

## ANALYSIS OF THE PERCEPTION OF ROMANIAN CONSUMERS REGARDING THE PRACTICE OF CREATIVE TOURISM AND ITS ROLE IN SUSTAINABLE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

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### Abstract

*Tourism, as a form of spending free time, has undergone numerous transformations in the last period of time, this is due both to globalization that contributed to the internationalization of tourist experiences, but also to recent events (such as the Covid-19 pandemic, economic crises, etc), but also changing the perception of tourism consumers regarding how they can spend their free time. Traditional or well-known destinations have started to face overcrowding, which is starting to be felt negatively by both residents and visitors who are starting to change their consumption habits regarding the locations they choose as tourist destinations. On the other hand, the challenges of the modern world regarding the effects of global warming, the sharp increase in the population, the depletion of planetary resources, but also the much greater concerns of the current generations regarding these aspects, make the choices we make regarding the choice leisure destinations to change and become more responsible. In this context, creative tourism as an increasingly sought-after option, among a growing category of consumers. In this paper, we set out to analyze the perception that tourism consumers in Romania have regarding this form of tourism. The research assumed, on the one hand, a bibliographic analysis regarding the term creative tourism and how this notion has evolved from the moment of its definition as a form of tourism in the 2000s until now, as well as from a study of case based on the application of a questionnaire to measure the perception of consumers regarding this form of tourism, but especially on the awareness of its existence. The questionnaire had 16 questions answered by 124 respondents. The data were centralized and interpreted with the help of the Excel program, the results highlighting the fact that although some of the respondents practice creative tourism, it is quite little known as a concept. The answers given by the study participants highlighted the fact that they are interested in practicing activities integrated into creative tourism, considering that there are many advantages both regarding the experiences they create, with the interactions they establish with the locals or with the other participants. At the same time, the impact that creative tourism practices have at the local level (both economic and social) is recognized. We consider that these results are useful not only at the micro level, but also at the macro level, under the conditions that the development strategies of the field of hospitality will be thought in such a way as to promote, integrate and develop this form of contemporary tourism.*

**Key words:** creative tourism, local development, density, sustainability

### INTRODUCTION

Like any business, tourism is an activity that, in order to meet the increasingly high demands of consumers, must reinvent itself and identify new solutions to attract them. The inclination of tourists to return to their origins, their desire to spend free time in nature, but also the desire to protect it, make creative tourism, as a form of tourism practice brought into discussion at the beginning of the

2000s in an OECD report, to represent one of the solutions of these searches [3, 20].

The report considers that the relationship established between tourism and culture has led to its development, and the creativity associated with it has contributed to the development of conventional tourism models and their transformation into innovative, creative products, much more adapted to the modern world, constantly looking for new challenges [4, 12]. In this way, creative tourism can contribute to increasing the

attractiveness of tourist destinations, as well as to the local development of those areas, considering that it can develop both in well-known areas, but especially in areas that are less known or with less notoriety. Although initially creative tourism was related to big, cosmopolitan cities, its development possibilities are multiple. To an equally great extent, creative tourism can also be developed in smaller localities whose potential can be exploited by creating new experiences for the tourist due to participation in practical activities carried out with the community or unknown persons, and which also have a durable character. In the same way, you can rely on local gastronomy, on the creation of emotions, memories, experiences, traditions, customs, from which emotional links established between the tourist and the destination can result.

In this respect, creative tourism has been intensified during the Covid-19 pandemic [10].

Although the first definition given to creative tourism belonged to Richard Greg according to which it offers a way of redesigning cultural tourism, a non-interactive way that can create captivating and unforgettable experiences for visitors attracted to cultural activities, and not only that, with a positive effect on both parties [15, 16], we can consider that a reference to this concept was made by Pearce and Butler, in 1993 [22].

UNESCO is the organization that started the discussions regarding the identification of new forms of tourism, defining in 2006 creative tourism which was understood as a way of spending free time that can lead to authentic experiences (cultural, heritage, etc.), as a result of the participatory learning of the tourist and his connection with the inhabitants, with their customs and experiences [24].

That being the case, creative tourism cannot be reduced only to rural areas, because it can equally be developed in urban areas.

The UNWTO definition includes in the category of creative tourism art, architecture, music, literature, cultural traditions, culinary traditions, etc. i.e. all categories of industries that are creative, that participate in the

realization of a lifestyle, that imprint a system of values or beliefs [25].

However, the definitions and appreciations, the identified characteristics of cultural tourism are diverse and expressed by different authors.

Tan et al. considers that creative experiences in tourism refer to novelty and usefulness, to existential experiences and activities, but also to the application of a controlled risk related to the loss of cultural identity [21].

What distinguishes cultural tourism from creative tourism is the reduction of the experience that tourists have and that is due to its transformation into a tourism rather than mass tourism, in which tourists concerned with the exchange of experiences with the locals, adopting their objections and traditions, are removed [14, 17, 19]. However, many authors show that most forms of manifestation of creative tourism had cultural tourism as their starting point [5, 7]

Chugh considers that creative tourism is participative in nature, which involves the development of emotional bonds between participants and which makes tourists return to that destination, as a result of their emotional attachment to that destination [1]. Cloke, for his part, considers that in order to achieve a creative tourism, one can resort to the combination of different elements, in different ways, resorting to feelings, experiences, replacement or modernization of traditional forms of tourism [2].

Markusen et al. considers that by creating some spaces, some creative activities contribute directly to the animating of public and private spaces, to the architectural revitalization and streetscapes (a good example and model of Uramt being the cultural capitals - Sibiu - 2004, Timisoara - 2023), to increase the viability and visibility of some local businesses and, last but not least, to increase public safety [8].

Ricards considers that creative tourism cannot be a form of mass tourism, but a small-scale one, which involves a small number of visitors, who have a responsible attitude towards the environment and community and who want to determine economic, social and

cultural, and not just attracting tourists [13, 15, 18].

However, there are also authors who consider that the use of forms of creative tourism should be approached with reluctance or perhaps only critically when the question arises of the application of the ways of encouraging and supporting this form of tourism. This aspect is related both to the understanding and application of the concept of creativity and, on the other hand, the quality of the programs offered and which have a strong financial impact on the national and local budgets [6, 11, 23].

The adoption of a creative tourism, like any other form of tourism, must balance its advantages and disadvantages.

As far as local communities are concerned, they develop by increasing the population's income, by increasing social cohesion, by increasing equal opportunities, by integrating different complementary activity sectors, by showing a less aggressive tourism with the environment [9]. On the other hand, there is more and more talk about overtourism, about the fact that the residents no longer want to share their space with tourists looking for a perfect photo (protest of the residents of Hallstatt, 2023), a unique experience, visiting some places consecrated (Venice, Barcelona, etc.), of the invasion of some localities that still retain their local charm (Viscri, Romania).

However, this form of tourism is one that relies on creativity, modernity, open-mindedness, education, so that the negative effects of its practice can be much more easily understood and reduced, and its advantages can be turned into success.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Our research started from the analysis of the specialized literature, as a documentation stage, which had as its purpose both the definition and the identification of the main characteristics of the concept to be analyzed, as well as the identification of the strong points and the weak points related to its practice. The second stage consisted of completing the questionnaire composed of 16

questions. And the third stage, which took place between September and November 2023, involved uploading the questionnaire to collect respondents' answers regarding creative tourism. 124 questionnaires were thus collected. The questions that were the basis of this research had the aim of providing, on the one hand, demographic information about the respondents, and on the other hand, information about the concept of creative tourism. At the beginning of the questionnaire, information was provided regarding the definition of the concept.

**The concret questions refered to tourism** were the following:

(5) *Before completing this form, did you advance the term creative tourism?*

(6) *What are the forms of tourism that you have practiced so far?*

(7) *Have you practiced a form of creative tourism until now, even if you don't know the concept?*

(8) *If you practiced creative tourism, did it take place in Romania or in another country?*

(9) *What kind of accommodation do you prefer?*

(10) *How do you travel or go on vacation?*

(11) *What are the aspects that determine you to choose a certain tourist destination?*

(12) *What was the form of booking the destination?*

(13) *Do you prefer to go to new locations or do you return to a location that you liked?*

(14) *Do you consider that creative tourism is a form of tourism that you want to experience?*

(15) *What are the reasons for choosing creative tourism as a way of spending free time?*

(16) *What do you think is the impact of creative tourism on the environment, compared to traditional tourism?*

The questions that formed the basis of the questionnaire were closed questions.

The limits of the research were given by:

- the information collected on the basis of the questionnaire is at the level of the perceptions of those surveyed
- there is a certain difficulty in attributing the effects identified by the respondents

- data analysis using descriptive statistical methods, not duplicated by other categories of methods
- lack of control groups

### The group of respondents

A number of 147 respondents answered the questionnaire, of which only 124 provided complete answers.

Statistical methods were used to process the data, which were later presented in the form of tables or graphs. Based on these, opinions were formulated regarding the creative tourism, as well as conclusions and recommendations.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The answers obtained based on the questionnaires applied online through the Google Forms application were centralized and processed with the help of the Excel program.

Table 1. The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	72	58.06
Man	52	41.94
<b>Age</b>		
20-35	27	21.77
36-45	41	33.06
46-55	34	27.42
56-65	17	13.71
over 65	5	4.03
<b>Education level</b>		
High school	41	33.06
University	59	47.58
Master	21	16.94
Doctoral studies	3	2.42
<b>Residence environment</b>		
Urban	86	69.35
Rural	38	30.65

Source: Own calculation.

Of the 16 questions in the questionnaire, the first four had a demographic character. Thus, of the 124 people surveyed, 58% were female and 42% male. Of their total, 69% live in

urban areas and 31% in rural areas. Regarding the segmentation by age category, it was found that 22% of the respondents were between 30-35 years old, 33% between 36-45 years old, 27% between 46-55 years old, 14% between 56-65 years old and 4% older than 65 years. Among the 124 respondents, most have university (42%) and high school (33%) degrees. The share of those with master's studies was 17%, and of those with doctoral studies 2%.

**To question no. 5:** *Before completing this form, did you know what creative tourism is?* the answers provided highlighted the fact that the concept is little known among the respondents, this resulting from the 89% share of negative answers, compared to the 11% who had affirmative answers.

**From the answers to question no. 6:** *What are the main forms of tourism that you practice?* question with multiple answer options, it was found that 82% of respondents are those who travel during vacations or vacations, 33% participate in concerts, sports, cultural events, etc. and 29% also travel for business purposes. A rather small share, of only 6%, are those who volunteer during the holidays. Young people up to 35 years of age belong to this category. It is found that 58% of the respondents practice other forms of tourism (adventure, religious, etc.) (Fig. 1).

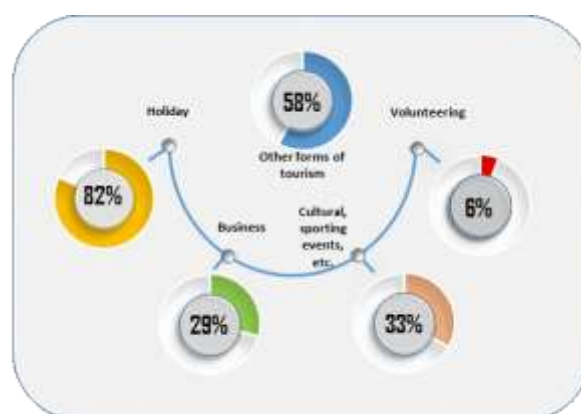


Fig. 1. Share of the main forms of tourism practiced by the respondents

Source: own processing

**To question no. 7:** *Have you practiced a form of creative tourism until now, even if you don't know the concept?* The respondents appreciated in a weight of 27% that they

practiced it, and it consisted of carrying out activities specific to the visited area, together with the locals or by participating in different customs or traditions.

**To question no. 8:** *If you practiced creative tourism, did it take place in Romania or in another country?* of the 33 respondents who answered affirmatively to the previous question, 41% stated that they were involved in creative tourism activities in Romania, 32% in trips they made to other countries, and 27% contacted with creative tourism both in Romania and in other countries. What we could find is that the number of Romanian tourists who are interested in practicing creative tourism is quite low, this is due to the fact that they do not know this concept well enough and they have not encountered enough activities of this kind during their trips made to spend their holidays, vacations or free timer (Fig. 2).

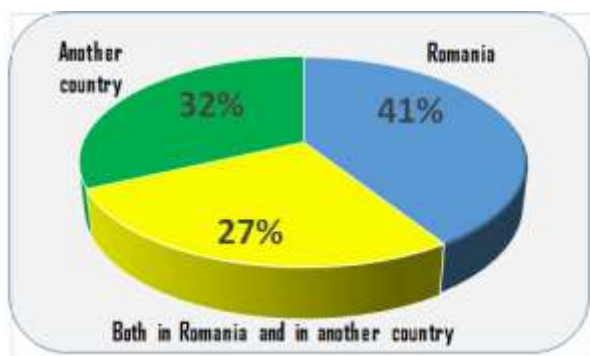


Fig. 2. Share of creative activities in which the respondents participated, in relation to the venue  
 Source: own processing.

Thus, we find that creative tourism has a niche character, that it has a lower visibility, which is a reason why it also needs a stronger promotion.

In this way, both tourists, hosts and local communities will become much more interested in practicing this form of tourism and will try together to identify solutions, "creative ideas", ways to increase the number of those who practice it and who can thus contributing to the increase of income for the hosts and the community.

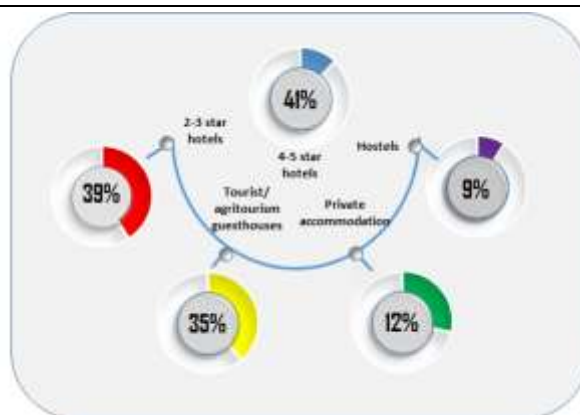


Fig. 3. Share of the type of accommodation preferred by the respondents  
 Source: own processing.

**To question no. 9:** *What kind of accommodation do you choose when you go on vacation?* The answer options were multiple, and the survey participants highlighted the fact that they usually prefer hotels; both on 4 and 5 stars (41%), but also on 2 and 3 stars (39%); 35% of the respondents also stay in agro-tourism or tourist guesthouses, and 12% prefer accommodation with private individuals. Only 9% of the respondents stay in hostels, they are generally young (Fig. 3).

**The answers given to question no. 10:** *How do you travel or go on vacation?*, which also had multiple answer options, highlighted the fact that most of the respondents go on vacation or spend their free time with their family (63%), as a couple (57%), with friends (42%) or in organized groups (39%). Also, 35% of the respondents travel alone, but this is due to the fact that some of them declare that they travel for business purposes. Whatever form is chosen for practicing creative tourism activities, it becomes a way of relaxing or sharing experiences (with friends, with strangers in the group, with locals, etc.).

Moreover, **to question no. 11:** *What are the aspects that determine you to choose a certain tourist destination?* the respondents, who had a choice between five answer options, appreciated that all of them contribute to the choice of the places they visit, the order being the following: the purpose of the trip, i.e. relaxation, visiting some tourist attractions, adventure tourism, etc. (76%), travel costs



(62%), distance (41%), attractiveness (53%) and other considerations (47%). Thus, we find that although tourists pursue quite precise objectives in their trips, a high percentage of them also take into account the costs of the trip, as well as the distance.

**To question no. 12:** *What was the form of booking the tourist destination?*, the answers provided highlight the fact that the majority of respondents prefer online platforms (67%), but also travel agencies (26%) or booking through the reception unit (34%). Only 6% of respondents go without a reservation.

Digitization, but also the development of digital skills, are an important factor in making reservations. Also, the scores and reviews on the platforms' pages are elements that tourists take into account in the choices they make when choosing an accommodation unit and a tourist destination.

**Question no. 13:** *Do you prefer to go to new locations or do you return to a location you liked?*, question that had three answer options, highlighted the fact that, in general, tourists choose both well-known locations, to which they return several times, but also new locations (94%). Only 9% of the respondents look for new locations every time and 7% of them prefer only known locations. Since creative tourism is based on establishing connections with the natives, this will result in the tourist returning to those locations, causing him to recommend them to his acquaintances or to express his opinion online. Creative tourism is ultimately a form of experiential tourism, which will lead the tourist to either look for new, unknown locations, but also locations to return to precisely because of the pleasant experiences he experienced.

**The answers to question no. 14:** *Do you consider that creative tourism is a form of tourism that you want to experience?*, showed that more than half of the respondents would like to experience the activities related to creative tourism, while 18% consider that these activities do not interest them, and 21% do not know if they want to do this (Fig. 4).

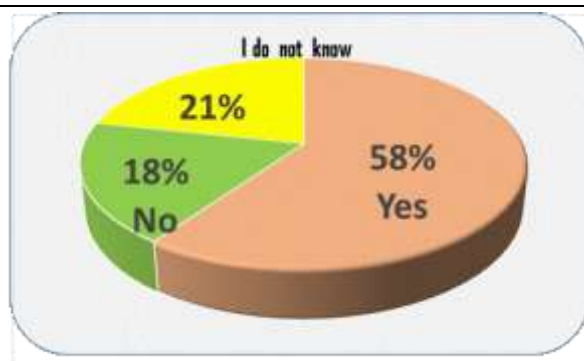


Fig. 4. Structura respondentilor interesati de practicarea turismului creativ

Source: own processing.

Thus, we find that there is a rather high interest among the respondents related to this form of tourism that should be promoted, but this does not depend only on the development of those public policies that I mentioned earlier, but also on the involvement of entrepreneurs, of the local population in thinking of creative activities and developing programs to attract tourists, both Romanian and foreign. According to the Emirati data, the interest of foreign tourists is higher in relation to creative tourism in Romania, compared to Romanian tourists.

**By applying question no. 15** we wanted to find out from the respondents: *What are the reasons for choosing creative tourism as a way of spending free time?* The question was a closed one, with multiple answer options, which highlighted the fact that tourists who would like to practice this form of tourism are interested in its sustainability (43%), as well as the fact that it is a pleasant form of leisure (41%) (Fig. 5).

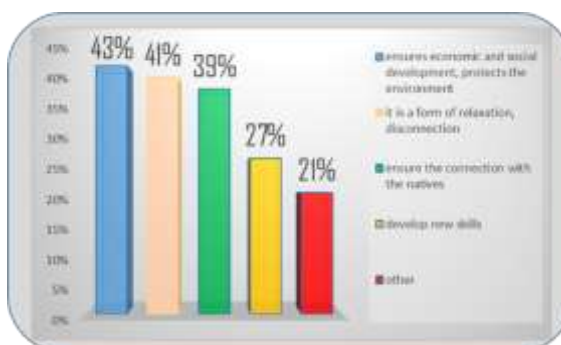


Fig. 5. Hierarchy of reasons for practicing creative tourism

Source: own processing.

At the same time, 31% of the respondents are interested in connecting with the natives and understanding their way of life, while 27% believe that it would be a way to acquire new skills; 21% of the people who answered the questionnaire considered that there are other reasons for choosing creative tourism as a way of spending free time (creating stronger bonds with family members or friends, getting to know new cultures, making new friends, etc.).

**To question no. 16:** *What do you consider to be the impact of creative tourism on the environment, compared to traditional tourism?*, 63% of respondents assessed that the impact is less, 29% considered that the impact could be greater, and 8% said that "no know" (Fig. 6). As a result of the fact that the motivation of this answer was also requested, among the reasons that were the basis of the assessment of the increase in the impact on the environment were: the increase in the number of tourists who do not always behave in a responsible way, the attraction of tourists to areas less circulated from a tourist point of view and less polluted, above the tourist agglomeration, etc.

On the other hand, the respondents who considered that creative tourism has a lower impact on the environment, motivated the choice of this answer by the fact that it does not produce so much waste that pollutes the environment, that people who practice creative tourism have a certain level of education and a more responsible behavior, etc.

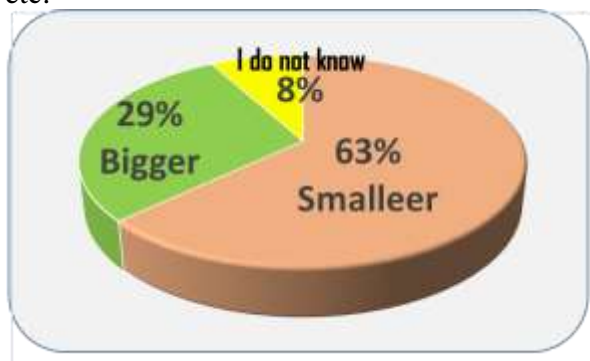


Fig. 6. Impact of creative tourism on the environment  
Source: own processing.

Therefore, creative tourism can be considered an innovative model, which, in addition to

developing the tourist experience of consumers, can also result in increased sustainability, being a way of renewal and development of the hospitality industry which can thus combine cultural experiences with learning and entertainment.

## CONCLUSIONS

Creative tourism developed as a result of belonging to alternative development models, thus becoming a diversification strategy in a global economy. The desire for uniqueness, to put into practice creative ideas from different fields that can thus participate in the creation of an individualized product, which can refresh classic, conventional tourism, are aspects that have contributed to the development of this form of tourism. In this way, creative tourism is a form of contemporary tourism, which becomes much more adapted to the wishes and expectations of the current generations, it is innovative, it seeks and offers new possibilities for spending free time and it is no longer limited to meeting the needs of rest and relaxation, but to offer more, to offer experiences, to offer memories, connections with the other participants, in a world that suffers from the breaking of social relations and individualism. Increasing interest in creative tourism was also determined by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, when people wanted to practice some forms of tourism that would make them leave the house, but which would keep them in safety, which will allow them social distancing [9]. Later, its attractiveness made creative tourism a way of life, a modern form of tourism with origins in traditions and culture.

The responses collected through the questionnaire and analyzed highlighted the fact that although the concept is quite little known among Romanian tourists, those who took part in such activities are generally young, educated, prefer to travel alone or in groups of friends and choose less crowded or well-known destinations, both in the country and outside the country, where they seek to interact with the local culture. They do not want to be involved in activities that imitate

or take over creative ideas, but they want to participate in forms of tourism developed by communities in their own ways and that are adapted to a certain rhythm of life, with which they resonate.

Considering the interest of young people in this form of tourism, this could be a strategic priority for Romania, so that through the strategies it proposes to create innovative models of local tourism, which will contribute to attracting tourists to practice some forms of tourism niche, less polluting, which will contribute to increasing the level of awareness of responsibility towards cultural identity, but also to the environment, which will lead to the decrease of social disparities and the increase of local incomes.

However, we consider that in addition to the promotion activity, the development of tourism in general, and creative tourism in particular, requires the existence of an adequate infrastructure that allows tourists access to these areas.

The present research was carried out only by surveying Romanian tourists. Considering, however, the interest of foreign tourists in the traditions, customs, traditional cuisine of Romania, culture, etc. we will leave room for future research that will also address this aspect.

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