

Section 3. Geography

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PUBLIC PERCEPTION ON NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE IN DEVOLL MUNICIPALITY, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Abstract: Public perception studies have a great importance in local and regional studies. Devolli municipality lies in the south-eastern part of Albania on the border with the Republic of Greece. It has many natural and cultural assets that offer opportunities for the development of tourism; however this sector is almost undeveloped. The purpose of the work consists in promoting the natural and cultural heritage of Devoll Municipality, studying the public perception on the recognition of these values as well as providing opportunities for the creation of a strategy for their good management in function of sustainable development. The use of literature review, field work, statistical and analytical methods was necessary

for the realization of this study. Through using Google Forms, was created a questionnaire which was completed by the residents of the Devolli municipality. The results and conclusions will make possible a comparison of the real natural and cultural potentials and the level of informing the population about these potentials. This study will influence the undertaking of promotional and incentive policies for the development of tourism in the Devoll municipality.

Keywords: Devolli municipality, public perception, natural heritage, cultural heritage, development, tourism.

Introduction

Tourism today is one of the most massive and important sectors of the Global Economy [1; 2]. Natural and Cultural heritage have a great important role in the development of tourism in the World. The community's perception of tourism development, based on natural and cultural values, play an important role in undertaking long-term policies for tourism development [3; 4]. Devoll municipality is a part of the Korça region. It is located in the southeastern part of Albania and has an area of 453. 43 km² [5]. The municipality of Devoll in the Northeast, East, Southeast, and South has international borders with the Republic of Greece. It has an important geographical position; important trade routes have passed through its territory [6].

Devolli municipality is surrounded by five rural administrative units with 44 villages; only one urban center who is Bilisht city. The population of the municipality are 42388 inhabitants [7; 8]. It is located at an altitude of 900 m above sea level. The climate of the municipality of Devolli is sub-mountainous SE Mediterranean. The average annual temperature is 10.6 °C [9; 10]. Climatic conditions, water resources and fertile lands make Devolli populated since early times; the main evidence is the Train Cave, one of the Middle Neolithic settlements [11; 12; 13]. Devolli municipality has

a various number of objects of natural and cultural heritage. Some of the protected areas in this municipality are: The southern part of the National Prespa Park, Managed Nature Reserve Cangonji, Nikolica Protected Landscape [14; 15].

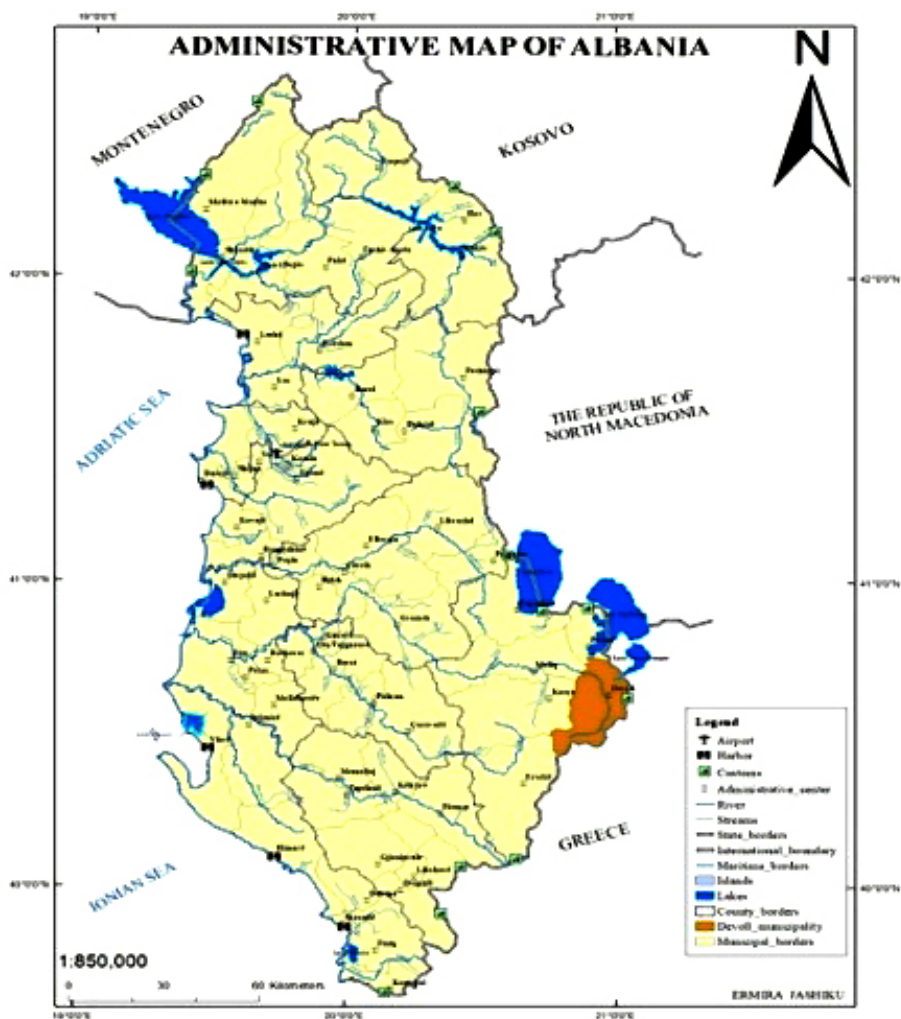


Figure 1. The geographical position of Devoli Municipality, in Albania country

Natural monuments such as: Train Cave, Stone of Mumje, Stone of Ariu, Spring of Progri, 5 bio monuments such as: *Ahishtja e Saint Konstandin*, *Forest of Saint Thanas*. *Ahishta e Bradvicës*, *Dushkaja e Dobërgorës*, *Poplars of Pilur* [5; 13; 14; 15]. In the territory of Devolli, there are also 13 archaeological and architectural monuments that belong to the first category of protected areas. They are: Gradishta e Shuecit, the Castel of Trajani (22 ha), Castel of Ventroku, Castel of Bilishti the prehistoric settlement of the Treni cave etc.[16].

Devolli has a number of religious, ethnographic, traditional kitchen and other cultural objects who offer many opportunities for the development of different types of tourism. Despite these conditions; the tourism sector is one of the most underdeveloped sectors in Devoll Municipality.



Figure 2. A. Small Prespa Lake; B. Prehistoric Picture of Spile C. Cave of Treni D. Rainfall of Sinica

Research method

The research is based on both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to investigate the community's perceptions through the literature review, fieldwork, and survey questionnaires. The major method used to collect data and information was the survey. Surveys are particularly useful to study the perceptions of communities in local development. To achieve the aim of the study a structured questionnaire with 35 questions was created in Google Forms and was completed by 144 residents of different administrative units of this municipality.

The questionnaire designed for the article was organized in four sections, where the *first section* were 7 questions about the general information of the population (age, gender, education, employment, emigration status), the *second section* were questions about information on natural and cultural heritage of Devolli municipality that they have or not (10 questions) the *third section* focused on problems who hinder the development of tourism in Devoll Municipality (11 questions) and the *four section* there are questions about the management of natural and cultural heritage. The collection and processing of data have revealed the lack of information on the protected areas of the municipality of Devoll as well as the lack of their utilization in the function of tourism development. Informing the population about natural and cultural values and their awareness of the importance of these values requires significant improvement in local government policies for a better development of the municipality in the future.

Results and discussions

The study was conducted during the period May-September 2023. According to the data collected by 144 residents of Devoll Municipality, 63% (90) of them were female and 37% (54) of them were male.

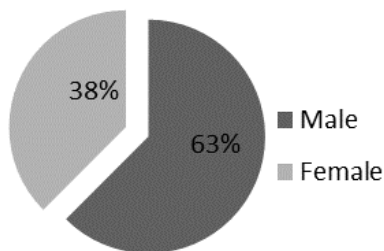


Figure 3. The gender of the respondents

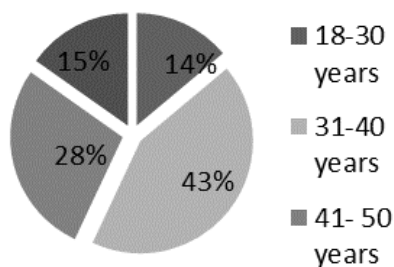


Figure 4. The age of the respondents

The age of the respondents is generally young, 14% (20) of the respondents are between 18–20 years old; 43% (62) of them are between 31–40 years old; 28% (40) are between 41–50 years old and only 15% (22) of them are over 50 years old. Regarding, their education the majority of the respondents 87% (126) have graduated from university, 10% (14) of them have a high school diploma and 3% (4) of them have a primary school.

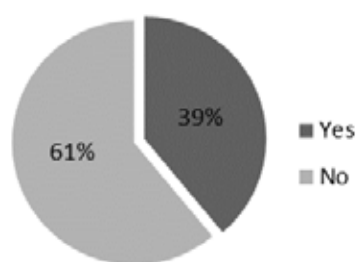


Figure 4. Have you been in emigration?

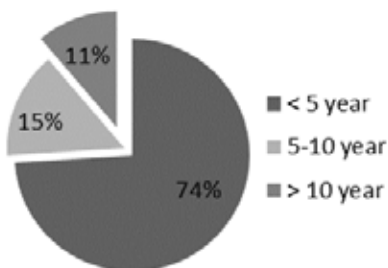


Figure 5 How long time?

According to the question “Have you been in emigration? The majority of them answered no, 61% (88) and 39% (56) of them answered yes. According to the question of the time of stay in emigration the majority 74% of the residents who were in emigration have stayed up 5 years; 15% of them have stayed in emigration between 5 to 10 years and only 11% of them were in emigration more than 10

years. Asked whether emigration has influenced the development of tourism in a different perspective, majority, 65% of the responds answered yes, they see tourism in a different perspective as a result of emigration; 26% of them answered “I don’t know” and 9% of them answered no. 132 out of 144 respondents answered the question of what you mean by natural values and majority of them answered that natural values are the environment that offers opportunities for the development of life, mentioning various natural objects such as mountains, plants, animals, water, air, etc. A small part of respondents included cultural values in natural values.

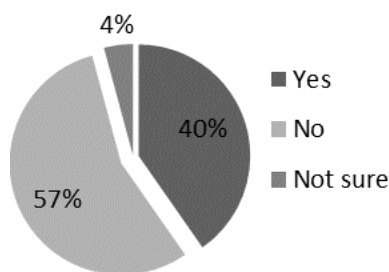


Figure 6.

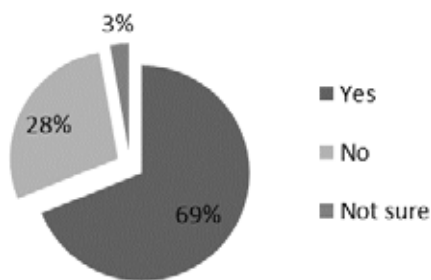


Figure 7.

The know about natural heritage The know about cultural heritage According to the question if they know about the natural heritage objects, most of responds 69% (100) answered yes; 28% (40) of them no and only 3% (4) of them answered not are sure. Asked if they know about the cultural objects in Devoll municipality which are protected by law, most of them 57% (82) answered no; 40% (57) of them answered yes and 4% (5) of them answered not sure. Meanwhile, the respondents who answered yes listed some protected natural objects such as: Prespa Park, Cangonji Reserve, Train Cave, Morava Mountains, while they have not mentioned at all. To the question of what do you mean by cultural values, the respondents listed answers such as: customs, traditions, art, characteristic songs, traditional dishes, music, language, cultural objects etc. Meanwhile, the respondents

who answered yes listed some protected cultural objects such as: Guri i Ariut, Kalaja e Trajanit, Shtepia Muze e Marigose, Shtepia e Dritero Agollit, Vallja Devollite etj. By comparing the graphs of recognition or not of natural and cultural objects it turns out that people have more information about natural objects than cultural ones.

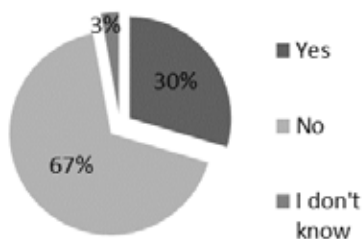


Figure 8. Have you been in any training?

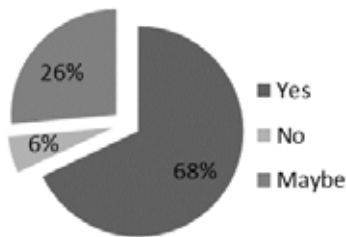


Figure 9. Do you want to participate in training?

According to the question if they are informed about the natural and cultural values of the area, the majority 67% (96) of them responded no; 30% (43) of them were answered yes and only 3% (4) of them answered no. Asked if they would like to be part of any program; training; the recognition of natural and cultural heritage activity with it, the majority of responds 68% (98) of them answering yes; 26% (20) answered maybe and 6% (8) of them answered no. These data show that the majority of the population has not participated in trainings or other events to inform about the values of the area, but the majority of residents also want to participate in various events on natural and cultural heritage information.

According to the question "How important are natural and cultural values in the development of tourism?" most of the surveyed people 79% of them answered that they are very important; 18% of them answered that they are important and only 3% of them answered that they are little important. This shows that people know that these values are of great importance for the development of tourism.

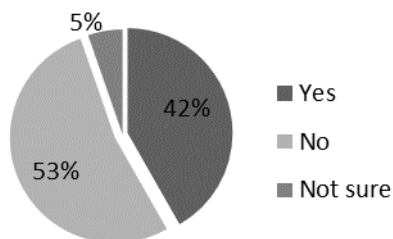


Figure 10. Do you know about historical monuments?

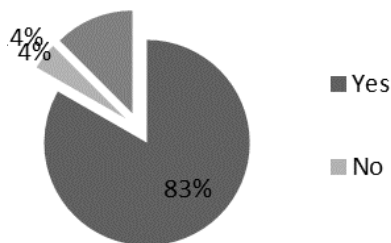


Figure 11. Has Devolli lack of information about natural and cultural heritage?

According to the question whether local residents know about historical monuments, majority 53% (77) of them answered no; 42% (60) of them answered yes and only 5% (7) of them answered not sure. The respondents, who answered that they know the historical objects of history by law, listed that historical monuments such as the house of Dritero Agolli, the Train Cave, the Poplars of Bilishti, the House of Marigo, the Castle of Trajan, etc. Nga pergjigjet e lartper-mendura duket se ka nje konfizion mbi njohjen e objekteve historike.

According to the questions about knowledge of historical values, the majority of respondents answered with definitions such as: historical past, archaeological monuments, castles, events, cults, war documents. Asked if in Devolli municipality has a lack of public information on the values of the area, most 83% (120) of them answered yes; 12.5% (18) answered they don't know and only 4.2% (6) of the respondents answered no. These data show the necessity of informing and promoting the population of the area about protected natural and cultural objects. According to the question which are the institutions that can provide information about natural and cultural heritage, most of them answered the Ministry of Tourism and Culture and after that local government, social media, cultural institutions, organizations and educational institutions.

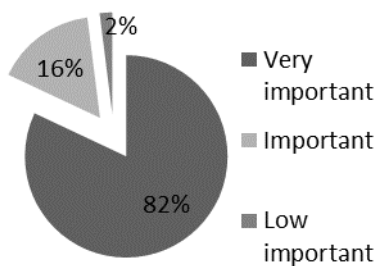


Figure 13. How important is to inform the population?

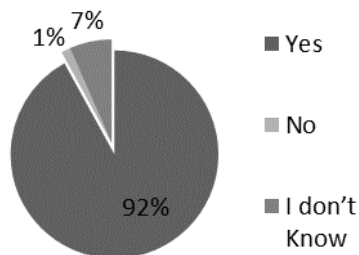


Figure 14. Does Devolli municipality have opportunities for tourism development?

Asked how important it is in your opinion to inform the population about the values of the area where they live? the majority; 82% (118) answered it is very important; 16% (24) answered that it is moderately important and only 1% (2) of them answered that informing the population is a little important. Asked if Devolli has opportunity for tourism development, the majority, 92% (132) of the respondents answered yes, Devolli has opportunity for tourism development, 7% (10) of them answered they do not know if Devolli has opportunity for the development of tourism and only 1.4% (2) of the respondents answered that Devolli has no opportunity for the development of tourism.

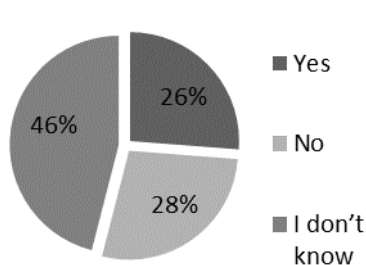


Figure 15. Initiatives taken for the development of tourism

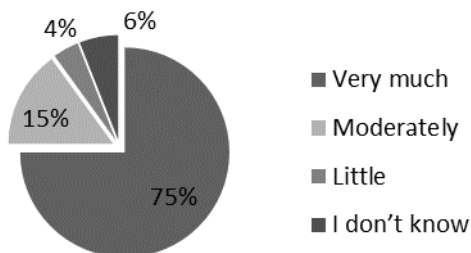


Figure 16. Has Devolli people lack of information?

According to the question if have been taken whether initiatives for the development of tourism in your municipality, most of the respondents 46% (68) answered that they do not know; 28% (42) of them answered no and 24% (34) of them answered yes. Asked if the people who live in Devoll had lack of information for natural and cultural values majority, 75% (101) of them answered that very much, the people in Devolli municipality had a lack of information for the natural and cultural values. 15% (23) of them answered moderately, 6% (8) of them answered “I don’t know” and 4% (5) of them answered no, the people who lives in Devoll have information about natural and cultural heritage.

According to the question “How much the lack of information about the values of the area affects in the development of tourism?” majority; 75% (110) of the respondents answered that the lack of information has affected the development of tourism. 15% (22) of them expressed themselves sufficiently, 5% (7) of them answered that they do not know and 4% (5) of them answered that the lack of information has little impact on the development of tourism.

In the question of who should take the initiative for the development of tourism, the respondents ranked the local government in the first place, the central government in the second place, the businesses in the third place and the population in the fourth place. A small part of the respondents also mentioned government organizations or educational institutions as initiators of tourism development.

Conclusions

According to the results of the questionnaires, most of the inhabitants do not have enough information for the natural and cultural heritage. They have general information on the natural and cultural objects of Devoll Municipality, but they do not know details about them. According to the answers, it seems that residents often confuse cultural heritage with natural heritage. The respondents listed some of

the villages that have more opportunities for tourism development, mentioning mountain villages as a result of the natural value and the architectural characteristics of the houses, such as Qyteza, Sinica, Grapshi, Nikolica, Bradvica; the settlements around of Small Prespa Lake such as Shyeci, Zagradeci, Rakicka, Treni, which have natural landscape, cultural and historical values and Menkulas. Hoçishti, Ziçishti for reasons of historical and cultural values. Devolli municipality offer many opportunities for the development of mountain tourism, cultural, historical, gastronomic, geo tourism, etc. Devolli also has opportunities for the development of agro tourism. Lack of infrastructure, lack of investment in the tourism sector and lack of attention from local and central government institutions are some of the problems listed by respondents as obstacles to the development of tourism in the municipality of Devolli.

The promotion of the natural, cultural and historical values of the area as well drafting policies for the use of natural and cultural potentials through sustainable development; Needed policies for the improvement of infrastructure and services; Drafting of policies for the promotion of the area's values and investments for the development of tourism; Investment absorption and projects for the development of agriculture are some of the solutions for tourism development and to increase the well-being of the population of this municipality.

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