

IS TOURISM DEVELOPMENT A BENEFICIAL ASPECT IN THE EYES OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY?

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Abstract

Rural development is a key objective of national and European policies, widely debated at political level but also in the academic community. Romania is a predominantly agricultural country which makes agriculture the main pillar of rural development. However, there are many rural areas in the mountains where agriculture cannot be practised at a high performance level, so diversification and the search for new economic sectors is essential. In these areas, tourism can be considered as an alternative to agriculture in rural development. It is important that tourism development is managed responsibly and that the views and concerns of local people are taken into account. Open dialogue and community consultation can help strike a balance between the economic benefits of tourism and the preservation of local values and quality of life. In this context, this paper aimed to carry out a survey in order to identify the opinion of the local population from the commune of Valea Doftanei in relation to the development of tourism and leisure activities as a source of income and with a positive impact on the community development. The survey was based on an interview using a structured questionnaire and addressed to 380 interviewees and the results have been statistically processed with SPSS Software. The results pointed out that the inhabitants of Valea Doftanei Commune have a positive attitude towards the development of tourism and leisure activities and consider that by a well managed tourism strategy it could be assured a beneficial economic development of the locality as well as the preservation of local values and quality of life.

Key words: tourism development, impact, local community, rural areas

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a necessity in people's life being a form of leisure and well being, an alternative for spending week-end and vacations and recover energy, physical body condition and extent the knowledge horizon.

Also, tourism could be seen as a useful tool in local communities for assuring economic and social development valorizing the natural and human resources.

Tourism is an additional source of income for local people, but it can be considered as the basis of rural development for areas that do not allow the development of agricultural or other related activities [8, 12, 5].

From an economic point of view, tourism can bring additional income to rural areas by attracting tourists who spend money in accommodation establishments, catering establishments, for recreational activities and to buy local products. This cash flow can

support local businesses and generate additional jobs in rural communities. Tourism can help diversify the rural economy, reducing dependence on agriculture or other single industries [7]. It makes communities more resilient to economic and climate change.

Based on the fact that tourism can make a major contribution to the development of local communities, and thus to rural development, studies have been carried out over the years on local people's perceptions of tourism development in their areas [10, 9, 4, 14].

In this context, the purpose of the paper is research the role of tourism and recreation from a local community perspective and identify the main issues which have to be solved. For this reason the case study was chosen in the commune of Valea Doftanei in Prahova County, Romania, where it is a high tourism potential but less exploited.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Description of the research area

This study was carried out in the commune of Valea Doftanei in Prahova County, Romania. In order to better understand the tourism potential of the area, the area was analyzed in terms of tourist attractions, accessibility of the area, potential tourists and activities that can be done for recreation.

Location of the tourist destination

Valea Doftanei commune is situated at 140 km from Bucharest, Romania's capital.

It is located in a picturesque natural setting in the North of Prahova County, in the area of the Curved Carpathians, along the middle course of the river with the same name. It is located in the Northern part of Prahova county, between the Prahova and Teleajen valleys. The commune is flourishing and modernizing from year to year, more and more Romanians discovering the wonderful natural environment, the clean and strong air.

The population of the locality in 2023 was 6,158 persons, of which 3,040 males and 3,118 females [3].

Main tourist attractions

From a tourist point of view, this commune offers several tourist attractions easily accessible for all types of tourists, being located in the hills at an average altitude of 600 meters. The main tourist attractions of the area are: the Paltinu Dam, the Doftana Gorge, the Glodeasa - Teșila Nature Reserve, the Doftana River, the ruins of the old church in Traisteni, the Museum of Fine Arts in Tesila, numerous viewpoints and quiet places in the middle of the forest. The activities tourists can do in the area are limited. We identified few activities, such as ATV rides, bike rides and participation in the "Cașcavea Cheese" Festival and the International Plastic Art Camp "Valea Neagră".

"Cașcavea" is an unfermented smoked cheese that is made from a sweet, unfermented curd. This product is representative of the area and is not produced in other parts of the country.

As [13] mentioned in their paper, local gastronomy outlets are a viable alternative for rural development in mountain areas and

beyond, promoting job creation, preservation of local cuisine, contact with local people, consumption of organic products.

Therefore, besides agricultural activities, handicrafts, local gastronomy, tourism could be another alternative for social and economic development of the localities situated in the rural areas of the mountain regions [11].

Tourism offer

In terms of accommodation units in Valea Doftana, from Figure , it can be seen that the number of accommodation units in 2021 doubled compared to the previous year, reaching a total of 18 units with a total capacity of 301 guests. In the year 2022, 3 more accommodation units were created increasing the accommodation capacity by other 29 places.

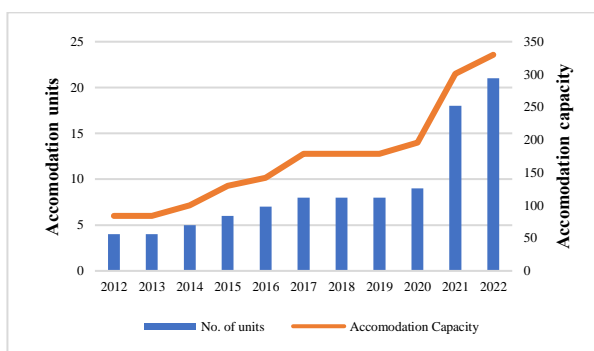


Fig. 1. Number of accommodation units and accommodation capacity in Valea Doftanei
 Source: Own design based on the data from [3].

Figure 2 shows the structure of the 21 accommodation units according to their type. The majority of the units are the agrotouristic pensions type, 9 in number, which can accommodate 185 guests.



Fig. 2. The structure of accommodation units in 2022 in Valea Doftanei
 Source: Own design based on the data from [3].

At the opposite end is the Tourist Cottage type accommodation with only one unit of this type having a capacity of 20 guests.

A brief analysis of the above shows that this area has a high tourist potential, but it is not exploited to its true value.

The organization of the field survey

Being an area that has been developing recently, in order to identify the opinion of the locals living in Valea Doftanei Commune regarding the promotion of tourism and its development in their area, it was organized a field survey.

The structured questionnaire content

For studying the impact of agrotourism on the community of Valea Doftanei, a structured questionnaire was applied to the inhabitants, including several aspects: economic impact, social impact, cultural impact and environmental impact.

In addition to all these aspects, the degree of current involvement of local people in local tourism and their willingness to get involved if they would be supported and encouraged by the local authorities or a third party was also analyzed.

In the questionnaire, locals had to express on a Likert scale [6] (1 - Total Disagree, 5 - Total Agree) their disagreement/agreement on 18 issues related to the impact of tourism on the community grouped in 4 categories not known by the respondents.

In the second part of the questionnaire, the general opinion of locals on the current state of tourism development in their area was addressed.

The third part of the questionnaire addresses the willingness of locals to take part in the development of local tourism.

The last part of the questionnaire deals with demographic issues.

The sample size

According to the preliminary data of the 2022 Census, Doftana Valley has a population of 6,100 inhabitants.

The population sampling has been determined in order to get the data correctly.

The sample calculation formula used was as follows:

$$n = N * \frac{\frac{Z^2 * p * (1-p)}{e^2}}{N-1 + \frac{Z^2 * p * (1-p)}{e^2}} \dots \dots \dots (1)$$

where:

N = Population of Valea Doftanei commune;

Z = score for 95% confidence level;

P = standard deviation;

e = margin of error;

n = sample determined

By substituting customised data for a Z-score of 1.96, corresponding to a 95% confidence level, a standard deviation of 0.5 and a margin of error of 5%, we obtained the following relationship:

$$n = 6,100 * \frac{\frac{1.96^2 * 0.5 * (1 - 0.5)}{0.05^2}}{6,100 - 1 + \frac{1.96^2 * 0.5 * (1 - 0.5)}{0.05^2}} = 361.46$$

Therefore, the calculations showed that in order for the sample to be considered representative and for the information to be extrapolated to the entire population, the minimum number of respondents (the sample determined) must be 361.

The interview based on questionnaire in field survey

The questionnaire was applied in the field to 380 people living in Valea Doftanei Commune.

After checking the correctness of the completion of the questionnaires, it was found that 20 (approximately 5%) of the 380 questionnaires were filled in incorrectly or not completed in full and were excluded from the processing/research.

In the end, 360 completed questionnaires with relevant data to be taken into account in the analysis and interpretation stage were processed.

Following the centralization of the questionnaire responses, the data obtained from the 360 respondents were tested and validated.

At this stage, the 20 questionnaires considered to be inconclusive for the research were eliminated.

The data were processed for input into SPSS.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Socio-demographic characteristics of the interviewees

In the first component of the questionnaire, data on respondents' gender, age, education and income categories were addressed to profile the respondents. To create an overview of these questions, descriptive statistics were used to see the frequency of responses to questions in this category, the share of responses in the total and the cumulative share of responses.

As can be seen in Table 1, out of the total of 360 respondents (valid questionnaires) approximately two thirds were female and one third were male. From the stage of the questionnaire application we observed that male respondents were less willing to participate in the questionnaire, citing that they did not have the time, did not have the knowledge to answer, etc..

It can be seen that 48.3% of the total respondents are in the 30-50 age group. The second largest category is the 50-65 age group - 17.8%. The smallest share is in the category 25-30 years (8.3%). It can be explained that young people aged 25-30 are the most active in terms of activities undertaken, most of them having jobs in big cities near the municipality.

When asked about the employment status of the respondents, it was found that 59.4% of them are employed, while only 10.6% have no job and 3.9% of them are unemployed. Through the application of the questionnaire, 12 respondents were identified as having a business in the tourism sector, while another 10 have businesses in other sectors.

A share of 5%, i.e. 18 respondents, stated that they attend a high school/university. An important category is represented by pensioners - 15%. It can be noted that 54 respondents stated that they were retired, while only 48 stated that they were over 65 years old. The difference can be explained by the fact that the retirement age for women starts at 63 years or there is the possibility of early retirement in case of illness.

In terms of income, 43.9% of respondents said that their monthly income was between 1,500 and 3,000 lei, which can be explained by the value of the net minimum wage at the time of the questionnaires, which was 1,524 lei. As the income ranges increase, there is a decrease in the number of people, thus only 52 people stated that their income is between 3,000 and 6,000 lei and 22 people stated that their income is above 6,000 lei monthly.

We recall that in the previous question 214 persons stated that they were employed and in the question on income 232 persons stated that their income was over 1,500 lei. From this correlation, it can be assumed that the respondents completed the questionnaires responsibly.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Respondents characteristics (n=360)		
	f	%
Sex		
Male	124	34.4
Female	236	65.6
Age		
18-25	44	12.2
25-30	30	8.3
30-50	174	48.3
50-65	64	17.8
65+	48	13.3
Profession		
Employed	214	59.4
Not employed	38	10.6
Temporary Unemployed	14	3.9
Retired	54	15.0
Tourism entrepreneur	12	3.3
Entrepreneur in another field	10	2.8
Student >18 years old/Student	18	5.0
Average monthly income		
No income	52	14.4
Under 1,500 lei	76	21.1
Between 1,500 and 3,000 lei	158	43.9
Between 3,000 and 6,000 lei	52	14.4
Over 6,000 lei	22	6.1
Educational level		
Secondary education	68	18.9
Vocational education	72	20.0
Secondary education without a baccalaureate diploma	40	11.1
High school with baccalaureate diploma	104	28.9
Bachelor degree	50	13.9
Master's degree	22	6.1
Doctoral degree	4	1.1

Source: Authors calculation based on survey data.

The questionnaire content

In the second component of the questionnaire, 18 aspects were addressed, grouped into 4 distinct categories as shown in Table 2.

The first category concerns the perception of local people on economic impact, consisting of 5 aspects: creation of new jobs, income generation, infrastructure development and upgrading, and influence on prices of goods, services and land.

The second category concerns local people's perception of the social impact of tourism and leisure activities on the local community. In this category, 6 aspects were included that address the advantages and disadvantages they experience because of or due to tourism.

Table 2. Clustering of the 18 issues into 4 categories according to impact

Economic Impact
@IE1 Creates jobs in the commune
@IE2 Contributes to increasing local income
@IE3 Helps improve infrastructure and services in the area
@IE4 Influences prices (food, goods, products)
@IE5 Raises the sale price of land
Social Impact
@IS1 Provides opportunities for further education in tourism
@IS2 Provides recreational facilities for both locals and tourists
@IS3 Accelerates the process of upgrading the area
@IS4 Helps to create a favorable image of the Valea Doftanei community (people, households, places).
@IS5 Causes discomfort to local people by disrupting daily life
@IS6 Creates discontent related to social differences between tourists and locals
Cultural Impact
@IC1 Stimulates the preservation of traditions and customs
@IC2 Encourages continuation of local arts and crafts
@IC3 Could influence local specificity in favour of modernity
Environment Impact
@IM1 Encourages care for the preservation of the environment
@IM2 Helps to protect and improve the environment
@IM3 Causes water pollution, air pollution and contributes to solid waste pollution through non-compliance with local regulations by tourists
@IM4 Threatens local flora and fauna species

Source: Authors finding based on research.

The main positive aspects refer to the opportunity for further education as a benefit of tourism, the possibility to enjoy leisure activities like tourists in the area, the acceleration of the modernization process of the area, the creation of a favorable opinion of the local community by tourists.

On the other hand, negative social aspects have also been addressed, such as: the discomfort created by tourists and the creation of discontent related to the discrepancy between the social condition of tourists and locals.

A third category targeted in the first part of the questionnaire was cultural. Here, topics related to the encouragement of the continuation of traditions and craft activities and the abandonment of traditional style in favor of the modern one were addressed.

The fourth category concerns the impact on the environment as perceived by local people as a result of tourism.

Cronbach Alpha reliability test

Table 3 shows that all 360 questionnaires were included in the reliability test, representing 100%. The determination of the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient resulted in a value of 0.684, which makes the consistency of the data also considered to be satisfactory. According to the statistical analysis, a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient value higher than 0.6 can be considered.

Table 3. Reliability test on survey data

Summary			
		n	%
Variable	Valid	360	100.0
	Excluded	0	0.0
	Total	360	100.0
Reliability test			
Croenbach's Alpha		N	
0.684		18	

Source: Own calculation with SPSS software.

However, we tried to improve the value of Cronbach's Alpha coefficient by identifying the observation that has a negative impact on it.

The coefficient was recalculated by excluding each of the 18 aspects of the questionnaire in turn. From the analysis of the data obtained it can be seen that the coefficient improves by

dropping one of the following 5 aspects: @IE4 - 0.690, @IS6 - 0.709, @IC3 - 0.696, @IM3 - 0.690, @IM4 - 0.692. Consequently, we can admit that the value of Cronbach's Alpha coefficient can be improved by eliminating the @IS6 aspect, which would lead to a value of 0.709 and classify the consistency as good instead of satisfactory. In order to analyze the data correctly, aspect @IS6 (Creates dissatisfaction with social differences between tourists and locals) will be excluded from the analysis for better interpretation of the final results. In the further analysis only 17 aspects out of 18 totals will be considered (Table 4).

Table 4. Reliability test cu coefficient adjustment

Reliability test		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha with standardised aspects	N
0.709	0.745	17

Source: Own calculation with SPSS software

Statistical description of the results obtained at the interview

After the data reliability check and adjustment stage, we proceeded to analyze the responses received and organized them into the four categories mentioned above according to the impact of the statements. The analysis of each category was done with the help of descriptive statistics where the following aspects were presented: mean of the responses on each statement, median, deviation or standard deviation, range, minimum value and maximum value. In the last column of the table containing the descriptive statistics of the category, the mean of the category is also shown, which allows the categories to be analyzed and compared with each other.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of the economic impact category

Statistics	@IE1	@IE2	@IE3	@IE4	@IE5	@IE
Items	Valid	360	360	360	360	360
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Average	4.16	4.09	4.02	3.34	4.16	3.95
Median	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	4.00
St. dev.	1.06	1.02	1.04	1.43	1.10	0.68
Interval	4	4	4	4	4	3.80
Minimum	1	1	1	1	1	1.20
Maximum	5	5	5	5	5	5.00

Source: Own calculation with SPSS Software.

In the first category of indicators addressing the economic impact of tourism and leisure activities on the analyzed area, the 5 aspects mentioned in Table 2 were analyzed.

Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics of the economic impact of tourism.

From Table 5, it can be seen that the mean of the responses varies from an average value of 3.34 (@IE4) to 4.16 (@IE1 and @IE5), which can be correlated with the nature of the statement.

When it came to the statement that tourism and recreational activities can create jobs in the territory of the municipality, the majority of respondents totally agreed with the statement, the two positive degrees: agree and totally agree amounting to 84.44% of the total responses.

Figure 1 shows that 4 out of 5 issues analyzed in this category have a similar structure, with the majority of respondents agreeing/strongly agreeing with the statements.

The only statement that breaks the pattern is the statement @IE4 about tourism and leisure development influencing the prices of goods and services in the study area. Here, the standard deviation falls below 1, which means that opinions are not so different among residents.

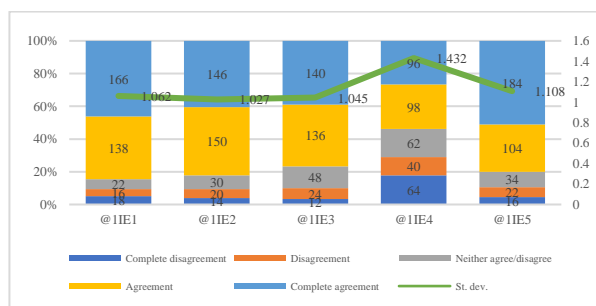


Fig. 1. Structure of Economic Impact aspects responses
 Source: Own design based on survey collected data.

In the second category the 5 aspects that analyses the social impact of tourism and leisure activities on the local community from the residents' point of view have been kept - Table 6.

Figure 2 shows that 74.9% of respondents agree/totally agree that tourism development provides opportunities for further education and adoption of new trends in tourism. An equally high percentage of responses where

respondents agreed/total agreed 76.6% was also recorded by the statement that locals can enjoy the facilities created for them to relax in the area.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics of the social impact category

Statistics	@IS1	@IS2	@IS3	@IS4	@IS5	@IS	
Items	Valid	360	360	360	360	360	360
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Average	3.97	3.98	4.30	4.45	2.86	3.65	
Median	4.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	3.00	3.66	
St. dev.	1.06	1.06	0.84	0.70	1.29	0.51	
Interval	4	4	3	4	4	2.83	
Minimum	1	1	2	1	1	2.17	
Maximum	5	5	5	5	5	5.00	

Source: Own calculation with SPSS Software.

The next two aspects stating that tourism accelerates the modernization process of the area and that it helps to create a favorable image for the locals had similar percentages where the vast majority agreed. In contrast, on the fifth aspect referring to the discomfort created by tourists, 41% of respondents disagreed/strongly disagreed.

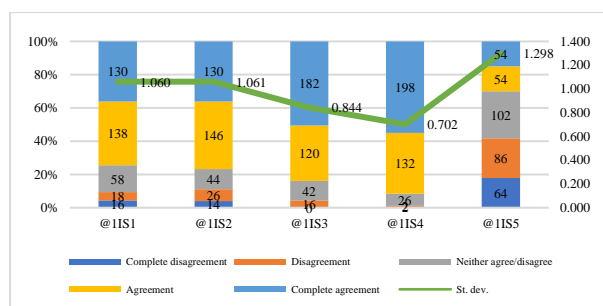


Fig. 2. Structure of Social Impact aspects responses
 Source: Own design based on survey collected data.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics of the cultural impact category

Statistics	@IC1	@IC2	@IC3	@IC	
Items	Valid	360	360	360	360
	Missing	0	0	0	0
Average	4.11	3.91	3.12	3.71	
Median	4.00	4.00	3.00	3.66	
St. Dev.	1.09	1.28	1.27	0.82	
Interval	4	4	4	4.00	
Minimum	1	1	1	1.00	
Maximum	5	5	5	5.00	

Source: Own calculation with SPSS Software.

In the third category, in Table 7, three aspects related to the cultural impact of tourism on the local community were aggregated. Figure 3 shows that the first two statements are

positive aspects, as tourism encourages the preservation of traditions and customs and encourages the continuation of crafts. Respondents agreed/strongly agreed more than 75% with the two statements mentioned above.

The third statement reflects a negative aspect that tourism could have on the local community from a cultural point of view: there is a risk of adopting the modern style against the traditional one. 43% of respondents disagree with this statement while a similar percentage agree.

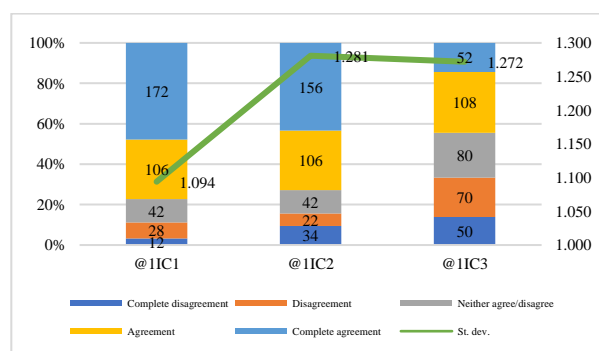


Fig. 3. Structure of Cultural Impact aspects responses
 Source: Own design based on survey collected data.

The last category in this analysis aggregates statements on environmental issues. Table 8 shows that the standard deviation is above 1.22, which shows that opinions are quite divided among the locals.

Table 8. Descriptive statistics of the environmental impact category

Statistics	@IM1	@IM2	@IM3	@IM4	@IM	
Items	Valid	360	360	360	360	360
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Average	3.53	3.44	3.26	2.83	3.26	
Median	4.00	4.00	3.00	3.00	3.25	
St. dev.	1.30	1.22	1.38	1.33	0.71	
Interval	4	4	4	4	4.00	
Minimum	1	1	1	1	1.00	
Maximum	5	5	5	5	5.00	

Source: Own calculation with SPSS Software.

On the first point, 60% of respondents agreed that the development of tourism and recreational activities increases the concern for the preservation of the environment, both for residents and tourists.

Figure 4 shows that in point 2 of this category 50.5% agree with the statement that tourism helps to improve the environment. Point 3

shows that residents are concerned that air, water and solid waste pollution could increase in their locality - 50.5%. This concern is caused by the practices of tourists camping on the banks of the Doftana River near the locality.

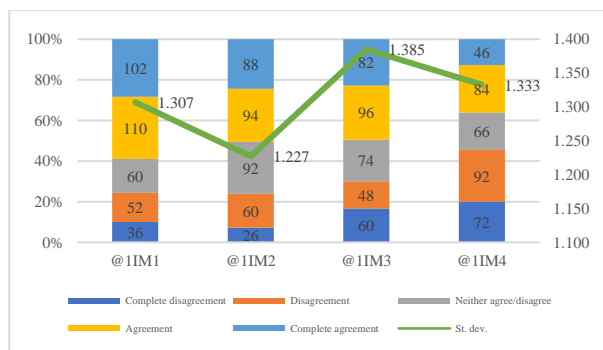


Fig. 4. Structure of Environmental Impact aspects responses

Source: Own design based on survey collected data.

Table 9. Overall perception of residences on tourism development in Valea Doftanei

Statistics	f	%	Valid Percent
Valid	Yes	332	92.2
	No	10	2.8
	I don't care	18	5.0
	Total	360	100.0

Source: Own calculation with SPSS Software.

At the end of the questionnaire a question was asked to the respondents: Taking into account all the previous aspects, do you consider it a good thing to develop tourism in the area where you live? An overwhelming 92.2% said that developing tourism and leisure activities in their area is a good thing and would help them develop personally and as a community.

CONCLUSIONS

As mentioned in this paper, the area under analysis is an area where tourism can develop, but especially leisure activities. The locality, being no more than two hours away from the capital, can be considered as a day destination or a place to relax. The development of tourism in rural mountain areas can make a decisive contribution to sustainable rural development. The benefits can be quantified in economic, social, cultural, environmental and other terms.

As other studies on the same subject in other parts of the world have shown [1, 2, 6, 9], the present study on the community of Valea Doftanei shows that the inhabitants have a positive attitude towards the development of tourism and leisure activities in the area where they live.

Some locals see tourism development as an important economic opportunity. They believe that tourism can bring additional income by creating jobs in the hospitality sector. This can help improve the community's standard of living. Most locals believe that tourism can help preserve local traditions, culture and history. Tourism development can lead to the preservation and promotion of unique elements of the community. Most locals do not believe that tourism development can lead to an increase in the cost of living in the community.

It is important that tourism development is managed responsibly and that the views and concerns of local people are taken into account. Open dialogue and community consultation can help strike a balance between the economic benefits of tourism and the preservation of local values and quality of life.

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