



Perceptions of the local government and the residents regarding rural tourism development effects. Survey in the Suceava County – Romania

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ABSTRACT: *Rural tourism has received more and more attention because it can contribute to increase the living standard in some rural areas, stimulate local economy and reduce the urban-rural gaps. At the same time, the preference for this type of tourism is growing, but for the efficient use of the existing potential, the involvement of local authorities and residents is needed. This paper revealed the perceptions of human resources in local government institutions and of residents in Suceava County - Romania to identify the effects of tourism development on the administrative process, living standards and natural environment. The undertaken questionnaire-based research showed that the degree of tourism development positively influenced the level of improvement of the public affairs management process in the respective administrative-territorial unit, as well as the standard of living of the local community. Regarding the influence of tourism development on the environment, the recorded results showed that the intensification of the tourism phenomenon does not strongly threaten the local environment, but it is necessary to raise awareness of the environmental impact.*

Key words: rural tourism, development, questionnaire, City Halls, local communities.

Percepções do governo local e dos residentes sobre os efeitos do desenvolvimento do turismo rural: Levantamento no Condado de Suceava na Romênia

RESUMO: *O turismo rural tem recebido cada vez mais atenção porque pode contribuir para o aumento do padrão de vida em algumas áreas rurais, para o estímulo da economia local e para a redução das brechas urbano-rurais. Ao mesmo tempo, a preferência por este tipo de turismo é crescente, mas para o aproveitamento eficiente do potencial existente é necessário o envolvimento das autoridades locais e dos residentes. Este artigo tem como objetivo revelar as percepções dos recursos humanos em instituições governamentais locais e dos residentes no Condado de Suceava na Romênia para identificar os efeitos do desenvolvimento do turismo no processo administrativo, nos padrões de vida e no ambiente natural. A pesquisa baseada em questionários evidenciou que o grau de desenvolvimento do turismo influencia positivamente o nível de melhoria do processo de gestão da coisa pública na respectiva unidade administrativo-territorial, bem como os padrões de vida da comunidade local em questão. Em relação à influência do desenvolvimento do turismo no meio ambiente, os resultados registrados mostraram que a intensificação do fenômeno turístico não ameaça fortemente o meio ambiente local, mas é preciso conscientizar sobre o impacto ambiental.*

Palavras-chave: turismo rural, desenvolvimento, questionário, halls da cidade, comunidades locais, Condado de Suceava.

INTRODUCTION

In the twentieth century, rural areas suffered a decline because agriculture income decreased and there were no solutions for economic development. In some rural and peripheral regions, there is a decrease of population, a relatively elderly collectivity, poor employment opportunities and limited access to services (EUROSTAT, 2019). There are high socio-economic disparities between the urban areas and the rural ones, some being sub-populated. This problem is more serious in Eastern and Central Europe, as well as in Romania, where, compared to the EU average, a higher share of population lives in the rural areas. In rural areas

of the Eastern EU countries, unemployment rates tended to be higher than in the urban ones, and many rural populations in Eastern, Southern and Baltic Member States experienced the highest risk of poverty or social exclusion (EUROSTAT, 2018). In this context, rural tourism is a real alternative for sustainable economic development, contributing also to the development of other economic fields in the area. Agritourism entrepreneurship could represent a viable option for the progress of non-urban areas, as rural communities have a significant role worldwide, socio-economic changes and challenges occur and sustainable development gains more attention (DRĂGOI et al., 2017). For rural tourism to turn into a solution for rural

sustainable development, it is necessary that both the community members and the authorities are aware of the positive effects that occur and know how to manage this resource.

In Romania, the highest number of tourist and agrotourism pensions are reported in the Braşov, Harghita and Suceava Counties (NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF STATISTICS, 2020). Our study is focused on Suceava County, and here we chose the rural and semi-rural areas where tourism is the most intense, based on accommodation capacity, number of tourist arrivals and overnight stays statistics. The selected territorial units are: Vatra Dornei (1), Gura Humorului (2), Şcheia (3), Suceviţa (4) and Mănăstirea Humorului (5) (Figure 1).

In order to guide the entire scientific path, the empirical research developed in the frame of this paper has as overall aim to analyse the perceptions of human resources (HRs) in local government institutions and of local community members in order to identify the effects of tourism development on the administrative process, socio-economic environment and natural environment. During the contents of this research the aim was achieved.

In the developed scientific approach, we started from the following hypotheses:

H_1 : The degree of tourism development positively influences the level of improvement of the public affairs management process in the respective administrative-territorial unit.

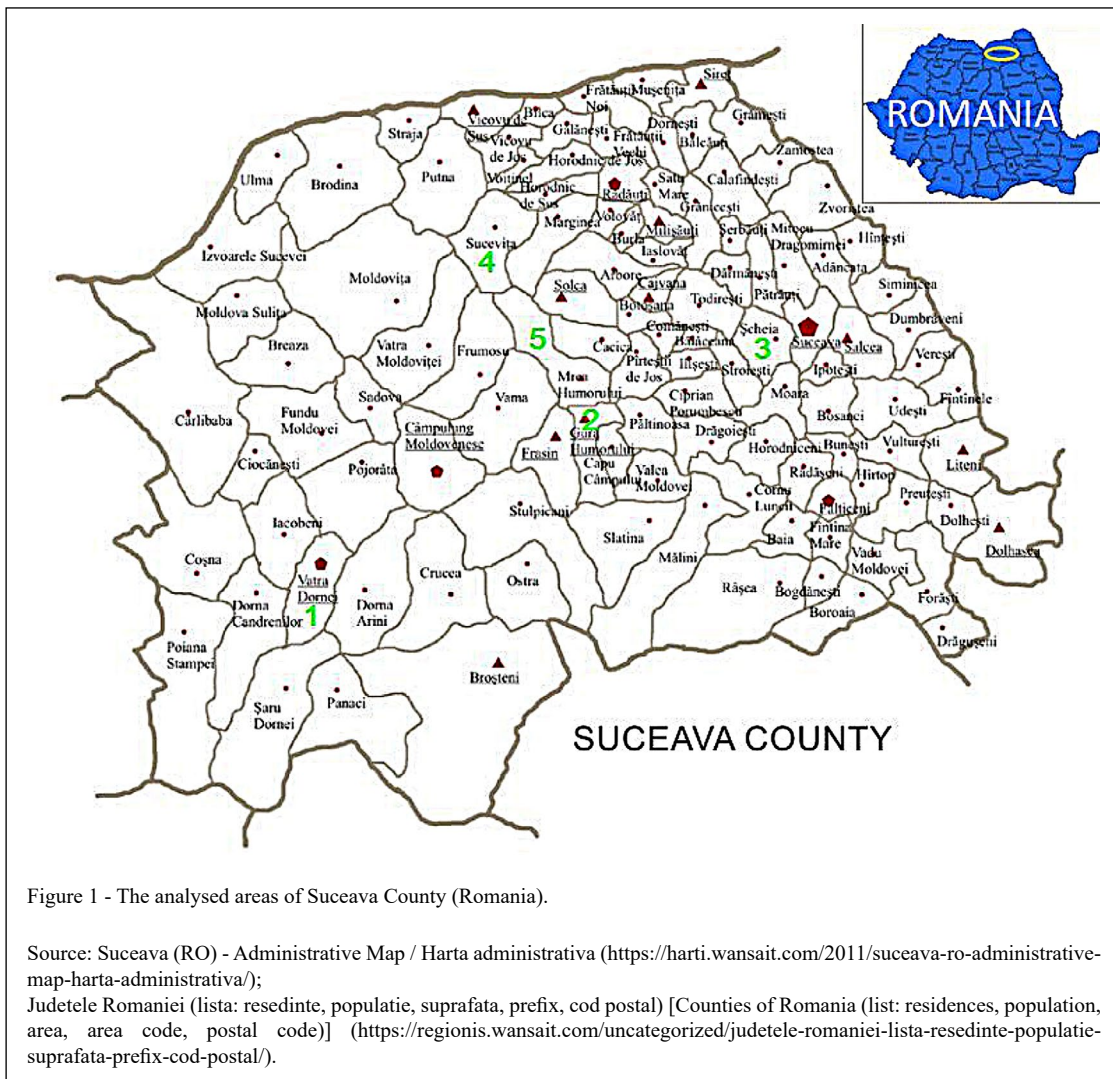


Figure 1 - The analysed areas of Suceava County (Romania).

Source: Suceava (RO) - Administrative Map / Harta administrativa (<https://harti.wansait.com/2011/suceava-ro-administrative-map-harta-administrativa/>);

Județele României (lista: reședințe, populație, suprafață, prefix, cod postal) [Counties of Romania (list: residences, population, area, area code, postal code)] (<https://regionis.wansait.com/uncategorized/județele-româniei-lista-reședințe-populație-suprafață-prefix-cod-postal/>).

H₂: There is a direct and positive relation between the degree of tourism development and the standard of living of the local community concerned.

H₃: A high degree of tourism development is associated with a high level of damage to the local environment.

Rural tourism is considered “the form of tourism and vacation, with rural villages as the destination, humanity without interference, ecological destruction, and experience of rural life”(YANG, 2018). It is one of the forms of tourism that has experienced an upward trend in many European countries, due to a growing demand. This happens because of an increasing preference for individualized holidays in a quieter and less polluted environment, far from cities’ agglomerations. The growth of demand for rural tourism is also stimulated by its relative cheapness, thus being affordable for low-income families and families with many children (FOTIADIS et al., 2019).

As rural tourism has direct and multiplying effects on other sectors and industries, it is considered by developing countries an accelerator to many of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (KHARTISHVILI et al., 2019). In the rural tourism industry, there are several sectors, such as hospitality, food and crafts, so this industry can bring significant benefits for local rural regions (FOTIADIS, 2011).

The positive implications of rural tourism development are more and more revealed and discussed and there are a lot of studies showing the benefits of rural tourism for the locals. There are a lot of studies showing the benefits of rural tourism for the locals. IORIO & CORSALE (2010) revealed that, in some areas, tourism has been accepted as a complementary activity, leading to economic diversification and creating positive links with agriculture. The economic recovery of regions is also based on tools like the development of rural tourism and its specific products, and tourism also contributes to the stabilization of country population, landscaping, mediating man’s return back to nature and respecting natural environment (RYGLOVÁ, 2007). Among other activities and sectors than agriculture, undoubtedly, rural tourism is considered a sustainable non-agricultural activity and uses in an appropriate way the significant potential of natural and cultural touristic resources in the Central and Eastern Europe (BADULESCU et al., 2015). According to SCUTARIU (2011) the share of tourism in Romania’s economy is not high, but there are areas, such as some rural ones, where tourism plays

an important role due to the positive results it can produce: higher incomes, lower unemployment, and development of some related activities.

In order to record an increase of employment and to boost the economy of the environment due to rural tourism, it is adequate that public administrations take improvement measures of the basic services in rural areas, such as education, health, and communication infrastructure, with positive effects on the quality of life of its population and the tourists (SÁNCHEZ SÁNCHEZ & SÁNCHEZ SÁNCHEZ, 2018). ALMEIDA (2017) found in his study that the people acknowledge the crucial role of the local authorities in developing a culture of cooperation between private and public entities. Funding for public infrastructure depends on the support from local governments for tourism (WILSON et al., 2001).

There are some studies that approach the subject of residents’ and stakeholders’ perception on rural tourism development in various areas. KUNASEKARAN & GILL (2012) state that most of the studies regarding the rural communities’ perception focus on economic and social impacts of the tourism on the local community. Both residents and qualified stakeholders have a very positive perception of tourism development and believe that tourism is very relevant to achieve local and regional competitiveness and can be a driver for the economic development of Boticas – Portugal (REMOALDO et al., 2017). In their study focused on a Serbian area, BLEŠIĆ et al. (2014) revealed that most respondents are favourable towards tourism and that residents know the benefits, as well as the problems caused by tourism in rural areas. The local residents also in Iran express positive attitudes to tourism development, but some of the residents are concerned about the environmental and social impacts of tourism (ABDOLLAHZADEH & SHARIFZADEH, 2014). In a study made in a Taiwan township, CHANG et al. (2018) revealed a ranking of local indigenous residents’ concerns about the future socio-cultural, economic, and environmental effects of tourism development. Our original contribution to the literature and the novelty comes from the fact that it reveals the perception of both the residents and the local government regarding the effects of rural tourism development.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to achieve the purpose of the research, as well as to confirm / invalidate the formulated hypotheses, we designed two types of questionnaires, addressed as follows:

Questionnaire one, addressed to human resources from local government institutions (City Halls) from Suceava County;

Questionnaire two, addressed to the residents of similar administrative–territorial units from Suceava County.

For each of these two categories of respondents we developed a questionnaire containing common questions that allow the tracking of comparable variables to be faced. In the elaboration of the questionnaires, we use structured closed questions, this type of questions being accepted more easily by the respondents and, at the same time, the coding of the answers and their processing being done without difficulty. Both questionnaires contain 22 questions, grouped into themes and corresponding variables (Table 1).

For the development of research, we used stratified sampling, as a random sampling method. The target population is represented by two categories: HRs from local public administration institutions (City Halls) and residents from the administrative–territorial units where the respective institutions have their headquarters.

The research methodology involves the application of two questionnaires, so it is necessary to build two samples.

Sample 1

The sampling for the construction of the sample made up of HRs from local government institutions in Suceava County takes place by selecting the City Halls from the administrative–territorial units where the most intense tourist activity is registered. In the construction of this sample, the criterion according to which we performed the stratification is ‘accommodation capacity, number of tourist arrivals and, respectively, overnight stays’. The sampling framework is represented by the list of City Halls in Suceava County, which includes 114 such public institutions: 5 Municipal City Halls, 11 City Halls and 98 Commune City Halls. Next, we select five City Halls, extracting them from the list: Vatra Dornei Municipal City Hall, Gura–Humorului City Hall, Șcheia Commune City Hall, Sucevița Commune City Hall, Mănăstirea Humorului Commune City Hall. In constructing this first sample, we decided to address the questionnaires to HRs from the City Halls listed

Table 1 - Thematic grouping and variables of the questions in Questionnaires one and two.

Crt. No.	Thematics	Question	Variables
1.	Tourism development and local public administration	Q1 – Q7	The interest of City Hall institution for the development of tourism The involvement of human resources in the City Hall institution in the development of tourism The degree of tourism development The level of improvement of the public affairs management process The influence of tourism development on the process of managing public affairs The influence of tourism development on local autonomy The influence of tourism development on infrastructure
2.	Tourism development and socio-economic environment	Q8– Q13	The living standards of the local community The increase of the jobs number through the development of tourism The increase of the living standard in the community through the development of tourism The limitation of the local population exodus through the development of tourism The increase of the cost of living in the locality through the development of tourism The influence of tourism on the demand for local products
3.	Tourism development and environment	Q14 – Q16	The level of damage to the local environment The impact of tourism development on the environment The influence of tourism development on noise pollution
4.	Identification data	Q17 – Q22	Staff category Type of local public institution Age Gender Education level The locality of the local public institution Age Gender Residential environment Education level Occupation Residential locality

Source: own study results.

above, which at the time of the survey hold both public positions (public dignity, management and execution) and contractual positions (management and execution).

Sample 2

In order to ensure the comparability of the data, we included in the second sample residents from the administrative–territorial units where the City Halls constituting the first sample are located. In the construction of this second sample, the criterion according to which we realize the stratification is ‘the locality where the respondent has his domicile or residence’: Vatra Dornei Municipality, Gura–Humorului City and the Șcheia, Sucevița, Mănăstirea Humorului Communes.

Within each locality we proceed to the random selection of residents, the questionnaires being applied online in proportion to the size of the localities by population. These five administrative–territorial units included in the second sample brought together 52 751 residents, the highest weights in total residents being represented by Vatra Dornei Municipality and Gura–Humorului City (Table 2).

The data collection was carried out between August 30 and September 24, 2021, for the research of both categories of respondents. After applying the questionnaires, the samples brought together 116 and 388 valid instruments, in total participating in the application of the research a same number of HRs and residents, respectively (Table 2).

The processing of the survey results is performed on two components: a descriptive analysis regarding the perceptions of the two categories of respondents and a correlation analysis between the research variables using the SPSS software.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Descriptive analysis of human resources' and residents' perceptions

Tourism development and local government

From the data recorded, it is observed that to the question ‘Is the City Hall Institution interested or not in the development of tourism in the locality?’, all HRs respondents stated that the interest of the institution for tourism development is very high (69.83%) and quite high (30.17%). By contrast with these opinions, among the residents there is a share of almost 1/3 (30.93%) for which the City Hall is only interested to a certain extent. In addition, almost ¼ (21.13%) of the locals states about the City Hall that they are almost never or not at all interested in the development of tourism in the locality. The results of this question at the level of Sample one were predictable, as the human resources of the local public administration responded from the position of employees, so that the answers provided contain a dose of subjectivism. Conversely, most residents preferred a neutral opinion, results that somewhat contradict the widespread tendency of

Table 2 - Composition of samples one and two.

City Halls Sample 1/ administrative-territorial units Sample 2	-----Sample one-----				-----Sample two-----			
	----Sampling basis----		-----Sample-----		----Sampling basis----		-----Sample-----	
	HRs total no.	%	Respondents no.	%	Residents total no.	%	Respondents no.	%
Vatra Dornei Municipality	230	49.46	57	49.14	16 786	31.82	123	31.70
Gura-Humorului City	141	30.32	36	31.03	17 169	32.55	125	32.22
Șcheia Commune	43	9.25	10	6.62	11 796	22.36	86	22.16
Sucevița Commune	24	5.16	6	5.17	3 235	6.13	26	6.70
Mănăstirea Humorului Commune	27	5.81	7	6.04	3 765	7.14	28	7.22
Total	465	100	116	100	52 751	100	388	100

Source: own elaboration based on the data from the Human Resources Department in the City Halls; the Statistical Yearbook of Suceava County, Suceava County Directorate of Statistics, National Institute of Statistics Bucharest, 2019, pp. 60, 68, 71, 72.

dissatisfaction with employees of a public institution. The explanation may lie in the fact that the residents preferred to have a predominantly neutral opinion on issues that do not necessarily depend on them and on which they have no way to intervene.

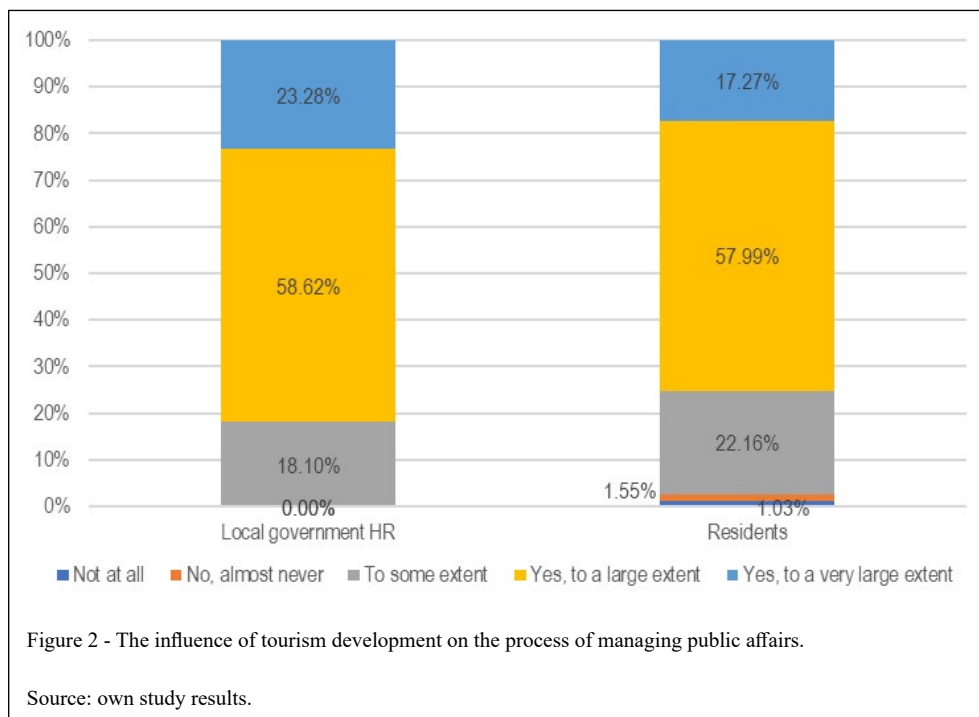
Regarding the variable involvement of human resources in the City Hall in the development of tourism, the results recorded surprised us somewhat. If only 9.48% of the surveyed workers say that they are very involved, the percentage of residents who appreciate the same thing is much higher (32.99%). As this question presupposes a subjective position, it would have been expected that a greater share of HRs would state that their involvement is very high. However, the share of 'high' and 'very high' responses is significantly higher in the case of HRs. These first two questions showed that, while in the case of residents, opinions are somewhat balanced, HRs tend to have predominantly positive opinions.

Perceptions expressed by respondents to the question 'Does the development of tourism influence or not the process of managing public affairs at the level of the local community?' they are somewhat concordant. From the collected data it is observed that over $\frac{3}{4}$ of the respondents of both categories - HRs and residents - ($81.9\% = 58.62\%$

+ 23.28% / 75.26% = 57.99% + 17.27%) think that tourism influences in a quite large and very large extent local public management. This result highlighted the link between the development of tourism and the improvement of the public affairs management process with an implicit effect on the development of the local community (Figure 2).

The analysis of the data reveals that for the variable influence of tourism development on local autonomy, the opinions expressed by HRs are similar to those of locals, being slightly better in the case of HRs. A percentage of 61.2% of the surveyed HRs and 57.8% of the residents believed that the development of tourism influences to a large and very large extent the local autonomy. On the background of the results recorded at the previous question, corroborated with the data collected for this variable, it can be stated that, according to the perceptions of both categories of respondents, tourism makes its mark on administrative activity, its development attracting the locality development. A developed locality depends on its own resources and decisions, without any other intervention, a situation that favours the functioning of local autonomy.

To the question 'Do you consider that the infrastructure (roads, sanitation, water supply, public



transport) is better as a result of the development of tourism in the locality?', the majority of respondents in both categories - HRs (68.96% = 43.10% + 25.86%) and residents (54.38% = 34.28% + 20.10%) - support this assertion. An intense tourist activity entails the improvement of the infrastructure in order to be able to respond to this need, and conversely, the lack of infrastructure or a deficient infrastructure constitutes a barrier in the development of tourism.

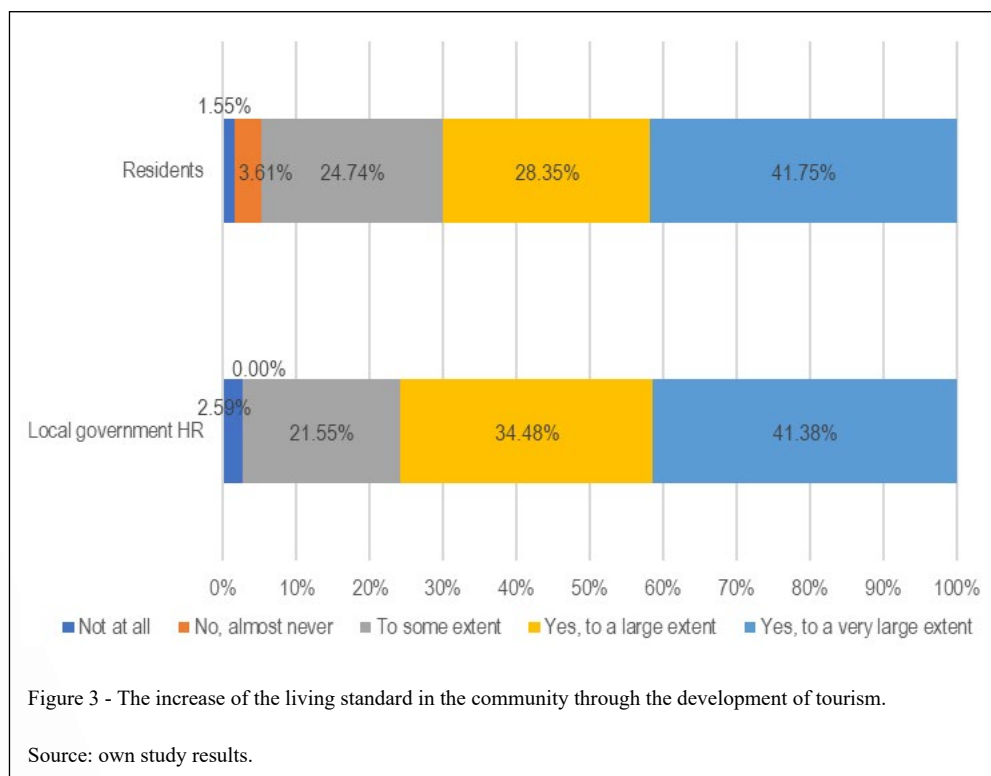
Tourism development and socio-economic environment

The perceptions of HRs in local public institutions and residents about the variable increase of the jobs number through the development of tourism are expressed as percentages. From the data collected it results that most respondents in both categories (especially the HRs) appreciate in a to a very large extent (50% / 36.86%) and to a large extent (29.31% / 30.93%) that a benefit of tourism development is the creation of new jobs. Tourism is a labour-intensive industry, so that the proper development and management of this sector will be able to increase the number of jobs in the administrative-territorial units concerned. This circumstance will

offer the possibility to those interested to enter the labor market, contributing to the decrease of the unemployment rate.

The answers received to the question 'Do you think that the development of tourism determines the increase of the living standard in the community?' demonstrated that, in this respect as well, both the majority of HRs and most of the residents have positive opinions (yes, to a very large extent - 41.38% / 41.75%; yes, to a large extent - 34.48% / 28.35%). The standard of living and implicitly the quality of life will increase in the administrative-territorial units in which the emphasis is on the tourism sector, its development determining the growth of the local economy and generating income in the area (Figure 3).

The collected data regarding the effect of the development of the tourism sector on the exodus of members of the local community demonstrates rather a neutral position (neither small nor large) from the majority of respondents belonging to both categories - HRs and locals (44.83% / 31.19%). Over 40% of the respondents of both categories consider that tourism contributes to a large and very large extent to stopping the exodus of the population. However, it can be seen that almost $\frac{1}{4}$ (23.71%) of residents



say that the exodus of the local population is limited to a small and very small extent by the development of the tourism industry. A proper management and development of this sector can mobilize economic resources in the areas concerned and thus can provide employment opportunities, in particular by stopping the exodus of young people. This result is surprising, in the context in which most (71.91%) resident respondents are under 30 years old, a situation that attests the fact that they are not aware of the tourism potential and the benefits that tourism development can bring in the area.

According to the data registered to the question 'Does the development of tourism contribute to the increase of the cost of living in the locality (higher prices for products, services and properties)?', the opinions of both categories of respondents seem to be somewhat concordant again. Both the majority of HRs in local public institutions (57.76%) and the majority of the local population (43.30%) consider to a large and very large extent that the cost of living increases with the development of tourism in the area. The more and more intense development of the tourist activity can have as a negative effect the increase of the cost of living for the residents. This situation cannot be avoided, as it is manifested by the increase in prices due to the increase in demand.

As expected, the study of respondents' perceptions about the influence of tourism on the demand for local products shows that most of both the HRs and the residents surveyed perceived to a large and very large extent (72.41% / 74.74%) this effect. HRs in local public institutions should include in the community development objectives the creation of traditional unique products characteristic of the areas concerned. These local products will be able to be capitalized as a result of the development of the tourism sector in the respective administrative-territorial units.

Tourism development and environment

To the question 'Does the development of tourism in your locality have a negative impact on the environment (waste, etc.)?', most of the answers of HRs (63.79% - to some extent) denote a neutral attitude, of non-involvement. This result surprises us, as local public administration authorities must be the first to apply measures to protect the environment and manage such negative effects of the tourism phenomenon. As tourism is achieved through and in dependence on the environment, the exaggerated intensification of tourist activity / mass tourism can endanger this environment with an effect on the

quality of life of the local community members. However, it seems that this is not the case because, from the data collected, it is observed that most of the residents (43.04%) claim that the environment is not affected at all or almost never by the development of tourism. With all these, it is necessary to comply with the environmental protection rules on waste and pollution (Figure 4).

From the study of the perception expressed by the respondents regarding the influence of tourism development on noise pollution, it results that the largest share of HRs in local public institutions (43.97%) and residents (33.76%) states that the intensification of tourism activity has only to some extent effect on the locality noise. In addition, more than 1/3 of the HRs surveyed do not perceive this influence (37.07%), an opinion that is shared by almost half (47.68%) of residents. However, it should be noted that one of the inconveniences caused by the intensification of tourist activity may be the acoustic discomfort, which means that measures are needed to reduce this type of pollution.

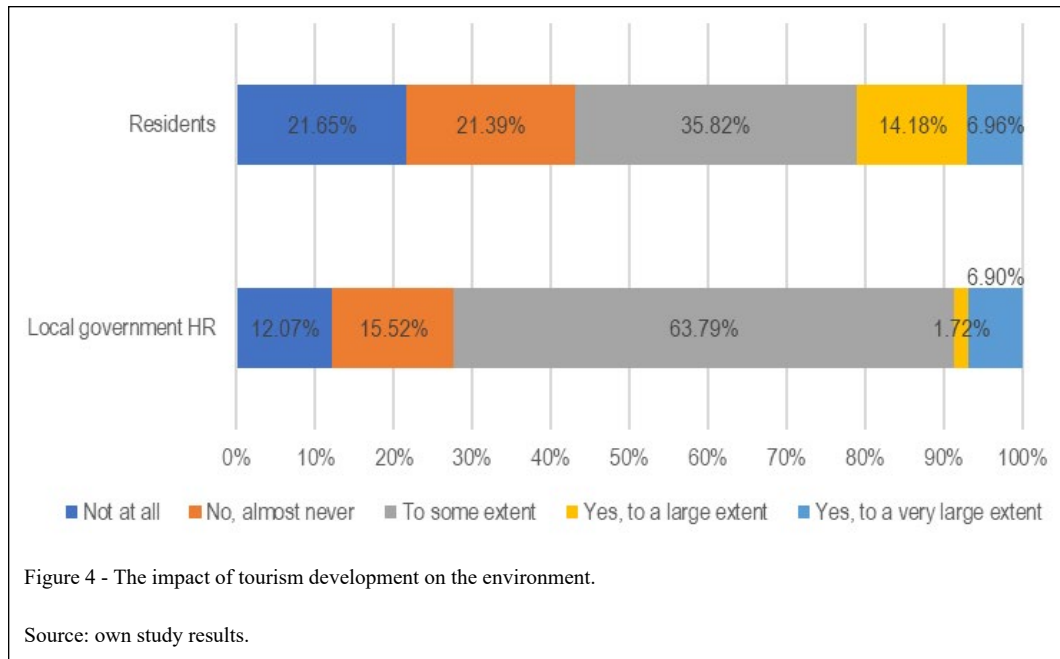
B. Correlational analysis between the variables of the research

1. The correlation between the degree of tourism development and the level of improvement of the management process of local public affairs

In order to verify H_1 , we correlated the items referring to the two variables *the degree of tourism development* and *the level of improvement of the management process of local public affairs*, according to the results registered at the level of the two samples.

The effect of *the degree of tourism development* on *the level of improvement of the local public affairs management process* is shown by recording a positive correlation between these two variables (at the level of Sample one: $r=0.689$, $P < 0.01$; at the level of Sample two: $r=0.512$, $P < 0.01$), which means that human resources and residents who say that the degree of development of tourism is high tend also to appreciate that the level of improvement of the management process of public affairs is high and vice versa (Table 3).

As r is an expression of the effect size, by reference to Cohen's criteria (KOTRLIK & WILLIAMS, 2003), it results that the relation between these two variables is strong. The coefficients of determination are $R^2=0.47$ / $R^2=0.26$, which means that 47%, respectively 26% of the variation of the variable *the degree of tourism development* explains the variation of the variable *level of improvement of the management process of local public affairs*.



Testing the significance of correlation coefficients is performed using the t test.

We formulated the null and alternative hypothesis as follows:

H_0 : There is no correlation between the degree of tourism development and the level of improvement of the management process of local public affairs.

H_1 : There is a correlation between the degree of tourism development and the level of improvement of the management process of local public affairs.

$H_0: r=0$ and $H_1: r \neq 0$

The values of the t test are: at the level of Sample one: $t_{calc}=10.15$ and at the level of Sample two: $t_{calc}=11.71$.

In table t Student, for $116-2 = 114$ degrees of freedom and a significance level $\alpha = 0.01$, $t = 2,326$. Since $t_{calc}=10.15 > t_{tab}=2.326$ / $t_{calc}=11.71 > t_{tab}=2.326$, we rejected the null hypothesis and concluded, with a risk of 1%, that the value of the correlation coefficient is not equal to 0, respectively that between the correlated variables there is a significant link, so the correlation coefficient is significant. The value of Sig. is equal to 0.000 and is less than 0.01, which means that there is a significant correlation between the two variables.

The graphical representations showed an ascending direction of the point cloud, a situation that

suggests the tendency to correlate the degree of tourism development with the level of improvement of the management process of local public affairs (Figure 5).

2. The correlation between the degree of tourism development and the standard of living of the local community

In order to validate / invalidate H_2 , we proceeded to correlate the items related to the two variables *the degree of tourism development* and *the standard of living of the local community*, according to the answers received from both human resources and locals.

The analysis of r Pearson correlation coefficients values and the corresponding Sig. values showed that the variable *the degree of tourism development* correlates directly positively with the variable *the standard of living of the local community* (at the level of Sample one: $r=0.880$, $P < 0.01$; at the level of Sample two: $r=0.774$, $P < 0.01$). It turns out that human resources and residents who believe that the degree of tourism development is high tend to declare that the standard of living of the local community is also high and vice versa (Table 4).

Compared to the interpretation system proposed by Cohen (KOTRLIK & WILLIAMS, 2003), the relation between the variables considered is strong.

Table 3 - The values of the r Pearson correlation coefficients and the values of Sig. corresponding to the correlation between the degree of tourism development and the level of improvement of the management process of local public affairs.

-----Correlations-----					
		-----HRs Sample-----		-----Residents Sample-----	
		Development tourism degree	Improvement level of public affairs management process	Development tourism degree	Improvement level of public affairs management process
Development tourism degree	Pearson Correlation	1	0.689**	1	0.512**
	Sig. (1-tailed)		0.000		0.000
	N	116	116	388	388
Improvement level of public affairs management process	Pearson Correlation	0.689**	1	0.512**	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0.000		0.000	
	N	116	116	388	388

**Correlation is significant at the P < 0.01 level (1-tailed).
Source: own processing with SPSS.

The coefficients of determination are $R^2=0.77/ R^2=0.59$, which means that the two variables have in common 77%/59% of the variation that characterizes them.

We formulated the null hypothesis and the alternative hypothesis as follows:

H_0 : There is no correlation between the degree of tourism development and the standard of living of the local community.

H_1 : There is a correlation between the degree of tourism development and the standard of living of the local community.

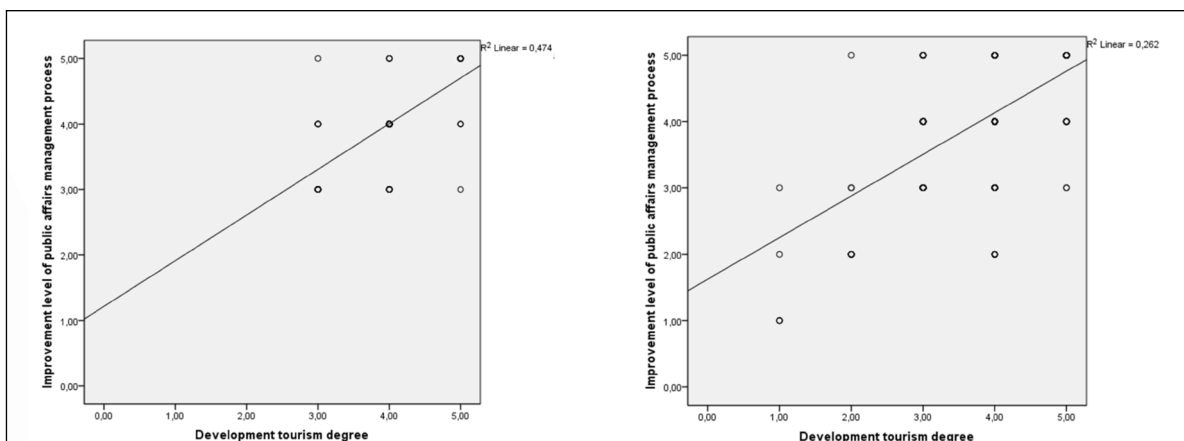


Figure 5 - Graphic representations of the correlation between the degree of tourism development and the level of improvement of the management process of local public affairs.

Source: own processing with SPSS.

Table 4 - The values of the r Pearson correlation coefficients and the values of Sig. corresponding to the correlation between the degree of tourism development and the standard of living of the local community.

-----Correlations-----					
		-----HRs Sample-----		-----Residents Sample-----	
		Development tourism degree	Living standard	Development tourism degree	Living standard
Development tourism degree	Pearson Correlation	1	0.880**	1	0.774**
	Sig. (1-tailed)		0.000		0.000
	N	116	116	388	388
Living standard	Pearson Correlation	0.880**	1	0.774**	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0.000		0.000	
	N	116	116	388	388

**Correlation is significant at the $P < 0.01$ level (1-tailed).

Source: own processing with SPSS

$H_0: r=0$ and $H_1: r \neq 0$

The values of the t test are: at the level of Sample 1: $t_{calc}=19.78$ and at the level of Sample two: $t_{calc}=24.01$.

Since $t_{calc}=19.78 > t_{tab}=2.326$ / $t_{calc}=24.01 > t_{tab}=2.326$, we rejected the null hypothesis and concluded, with a risk of 1%, that the value of the correlation coefficient is not equal to 0, respectively that between the correlated variables there is a significant link, so the correlation coefficient is significant. The value of Sig. is equal to 0.000 and is less than 0.01, which means that there is a significant correlation between the two variables.

According to the graphic expressions, the cloud of points is ascending, a situation that suggested that the relation between the degree of tourism development and the standard of living of the local community is positive (Figure 6).

3. The correlation between the degree of tourism development and the level of environmental damage

H_3 is verified by correlating the items related to the two variables *the degree of tourism development* and *the level of environmental damage* in accordance with the perceptions expressed by both human resources respondents and resident respondents.

Thus, continuing the correlation analysis, it is reported that there is a positive link between these two variables (at the level of Sample one: $r=0.220$, $P=0.009$; at the level of Sample two:

$r=0.162$, $P=0.001$). The surveyed human resources and residents who appreciate that the degree of tourism development is high tend to claim that the level of damage to the environment is high and vice versa (Table 5).

According to Cohen's proposed grid (KOTRLIK & WILLIAMS, 2003), the relation between these two variables is weak. Since the coefficients of determination are $R^2=0.04$ / $R^2=0.02$, it means that only 4%/2% of the variation of the variable *the degree of tourism development* explains the variation of the variable *level of environmental damage*.

The null and alternative hypotheses are:

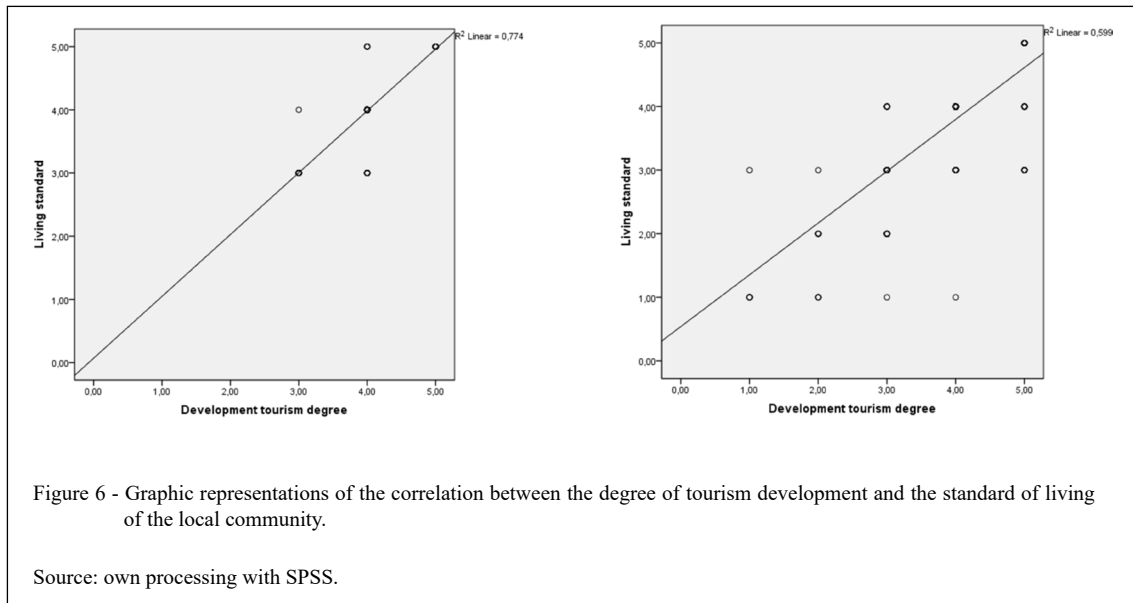
H_0 : There is no correlation between the degree of tourism development and the level of environmental damage

H_1 : There is a correlation between the degree of tourism development and the level of environmental damage

$H_0: r=0$ and $H_1: r \neq 0$

The values of the t test are: at the level of Sample one: $t_{calc}=25.70$ and at the level of Sample two: $t_{calc}=63.36$.

Comparing t_{calc} with t_{tab} , we observed that $t_{calc}=25.70 > t_{tab}=2.326$ / $t_{calc}=63.36 > t_{tab}=2.326$ and therefore we rejected the null hypothesis, so there is a significant relation between the correlated variables. The values of Sig., equal to 0.009/0.001, show a significant correlation coefficient, so there



are less than 1% chances of making a mistake if we say that there is a significant correlation between the two variables.

Visualizing the graph of the correlation between the degree of tourism development and the level of environmental damage suggested

the existence of the relation between these two variables (Figure 7).

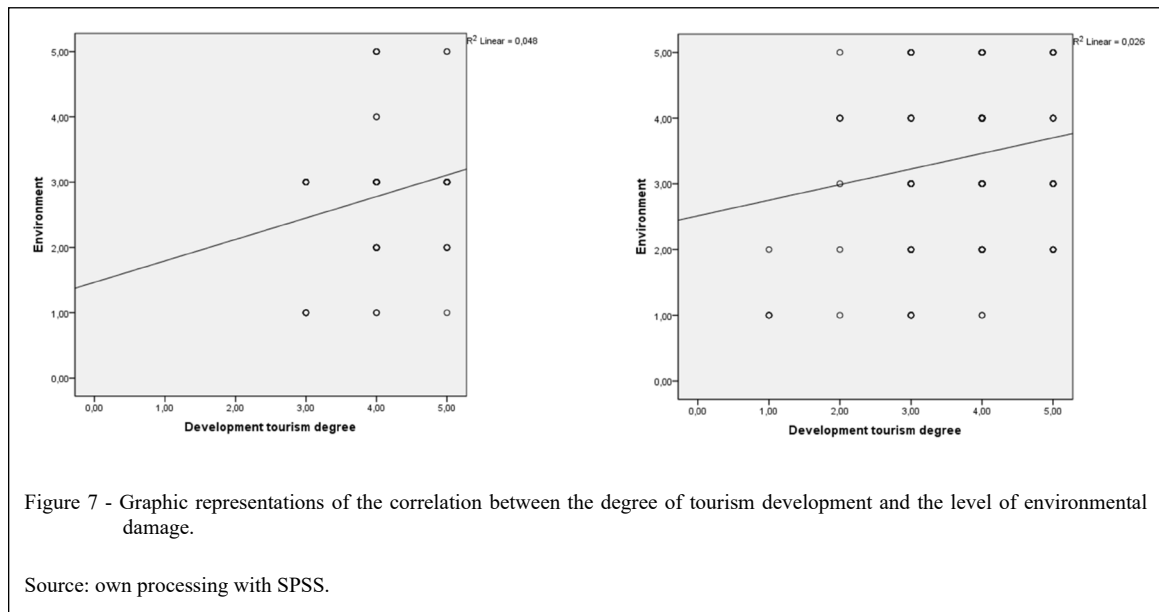
Our findings are also supported by other studies in the field. A study made in North-Eastern Portugal revealed that residents' perceptions on tourism impacts are positive (LOPES et al, 2019).

Table 5 - The values of the r Pearson correlation coefficients and the values of Sig. corresponding to the correlation between the degree of tourism development and the level of environmental damage.

-----Correlations-----					
		-----HRs Sample-----		-----Residents Sample-----	
		Development tourism degree	Environment	Development tourism degree	Environment
Development tourism degree	Pearson Correlation	1	0.220**	1	0.162**
	Sig. (1-tailed)		0.009		0.001
	N	116	116	388	388
Environment	Pearson Correlation	0.220**	1	0.162**	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0.009		0.001	
	N	116	116	388	388

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

Source: own processing with SPSS.



MURESAN et al. (2016) showed that in the North-West Region of Romania tourism development is perceived positively by rural residents, they being aware of the benefits, such as employment opportunity and well-being increases. Community-Based Tourism is perceived as a tool to contribute to the socio-economic sustainability of rural regions in Kenya, and as a contributor in creating jobs, development opportunities and a market for local goods and services, in improving quality of life (JUMA & KHADEMI-VIDRA, 2019).

CONCLUSION

In the context of urban-rural socio-economic disparities and of poor solutions for economic development in rural areas, rural tourism can be a real alternative for its positive effects on locals. In order to capitalize the growing preference for rural tourism and to create strategies for tourism development, firstly we must evaluate the perceptions and opinions of the local government HRs and residents, as they will be directly implied in the elaboration and implementation of those strategies.

In the light of the approach made in the previous pages, we can formulate, from a retrospective direction, the conclusion according to which the development of the tourist phenomenon has important administrative, economic and environmental implications. The results of the

questionnaire-based survey were presented in accordance with the proposed purpose, as well as with the hypotheses launched for validation, concentrating the two perspectives - of the HRs from the local public institutions, and of the locals from the administrative-territorial units concerned.

We saw that both HRs and locals perceived the interest and involvement of the City Hall for tourism development, but also the fact that this development influences local autonomy and infrastructure. The perceptions of HRs and residents regarding the influence of tourism development on the process of managing public affairs are consonant, over $\frac{3}{4}$ of the respondents of both categories stating that tourism influences to a large and very large extent the local public management. From the analysis of the collected data, we concluded that tourism makes its mark on the activity of local public administration, its development entailing the mobilization of local authorities in the process of managing community affairs in order to develop the locality.

Most respondents in both categories are aware that the development of tourism contributes to job creation, to the increase of the living standard and of the demand for local products, but to some extent also to the limitation of the exodus of local people and to the increase of the cost of living. Interpretation of the responses in relation to the variable increase of the living standard in the community through the development of tourism has shown that, in this

regard as well, both most HRs and most residents have positive opinions. In the case of administrative-territorial units where tourism is stimulated and where communities are based on the tourism sector, its development will generate income in the area with an effect on increasing the living standard of local community members.

Regarding the variable impact of tourism development on the environment, we reported that the perceptions expressed by the two categories of respondents are inconsistent. Most HRs have shown a neutral attitude, considering that the environment is threatened to some extent by the intensification of the tourism phenomenon. Noise pollution is slightly perceptible by both categories of respondents. As HRs in local public institutions are the ones who should advocate for environmentally friendly tourism and take public decisions and measures accordingly, their views have been unexpected. Conversely, the interpretation of residents' responses has shown that most respondents in this category are not aware of the negative effects induced by overdevelopment of tourism on the natural environment in the area, claiming that it is not affected at all or almost never.

As a result of the descriptive and correlation analyzes performed, based on the data recorded at the level of the two samples, the three hypotheses from which we started in the scientific approach were validated. The research made has shown that the variable *degree of tourism development* correlates directly positively with the variables *the level of improvement in the management process of local public affairs*, *the standard of living of the local community* and *the level of environmental damage*. The r Pearson correlation coefficients and the corresponding significance thresholds have recorded the following values: at the level of Sample one: $r=0.689$, $P < 0.01$; $r=0.880$, $P < 0.01$; $r=0.220$, $P=0.009$; at the level of Sample two: $r=0.512$, $P < 0.01$; $r=0.774$, $P < 0.01$; $r=0.162$, $P=0.001$. On this basis, we concluded that as the degree of tourism development tends to increase, so does the level of improvement in the management process of local public affairs, the standard of living of local community members, and the level of damage to the environment. The recorded results showed that if the correlations between *the degree of tourism development* and *the level of improvement of the management process of local public affairs*, respectively *the standard of living of local community members* are strong, the link with *the level of environmental damage* in the locality is weak. The influence of tourism development does not seem to be perceived by the two categories of respondents, in which sense programs are needed to clarify and raise awareness of the environmental impact.

Overall, as a result of our own empirical investigations on the opinions of the two categories of respondents, we managed to elucidate the perceptions regarding the effects of tourism development on the management process of public affairs, on the living standard of the local community and on the environment. Once the local government HRs and the residents are aware of the positive effects of the tourism activity intensification, they will be stimulated and motivated to get involved in the tourism development. These kinds of studies are important for the decision-makers because knowing the perceptions they could adequately adapt their strategies. In the case the community is not aware of the benefits, perhaps it should be stimulated more the development of tourism. Thus, future strategies could be adapted for future sustainable development and to prevent possible negative effects.

Our analysis on local government and residents' perceptions regarding tourism development effects has some limitations, mainly due to difficulties in data collection. This was also due to the pandemic situation that made difficult the access to the respondents. The questionnaire included more questions, but due to the space limits, we included in this paper only the most important ones, which responded to the purpose defined. A limitation of our research may be the fact that our analysis focused only on the Suceava County in Romania, and future studies could include regions from other parts of Europe. Future research directions could reveal perceptions regarding the development of tourism in other similar areas in Romania or Europe.

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DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare there is no conflict of interest.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors have contributed equally to the design and writing of the manuscript. All authors have critically revised the manuscript and approved the final version.

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