

Perceptions of Stakeholders on the Environmental Impacts of Tourism: A Quantitative Analysis from Coastal Albania

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Abstract:

In this paper, we will analyze through questionnaires the perceptions of the three main actors on the impact of the increase in tourism activity on the coastal area in the city of Durres. To collect data, a quantitative method was used through questionnaires for each group (N=149 citizens; N=72 businesses; N=64 institutions). Based on the results of the paper, we see that there is a perception of the negative impact on the environment by degrading the landscape, increasing pollution, increasing waste, and distrust in local government policies, but also an important result is that all three actors agree on the importance of environmental protection and the measures that need to be taken by all parties and not only by central and local government. This study contributes to policymakers by providing them with measurable evidence based on quantitative studies regarding their orientation to draft policies for environmental protection in tourist areas.

Keywords: Tourism impacts; Environmental perception; Sustainable tourism; Stakeholder analysis; Community engagement; Albania

JEL Codes: Q56, L83, O13

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1. Introduction

The paper will assess the pressures on the environment as a result of tourism developments in the coastal area of the city of Durrës. This paper will be based on quantitative data analysis by measuring the perceptions of 3 main actors, individuals, businesses and institutions.

For Albania, the tourism sector is taking on a very important role in youth employment as well as in increasing national income. Gössling, 2002 and Hall, 2011 have emphasized the role of tourism as an engine of economic development but also as it affects the ecosystem, while Sharpley, 2014 and Saarinen, 2014 emphasize that during tourist seasons there should be more intervention by local government to manage waste. These issues make it necessary to conduct an analysis of the perceptions of the actors who have been studied in order to see more clearly these issues on the coast of Durrës district, thus offering suggestions for long-term solutions. The participation of these actors is also seen in the work of Bramwell & Lane, 2011 and UNWTO, 2018, where they emphasize the importance of their participation. Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2010 in their work showed us that support for tourism will depend on what is perceived for the benefits and costs of tourism, which means that if the environmental cost is high then distrust towards institutions increases.

Main purpose of the study

The main purpose of this paper is to assess the perceptions of citizens, businesses and institutions regarding the impact of tourism on the environment, as well as to suggest policies and interventions for sustainable tourism.

Specific objectives

1. Measure the perceptions of the actors involved in the study regarding the negative impacts on tourism
2. Assess the effectiveness of current policies in environmental management.
3. Identify the readiness of the community and business to engage in sustainable tourism practices.
4. Provide recommendations for policymakers based on the empirical results.

The study has several limitations that affect this work and should be taken into consideration:

- We focus only on one coastal area, making it difficult to generalize to the entire Albanian coast or the regional one
- The questionnaire used measures perceptions, which means it is exposed to bias.
- The work is only carried out at a certain point in time, which leaves room for generalizations on the effects of year-round tourism.

Despite the limitations, this study provides valuable evidence for local policymakers and tourism stakeholders in the coastal area of Durrës.

2. Literature review

Sustainable tourism is a concept that has been widely studied by international literature which emphasizes the importance of actors such as citizens, businesses and institutions in perceiving the impacts of tourism on the environment. Findings from a recent study on the Durrës Region show that tourism has already generated measurable environmental pressures (Lika, Gashi, Prendi, Subashi, & Jaho, 2024). Gössling, 2002 and Hall, 2011 in their work have emphasized the importance of tourism as a development engine but also its impact on the environment and according to UNWTO, 2018 the impacts include the increase in waste, air pollution, environmental pollution, water pollution, pressure on the coastline, etc. Andereck et al., 2005 and Kuvan & Akan, 2005 have written that local residents are the first to identify these problems. The results of this work that tourism development has brought about the degradation of nature are also seen in international literature where an increase in tourist activity is accompanied by distrust of institutions

because there is no control over construction and waste management leaves much to be desired, this fact has also been shown in the work of Sharpley, 2014 and McLennan et al., 2017. According to Bramwell et al., 2017 and Font et al., 2016, businesses, although they benefit from tourism and are aware of the negative impacts on the environment, are still reluctant to take measures towards sustainable tourism, this is also evidenced in the work of the authors Holden, 2016 and Saarinen, 2014 where businesses report damages but do not take measures to protect the environment. The concept of sustainable tourism indicates that there should be a balance between environmental protection and economic benefits from tourism (UNWTO, 2018). According to Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2010 theoretical models show that when the costs of tourism are smaller than the benefits then community support is positive and vice versa. Community participation in environmental monitoring has also been seen by authors Tosun, 2006 and Aas, Ladkin, & Fletcher, 2005 as an integral part of policy creation and their implementation in practice. When the level of agreement is very high regarding community participation and their cooperation then we do not have what authors Bramwell & Lane, 2011 call as a participation deficit and all this supports the recommendation that sustainable tourism policies move from top-down models towards co-governance with local actors. In some academic works on tourism, quantitative methods have been used to measure the perceptions of actors such as individuals, businesses and institutions by analyzing the data through descriptive analysis and assessing the directions of attitudes at the consensus level, such as works by the authors Andereck et al., 2005, Ko & Stewart, 2002 and Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2010. By including all actors, we can increase the reliability and validity of the work by comparing the responses between actors and this chosen method is one of the most recommended for this type of study because it is not limited to a single work, this method has also been mentioned by the authors Hall, 2011; Bramwell & Lane, 2011. Adding that the use of hybrid questionnaires is also supported in academic literature by reducing the bias for fixed results. We also find these methods in the works of the authors Evans & Mathur, 2005, Wright, 2005; Nayak & Narayan, 2019, where they emphasize that non-influence and voluntary participation is very important.

3. Methodology

In this paper we will use quantitative analysis to derive our results. This analysis is used when we have primary or secondary quantitative data. Our data is primary data collected through questionnaires for each stakeholder group. We distributed the questionnaire to 200 citizens and received responses from only 149, 100 questionnaires were distributed to businesses and received 72 responses, 100 questionnaires were distributed to institutions and received 64 responses. Likert scales were used for all three questionnaires (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree) and questions included concepts such as: air/water pollution, waste, tourist construction, environmental policies, community engagement and the priority of sustainable tourism. The distribution of the questionnaires was done online through the Google Form platform and physically in order to ensure the widest possible geographical and demographic representation of the respondents. The questionnaire was distributed in the field mainly in areas with high tourist density, to include participants who did not have access to or did not use online platforms. The use of the hybrid method ensures greater diversity in the selection and reduces the risk of bias (Evans & Mathur, 2005). Participation was voluntary and participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time if they saw fit. The data were analyzed using SPSS v.26. To obtain an overview of the data, some descriptive statistics were generated for each question using the mean, standard deviation, Skewness and Kurtosis.

Mean (M):

$$\bar{Y} = \frac{\sum Y}{n}$$

Standart Deviation (SD):

$$\sigma = \sqrt{\frac{\sum (x_i - \mu)^2}{N}}$$

Skewness:

$$Skewness = \frac{\frac{\sum_{i=1}^n (x_i - M)^3}{n}}{SD^3}$$

Kurtosis:

$$Kurtosis = \frac{\frac{\sum_{i=1}^n (x_i - M)^4}{n}}{SD^4} - 3$$

During interpretation, the following information will be taken into account:

- ☐ M > 4, Strong agreement
- ☐ M < 2.5, Strong disagreement
- ☐ Negative skewness, tendency towards agreement
- ☐ High positive kurtosis, high consensus

4. Analysis of results

From the results of the descriptive analysis, we see that women are 76% of the responses, while the remaining part is male (24%). Regarding the educational level, the respondents are between bachelor and master studies (M = 2.73; SD = 0.881). The respondents asked are mainly focused on the fields of Education & Academy and Health & Social Services, while also including Economy, Finance & Business, Students & Unemployed and other categories such as Crafts, Technicians and Free Professions.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of perceptions on the impact of tourism on the environment

Statement	N	Mean	Dev. Stand.	Skewness	Kurtosis
I notice an increase in pollution during the tourist season	149	3.9	1.207	-0.74	-0.568
Tourists leave a lot of garbage in public areas	149	3.09	1.362	0.055	-1.122
The natural landscape has been damaged by tourist construction	149	4.17	1.27	-1.343	0.582
Local authorities protect the environment sufficiently	149	2.07	1.203	0.871	-0.204
The community should be more involved in environmental issues	149	4.57	0.84	-2.164	4.573

Source: Authors

The statement “The community should be more involved in environmental issues” ($M = 4.57$; $SD = 0.840$), reflecting that a higher commitment of the community is needed in the protection and management of the environment. The statements “The natural landscape is damaged by tourist constructions” ($M = 4.17$; $SD = 1.270$) and “I notice an increase in pollution during the tourist season” ($M = 3.90$; $SD = 1.207$) indicate that citizens perceive pressure on the environment during the summer season. The statement “Tourists leave a lot of waste in public areas” ($M = 3.09$; $SD = 1.362$) suggests that pollution is present, but not un concerning. The statement “Local authorities protect the environment sufficiently” ($M = 2.07$; $SD = 1.203$), indicates a high level of distrust of citizens towards the commitment of local institutions to environmental protection. The skewness and kurtosis values show that there is a high consensus among citizens and that everyone is in favor of interventions to protect the environment.

Analysis of businesses' perception of the environmental impacts of tourism

From the table below we see that businesses have a high awareness of taking measures towards environmental protection, noting pressure on it in terms of waste, deforestation, destruction of the coastline by construction, etc., but taking into account the statement "My business implements measures to protect the environment" ($M = 2.08$), this gives us a different picture because on the one hand they have awareness but on the other hand they do not take concrete actions.

Table 2: Descriptive

Statement	N	Mean	Dev. Stand.	Skewness	Kurtosis
Tourist activities negatively impact the environment	72	3.9	1.235	-0.917	-0.073
Tourist waste is a perennial problem in the season	72	3.21	1.404	-0.037	-1.218
New constructions are damaging the natural landscape	72	4.25	1.264	-1.478	0.932
My business implements measures to protect the environment	72	2.08	1.297	0.956	-0.172
Sustainable tourism should be a strategic priority	72	4.54	0.903	-2.017	3.535

Source: Authors

From the table above we see that businesses have a high awareness of the environmental impacts of tourism, with a high level of agreement that new constructions damage the natural landscape ($M = 4.25$) and that sustainable tourism should be a strategic priority ($M = 4.54$). It is also seen that tourism activities have a negative impact on the environment ($M = 3.90$) and that waste management is a permanent problem in the season ($M = 3.21$). The values of skewness and kurtosis indicate a strong business orientation towards environmental protection and that sustainable tourism should be a priority.

Analysis of institutional perceptions of the environmental impacts of tourism

The results of the analysis for the group of institutional representatives show a very high awareness of the environmental impacts of tourism and the importance of cooperation for environmental protection.

Table 3: Descriptive

Statement	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Tourism has led to increased air and water pollution	64	3.95	1.015	-0.563	-0.819
There is excessive accumulation of waste in tourist areas	64	3.83	1.189	-0.533	-1.25
The natural landscape has been degraded due to tourist developments	64	3.73	1.616	-0.811	-1.065
Environmental management policies are effective	64	2.41	1.191	0.549	-0.328
Collaboration with the community is essential for environmental protection	64	4.88	0.519	-4.383	19.305

Source: Authors

The statement "Collaboration with the community is necessary for environmental protection" ($M = 4.88$; $SD = 0.519$), reflects almost complete consensus among participants, while the high kurtosis value (19.305) indicates strong belief in community cooperation for environmental protection. In the following three statements "Tourism has led to increased air and water pollution" ($M = 3.95$; $SD = 1.015$), "There is excessive accumulation of waste in tourist areas" ($M = 3.83$; $SD = 1.189$), and "The natural landscape has been degraded due to tourist developments" ($M = 3.73$; $SD = 1.616$), we see that pressures on the environment come as a consequence of tourist developments. If we look at the statement for "Environmental management policies are effective" ($M = 2.41$; $SD = 1.191$) we see that there is distrust of these policies. The positive value of skewness for this statement indicates a tendency towards disagreement, which suggests that institutions perceive current policies as not being effective enough to address the environmental challenges caused by tourism.

Comparative analysis of perceptions on the impact of tourism on the natural environment

The table below compares perceptions between the three actors. As we can see from the table, there is a high consensus from citizens and institutions on community engagement, while businesses see tourism as a higher priority. Meanwhile, all three actors agree that tourism affects air and water pollution and the natural landscape. In terms of waste, institutions are reported to be more engaged than citizens and businesses. What we notice and it is obvious that none of the groups has confidence in current policies.

Table 4: Descriptive

Issue	Citizen	Business	Institutions	Comparison & Trend

Community engagement	4.57 ↑	–	4.88 ↑↑	Very high consensus in both groups where the question was asked. Institutions have almost maximum level.
Sustainable tourism as a priority	–	4.54 ↑	–	Businesses see it as a strategic necessity.
Increasing pollution during the tourist season / air & water pollution	3.90 ↑	3.90 ↑	3.95 ↑	High level of perception in all groups.
Tourist waste / littering	3.09 →	3.21 →	3.83 ↑	Institutions report a higher level of concern compared to citizens and businesses.
Natural landscape damaged by tourist developments	4.17 ↑	4.25 ↑	3.73 ↑	Citizens and businesses report greater concern than institutions.
Protection by authorities / effective management policies / implementation of measures by businesses	2.07 ↓	2.08 ↓	2.41 ↓	All three groups show a low level of trust in the effectiveness of current policies and measures.

Source: Authors

5. Conclusion

The study highlights the high pressure of tourist development on the coastal areas of the Durres district, giving us valuable information that all actors are responsible for these negative effects but have distrust of the interventions that can be carried out and of the policies for its protection. This fact shows that there is a weakness in the implementation of environmental rules and standards at the local level. From the paper we see that there is a full consensus on the need to involve actors in the development of sustainable tourism, seeing that citizens and institutions express the desire for cooperation while business sees it as a priority but without giving a real contribution to taking concrete measures. Comparative analysis between groups shows high agreement in the assessment of environmental pressure and a common distrust of the effectiveness of current measures, but the study does not evidence a deep conflict of interests between actors, but rather a gap in clarity, coordination and responsibility. From the studies we conclude that Durres needs: strengthening construction and waste management supervision mechanisms, introducing mandatory environmental standards for tourism businesses, creating sustainable community consultation platforms and transparency on the results of the policies undertaken. Although limited to a single area and a single point in time, the study contributes to the literature and practice by providing a clear multi-stakeholder measurement model, suitable for replication in other Albanian destinations.

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