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LOCAL'S PERCEPTION REGARDING THE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN TURDA

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PERCEPȚIA LOCALNICILOR PRIVIND DEZVOLTAREA TURISMULUI ÎN TURDA

Tourism development is important for local communities mostly because it brings opportunities for economic growth, but it can also be a threat for changing the environment or the social life. The article aim is to determine the attitude of local residents from Turda towards the tourism development from their city after the Salt Mine, the most important tourism attraction, was modernized and attracted a high number of visitors. A survey was conducted among the sample population from Turda County. Results indicate that the locals have usually a positive perception regarding tourism development, but there are no particular signs that this led to a significant change in their daily lives.

Keywords: salt mine, personal benefits, economy development, tourism strategies, community

Cuvinte cheie: Salina, beneficii personale, dezvoltare economică, strategii turistice, comunitate

1. Tourism importance for local communities

Very often tourism development is considered to be a double-edged sword for local communities [1], [2], [3] mostly because it brings opportunities for economic growth, but also threats related to natural

environment or social life. Local's attitude towards tourism in their area directly affects the current and future tourism industry development.

Community positive attitudes will encourage tourists' satisfaction levels and contributes to the word-of-mouth promotion among them [2]. Therefore, the involvement and the participation of the host community are pertinent towards the success of the tourism development plan.

A research was conducted in Minas de Riotinto (Spain), a town with a former open-cast mining, which has given rise to a unique and spectacular landscape, becoming the town's major attraction [4].

Results indicated that the local population considers that tourism can bring to the municipality more advantages than disadvantages, in terms of improving quality life, increasing demand for cultural and leisure activities, protection of the natural environment. A research conducted in Washington [5] highlighted that tourism development was perceived in a positive manner by women and youngsters because of the cultural opportunities given by arts, crafts and social life.

Another relevant study conducted among the population of Tioman Island (Malaysia) by [2] indicated positive perception towards the economic and social impact of tourism. However, they depicted the impact of tourism on the environment in the opposite way.

2. Research area and method

The article aim is to determine the attitude of the local community in Turda, in terms of tourism development in the region, after the modernization process. A survey was conducted among residents from Turda using a questionnaire comprising 23 questions. Sample size was calculated using Taro-Jamane formula, starting from Turda total population with a maximum admitted error of 92 %, obtaining 156 respondents.

Turda city is located in Transylvania. Turda is one of the six cities of Cluj County and the second largest after the county capital, in terms of the population of 47,744 inhabitants according to the census conducted in 2011.

Fact representing 8.31 % of the total population County, which is about 720,000 inhabitants and 14.57 % of its urban population, about 468,000 inhabitants. The municipality Turda represents 1.37 % of the county total area of 6,674 km².

Tourism development strategy of the area takes into account the necessity of valuing natural resources (saline waters and vegetal slimes), quality of the environment, lack of pollution, the natural habitat Turda and that offered by Aries Valley and the mountains surrounding, the locals attitudes and traditional occupations etc. Among the tourist attractions, the Salt mine is by far the most important one.

Because of the large number of tourists visiting the salt mine the town is mentioned in popular publications worldwide (including CNN), which recommended Turda as a tourist destination. Within the PHARE program, in 2008 the salt mine suffered a large modernization process and planning and in 2010 it was reopened to the public [6].

The modernization effects are easy to be noticed by analyzing the evolution of tourist's visits before and after the process (Figure 1). The number of annual visits before 2010 were less than 100000, while after the reopening the number of visits boosted, so in 2015 their number reached 550,000.

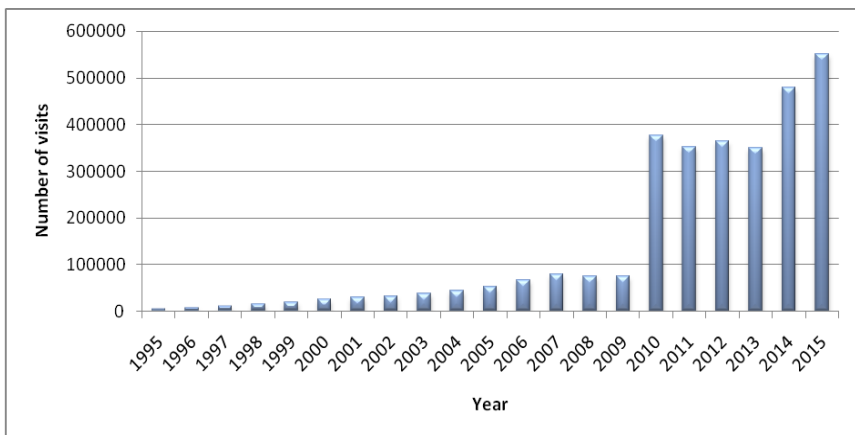


Fig. 1 The number of visits in the Turda salt mine between 1995-2015 (Salt mine administrative department)

3. Local resident's attitude towards tourism

Regarding the main reasons for visiting their city, respondents mentioned the Salt mine as being the most important one (32.69 %), followed by treatment or SPA (18.59) and history (12.82) (Figure 2). This information is very important for building proper tourism strategies.

Respondents were asked to express their opinion regarding the tourism situation in Turda using a five point Likert scale comprising 11 statements were 1 means “very poor” and 5 means “very good”.

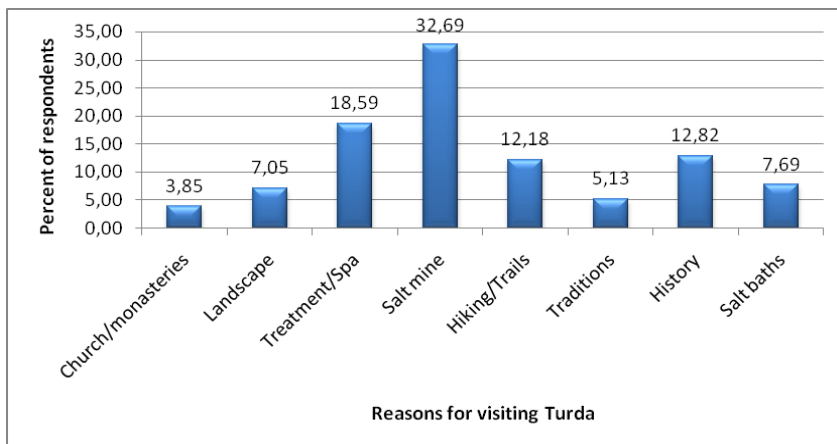


Fig. 2 The main reasons for visiting Turda city

After calculating the mean values for each statement it can be stated that overall the attitude is 3.31 (almost good). The mean values which are considered to correspond to “good” are: “the quality of food and drinks” (3.85), followed by “accessibility of tourists” (3.73), “accommodation quality” (3.66) and “services quality” (3.52). The rest of the statements are closer to a “nor poor, nor good” appreciation by the respondents meaning that their improvement is mandatory: tourist information possibilities before arriving in the region (3.22), quality marks and walking trails (3.34), standards transport services within the region (3.34), environmental quality (clean area, air pollution etc.) (3.04) and the multitude of possibilities for leisure (3).

Another set of statements refer to the personal benefits after reopening the salt mine. Mean value obtained was 3.09 meaning that the final effect among residents was medium. The revitalization of downtown Turda helped 20 % of the respondents while for 6 % it did not help at all. The existence of fairs and festivals helped 34 % of the respondents, shopping and dining choices was favourable for 14 % of them, while 43 % responded that they had little of personal benefits. The contribution to the local economy helped a lot 37 % of the respondents and recreational opportunities 34 % of them.

Environmental issues related to tourism development were also analyzed. Respondents disagree that the city is too crowded (1.88) or that the construction of new tourism facilities led to environmental degradation (1.99). The respondents agree that tourism has many positive environmental effects than negative (3.47) and do not consider that increased the amount of waste in the city (2.38) or affected the quality of air (2.44).

The impact of tourism on the community and local culture in Turda indicates favourable results. Therefore, the respondents agreed that the number of stores/restaurants has grown (3.47) and that tourism led to restoration of historical buildings (3.55). There is a general consensus that cultural attractions need better promotion (4.24).

The contribution of tourism to the community in Turda is perceived by locals in a positive way as a key factor for the local economy. They enjoy recreational spaces created for tourists (3.49) and they agree that there are many places for entertainment (3.53).

4. Conclusions

- Local population from Turda considers that tourism is able to bring more advantages than disadvantages to the community. It can be concluded that the locals are more satisfied than dissatisfied following the changes that have occurred in Turda after salt mine reopening.

- They expressed a distinctively positive attitude towards tourism and identified a variety of shared social benefits they associated with tourism development. Life and lifestyle of the locals has not changed very much behind the development of tourism and they believe that everything is tourism not affect anything, on the contrary it help them.

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PERCEPȚIA LOCALNICILOR PRIVIND DEZVOLTAREA TURISMULUI ÎN TURDA

Dezvoltarea turismului este importantă pentru comunitățile locale, în mare parte, deoarece aduce oportunități de creștere economică, dar poate fi, de asemenea, o amenințare pentru schimbarea mediului sau vieții sociale. Scopul lucrării este de a determina atitudinea locuitorilor din Turda despre dezvoltarea turismului din orașul lor după deschiderea minei de sare, cel mai important punct de atracție turistică, care a fost modernizat și a atras un număr mare de vizitatori. Studiul a fost realizat în rândul populației eșantion din Turda.

Rezultatele indică faptul că localnicii au de obicei o percepție pozitivă în ceea ce privește dezvoltarea turismului, dar nu există nici un semn special, faptul că acest lucru a condus la o schimbare semnificativă în viața lor de zi cu zi.