

Open Access

Research Article

The Local Community Perception of Rural Tourism Impact (Case of Valbona)

Bardhyl CEKU^{1*}, Semiha LOCA², Forcim KOLA³

¹Agriculture University of Tirana, bardhi.cku@gmail.com

²Marin Barleti University, semi_loca@yahoo.com

³Metropolitan Tirana University, forcimkola@gmail.com

Abstract

It is generally accepted that there is a positive impact of tourism referring to the increase in jobs, a higher quality of life, and an increase in the wealth of an area. Tourism also has the advantage of rebuilding and restoring historic sites and encouraging the revitalization of cultures in impacted areas. The purpose of this research study is to explore if there can be found any impact of tourism and if so, what are they and in what ways can they affect a small rural area as a tourism destination and the specific effect on the residents, taking Valbona destination as an example. Primary data gathered from a survey will be used to show a descriptive panorama of how tourism is perceived in that area. The positive effects of tourism seem to outweigh the negative ones and it is evident that tourism has a positive impact on destinations in rural areas and not only on coastal areas of Albania.

Keywords: Tourism, rural tourism, economic impact, social and environmental effects.

JEL Codes: Z32, M1, M31

Introduction

Due to the growth performance, Albania developed from one of the poorest nations in Europe to a middle-income country, with poverty declining by half during that period. However, Albania's growth model needs to shift from consumption-fuelled to investment and export-led growth economy. The new model will need to help those people with less access to economic opportunities to contribute to, and benefit from, the economic growth.

* *Corresponding Author*

Accepted for publication December 2021

Open Access

The Albanian government has identified tourism as a key economic sector, touting its potential to spur development of the entire country. Located in the Mediterranean region, Albania could well represent Europe's last tourism "secret".

Whereas tourism has been variably heralded and cursed as a solution to development, sustainable tourism, notably with a pro-poor approach, has recently begun to celebrate successes based on local participation and resources, equitable partnerships, and the maintenance of cultural and environmental integrity of a location.

The sustainable tourism for development is suggested as an entrepreneurial, locally rooted, and locally defined solution, contributing to poverty alleviation through economic and social benefits, similar to any social business.

The tourism industry is seen as a promising sector for developing countries. Evidence of successful growth through tourism in developing countries is usually given by increased numbers of international arrivals and gross tourist expenditures in hard currencies. International tourism arrivals to developing countries have increased by 6.5% annually since 1988, a higher rate than average world growth of arrivals. Income through international visitors is representing a large component of international exports in the Least Developed Countries (Denman et al. 2004, WTO 2002a).

The valley of Valbona (*Tropoja District*) in Kukesi Region of Albania is such an area where tourism can ensure engagement of huge portion of people in employment creating the opportunity to engage local community in this sector.

Literature Review

Tourism contributes to a country's economy development and has become the development sector of choice to rural areas for many developing countries (Reid, 2003). Now in many such countries it is believed that tourism can aid to progress their economy because this industry does not require much capital investment and tourism products can be easily created locally.

Tourism can increase contribution to economic development by *poverty alleviation*, *economic development* and *job creation* if it could be boosted in a proper way (Mahony & Zyl, 2002).

Many rural communities have turned to tourism as a way to differentiate their economic aspect (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004; Busby & Rendle, 2000; Mair, 2006). Rogerson (2000) express tourism development strategies as an anchor to local economic development. Rural communities seek to switch themselves from an economy of commodity production to a site of consumption in launching tourism industry (Gill & Reed, 1997).

Open Access

Eraqi (2007) researches on local communities' attitudes towards impacts of tourism development. This works concludes positive attitudes but some negative impacts of tourism on local communities regarding the environment.

Ramseook-Munhurrun and Naidoo (2011) search for attitude toward perceived benefit of tourism by local communities. Study reveals economic, social and cultural aspects have positive impact on tourism development and environment aspect has negative impacts.

Objectives of the study.

The main objective of this study is to assess the impact of tourism development on smaller local community, focusing on Valbona, in Tropoja area in Albania as it is perceived by locals living there.

Some of the specific objectives of the study were:

- ✓ to measure the impact of tourism development on the standard of living of the local community.
- ✓ to measure the impact of tourism development on the income level of the local community.
- ✓ to measure the benefits of tourism development to the local community.

Research methodology

For the purpose of this study it has been used Cluster Sampling (*sometimes known as one-stage cluster sampling*) grouping the research data by geographical area (*Valbona valley*). After clustering geographically then it was selected just the cluster of Valbona, and the sample into this cluster was approached as random sampling.

A total of 146 random people were asked using online survey. This sample was selected from the pool of people living and working in the Valbona area of Tropoja, Region of Kukesi in Albania.

As a data gathering technique, it was used online survey, applying a questionnaire to collect the required data. Questionnaires are usually not particularly good for exploratory or other research that requires large numbers of open-ended questions (*Saunders M., Lewis P., and Thornhill A, 2016*) but in our research most of the questions were closed ones. They work best with standardised questions that you can be confident will be interpreted the same way by all respondents (*Robson 2011*). Questionnaires therefore tend to be used for descriptive or explanatory research. Descriptive research, such as that undertaken using attitude and opinion questionnaires and questionnaires of organisational practices, will enable you to identify and describe the variability in different phenomena (*Gill and Johnson 2010*). For both web and mobile questionnaires, it is important to have a clear timetable that identifies the tasks that need to be done and

Open Access

the resources that will be needed. A good response is dependent on the recipient being motivated to answer the questionnaire and to send it back. Although the covering email or SMS message and visual appearance will help to ensure a high level of response, it must be remembered that, unlike paper questionnaires, the designer and respondent may see different images displayed on their screens. Web and mobile questionnaires were delivered via a web link. This normally uses email or a web page to display the hyperlink (*web link*) to the questionnaire and is dependent on having a list of addresses.

Data analysis and findings

Using collected data, a descriptive analysis of the study sample was prepared, on the basis of which the profile of the targeted respondents was prepared. Below there are the sample data on gender, age group, status, location, educational level of respondents, etc. Further the analysis follows with the data about assessing the impact of tourism development on the standard of living of the local community in Valbona valley, measuring the impact of tourism development on the income level of the local community and identifying some of the benefits of tourism development to the local community.

Demographic data of the sample

From the data gathered, 71% of the sample are male and 29% are female, which clearly shows a dominance of males in the group of the respondents in the area of the study.

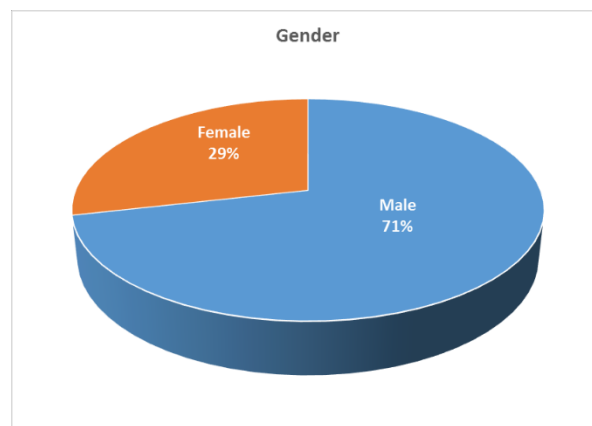


Figure 1. Gender

However, women also remain a very important target group among community there to be considered for measuring the perceived impact of tourism development on the area.

Open Access

It is a fact that many of the employees in tourism in this area are women so it must be considered as an impact on gender coming from tourism development.

Regarding the age group of the respondents, there are the data; up to 18 years old (3.6%), 19-25 (35.7%), which are the majority, 26-35 (17.9%), 36-45 (21.4%), and more than 45 years (21.4%).

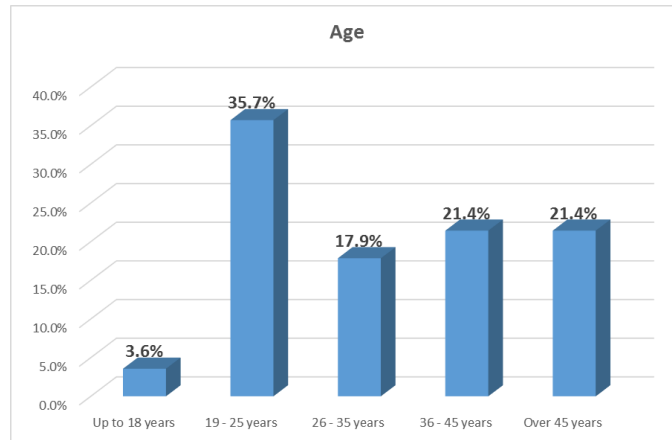


Figure 2. Age

This can be explained with the access to the internet and the technology which makes the age group of 19-25 years old the majority of the sample.

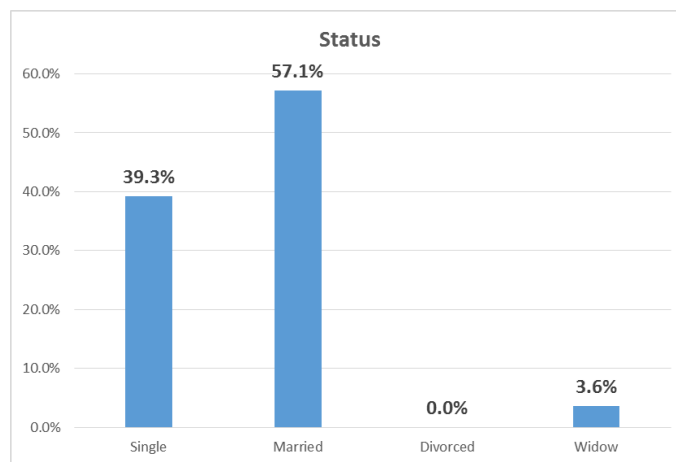


Figure 3. Status

Open Access

Analysing the sample data, regarding the status of the repondents, there are these findings; Single (39.3%), Married (57.1%), which are the majority, Divorced (0.0%), and Widow (3.6%).

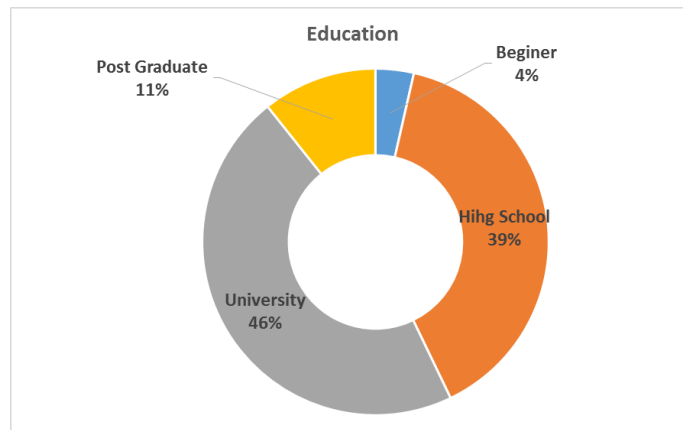


Figure 4. Education

Most of the target community respondents are with University (46%), followed by those with High School (39%), then those with Master Degree (11%) and finally those with Elementary School (4%).

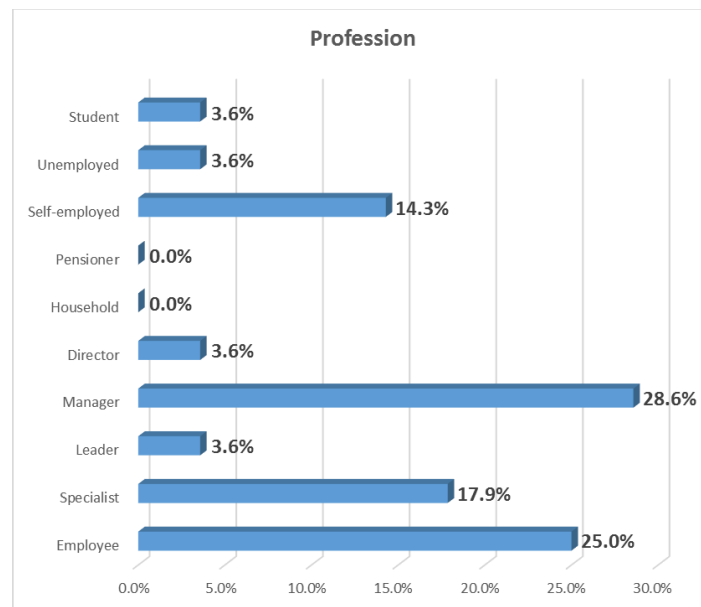


Figure 5. Profession

Open Access

Out of the target group of community, Employees are 25%, Specialists are 17.9%, Leaders are 3.6%, Managers are 28.6%, Directors are 3.6%, Households are 0.0%, Pensioners are 0.0%, Self-employed are 14.3%, Unemployed are 3.6% and Students are 3.6%.

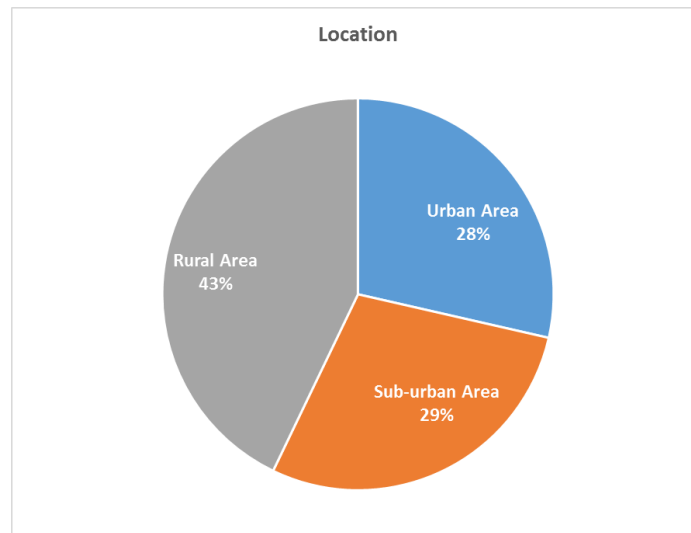
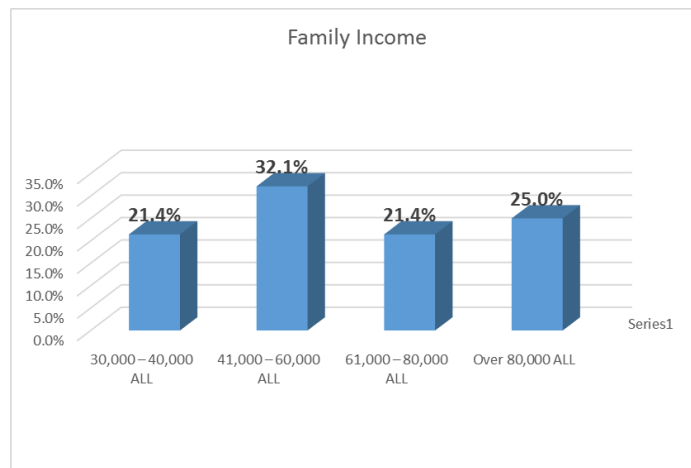


Figure 6. Location

Referring to the location of the targeted community respondents we have the following data; Rural Area (43%), Sub-Urban area (29%) and and Urban area (28%). Knowing that the Valbona valley is quite a rural area in the Region of Kukesi, Albania, it make sence this group of respondents to be the majority. The other parts, Urban and Sub-urban has the cathegory of respondents who have tourism businesses there or are working in tourism sector in this valley.

Open Access**Figure7.** Family Income

Regarding the family income of the community, the data are as; 30,000 – 40,000 ALL (21.4%), 41,000 – 60,000 ALL (32.1%), 61,000 – 80,000 ALL (21.4%) and over 80,000 ALL (25%).

Impact of tourism on smaller communities.

By analysing the data about the impact of tourism development on *the standart of living* of the local community, using a Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), there we have;

- ✓ I am satisfied with my standard of living (5.0).
- ✓ My standard of living was improved (5.1).
- ✓ The standard of services provided in the area is higher (4.5).
- ✓ We are offered higher standard of public services (4.0).

As evidenced by the data gathered, there is a better positive perception regarding; (a) Satisfaction with the standard of living (5.0) and (b) The improvement of the standard of living (5.1), compared to the standard of provided services and the standart of public services.

Open Access

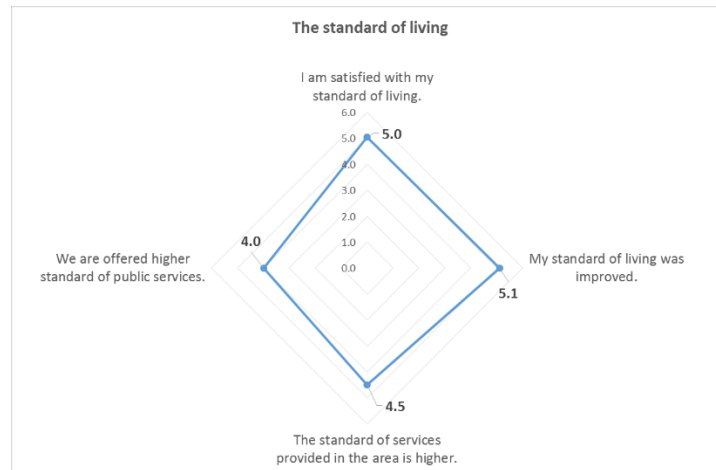


Figure 8. Impact of tourism on the standart of living

Regarding the analyses of the data about the the impact of tourism development on *the income level* of the local community, using a Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), we have the following responses;

- ✓ I am satisfied with the income I receive (5.0).
- ✓ My income is related to tourism (5.9).
- ✓ Tourism offers economic benefits (6.4).
- ✓ I saved enough to take care of my family (4.7).

By analysing the data gathered, we evidenced that there is a better positive perception regarding; (a) Economic benefits ot tourism (6.4) and (b) Income related to the tourism industry on the area (5.9), compared to the satisfaction because of the income they receive from tourism and saving enough to take care of their family.

Open Access

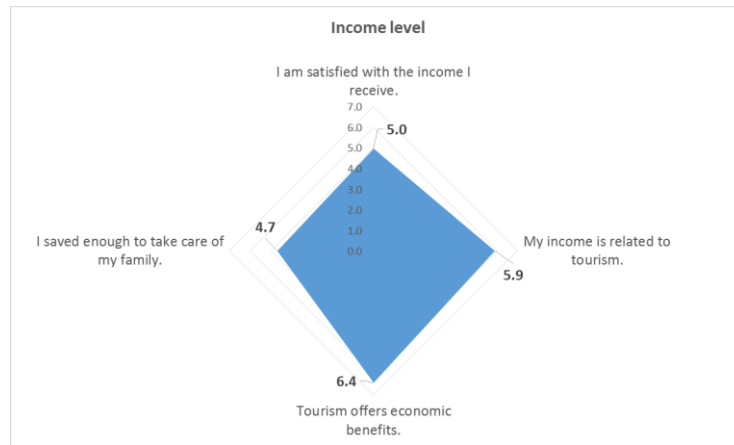


Figure 9. Impact of tourism on the level of income

Asking about some of *the benefits of tourism development* to the local community, using a Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), there we have the findings;

- ✓ Tourism businesses are mainly owned by locals (5.1).
- ✓ Products and services are sold at a higher price (5.6).
- ✓ The value of real estate has increased (6.1).
- ✓ Tourism creates new jobs (6.2).

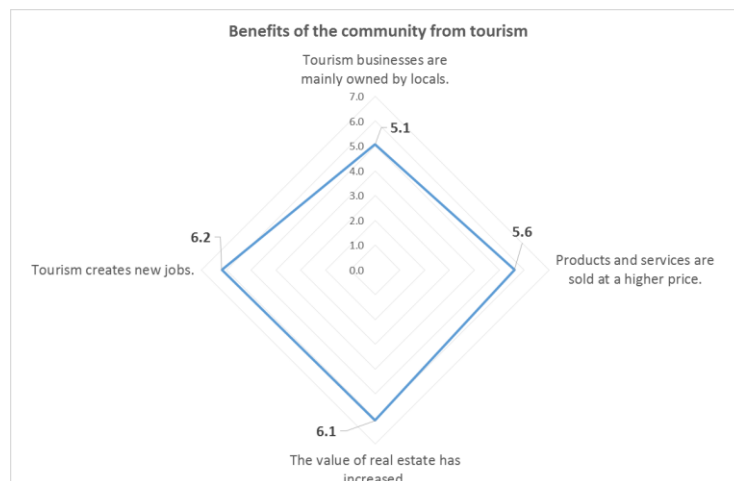


Figure 10. The benefits of the community from tourism

Open Access

As evidenced by the data gathered, there is a better positive perception regarding; (a) Job creation from the industry of tourism (6.2) and (b) The increased value of real estate (6.1), compared to the ownership of local tourist businesses and the price of sold products.

Conclusion

According to the findings of this study there is a perceived positive impact of tourism development on the standard of living of the local community, on the income level of the local community and there are some perceived positive benefits of tourism development to the local community.

It is evidenced that there is a positive impact of tourism referring to the standard of living and the improvement of the standard of living to the local community in the area.

Also the data show us that there is a positive perception regarding the economic benefits of tourism and the income related to the tourism industry in the area.

Some better positive results were evidenced regarding job creation from the industry of tourism and the increased value of real estate because of tourism development in the area.

References

- Gill J., and Johnson P., - Research Methods for Managers Fourth Edition, 2021.
- Higgins-Desbiolles F., Doering A., - Socialising Tourism (Contemporary Geographies of Leisure, Tourism and Mobility).
- Kolb B., 2018, Marketing Research for the Tourism, Hospitality and Events Industries.
- Kotler P., Bowen J., Makens J., and Baloglu S. - Marketing for Hospitality and Tourism, 7th edition, published by Pearson, 2017.
- Ministria e Turizmit & Mjedisit (Shqiperi) - Strategjia kombëtare për zhvillimin e qëndrueshëm të turizmit 2019 – 2023, botuar në 2019.
- Ministria e Turizmit dhe Mjedisit <https://turizmi.gov.al>
- Morrison A., Marketing and Managing Tourism Destinations, 2018.
- Robson C., 2011, Real World Research.
- Ross G., 2021, Marketing for Hospitality and Tourism.
- Saunders M., Lewis P., and Thornhill A. – Research Methods for Business Students 7th edition 2016, Pearson.
- <https://www.unwto.org>
- <https://www.etoa.org>