hall & Lew, 2009).

A study by Alrwajfah et al. (2019) in Petra highlighted concerns about environmental degradation due to increased tourism, emphasizing the need for sustainable tourism practices. Similarly, Banga et al. (2022) discussed the nexus between tourism development, environmental quality, and economic growth, suggesting that renewable energy and energy efficiency can contribute to achieving carbon neutrality in tourism destinations.

Sustainable tourism practices aim to balance the economic, social, and environmental impacts of tourism to ensure long-term benefits for host communities. These practices include community participation, environmental conservation, and equitable distribution of tourism benefits (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2017). Research by Rasoolimanesh et al. (2017) emphasized the importance of community factors in shaping residents' support for sustainable tourism development, highlighting the need for inclusive planning processes. Additionally, studies by Andereck & Nyaupane (2011) and Liasidou et al. (2023) underscore the significance of understanding residents' perceptions to promote sustainable tourism practices effectively.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the context of this study, an indirect survey method was employed, utilizing an opinion poll based on a pre-designed questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered to a sample of 100 respondents from Hunedoara County. The primary criterion for the selection of the respondents was that they should be residents of Hunedoara County. The aim of this research is to analyze residents' perceptions regarding changes in their living conditions and the impact of tourism on the local community, from an economic, social, cultural, and environmental perspective. Upon data collection, the responses were systematically compiled, and the research proceeded to the subsequent phase, which involved analyzing and interpreting the results. The responses to the nine questions were consolidated and subjected to a thorough analysis to derive the conclusions.

IV. RESEARCH RESULTS

This study is subject to several general limitations associated with the use of the contingent valuation approach. The most significant limitations of this study are (1) the survey was conducted exclusively with Romanian residents – ideally, the survey would have been conducted with residents from multiple countries or regions – and (2) the survey was carried out in various tourist locations. Regarding the first limitation, the random selection of residents minimized the potential for bias. However, the representativeness of the sample may not have an indisputable sociological value. As for the second limitation, conducting surveys in different locations could introduce biases based on regional differences. Tourist preferences and behaviors may vary depending on their country of residence, as individuals often seek what is not available near their homes.

The aforementioned limitations, coupled with the author's concerns regarding the influence of tourism choices on younger members of Generation Z and older members of Generation Alpha, suggest that this topic warrants further investigation. A future study, in which data will be collected from a representative sample across Europe, is the next step the author intends to pursue. This new research will focus on the evolving dynamics of tourism and the emerging trends influenced by these generations.

1. Do you consider that the development of tourism in your residential area has impacted life in the community?

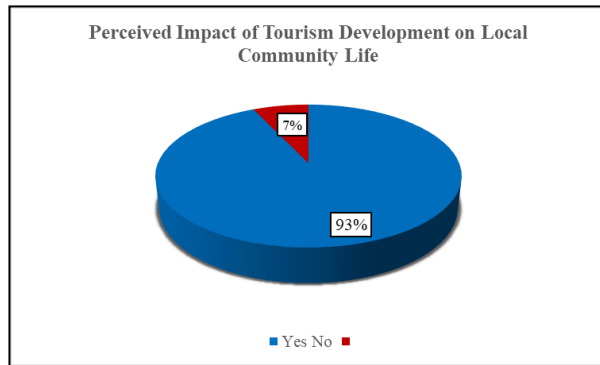


Figure 1. Impact of tourism development on the respondents' residential area and community

According to the results obtained from the survey, 93% of respondents affirmed that the development of tourism has had an impact on their community, while 7% indicated that it has not. This significant majority suggests that the respondents perceive tourism as a prominent factor influencing various aspects of life in their residential area.

The overwhelming consensus highlights the importance of tourism development in shaping local dynamics, whether in terms of economic growth, social interactions, or environmental changes. These findings underscore the growing role of tourism in transforming communities, particularly in areas where tourism is an essential part of the local economy. The positive impact perceived by the vast majority of respondents can be attributed to factors such as job creation, infrastructure improvement, and increased opportunities for local businesses. However, further analysis is needed to explore the specific dimensions of this perceived impact, including potential challenges associated with tourism growth.

2. Do you consider that the development of tourism in your residential area has had a predominantly positive, negative, neutral impact?

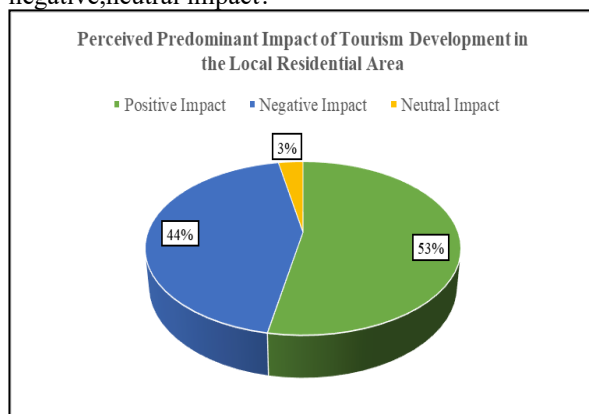


Figure 2. Impact of tourism development in the local residential area

The survey results reveal that 53% of respondents believe that tourism development in their residential area has had a positive impact, while 44% consider it to have a negative impact. Only 3% of respondents

reported a neutral impact. These findings indicate a majority view in favor of the positive influence of tourism, suggesting that respondents perceive benefits such as economic growth, improved infrastructure, and increased employment opportunities.

However, the 44% of respondents who reported a negative impact highlight significant concerns, which may include issues such as overcrowding, environmental degradation, or social challenges. The 3% of respondents who perceived a neutral impact indicate a more balanced or less pronounced view on tourism's influence in their community. This mixed response suggests that while tourism is largely seen as beneficial, there are notable reservations and challenges that need to be addressed to ensure sustainable and equitable development.

3. What do you consider to be the positive effects of road infrastructure development?

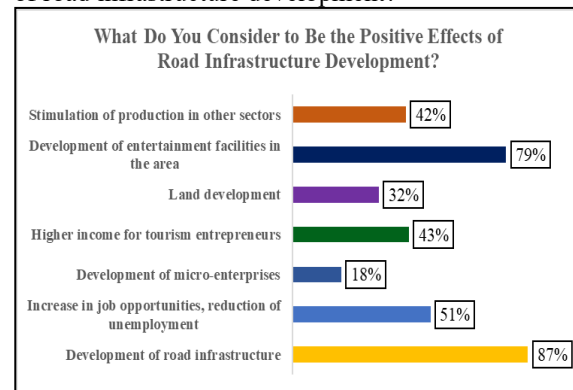


Figure 3. Residents' perceptions of the positive effects of road infrastructure development

The majority of participants (87%) consider the development of road infrastructure itself to be the most significant positive outcome. Following this, 79% of respondents highlight the development of entertainment facilities in the area as a major benefit, suggesting that improved accessibility stimulates recreational and tourism activities.

Moreover, 51% of participants associate road infrastructure development with an increase in job opportunities and a reduction in unemployment, underlining the importance of economic growth and labor market expansion. Higher income for tourism entrepreneurs is perceived as a positive effect by 43% of the respondents, indicating that the tourism sector is expected to significantly benefit from better infrastructure.

Meanwhile, 42% believe that stimulation of production in other sectors is an important consequence, showing an awareness of indirect economic impacts. Land development is considered a benefit by 32% of respondents, while only 18% identify the development of micro-enterprises as a significant effect, suggesting that the support for small businesses is seen as less direct compared to other benefits.

Overall, the findings indicate that the residents of the Hunedoara area primarily associate road infrastructure improvements with greater accessibility, economic growth, and the enhancement of the tourism and entertainment sectors, which are critical for the region's development.

4. What are the main negative effects of development in the residential area?

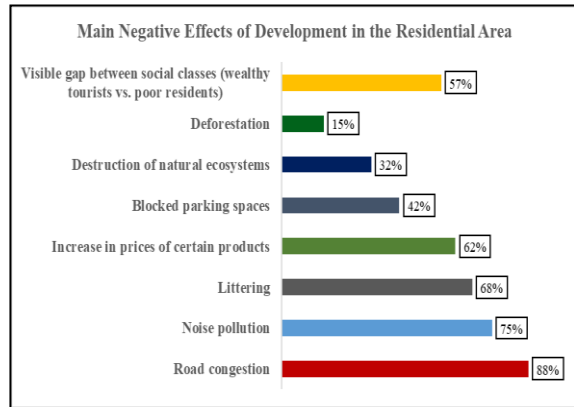


Figure 4. Main negative effects of development in the residential area

The most frequently cited issue is road congestion, identified by 88% of the participants, emphasizing significant concerns regarding traffic and mobility within the community.

Following closely, noise pollution is recognized by 75% of respondents as a major negative outcome, suggesting that increased development activities have disrupted the residents' quality of life. Littering is mentioned by 68%, indicating an environmental degradation perceived by a large portion of the population.

Another important concern is the increase in prices of certain products, highlighted by 62% of the respondents, reflecting the economic pressure felt by local residents as a result of development. Furthermore, 57% pointed to a visible gap between social classes (wealthy tourists versus poor residents), underlining a perceived social inequality.

Other notable negative effects include blocked parking spaces (42%) and destruction of natural ecosystems (32%), which point towards environmental and urban planning challenges. Meanwhile, deforestation was mentioned by only 15% of the respondents, suggesting that it is perceived as a less immediate issue compared to other consequences.

5. What measures can be taken to limit the negative effects of tourism?

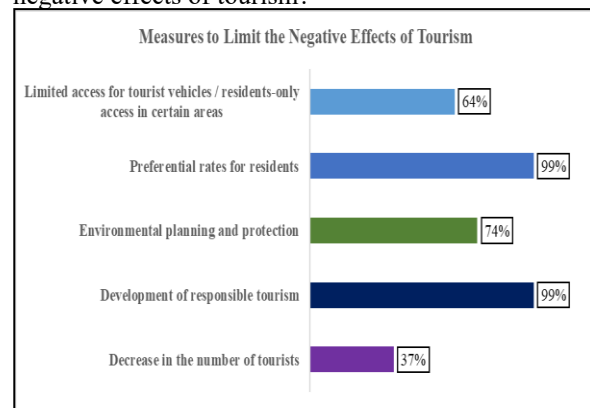


Figure 5 Measures to limit the negative effects of tourism

The most strongly supported measures are preferential rates for residents and the development of responsible tourism, each selected by 99% of the participants, indicating a near-unanimous agreement on the importance of protecting local communities and promoting sustainable tourism practices.

Additionally, environmental planning and protection is endorsed by 74% of respondents, highlighting the residents' concern for safeguarding natural resources and ensuring a balanced relationship between tourism and the environment.

Limited access for tourist vehicles and residents-only access in certain areas is considered a viable measure by 64% of participants, suggesting that controlling tourist mobility could help preserve residential quality of life.

On the other hand, only 37% of respondents support a decrease in the number of tourists as a solution, implying that while tourism's negative impacts are acknowledged, the local community still values the economic and social benefits brought by tourism and prefers management strategies over restrictive reductions.

Overall, the findings suggest that residents favor measures aimed at promoting sustainable and responsible tourism while preserving their rights and the local environment, rather than limiting tourism flows drastically.

6. On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = Very Low, 5 = Very High), how do you perceive the impact of tourism development in the residential area on the following aspects?

Table 1. Residents' Perception of the Impact of Tourism Development on Different Aspects (Scale 1–5)

Impact Type	1 (Very Low)	2 (Low)	3 (Moderate)	4 (High)	5 (Very High)
Economic Impact	2%	5%	18%	40%	35%
Social Impact	5%	10%	30%	35%	20%
Cultural Impact	8%	12%	32%	30%	18%
Environmental Impact	3%	6%	20%	30%	41%

The table presents residents' perceptions regarding the impact of tourism development in their residential area across four dimensions — economic, social, cultural, and environmental — using a five-point scale (1 = Very Low, 5 = Very High).

The economic impact is perceived as high or very high by the majority of respondents, with 40% rating it as high and 35% as very high. Only a small percentage, 2%, consider the economic impact to be very low, indicating that tourism is largely seen as an important economic driver.

Regarding the social impact, perceptions are slightly more moderate. While 35% of respondents rated the social impact as high and 20% as very high, a significant portion (30%) rated it as moderate. This suggests a more balanced or mixed perception of tourism's effects on social life.

The cultural impact is also perceived moderately, with 32% rating it as moderate, 30% as high, and 18% as very high. Meanwhile, 8% of respondents believe the cultural impact is very low, indicating some concerns about cultural changes due to tourism.

The environmental impact is seen as particularly significant. 41% of respondents rated it as very high and 30% as high, suggesting strong awareness of tourism's effects on the natural environment. Only 3% of respondents perceived the environmental impact as very low.

7. What is your highest level of education?

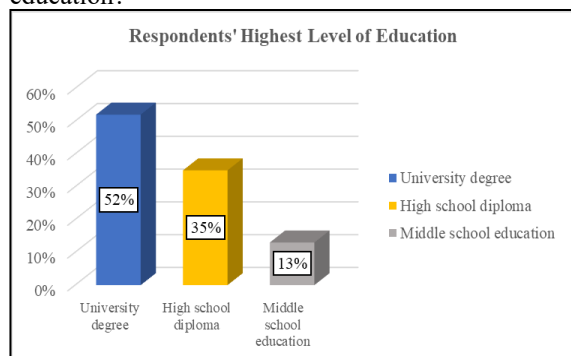


Figure 6 Educational background of respondents

The educational level of the respondents highlights a relatively high degree of schooling among the surveyed residents. According to the data, 52% of the participants hold a university degree, suggesting that over half of the population surveyed has benefited from higher education. Meanwhile, 35% of the respondents have completed only a high school diploma, indicating that a significant portion of residents possess a secondary education level. A smaller percentage, 13%, reported having only a middle school education, reflecting a minority with lower educational attainment.

These results suggest that the majority of residents have a medium to high level of education, which may influence their perceptions of tourism development in a more informed and critical manner.

8. What is your age?

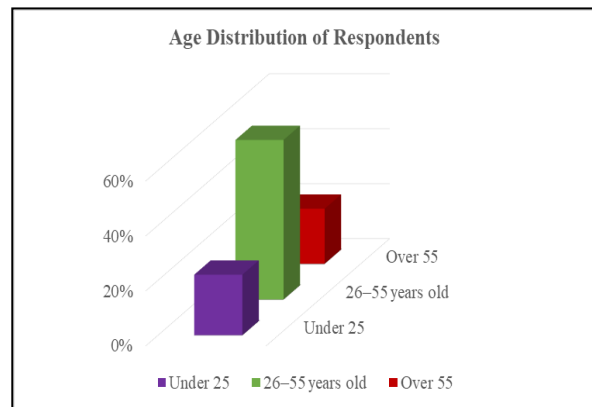


Figure 7. Age distribution of respondents

The age distribution of the respondents reveals a balanced representation across different age groups. The largest share of participants, approximately 60%, fall within the 26–55 years age range, indicating that the majority are adults in their economically active and socially engaged stage of life.

A significant portion, about 30%, are under 25 years old, suggesting a considerable number of young individuals, possibly students or early-career professionals, who are also affected by tourism development in the area.

Only 10% of respondents are over 55, showing lower engagement among the elderly population in the survey sample.

This age structure reflects a predominantly young to middle-aged population, which may contribute to more dynamic and modern perspectives regarding local tourism development.

9. What is your income level?

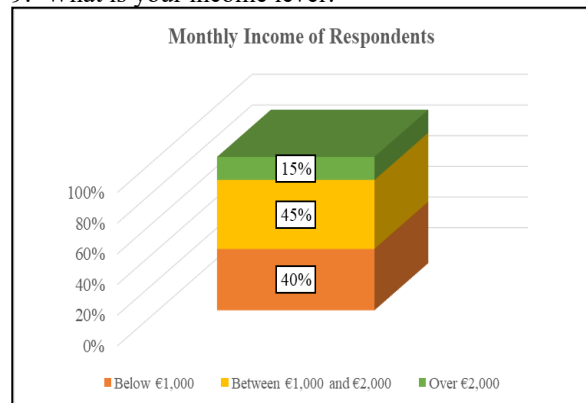


Figure 8 Monthly income of respondents

Income data from the survey shows that the majority of respondents have modest to moderate earnings. The largest group, 45%, report a monthly income between 1,000 and 2,000 euros, placing them in a middle-income bracket.

40% of respondents earn below 1,000 euros, indicating a substantial portion of the population with limited financial resources, which may influence their expectations and concerns regarding the economic effects of tourism.

Only 15% report earning over 2,000 euros per month, representing a smaller, higher-income segment of the community.

These figures suggest that tourism development strategies should be sensitive to local economic realities, ensuring that the benefits of tourism reach all social categories.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The research conducted in Hunedoara County highlights the multifaceted nature of tourism development and its perceived effects on the local population. The findings reveal a generally favorable perception of tourism among residents, particularly with respect to its economic and infrastructural benefits, such as job creation, increased income opportunities, and improvements to road networks. However, the data also indicate awareness of several negative impacts, including environmental degradation, increased traffic, and cultural commodification.

Respondents expressed concern regarding the ecological footprint of tourism, underlining the need for sustainable practices to limit pollution and preserve local biodiversity. Moreover, the study illustrates that while residents acknowledge the

cultural and social exchange facilitated by tourism, there are concerns about overcrowding and disruptions to daily life.

Educational background and income levels appear to influence the way residents perceive both the benefits and drawbacks of tourism. For example, individuals with university degrees were more likely to recognize the importance of sustainable tourism policies, whereas those with lower income levels emphasized the economic advantages over ecological concerns.

In light of these insights, it becomes clear that community engagement and inclusive tourism planning are essential for achieving balanced development. Authorities and tourism stakeholders should invest in public awareness campaigns and infrastructure that align with sustainable tourism principles. Moreover, future tourism strategies should be tailored to accommodate the concerns of residents while maximizing long-term socio-economic and environmental gains.

Ultimately, this study reinforces the idea that tourism, while a vital driver of regional development, must be carefully managed to ensure that the voices of local residents are heard and their quality of life preserved.

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