

Article

The Influence of Socio-Demographic Factors on Local Attitudes Towards Sustainable Tourism Development in Skadar Lake and Durmitor National Parks, Montenegro

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Abstract: This study investigates the attitudes of local residents regarding the impacts of sustainable tourism development in two national parks in Montenegro: Skadar Lake National Park (NP) and Durmitor National Park (NP). The aim is to identify the key factors that shape these attitudes and to discern the differences in perceptions between the residents of these two areas. The research is based on the assumption that socio-demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, and level of education, significantly influence attitudes toward sustainable tourism development. Data were collected through a questionnaire covering various attitudes toward tourism. Analyses were conducted using multiple regression analysis, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), and Pearson's correlation, with careful verification of all key statistical assumptions to ensure the validity of the results. The findings reveal significant differences in perceptions between residents of NP Skadar Lake and NP Durmitor. Respondents from NP Durmitor generally rated tourism's positive and negative aspects higher than those from NP Skadar Lake. On the other hand, NP Skadar Lake residents exhibited more enthusiasm for tourism promotion and engagement in tourism development processes. It was concluded that socio-demographic characteristics, particularly education and age, influence attitudes toward tourism. These findings provide a basis for formulating recommendations to improve tourism development, considering local communities' specific needs and perceptions in both national parks.

Keywords: tourism; resilience; sustainability; national parks; Skadar Lake; Durmitor; socio-demographic; development; perception; attitudes



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1. Introduction

Tourism plays a crucial role in global economic growth, cultural exchange, and environmental awareness [1–6]. However, balancing tourism expansion with conservation efforts—particularly in protected areas such as national parks—remains a significant challenge [7–11]. The rise of mass tourism and increasing pressure on fragile ecosystems have made it difficult for national parks worldwide to sustain this balance while ensuring economic benefits for local communities [12–15]. Sustainable tourism frameworks emphasise

the importance of responsible tourism practices that integrate environmental conservation, economic development, and community engagement [16–18].

Since local communities play a central role in shaping sustainable tourism strategies, understanding their attitudes toward tourism development is essential for policymakers and tourism planners [19–22]. Despite the growing importance of sustainable tourism [17,23–34], there remains a gap in understanding how local communities perceive tourism development and resilience, particularly in the context of national parks. Assessing these perceptions is crucial for effective policy formulation and ensuring that tourism contributes to long-term socio-economic stability without compromising environmental conservation efforts [31,32,35,36]. This research addresses this gap by focusing on how socio-demographic factors shape these perceptions, providing valuable insights for policymakers, tourism planners, and conservation organizations.

For many communities, especially those in rural or protected areas, tourism serves as a primary source of income and employment, making its sustainable development critical for long-term socio-economic stability [31,33,37,38]. International frameworks, such as UNESCO’s Sustainable Tourism Program and EU environmental policies, guide national tourism strategies, underscoring the need for inclusive governance that integrates local perspectives [25,32,35,39]. This approach ensures that tourism growth aligns with conservation objectives and community well-being.

Montenegro’s national parks, particularly Durmitor and Skadar Lake, are among the country’s most valuable natural and cultural heritage sites. These protected areas play a crucial role in environmental conservation and serve as key tourism destinations that contribute significantly to the national economy. Understanding how tourism interacts with these landscapes, communities, and historical legacies is essential for developing sustainable management strategies that balance conservation with economic benefits [40–43].

The choice of these two national parks is based on their distinct characteristics and different levels of tourism development. The selection of Skadar Lake and Durmitor National Parks reflects the diversity of tourism development in Montenegro while serving as a case study for similar protected areas in the Balkans, where balancing economic opportunity with environmental sustainability remains a pressing issue [44–46]. Durmitor National Park, a well-established tourist destination with UNESCO World Heritage status, features diverse geological formations and glacial lakes. In contrast, Skadar Lake National Park is still developing its tourism potential, offering a different perspective on how communities respond to tourism at various stages of growth. By examining these two parks, this study provides insight into how socio-demographic characteristics—such as gender, age, and education—shape residents’ attitudes toward tourism and their level of participation in decision-making processes.

This study explores how socio-demographic factors influence residents’ perceptions of sustainable tourism development, focusing on Skadar Lake and Durmitor National Parks in Montenegro. While previous research has examined the environmental and economic impacts of tourism, fewer studies have investigated local communities’ perspectives and their role in the tourism planning process [47–49]. Theories such as community-based tourism (CBT) [50–55] This research highlights the importance of resident participation in tourism development and suggests that inclusive decision-making leads to more sustainable outcomes. Applying these theoretical perspectives aims to provide empirical evidence on how local communities perceive tourism development and their involvement in shaping tourism policies.

As tourism in Montenegro continues to grow, understanding the perceptions of local communities regarding tourism development and resilience becomes critical [44–46]. The sustainable development of these national parks depends not only on their natural and

historical significance but also on the engagement of local populations. Sustainable tourism frameworks often examine tourism development in protected areas, which emphasise the balance between environmental conservation, economic growth, and local community involvement [31,56–59]. Theories such as the community-based tourism (CBT) model highlight the importance of resident participation in tourism planning, suggesting that successful tourism development depends on including local stakeholders in decision-making processes [49,50,52,54,55,60]. Applying these theoretical perspectives to the Skadar Lake and Durmitor National Parks cases will help contextualise the study's findings within a broader sustainable tourism discourse.

Focusing on these two national parks, this study provides a case-based framework applicable to other protected areas facing similar sustainability challenges. The insights gained can be used to develop evidence-based policies that enhance community engagement, strengthen resilience, and ensure that tourism growth aligns with conservation objectives and local socio-economic needs. While previous research has extensively examined the economic and environmental impacts of tourism in protected areas [38,61–65], limited studies have focused on how residents perceive tourism development and their role in shaping its outcomes [66–70]. Understanding these perceptions is essential for developing sustainable tourism models that prioritise community involvement and resilience [71–74].

This study aims to provide an in-depth analysis of how local communities perceive tourism development and resilience in Skadar Lake and Durmitor National Parks. It focuses on understanding residents' perspectives on tourism, examining the influence of socio-demographic factors—such as gender, age, and education—on these perceptions, and assessing the broader effects of tourism development on community resilience. Furthermore, the research investigates the degree to which residents participate in tourism-related decision-making processes. By addressing these gaps, this research aims to contribute to the growing body of literature on sustainable tourism development by providing policy recommendations that ensure inclusive and community-centred tourism strategies. The findings will serve as a valuable resource for local governments, tourism stakeholders, and conservation organisations in designing tourism models that align with the interests and well-being of residents [53,75–77].

Literature Review

Several studies have examined how socio-demographic factors—such as age, education, employment status, and length of residency—influence residents' attitudes toward tourism development [21,47,78–83]. For instance, age and gender influence how proximity to tourism centres shapes residents' perspectives, with differences in support for tourism development based on these demographic traits [80,84]. For example, gender shapes views on sustainable tourism, affecting attitudes, participation, and policy considerations [85–93].

Studies indicate that men generally express more scepticism toward sustainable tourism than women, particularly regarding financial support [91]. Furthermore, gender moderates the relationship between social and environmental perspectives and residents' satisfaction with tourism sustainability [85]. Women's empowerment in rural tourism fosters greater involvement and contributes positively to sustainable tourism development, with cooperatives as a key enabler in this process [87]. Promoting gender equality is fundamental to achieving sustainability in tourism, as it supports the realisation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and helps to challenge existing power dynamics [92]. Incorporating gender perspectives into tourism sustainability research is necessary to build more inclusive frameworks that address intersectional issues and the experiences of marginalised groups [89,90].

Additionally, gender differences influence entrepreneurial strategies in the tourism sector, shaping approaches to risk-taking and business sustainability [94]. Addressing gender-based perceptions, societal expectations, and policy limitations can strengthen the sustainability of women's entrepreneurship in tourism [86]. Although economic, environmental, and digital marketing factors play a significant role in post-industrial tourism development, some findings suggest that gender may not always be decisive in shaping attitudes toward tourism sustainability [88].

On the other side, education plays a crucial role, as individuals with higher levels of education often recognise the benefits of tourism while also demonstrating a more comprehensive understanding of its effects [81,83,84,95]. Environmental education is key in fostering residents' commitment to sustainability and their willingness to support sustainable tourism initiatives [96]. Informal educational programmes can enhance tourists' understanding of environmental issues, leading to increased awareness, improved attitudes, and more potent ecological literacy, which may also boost their long-term engagement with sustainable tourism practices [97–103].

Although both residents and students generally support sustainable tourism, further education is needed to deepen their knowledge and encourage more active participation [104–107]. In rural areas, attitudes toward sustainable tourism are influenced by a combination of environmental, economic, and socio-cultural conditions, as well as infrastructure and demographic factors such as age, gender, and educational background [108–110].

The duration of residency also affects attitudes, with newer residents generally viewing tourism more favourably, likely due to reduced exposure to its long-term drawbacks [81,95]. Moreover, place of birth can shape how tourism's impacts interact with residency length, further influencing perceptions of tourism growth [81,95]. Employment in the tourism industry and perceived financial benefits at a personal level are also key factors that foster more positive attitudes toward tourism expansion [83,84].

Another critical aspect the literature addresses is the influence of governance and policy frameworks on the relationship between tourism and conservation [111–114]. Studies on protected areas in Australia and Canada reveal that collaborative governance—where government agencies, local communities, and private sector stakeholders work together—often leads to more successful conservation efforts [115–118]. On the other hand, research focusing on rapidly growing tourism markets, such as those in Southeast Asia, underscores the challenges associated with unregulated tourism expansion, including habitat destruction and over-tourism [119–122]. These findings highlight the importance of policy-driven approaches that align conservation objectives with the principles of sustainable tourism.

Also, many researchers examining the relationship between tourism development and nature conservation emphasise the complex challenge of achieving a balance between economic expansion and environmental preservation [38,59,123–125]. It can be said that researchers have explored various sustainable tourism models, highlighting the necessity of integrating environmental protection measures into tourism policies to mitigate adverse effects [59,124–127]. The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) has also emphasised the role of responsible tourism, advocating for policies that promote biodiversity conservation while simultaneously fostering economic benefits for local communities [128–130]. On the other side, different research conducted across various regions, including national parks in North America, Europe, and Asia, suggests that well-regulated tourism, combined with the active participation of local communities in decision-making, can serve as an effective tool for conservation [45,59,63,66,124,125,128,130–134].

In Europe, studies examining tourism's impact on protected areas emphasise the necessity of adaptive management strategies that can respond effectively to evolving environmental and social conditions [24,58,135–139]. Despite the considerable progress made

in sustainable tourism research, scholars continue to debate the long-term feasibility of tourism in ecologically sensitive areas. While some argue that sustainable tourism can function as a conservation tool, others warn that an increase in tourist activity inevitably exerts pressure on the environment if not carefully regulated [62,140–142]. This ongoing discourse reinforces the importance of continuous monitoring and flexible policy adjustments to ensure that tourism development does not compromise the ecological integrity of protected areas.

Also, research on the relationship between nature conservation and tourism development remains relatively limited, with only a few authors exploring this complex issue [124,125,127,143]. Various socio-demographic factors, such as age, gender, and education level, influence the perceptions of residents regarding tourism development [144–150]. These factors shape attitudes toward tourism's benefits and challenges and residents' willingness to engage in decision-making. By analysing these dimensions, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in tourism affirmation within national parks.

Existing research highlights the importance of understanding residents' perceptions of tourism development, as their support or opposition can significantly impact the success of sustainable tourism initiatives. Studies indicate that multiple factors, including perceived economic benefits, environmental concerns, and social impacts of tourism, shape residents' attitudes [76,151–153]. However, in the context of Montenegro's national parks, there is a lack of empirical data on how local communities perceive and interact with tourism development [154–158]. This study seeks to bridge that gap by focusing on Durmitor and Skadar Lake National Parks.

One of the pioneering studies in this area was conducted by Nikolić [159], who examined the interdependence between nature protection and tourism, emphasising the role of ecological conservation as a prerequisite for the long-term development of tourism in Montenegro. Expanding on this perspective, Radović [156] provided a concise overview of ecological protection in tourist areas, focusing on the necessary conditions for achieving sustainable and high-quality tourism development.

A more localised approach was taken in the research of Radosavović [160], which analysed the role of tourism in the development of Plužine municipality. The findings revealed a three-tiered pattern of participation among residents: some directly engage in tourism; others are indirectly involved. At the same time, a portion of the population does not participate at all. Moreover, the study highlighted both positive and negative effects of tourism on the local community, emphasising that the local population is highly interested in tourism development and well aware of the region's potential. The study also found that residents are open to collaboration with local authorities and tourism professionals, suggesting a strong foundation for participatory tourism planning [160].

When analysing similar studies in neighbouring countries, the research conducted in the Mura-Drava Regional Park examined the perspectives of local and regional tourism organisations on community involvement in tourism development. The results confirmed that local tourism stakeholders recognise the essential role of residents in the development of sustainable tourism [161].

Further supporting the significance of community engagement, a study on local support for tourism development in Istria employed regression analysis to assess key determinants influencing resident attitudes. The results indicated that residents' perceptions and attitudes toward tourism are crucial factors shaping their level of support, regardless of socio-demographic differences. These findings underscore the importance of tourism planning that aligns with the needs and expectations of the local population [162].

Additionally, research on resident attitudes toward tourism development in Vrbas identified notable differences based on employment status, gender, and occupation. Unemployed individuals mainly supported tourism development, while young people demonstrated strong enthusiasm for tourism initiatives [163]. The study also revealed that residents support tourism development but are often unaware of the region's full potential. Notably, the perceived negative impacts of tourism received lower ratings, suggesting that residents may not be fully aware of potential challenges associated with tourism growth [163].

These studies highlight the multifaceted relationship between tourism development and local community engagement. While tourism's economic and social benefits are well recognised, there remains a gap in awareness regarding potential negative consequences. This underscores the need for inclusive tourism policies that capitalise on local knowledge and engagement and address sustainability concerns and community well-being.

2. Methods

This study aims to critically assess how local populations perceive tourism development in Skadar Lake and Durmitor National Parks (Figure 1). Specifically, it seeks to explore residents' attitudes toward tourism, investigate how socio-demographic factors—such as gender, age, and education—shape these perceptions, and evaluate the broader implications of tourism development on community resilience. On the other side, this study is guided by the conceptual framework of sustainable tourism and community engagement [36,51,164–166], which suggests that local populations play a crucial role in shaping tourism policies and ensuring the long-term viability of tourism-based economies. By integrating socio-demographic variables into the analysis, this research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how different groups perceive tourism development and resilience in national parks. The formulated hypotheses, therefore, seek to explore the relationships between demographic characteristics and attitudes toward tourism, as well as the extent of local involvement in tourism decision-making. Additionally, the study examines the extent to which residents are engaged in tourism-related decision-making processes.

The study employed a stratified random sampling method to ensure representative coverage of the local population in Skadar Lake and Durmitor National Parks. The stratification criteria included age, gender, education level, and economic dependence on tourism, allowing us to capture diverse perspectives on sustainable tourism development. A total of 500 respondents were selected through random sampling from local community registries and public records. This ensured that the sample included a balanced representation of residents with varying levels of engagement in the tourism sector. The data were collected using structured, in-person, and online questionnaires to maximise response rates and inclusivity. Before full-scale data collection, a pilot study was conducted with 50 respondents to validate the questionnaire and refine the wording for clarity and reliability. The study design did not impose a gender quota; however, the final sample composition reflected the natural demographic distribution of the local population. Any observed gender imbalance in the sample was accounted for in the statistical analysis phase.

To achieve these objectives, the research is guided by the following key questions: (a) How does the level of education influence residents' perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of sustainable tourism development? (b) In what ways do gender differences shape attitudes toward sustainable tourism, particularly regarding environmental concerns? (c) Do younger residents support tourism expansion more due to perceived economic opportunities, while older residents prioritise cultural preservation? and (d) How does economic dependence on tourism influence residents' attitudes toward tourism development?

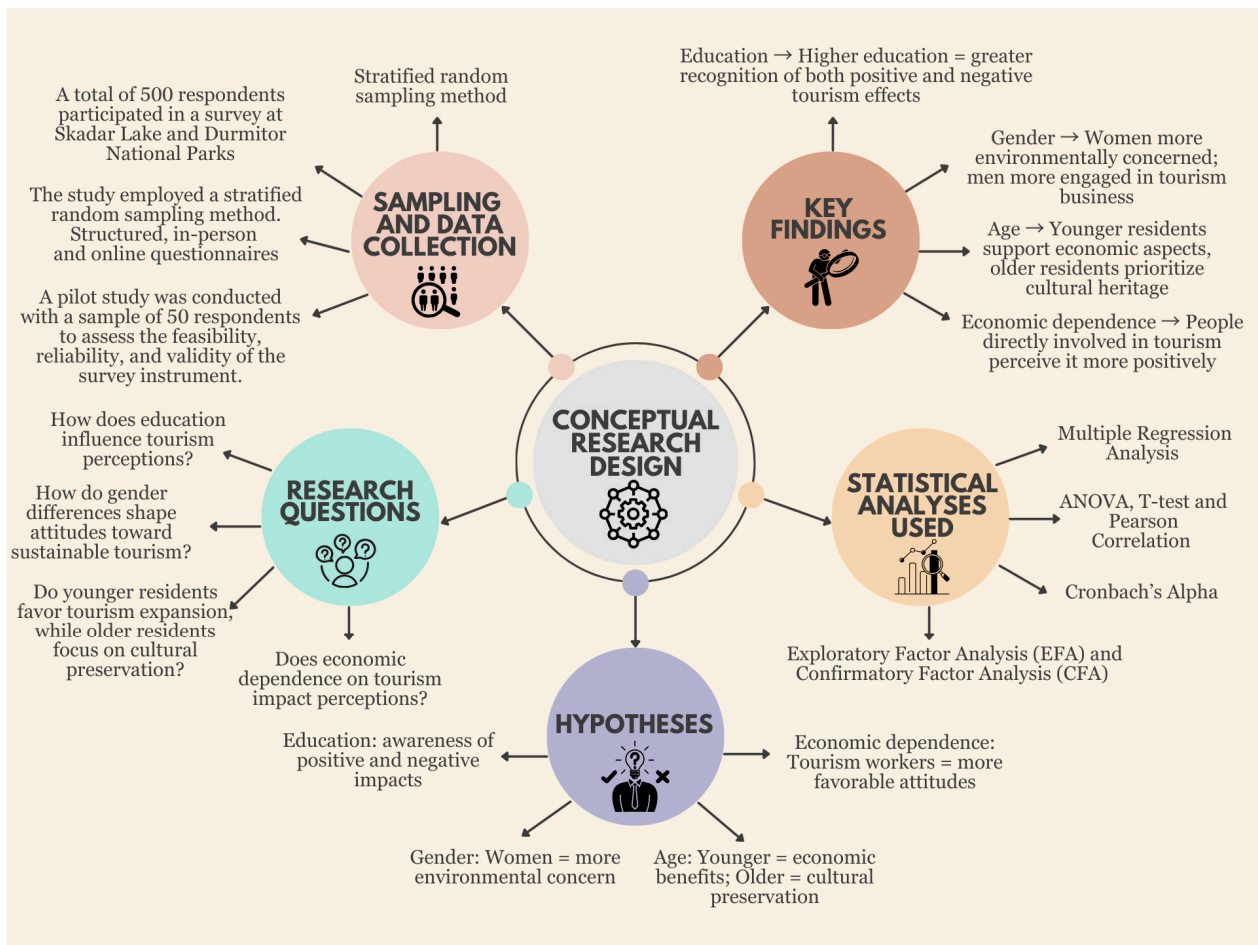


Figure 1. Conceptual research design.

Based on the objectives of this study and the conducted multiple regression analysis, the following hypotheses have been formulated to explore the relationship between socio-demographic factors and residents' perceptions of tourism development, as well as their involvement in decision-making processes:

Hypothesis 1. Residents with higher levels of education are more likely to recognise both the positive and negative impacts of tourism on their local community. This aligns with social exchange theory (SET), which suggests that individuals with higher education levels tend to have greater awareness of tourism's economic and environmental consequences, leading to more balanced evaluations of tourism impacts [167–170].

Hypothesis 2. Gender differences significantly shape residents' support for tourism, with women showing more significant concern for environmental sustainability. Studies on gender and ecological attitudes indicate that women are generally more environmentally conscious and support sustainable tourism policies more strongly than men [86,89,91,93].

Hypothesis 3. Younger residents are more supportive of tourism expansion due to perceived economic opportunities, whereas older residents express more significant concerns about cultural preservation. Research on youth engagement in tourism suggests that younger individuals prioritise employment and economic benefits over cultural or environmental concerns [171,172].

Hypothesis 4. Economic dependence on tourism moderates residents' perceptions, with those employed in the tourism sector displaying more positive attitudes toward development. Based on the

Tourism Dependency Theory, individuals with direct economic benefits from tourism tend to have more favourable attitudes toward tourism growth, while those without such benefits may be more critical [47,173].

These hypotheses provide a foundation for analysing the impact of key demographic variables on residents' attitudes and their role in sustainable tourism development.

2.1. Study Area

The selection of these areas (Durmitor and Skadar Lake National Parks in Montenegro) for study stems from their specific characteristics (Figure 2). These are regions rich in natural and anthropogenic tourism values, subject to a certain degree of protection, yet still not fully developed as tourist destinations. This suggests that possessing well-preserved natural beauty and a rich cultural-historical heritage does not necessarily equate to developed tourism. Instead, it represents only the first step in the complex process of tourism affirmation. Durmitor and Skadar Lake National Parks exhibit noticeable differences. NP Durmitor is the largest national park in Montenegro, located in the northern region, and is most renowned for its unique relief.

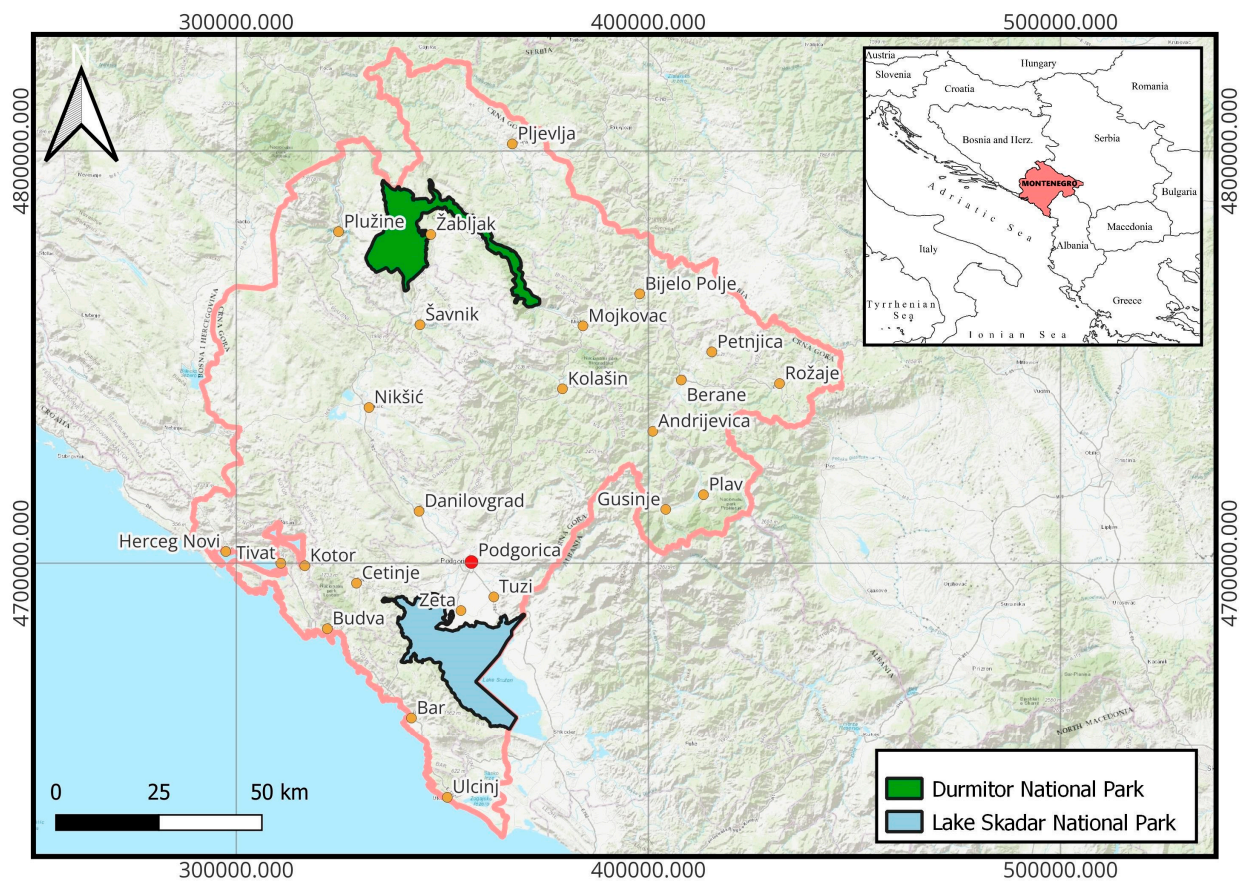


Figure 2. Study area: location of Durmitor and Skadar Lake National Parks, Montenegro.

Additionally, its climatic and hydrological characteristics and the richness and diversity of its flora and fauna contribute to a distinct and recognisable natural entity. In contrast, NP Skadar Lake is in central Montenegro and encompasses numerous geological, geomorphological, climatic, and cultural-historical features. However, the most outstanding value of the park lies in its wealth of clean water and the diversity of its plant and animal life [157]. Durmitor National Park is the largest national park in Montenegro. It includes the Tara Canyon, the canyons of Tara's right tributaries (Vaškovska River and

Draga), Zabojsko Lake on Sinjajevina, with a narrow belt connecting it to the Crna Poda primaeval forest in the Tara Canyon, the Durmitor massif, parts of the Piva Mountain, the Sušica Canyon, the source area of Bukovica, and most of Jezera Drobnyačka. The total area of the park is 39,000 hectares [157].

This territory covers five Montenegrin municipalities: Žabljak, Pljevlja, Plužine, Šavnik, and Mojkovac. The Tara Canyon, from the confluence of the Bistrica River to Šćepan Polje, stretching 80 km, was included in the list of World Ecological Reserves in 1987, while Durmitor National Park was added to the UNESCO World Cultural and Natural Heritage List in 1980 [155]. The depth of the Tara Canyon reaches up to 1300 m in some areas, making it the deepest canyon in Europe and the second largest in the world [159].

NP Durmitor exhibits an extraordinary complexity of geodiversity, featuring unique relief characteristics, significant altitude differences over short distances, massive mountain peaks, rich mountain rivers with stunning landscapes, and many glacial lakes. Due to its numerous geological, geomorphological, hydrological, botanical, historical, and cultural attributes, this area has exceptional tourism potential [154].

Evidence of prehistoric settlements within NP Durmitor was found in caves in the Piva region, which were flooded in 1976 during the creation of an artificial lake for the Piva Hydroelectric Plant: Odmut Cave and the cave at Sastavci. Archaeological findings (ceramic artefacts, stone tools, and animal bones) from Odmut Cave belong to the pre-Mesolithic, Mesolithic, and partially Neolithic phases of settlement development. The Neolithic phase was based on the Vinča culture, while ceramic finds from the cave at Sastavci indicate the influence of the Starčevo culture [174]. Significant archaeological remains from the Bronze Age testify to the Illyrians and other peoples in this area, such as burial sites—tumuli around Lever Tara, in Tepci and Todorov Dol. Among the archaeological remains from the Roman period, the bridge on the Bukovica River near Šavnik, also known as the Uskoci Bridge, stands out. From the mediaeval period, notable finds include stećci (stone tombstones) found in Novakovići, Bare Žugića, Šćepan Polje, Borkovića Katun, and other locations. There are also four significant mediaeval sites that, however, have not been extensively researched: the remains of the fortifications Pirlitor, Soko-Grad, Taban-Grad, and Kukulj-Grad [155,158].

In the area of NP Durmitor, there are several sacral objects (churches and monasteries) that have played a significant historical and cultural role not only in this region but beyond: the Monastery of Dovolja on the right bank of the Tara River (15th century), the Monastery of St. Archangel Michael on the right bank of the Tara River (15th century), the Monastery of Podmalinsko on the right bank of the Bukovica River (15th century), the Monastery of Bijela in the canyon of the Bijela River (17th century), the Monastery of Dobrilovina on the left bank of the Tara River (17th century), and the Monastery of Piva (16th century) as the most significant [155].

In the area of Skadar Lake National Park, there are numerous geological, geomorphological, and climatic features, but the most incredible value of the lake lies in the abundance of clean water and the diversity of plant and animal life [157]. Skadar Lake National Park covers a large part of the Podgorica-Skadar basin. The shoreline of Skadar Lake is highly indented, with numerous islands (Grmožur, Starčevo, Beška, Moračnik, Gradac, Tophala, Gorica, Gljat, etc.), bays, and capes, while the karst surroundings of the lake contain many underground cave formations, including Lipska Cave, Obodska Cave, Grbočica, Bobošuta, Ispila, and others [155]. Skadar Lake is fed by the Morača River and its tributaries, the Crnojević River, numerous smaller rivers in the surrounding area, and sublacustrine springs [157].

The area of Skadar Lake National Park includes biotopes of water bodies, wetland vegetation, floodplain meadows and forests, scrublands, and rocky terrains. It has been determined that 930 species of algae are present in the lake [155]. While endemic plant

species are rare in the lake itself, the surrounding areas are rich in them, with the ecosystems of the Prokletije, Rumija, and Lovćen mountains containing over 50% of the total number of Balkan endemics [157]. Research indicates that the lake hosts 45 species of fish, classified into 17 families. Skadar Lake is also an internationally significant gathering centre for ornithofauna, with 279 bird species residing in or migrating through the lake, either temporarily or permanently [155].

Multiple findings from the Mediterranean Neolithic period have been discovered on the territory of Skadar Lake National Park. One example is Dučića Cave, located on the northern edge of the Skadar basin, above the villages of Peuta and Gornja Vrbica, where various weapons and tools were found, including a flint knife and a polished axe [174]. The early Bronze Age saw the emergence of fortified settlements (gradine) such as Međeđa Glava and numerous tumuli. Particularly significant remains from this period include the Illyrian settlement of Meteon-Medun (late 4th century BC–early 3rd century BC), the fortress of Samobor above Skadar Lake (3rd century BC), burial sites in Momišići, and the necropolis in Gostilj. The most significant archaeological site from the Roman period is Doclea (Duklja), near present-day Podgorica, which was founded by the Romans in the 1st century AD and granted municipal status. In addition to Doclea, several other cities existed in antiquity, including Alata (Halata), Birziminium, Skadar, Gajtan, Kodra, and Gradac [155].

From the cultural and historical heritage, several religious structures from different periods stand out: the Monastery of Prečista Krajinska, located 22 km from Virpazar, near the village of Ostros (11th century); the Kom Monastery (15th century) as well as the remains of Žabljak (15th century) and Obod (15th century). At Obod, according to historical documents, the first Cyrillic printing house of the South Slavs began operating in 1493, making it the second Cyrillic printing house in Europe after the Krakow printing house [155]. Skadar Lake National Park extends across the municipalities of Podgorica, Cetinje, and Bar. It is a unique natural classroom and represents an area with great potential for developing sports, hunting and fishing, excursion, transit, religious, and cultural tourism.

2.2. Sample Characteristics

The study employs a structured survey methodology, with data collected from residents of communities surrounding Skadar Lake and Durmitor National Parks. A stratified random sampling technique ensured a representative distribution across different age groups, genders, and education levels. The questionnaire consisted of Likert-scale items measuring perceptions of tourism development, community involvement, and socio-demographic characteristics. Table 1 presents the sample distribution based on three key demographic variables: gender, age, and education. These variables are essential for understanding the characteristics of respondents and provide a foundation for a deeper analysis of their attitudes and perceptions within the study. The study included 500 respondents, of whom 217 were men (43.4%) and 283 were women (56.6%). This ratio indicates a slight predominance of female respondents, which may have implications for analysing gender-based differences in attitudes. Regarding age structure, the most significant proportion of respondents belongs to the 26–35 age group (38.2%), followed by those aged 36–45 (18.0%). The least represented groups are respondents younger than 18 (9.2%) and those older than 56 (8.8%). This distribution suggests that most respondents are in their working-age years, which is relevant for contextualising their perspectives. Regarding education, the highest percentage of respondents hold a higher education degree (47.4%), while 42.8% have completed secondary education, and 9.8% have only completed primary education. These findings indicate that most respondents have a high level of education, which may influence

their attitudes and understanding of the study topics. This demographic analysis provides essential information about the sample and offers more profound insights into the structure of the population surveyed. The higher proportion of highly educated respondents and the dominant age group of 26–35 years suggest that the study findings will likely reflect the views of these groups. Additionally, the slight predominance of female respondents allows for a comparative analysis of gender-based attitudes. These demographic characteristics are crucial for the accurate interpretation of the research results.

Table 1. Demographic structure of respondents.

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	217	43.4
	Female	283	56.6
Age	Up to 18 years	46	9.2
	18 to 25 years	72	14.4
	26 to 35 years	191	38.2
	36 to 45 years	90	18.0
	56 and older	44	8.8
Education	Primary education	49	9.8
	Secondary education	214	42.8
	Higher education	237	47.4

2.3. Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire development process involved several key steps to ensure validity and reliability (Appendix A). Initially, a pilot study was conducted on a small group of respondents similar to the target population to identify and correct potential issues in question comprehension and instructions. Following this, the reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using statistical methods, such as Cronbach's alpha coefficient, to ensure internal consistency within thematic sections. The validation was also performed to confirm that the questionnaire accurately measured the intended constructs through content and construct validity assessments. Based on these evaluations, the questionnaire was revised and finalised before being distributed to the target population for the main study. This approach ensured that the questionnaire was a reliable tool for collecting relevant data that were aligned with the research objectives.

The introductory section of the questionnaire is designed to collect respondents' essential demographic and socio-economic characteristics, allowing for a deeper analysis of data from the primary research section. This part includes questions covering respondents' gender, age structure, and education level.

The first question in this section pertains to gender, where respondents choose between "male" or "female". This information allows researchers to analyse gender-based differences in attitudes toward tourism. The second question addresses age structure, with categories "under 18", "18–25", "26–35", "36–45", "46–55", and "56 and older". These data are crucial for identifying age-related differences in perceptions of tourism and its impacts on the local community. The third question focuses on education level, with options including "primary education", "secondary education", and "higher education". This information enables researchers to examine how educational background influences attitudes toward tourism, particularly its economic and cultural impact on the community. By collecting these demographic and socio-economic data, researchers can gain a more detailed understanding of how different respondent groups perceive tourism and its development in their region and how these attitudes vary based on gender, age, and education level.

The main section of the questionnaire is designed to explore residents' attitudes toward the impact of tourism on their community, their involvement in tourism development, and their perception of tourism's future in their area. This section is divided into several thematic units, each containing a series of statements rated on a five-point Likert scale, where one means "strongly disagree" and five means "strongly agree".

The first thematic unit examines the impact of tourism on the local community, exploring how residents perceive changes in culture, traditions, and the environment as a result of tourism development. This section also includes questions about the negative aspects of tourism, such as the degradation of cultural and historical heritage and threats to biodiversity, as well as positive aspects, such as increased employment opportunities and community income growth.

The second thematic unit focuses on residents' involvement in tourism development. This section examines whether residents were consulted in tourism-related decision-making and to what extent they were active participants in creating tourism projects. Questions assess how much residents' suggestions were considered and whether their participation in the tourism development process was adequate.

The third thematic unit covers attitudes toward tourism promotion, exploring whether residents want their area to be recognised as a tourist destination, whether they see tourism as a potential industry for the future, and whether they would personally engage in the tourism sector.

The final thematic unit focuses on perceptions of local residents' significance in tourism development. This section examines the extent to which respondents believe that residents are a key component in tourism growth and whether they think their opinions and knowledge about the local community should be respected in planning and implementing tourism activities. These questions emphasise the role of local expertise and knowledge in preserving authenticity and ensuring the successful development of tourism.

2.4. Analyses

In this study, various statistical methods were applied to comprehensively understand local residents' attitudes toward tourism development in Skadar Lake National Park and Durmitor National Park. The analyses included multiple linear regression, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), and Pearson correlation, with all key assumptions for each method carefully verified. Reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach's alpha to ensure the internal consistency of the survey items. At the same time, multiple regression analysis was applied to examine the impact of independent variables (gender, age, education) on residents' perceptions of tourism.

Multiple regression analysis was used to examine the effects of several independent variables, including gender, age, and education, on different aspects of tourism perception. The dependent variables included mean scores of attitudes toward tourism development, such as tourism's impact on residents, local communities' involvement in tourism development, and perceptions of tourism affirmation. Before conducting the regression analysis, key assumptions were tested, including the linear relationship between independent and dependent variables, homoscedasticity, normality of residuals, and the absence of multicollinearity. These analyses helped identify the key predictors significantly influencing residents' attitudes.

The dependent variables in this study were constructed as mean values of responses to multiple Likert-scale items measuring four key aspects of tourism perception: (a) perceived impacts of tourism on local residents, (b) involvement of local residents in tourism development, (c) positive attitudes toward tourism, and (d) the role of local communities in the affirmation of tourism in NP Skadar Lake and Durmitor. The statements were designed

based on the existing literature on tourism perception and community engagement, ensuring theoretical relevance. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale, where 1 represented “strongly disagree” and 5 “strongly agree”. To ensure the validity and reliability of these constructs, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using principal component analysis with varimax rotation. The factor analysis confirmed the expected factor structure, with items loading on their respective constructs, thereby supporting their theoretical alignment. Additionally, internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha, which indicated satisfactory reliability for all constructs ($\alpha > 0.7$). Furthermore, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to verify the measurement model, and the results demonstrated good construct validity, with acceptable fit indices (CFI, RMSEA, TLI).

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied to examine differences in perceptions among respondents with different levels of education. This method allowed for identifying variables that significantly differentiated groups’ attitudes toward tourism. Before conducting the ANOVA test, assumptions regarding the normality of distributions and homogeneity of variances were tested to ensure the reliability of the results.

Pearson correlation was used to assess the relationship between respondents’ age and their attitudes toward tourism development. This analysis helped identify statistically significant correlations between age and perceptions, providing insight into how age influences attitudes toward tourism. As with previous studies, assumptions regarding the linear relationship between variables and the absence of extreme values that could affect results were carefully tested.

All these statistical analyses provided a detailed insight into residents’ attitudes toward tourism, identifying key factors that shape these attitudes and formulating recommendations for improving tourism development in these national parks.

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive Analysis of Local Residents’ Attitudes Toward Sustainable Tourism Development

Results of descriptive statistical analyses, presented in Table 2, shed light on various aspects of residents’ perceptions of the impact of tourism on their community. Descriptive statistics indicate that most respondents view tourism as beneficial for economic development but express concerns over environmental degradation and limited community participation in decision-making. The average rating for the statement that tourism development has negative consequences for residents, mainly due to changes in local culture and tradition, is $M = 2.24$, indicating relatively low agreement with this claim. Similarly, the statements that tourism changes traditional behaviour patterns ($M = 2.51$) and damages the environment ($M = 2.54$) also have low average ratings, suggesting that residents do not perceive tourism as highly harmful.

On the other hand, statements regarding the positive impacts of tourism have higher average ratings. For example, the perception that tourism brings more excellent employment opportunities averages $M = 3.95$. In contrast, the statement that tourism contributes to the income growth of the local community is rated at $M = 3.91$. The belief that tourism stimulates infrastructure development also received an average rating of $M = 3.84$.

It is noteworthy that statements related to residents’ involvement in decision-making and planning of tourism activities received lower average ratings, such as “Our suggestions and opinions were considered regarding the tourism development of our local community” ($M = 2.26$) and “Residents were involved in the development of the tourism project” ($M = 2.26$). These results suggest that residents feel insufficiently involved in the tourism development process.

Table 2. Results of the descriptive statistical analyses.

Variables	Mean	SD
Tourism development has negative impacts on the local population by changing local culture and traditions	2.24	1.08
Tourism development alters traditional behavioural patterns of the local population	2.51	1.13
Tourism development disrupts the environment	2.54	1.18
Degradation of cultural and historical heritage is a consequence of tourism development	2.41	1.08
Tourism development threatens biodiversity	2.61	1.18
Tourism development increases employment opportunities	3.95	1.11
Through tourism development, local community income increases	3.96	1.1
Tourism development stimulates investment in the local community	3.87	1.11
Tourism development requires a preserved environment, thereby enhancing its protection	3.68	1.16
Tourism development positively contributes to the preservation of cultural and historical heritage	3.61	1.13
Tourism development encourages infrastructure development	3.86	1.09
There is support from local government or the state for residents engaging in tourism (loans, subsidies, donations)	2.96	1.14
The local population helps each other in engaging in tourism	3.18	1.07
Local products are utilised to create a tourism offering	3.32	1.1
During the planning of activities related to tourism development, we were consulted in some way by the local government	2.47	1.15
When vital decisions regarding tourism development were made in our local community, we were active participants in decision-making	2.2	1.14
Our suggestions and opinions were considered in the tourism affirmation of our local community	2.22	1.11
The local population is sufficiently involved in the tourism development process	2.28	1.14
The local population has been/is currently involved in the development of a tourism project	2.24	1.11
I want my place to be recognised as a tourist destination	3.81	1.18
I believe that tourism development can bring many benefits to my local community	3.91	1.12
I want to engage in tourism	3.43	1.24
Tourism is the industry of the future	3.76	1.13
Every resident of the local community is equally essential for tourism development	3.91	1.12
The views of the local population must be considered	4.06	1.08
The local population knows their local environment best	4.08	1.07
The local population best understands the advantages and disadvantages of their local community	4.06	1.07
The local population is being educated in the field of tourism	3.01	1.33

Conversely, statements regarding the importance and knowledge of the local community have high average ratings, such as “Residents know their community best” ($M = 4.05$) and “The opinions of residents must be respected” ($M = 4.02$). These high ratings indicate a strong perception that local knowledge is crucial for successful tourism development.

These results provide insights into residents’ attitudes toward tourism, highlighting both the positive and negative aspects they perceive regarding tourism development in their community (Table 2).

In addition to the previously described variables, several additional factors further illuminate residents’ attitudes toward tourism. For example, the statement that the degradation of cultural and historical heritage is a consequence of tourism development received an average rating of $M = 2.41$, indicating that residents generally do not believe tourism has a significant negative impact on cultural heritage preservation. Similarly, the perception

that tourism threatens biodiversity was rated $M = 2.61$, suggesting mild concern, but not to a great extent (Table 2).

Residents moderately believe that tourism development requires an intact environment and can contribute to its protection, with an average rating of $M = 3.64$. However, there is somewhat less satisfaction with local government support for tourism, as shown by an average rating of $M = 2.9$ for the statement that local government or the state provides adequate support. Regarding mutual solidarity, residents help each other in tourism-related activities ($M = 3.12$), while there is moderate agreement with the claim that local products are utilised in creating tourism offerings ($M = 3.28$) (Table 2).

Regarding consultations with local authorities, the statement that residents were consulted in planning activities related to tourism development received an average rating of $M = 2.55$, indicating partial involvement in the process. On the other hand, there is an intense desire for their community to be recognised as a tourist destination ($M = 3.88$) and a firm belief that tourism can bring significant benefits to the local community ($M = 3.93$).

Additionally, residents have a moderate but significant interest in engaging in tourism-related activities ($M = 3.52$) and a strong belief that tourism is an industry of the future ($M = 3.77$). Finally, the statement that residents receive tourism-related education obtained an average rating of $M = 3.12$, indicating moderate agreement and a need for further education and skill development in this field. These additional results complement the existing understanding of residents' attitudes, highlighting the complexity of perceptions of tourism development in their community (Table 2).

Further research findings (Table 3) indicate significant differences in residents' perceptions regarding the impacts of tourism between Skadar Lake National Park and Durmitor National Park. Overall, respondents from Durmitor National Park were more inclined to highlight both the positive and negative aspects of tourism compared to those from Skadar Lake National Park. For example, the belief that tourism development alters local culture and tradition ($M = 2.308$) and negatively affects the environment ($M = 2.600$) received higher ratings among respondents from Durmitor National Park than those from Skadar Lake National Park ($M = 2.176$ and $M = 2.472$, respectively). Similarly, the perception that tourism development threatens biodiversity was also more pronounced among respondents from Durmitor National Park ($M = 2.656$) than those from Skadar Lake National Park ($M = 2.560$) (Table 3).

On the other hand, the positive effects of tourism, such as increasing local community income ($M = 4.016$) and stimulating investment in the community ($M = 3.928$), received slightly higher ratings in Durmitor National Park than in Skadar Lake National Park ($M = 3.896$ and $M = 3.816$, respectively). However, it is noteworthy that respondents from Skadar Lake National Park demonstrated tremendous enthusiasm for promoting their area as a tourist destination ($M = 3.880$) and expressed more substantial interest in engaging in tourism-related activities ($M = 3.516$) compared to respondents from Durmitor National Park ($M = 3.736$ and $M = 3.352$, respectively) (Table 3).

Differences were also observed regarding the involvement of residents in decision-making processes and support from local authorities. Respondents from Skadar Lake National Park rated their participation in the planning process and the consideration of their opinions higher ($M = 2.352$ and $M = 2.264$) compared to respondents from Durmitor National Park ($M = 2.208$ and $M = 2.176$). Conversely, support from local authorities and mutual assistance in tourism were rated slightly higher in Durmitor National Park ($M = 3.012$ and $M = 3.232$) than in Skadar Lake National Park ($M = 2.904$ and $M = 3.124$) (Table 3 and Figure 3).

Table 3. Results of differences in mean score ratings of attitudes for Skadar Lake and Durmitor.

Variables	Skadar Lake (M)	Durmitor (M)
Tourism development has negative impacts on the local population by changing local culture and traditions	2.17	2.30
Tourism development alters traditional behavioural patterns of the local population	2.49	2.51
Tourism development disrupts the environment	2.47	2.61
Degraded cultural and historical heritage is a consequence of tourism development	2.34	2.47
Tourism development threatens biodiversity	2.56	2.65
Tourism development increases employment opportunities	3.95	3.94
Through tourism development, the income of the local community increases	3.89	4.01
Tourism development stimulates investment in the local community	3.81	3.92
Tourism development requires a preserved environment, thereby enhancing its protection	3.63	3.71
Tourism development positively contributes to the preservation of cultural and historical heritage	3.54	3.67
Tourism development encourages infrastructure development	3.83	3.87
There is support from local government or the state for residents engaged in tourism (loans, subsidies, donations)	2.90	3.01
The local population helps each other in engaging in tourism	3.12	3.23
Local products are utilised to create a tourism offering	3.27	3.36
During the planning of activities related to tourism development, we were consulted in some way by the local government	2.54	2.38
When essential decisions regarding tourism development were made in our local community, we were active participants in decision-making	2.25	2.14
Our suggestions and opinions were considered in the tourism affirmation of our local community	2.26	2.17
The local population is sufficiently involved in the tourism development process	2.35	2.20
The local population has been/is currently involved in the development of a tourism project	2.26	2.22
I want my place to be recognised as a tourist destination	3.88	3.73
I believe that tourism development can bring many benefits to my local community	3.92	3.89
I want to engage in tourism	3.51	3.35
Tourism is the industry of the future	3.76	3.74
Every resident of the local community is equally vital for tourism development	3.85	3.96
The views of the local population must be considered	4.02	4.10
The local population knows their local environment best	4.04	4.11
The local population best understands the advantages and disadvantages of their local community	4.02	4.10
The local population is being educated in the field of tourism	3.12	2.89

When considering attitudes toward residents' knowledge and the importance of their participation in tourism development, respondents from Durmitor National Park reported slightly higher ratings, particularly regarding the recognition of residents' opinions (M = 4.108) and their understanding of their community's strengths and weaknesses (M = 4.104). However, interestingly, respondents from Skadar Lake National Park rated

residents' education in tourism higher ($M = 3.120$) compared to respondents from Durmitor National Park ($M = 2.892$) (Table 3).



Figure 3. Differences in mean score ratings of attitudes for Skadar Lake and Durmitor.

These findings indicate complex perceptions of tourism among residents of the two national parks, where Durmitor National Park exhibits more intense positive and negative attitudes. On the other hand, Skadar Lake National Park demonstrates tremendous enthusiasm for tourism promotion and participation in tourism development processes. These differences may be related to each region's specific socio-economic and cultural characteristics and the distinct experiences and challenges faced by these two destinations (Table 3).

3.2. Correlations and Influences of Socio-Demographic Factors on Local Attitudes Towards Sustainable Tourism Development

The Pearson correlation between age and respondents' attitudes toward tourism, presented in Table 4, reveals several significant findings. First, the correlation between age and the belief that "tourism development has negative impacts on residents because it changes local culture and tradition" shows a positive and statistically significant relationship ($r = 0.096$, $p = 0.031$). This indicates that older respondents are slightly more inclined to perceive tourism as threatening local culture and tradition.

Similarly, the belief that "tourism development changes traditional behavioural patterns among residents" also exhibits a positive and statistically significant correlation with age ($r = 0.090$, $p = 0.045$). This suggests that older respondents are likelier to believe that tourism alters traditional behavioural patterns.

On the other hand, significant negative correlations were found for the attitudes that "tourism development stimulates investment in the local community" ($r = -0.131$, $p = 0.003$)

and that “tourism development encourages infrastructure construction” ($r = -0.118$, $p = 0.008$). These results imply that older respondents are less likely to believe that tourism positively impacts investment in the community and infrastructure development.

Table 4. Results of Pearson correlation on the impact of age on respondents’ attitudes.

Variables	<i>r</i>	Sig.
Tourism development has negative impacts on the local population by changing local culture and traditions	0.096	0.031
Tourism development alters traditional behavioural patterns of the local population	0.09	0.045
Tourism development disrupts the environment	0.061	0.174
Degradation of cultural and historical heritage is a consequence of tourism development	0.021	0.645
Tourism development threatens biodiversity	0.051	0.256
Tourism development increases employment opportunities	−0.07	0.12
Tourism development increases local community income	−0.096	0.032
Tourism development stimulates investment in the local community	−0.131	0.003
Tourism development requires a preserved environment, thereby enhancing its protection	−0.068	0.127
Tourism development positively contributes to the preservation of cultural and historical heritage	−0.066	0.139
Tourism development encourages infrastructure development	−0.118	0.008
There is support from local government or the state for residents engaged in tourism (loans, subsidies, donations)	−0.037	0.412
The local population helps each other in engaging in tourism	−0.05	0.266
Local products are utilised to create a tourism offering	0.008	0.866
During the planning of tourism development activities, we were consulted in some way by the local government	0.017	0.707
When essential decisions regarding tourism development were made in our local community, we were active participants in decision-making	0.047	0.29
Our suggestions and opinions were considered in the tourism affirmation of our local community	0.035	0.43
The local population is sufficiently involved in the tourism development process	0.005	0.906
The local population has been/is currently involved in the development of a tourism project	−0.005	0.905
I want my place to be recognised as a tourist destination	0.029	0.523
I believe that tourism development can bring many benefits to my local community	−0.0	0.992
I want to engage in tourism	0.055	0.218
Tourism is the industry of the future	−0.03	0.498
Every resident of the local community is equally essential for tourism development	−0.034	0.455
The views of the local population must be considered	−0.037	0.407
The local population knows their local environment best	−0.033	0.467
The local population best understands the advantages and disadvantages of their local community	−0.038	0.403
The local population is being educated in the field of tourism	−0.033	0.466

Most other correlations are not statistically significant, suggesting that age does not play a major role in shaping attitudes toward most aspects of tourism among respondents. For example, the attitudes that “tourism development positively affects the preservation of cultural and historical heritage” ($r = -0.066, p = 0.139$) and “tourism development increases employment opportunities” ($r = -0.070, p = 0.120$) are not statistically significant.

In conclusion, the results suggest that older respondents generally hold slightly more critical views on the negative aspects of tourism but are less convinced of its positive effects on investment and infrastructure. However, these effects are relatively mild, as seen in the low correlation coefficient values (Table 4).

Based on the results of the one-way ANOVA analysis, a statistically significant effect of education level was determined on the following variables: tourism development has negative impacts on local residents because it changes local culture and tradition ($F = 3.49, p = 0.03$); tourism development increases employment opportunities ($F = 7.04, p = 0.00$); tourism development increases local community income ($F = 5.36, p = 0.00$); tourism development stimulates investment in the local community ($F = 4.79, p = 0.01$); tourism development encourages infrastructure construction ($F = 2.99, p = 0.05$); local residents are sufficiently involved in the tourism development process ($F = 3.33, p = 0.04$); I want my community to be recognized as a tourist destination ($F = 7.29, p = 0.00$); I believe that tourism development can bring significant benefits to my local community ($F = 3.61, p = 0.03$); every local resident is equally vital for tourism development ($F = 4.04, p = 0.02$); the opinions of local residents must be respected ($F = 5.87, p = 0.00$); and local residents receive tourism-related education ($F = 3.41, p = 0.03$) (Table 5).

The results of the one-way ANOVA analysis confirm that education level significantly influences various aspects of tourism perception in the local community. Respondents with different levels of education perceive the adverse effects of tourism on local culture and tradition differently ($F = 3.49, p = 0.03$), with respondents with lower education levels (high school) reporting more harmful effects ($M = 2.49, SD = 1.19$) compared to those with higher education levels ($M = 2.12, SD = 1.03$).

Similarly, the perception that tourism increases employment opportunities ($F = 7.04, p = 0.00$) varies significantly, with respondents with higher education levels being more optimistic ($M = 4.12, SD = 1.07$) compared to those with lower education levels ($M = 3.55, SD = 1.19$). Likewise, the perception that tourism development increases local community income ($F = 5.36, p = 0.00$) was stronger among those with higher education ($M = 4.24, SD = 1.05$) than among those with lower education ($M = 3.90, SD = 0.96$).

The perception that tourism stimulates investment in the local community ($F = 4.79, p = 0.01$) also differs, with higher-educated respondents giving higher ratings ($M = 3.91, SD = 1.10$) compared to those with lower education ($M = 3.55, SD = 1.19$). A borderline statistical significance was found in the perception that tourism development encourages infrastructure construction ($F = 2.99, p = 0.05$), where those with higher education reported slightly higher scores ($M = 3.48, SD = 1.29$) than those with lower education ($M = 3.38, SD = 1.20$).

The perception of residents' involvement in the tourism development process ($F = 3.33, p = 0.04$) shows that respondents with higher education feel more involved ($M = 3.48, SD = 1.29$) compared to those with lower education ($M = 3.38, SD = 1.20$). Similarly, the desire for their community to be recognised as a tourist destination ($F = 7.29, p = 0.00$) is significantly stronger among respondents with higher education ($M = 4.24, SD = 1.05$) than among those with lower education ($M = 3.90, SD = 0.96$).

The perception of the benefits that tourism development can bring to the local community ($F = 3.61, p = 0.03$) also varies with education level, with higher-educated respondents placing greater importance on this aspect ($M = 4.01, SD = 1.16$) than those with lower

education ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 1.17$). The perception that every resident is equally vital for tourism development ($F = 4.04$, $p = 0.02$) shows that those with higher education value equality in participation more ($M = 3.49$, $SD = 1.17$).

Table 5. Results of ANOVA analysis on the impact of education level on the perception of tourism impact.

Variables	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Tourism development has negative impacts on the local population by changing local culture and traditions	3.49	0.03
Tourism development alters traditional behavioural patterns of the local population	0.04	0.96
Tourism development disrupts the environment	0.15	0.86
Degraded cultural and historical heritage is a consequence of tourism development	1.22	0.3
Tourism development threatens biodiversity	0.33	0.72
Tourism development increases employment opportunities	7.04	0.0
Through tourism development, the income of the local community increases	5.36	0.0
Tourism development stimulates investment in the local community	4.79	0.01
Tourism development requires a preserved environment, thereby enhancing its protection	1.56	0.21
Tourism development positively contributes to the preservation of cultural and historical heritage	0.57	0.57
Tourism development encourages infrastructure development	2.99	0.05
There is support from the local government or the state for residents engaged in tourism (loans, subsidies, donations)	1.71	0.18
The local population helps each other in engaging in tourism	0.37	0.69
Local products are utilised to create a tourism offering	1.97	0.14
During the planning of activities related to tourism development, we were consulted in some way by the local government	2.87	0.06
When essential decisions regarding tourism development were made in our local community, we were active participants in decision-making	1.41	0.25
Our suggestions and opinions were considered in the tourism affirmation of our local community	0.97	0.38
The local population is sufficiently involved in the tourism development process	3.33	0.04
The local population has been/is currently involved in the development of a tourism project	1.59	0.21
I want my place to be recognised as a tourist destination	7.29	0.0
I believe that tourism development can bring many benefits to my local community	3.61	0.03
I want to engage in tourism	0.39	0.68
Tourism is the industry of the future	2.52	0.08
Every resident of the local community is equally vital for tourism development	4.04	0.02
The views of the local population must be considered	5.87	0.0
The local population knows their local environment best	2.92	0.05
The local population best understands the advantages and disadvantages of their local community	2.95	0.05
The local population is being educated in the field of tourism	3.41	0.03

Respondents' opinions on recognising residents' views on the tourism development process ($F = 5.87$, $p = 0.00$) significantly differ, with higher-educated respondents emphasising the importance of respecting these views ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 1.08$). Finally, tourism-related education ($F = 3.41$, $p = 0.03$) is considered more important by respondents with higher education levels ($M = 3.14$, $SD = 1.31$), indicating greater awareness of the importance of education in this field (Table 5).

These results suggest that education level significantly influences the perception of various aspects of tourism development in the local community. Higher-educated individuals generally have more positive attitudes and a greater degree of involvement in tourism-related activities.

The independent samples *t*-test results between gender and observed variables related to tourism impacts on the local community indicate statistically significant differences between male and female respondents for multiple variables. Male respondents are more likely to agree with the statement that tourism development negatively affects local culture and tradition ($M = 2.39$, $SD = 1.13$) compared to female respondents ($M = 2.13$, $SD = 1.02$), with this difference being statistically significant ($p = 0.008$). Similarly, men perceive tourism development as a more substantial threat to biodiversity ($M = 2.78$, $SD = 1.21$) compared to women ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 1.13$), with a statistically significant difference ($p = 0.003$) (Table 6).

Table 6. Results of the *t*-test for gender independence and observed variables.

Variables	<i>F</i>	<i>t</i>	Sig. (2-Tailed)	df	Male M (SD)	Female M (SD)
Tourism development has negative impacts on the local population by changing local culture and traditions	7.73	2.65	0.008	498	2.39 (1.13)	2.13 (1.02)
Tourism development alters traditional behavioural patterns of the local population	3.62	2.75	0.006	498	2.66 (1.15)	2.39 (1.1)
Tourism development harms the environment	0.96	1.51	0.132	498	2.63 (1.18)	2.47 (1.18)
Degraded cultural and historical heritage is a consequence of tourism development	1.78	0.62	0.534	498	2.44 (1.08)	2.38 (1.08)
Tourism development threatens biodiversity	1.84	2.94	0.003	498	2.78 (1.21)	2.47 (1.13)
Tourism development increases employment opportunities	1.37	−1.72	0.086	498	3.85 (1.15)	4.02 (1.08)
Through tourism development, the income of the local community increases	1.77	−1.11	0.268	498	3.89 (1.04)	4.0 (1.14)
Tourism development stimulates investment in the local community	0.02	−1.74	0.083	498	3.77 (1.1)	3.95 (1.11)
Tourism development requires a preserved environment, thereby enhancing its protection	0.39	−2.0	0.046	498	3.56 (1.16)	3.77 (1.15)
Tourism development positively contributes to the preservation of cultural and historical heritage	0.0	−1.88	0.061	498	3.5 (1.08)	3.69 (1.17)
Tourism development encourages infrastructure development	0.8	−2.13	0.034	498	3.74 (1.1)	3.95 (1.08)
There is support from the local government or the state for residents engaged in tourism (loans, subsidies, donations)	0.06	−1.73	0.085	498	2.86 (1.13)	3.04 (1.15)
The local population helps each other in engaging in tourism	1.88	−0.81	0.417	498	3.13 (1.04)	3.21 (1.09)
Local products are utilised to create a tourism offering	1.0	−1.35	0.179	498	3.24 (1.07)	3.38 (1.13)
During the planning of activities related to tourism development, we were consulted in some way by the local government	0.28	−3.22	0.001	498	2.28 (1.12)	2.61 (1.15)

Table 6. Cont.

Variables	F	t	Sig. (2-Tailed)	df	Male M (SD)	Female M (SD)
When essential decisions regarding tourism development were made in our local community, we were active participants in decision-making	0.91	−1.19	0.235	498	2.13 (1.14)	2.25 (1.13)
Our suggestions and opinions were considered in the tourism affirmation of our local community	2.71	−1.93	0.054	498	2.11 (1.07)	2.3 (1.14)
The local population is sufficiently involved in the tourism development process	1.39	−1.57	0.117	498	2.19 (1.13)	2.35 (1.14)
The local population has been/is currently involved in the development of a tourism project	3.99	−2.27	0.024	498	2.12 (1.08)	2.34 (1.13)
I want my place to be recognised as a tourist destination	0.55	−0.25	0.8	498	3.79 (1.21)	3.82 (1.17)
I believe that tourism development can bring many benefits to my local community	0.11	−0.04	0.97	498	3.91 (1.1)	3.91 (1.14)
I want to engage in tourism	3.54	2.46	0.014	498	3.59 (1.17)	3.31 (1.29)
Tourism is the industry of the future	1.31	2.82	0.005	498	3.59 (1.12)	3.88 (1.12)
Every resident of the local community is equally vital for tourism development	0.05	−2.77	0.006	498	3.75 (1.08)	4.03 (1.13)
The views of the local population must be considered	0.33	−2.6	0.01	498	3.92 (1.06)	4.17 (1.08)
The local population knows their local environment best	1.65	−1.76	0.079	498	3.99 (1.03)	4.16 (1.1)
The local population best understands the advantages and disadvantages of their local community	1.02	−2.71	0.007	498	3.92 (1.03)	4.18 (1.08)
The local population is being educated in the field of tourism	2.7	−2.0	0.046	498	2.87 (1.26)	3.11 (1.37)

On the other hand, women are more inclined to agree that tourism development stimulates infrastructure construction ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 1.08$) compared to men ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 1.1$), with a statistically significant difference ($p = 0.034$). Additionally, women express more substantial agreement with the statement that residents receive tourism-related education ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 1.37$) compared to men ($M = 2.87$, $SD = 1.26$), with a significant difference ($p = 0.046$). However, men show a greater desire to engage in tourism-related activities ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 1.17$) compared to women ($M = 3.31$, $SD = 1.29$), which is also statistically significant ($p = 0.014$). Conversely, women are more likely to believe that tourism is the industry of the future ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 1.12$) compared to men ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 1.12$), with a statistically significant difference ($p = 0.005$) (Table 6).

Women also place greater importance on inclusivity in tourism development, as they more strongly agree that every member of the local community must be considered in the tourism development process ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 1.13$) compared to men ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 1.08$), with a statistically significant difference ($p = 0.006$). They also more firmly believe that residents' opinions must be respected ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 1.08$) compared to men ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 1.06$), with a significant difference ($p = 0.01$). Finally, women agree more with the statement that residents know the strengths and weaknesses of their community best

($M = 4.18$, $SD = 1.08$) compared to men ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 1.03$), with a significant difference ($p = 0.007$) (Table 6).

These results highlight significant gender-based differences in the perceptions of tourism impacts on various aspects of the local community, which could have implications for tourism policies and development strategies.

3.3. The Predictors of Local Attitudes Towards Sustainable Tourism Development

In this study, multiple regression analysis was used to examine the effects of independent variables on residents' perceptions of various aspects of tourism development (Table 7). The dependent variables were the mean values of four hypotheses related to different aspects of tourism: (a) tourism development has specific impacts on residents; (b) residents are insufficiently involved in tourism development; (c) residents have a positive attitude toward tourism affirmation; and (d) residents are a significant component of the tourism affirmation of NP Skadar Lake and Durmitor. The analysis was conducted using the standard procedure of multiple regression analysis, where independent variables (gender, age, and education) were used to predict dependent variables (hypotheses). Each model was evaluated based on regression coefficients (B), standardised coefficients (β), standard errors (SE), and other values indicating the percentage of variance explained in the dependent variables. This approach provided a detailed insight into how each predictor contributes to changes in residents' attitudes toward tourism.

Table 7. Results of multiple regression analysis of predictor influence on the hypothetical research framework.

Predictor	Tourism Development Has Specific Impacts			Residents Are Insufficiently Involved			Positive Attitude Toward Tourism Affirmation			Residents Are a Significant Component		
	B	SE	β	B	SE	β	B	SE	β	B	SE	B
Education	0.053	0.05	1.056	0.119	0.07	1.693	0.183	0.069	2.643	0.178	0.066	2.714
Gender	-0.123	0.066	-1.858	0.151	0.093	1.632	-0.028	0.091	-0.304	0.202	0.087	2.331
Age	0.017	0.023	0.723	0.014	0.033	0.432	0.008	0.032	0.245	-0.032	0.031	-1.051
R^2 (R^2_{adj})	0.009 (0.003)			0.014 (0.008)			0.014 (0.008)			0.031 (0.025)		

The analyses show that for the hypothesis "Tourism development has certain impacts on residents", the study indicates that education ($\beta = 1.056$, $p = 0.291$) has a positive but not statistically significant impact. In contrast, gender ($\beta = -1.858$, $p = 0.064$) and age ($\beta = 0.723$, $p = 0.470$) also do not have a statistically significant impact in this model. This regression model ($R^2 = 0.009$, $Adj. R^2 = 0.003$, $F = 4.41$, $t = 17.49$, $p > 0.05$) explains 0.9% of the variance in the perceived impacts of tourism development on residents.

For the hypothesis "Residents are insufficiently involved in tourism development", education ($\beta = 1.693$, $p = 0.091$) and gender ($\beta = 1.632$, $p = 0.104$) have a positive but not statistically significant impact. In contrast, age ($\beta = 0.432$, $p = 0.665$) also does not show a statistically significant impact. This regression model ($R^2 = 0.014$, $Adj. R^2 = 0.008$, $F = 4.20$, $t = 7.20$, $p > 0.05$) explains 1.4% of the variance in the insufficient involvement of residents in tourism development.

In contrast, for the hypothesis "Residents have a positive attitude toward tourism affirmation", education ($\beta = 2.643$, $p = 0.009$) shows a statistically significant positive impact, while gender ($\beta = -0.304$, $p = 0.761$) and age ($\beta = 0.245$, $p = 0.622$) do not show a statistically significant impact. This regression model ($R^2 = 0.014$, $Adj. R^2 = 0.008$, $F = 3.15$, $t = 14.46$, $p < 0.05$) explains 1.4% of the variance in residents' positive attitudes toward tourism affirmation (Table 7).

Finally, for the hypothesis “Residents are a significant component of the tourism affirmation of NP Skadar Lake and Durmitor”, education ($\beta = 2.714, p = 0.007$) shows a statistically significant positive impact. In contrast, gender ($\beta = 2.331, p = 0.022$) has positive but marginally significant implications. Age ($\beta = -1.051, p = 0.293$) does not show a statistically significant effect. This regression model ($R^2 = 0.031, Adj. R^2 = 0.025, F = 3.15, t = 14.73, p < 0.05$) explains 3.1% of the variance in the perception of residents as a significant component of tourism affirmation (Table 7). These results indicate that education has a consistent and statistically significant positive effect on residents’ perceptions in some models, while gender and age are less significant factors.

4. Discussion

This study explored various sociodemographic factors, such as gender, age, and education, to comprehensively understand the elements shaping local residents’ attitudes toward tourism. The study provides valuable insights into how different demographic groups perceive tourism’s benefits and challenges by analysing these variables. The findings highlight existing perceptions and offer a basis for anticipating potential obstacles and opportunities for sustainable tourism development. Understanding these attitudes is crucial for policymakers and tourism planners, as it enables the creation of tailored strategies that address the specific needs and concerns of diverse population segments [42,83,175,176].

Multiple regression analysis identified education as a key determinant of tourism perception, revealing that individuals with higher levels of education tend to exhibit more enthusiasm and support for tourism development. This aligns with broader research suggesting that education fosters awareness of tourism’s multifaceted benefits, including economic growth, infrastructure development, and cultural exchange. Educated individuals typically have better access to reliable sources of information, allowing them to develop a more nuanced understanding of tourism’s long-term advantages [106,177–179].

The findings align with prior research emphasising the role of education in shaping attitudes toward tourism development [73,106,177,179]. Higher education levels appear to be associated with increased awareness of tourism’s economic benefits, whereas lower educational attainment correlates with scepticism regarding tourism’s sustainability. These insights underscore the need for targeted community engagement initiatives that address concerns about cultural preservation while promoting the economic advantages of tourism [50,60,66,132,133,153]. Moreover, the results highlight the necessity for policymakers to develop more inclusive tourism planning frameworks that actively involve residents in decision-making processes [52,54,58,76,113].

Additionally, higher education levels correlate with greater civic engagement and participation in community initiatives. Educated individuals are more likely to advocate for policies that promote sustainable tourism practices, emphasising environmental protection, cultural preservation, and economic inclusivity. This finding underscores the importance of investing in educational programmes and community awareness campaigns to ensure that tourism development aligns with the broader interests of society [73,106,178,179].

Another important consideration is the role of lifelong learning and informal education [180,181]. Even among individuals with lower formal education levels, exposure to tourism-related training programmes or informational campaigns can significantly improve their understanding of tourism’s benefits. Therefore, initiatives such as local workshops, public seminars, and digital literacy campaigns could help bridge the knowledge gap and foster more positive attitudes toward tourism across different educational groups [99,106,182–184].

Age emerged as another critical factor influencing tourism perception, with older respondents expressing more scepticism regarding its impacts. This pattern is primarily driven by

a deep-rooted attachment to traditional lifestyles and concerns over cultural, environmental, and social disruptions caused by tourism [185–188]. Older residents often view tourism as a double-edged sword—while it brings economic benefits, it also introduces changes that may threaten local customs, traditions, and natural landscapes. In communities with strong cultural identities, tourism can sometimes be perceived as an external force imposing change rather than an opportunity for cultural revitalisation [189–192]. Many older residents fear that tourism could commodify cultural heritage, where traditions are altered to cater to tourists rather than preserved in their authentic form. Additionally, environmental concerns, such as increased pollution, resource depletion, and overcrowding, contribute to the scepticism among older age groups.

To mitigate these concerns, community engagement and participatory planning approaches are essential. Encouraging older residents to shape tourism policies actively can help address their apprehensions and ensure that tourism development aligns with local values [66,193,194]. For example, integrating older community members into cultural tourism initiatives—such as heritage storytelling programmes or traditional craft workshops—could turn their knowledge and experience into valuable tourism assets while fostering greater acceptance of tourism within these communities [195–197].

The findings further indicate significant variations in tourism perceptions based on education levels. One-way ANOVA analysis demonstrated that individuals with lower education levels are less likely to recognise tourism’s economic and social benefits, which may stem from limited access to information or a narrower understanding of tourism’s broader impacts. This underscores the crucial role of targeted awareness programmes in bridging the informational divide between different demographic groups. A key strategy for addressing this gap is the development of educational initiatives that focus on tourism’s practical benefits for local communities [106,179,183,184]. For instance, emphasising how tourism contributes to local job creation, infrastructure improvements, and economic diversification could help change perceptions among individuals with lower education levels [131,177,178,180,182]. Additionally, partnerships between tourism organisations and local schools or community centres could facilitate knowledge-sharing programmes that equip residents with the skills needed to participate in the tourism economy actively [198–201].

Importantly, digital platforms and social media can serve as powerful tools for increasing awareness [202]. Many tourism development initiatives now incorporate digital outreach efforts, such as informative videos, interactive webinars, and online training sessions, to engage broader audiences [203–206]. By leveraging these tools, policymakers can ensure that even individuals with limited formal education have access to relevant information about tourism and its potential advantages [207,208].

Further analysis using Pearson’s correlation revealed a significant relationship between age and tourism perceptions, with younger respondents exhibiting more optimistic views compared to their older counterparts. Younger individuals often perceive tourism as an avenue for economic mobility, employment opportunities, and exposure to new cultures and experiences [171]. Their openness to change makes them more receptive to tourism-driven developments, including modern infrastructure projects and business investments in the sector. However, generational differences in tourism perception also highlight the need for intergenerational dialogue in tourism planning. While younger individuals are more inclined toward innovation and modernisation, older generations provide valuable insights into cultural heritage preservation and sustainable practices [209–211]. A balanced approach incorporating both perspectives can lead to tourism policies that respect local traditions while embracing economic and technological advancements.

One potential solution is the implementation of mentorship programmes where younger and older community members collaborate on tourism-related initiatives. By

fostering cross-generational cooperation, communities can ensure that tourism development is progressive and culturally sensitive, ultimately creating a more harmonious and inclusive approach to local tourism management.

A comparative analysis between NP Skadar Lake and NP Durmitor revealed distinct differences in tourism perceptions. Residents of NP Durmitor expressed stronger opinions—both positive and negative—compared to those from NP Skadar Lake. This heightened awareness is likely due to the higher tourism intensity in NP Durmitor, which has brought economic gains and environmental challenges. Concerns over ecosystem degradation, over-tourism, and commercialisation of natural resources have led some residents to adopt a more cautious stance on tourism expansion.

In contrast, respondents from NP Skadar Lake displayed tremendous enthusiasm for tourism development, possibly due to the region's lower levels of tourism activity [156,157]. Many residents in this area view tourism as an untapped opportunity that could drive economic growth and infrastructure improvements. Their optimism suggests that, if properly managed, tourism could play a crucial role in enhancing local livelihoods while simultaneously promoting environmental conservation efforts [99,115].

Given these contrasting perspectives, a tailored approach to tourism development is necessary. In NP Durmitor, stricter environmental regulations and sustainable tourism policies should be enforced to address ecological concerns. Meanwhile, in NP Skadar Lake, investment in tourism infrastructure and capacity-building programmes could help harness the potential benefits of tourism while ensuring long-term sustainability.

Despite providing valuable insights, this study has several limitations. The sample may not fully capture the diversity of the local population, and self-reported survey data could introduce response biases. Additionally, perceptions of tourism change over time and are influenced by economic fluctuations, policy shifts, and global events such as pandemics. Future research should consider conducting longitudinal studies to track how tourism perceptions evolve.

Furthermore, expanding the study beyond NP Skadar Lake and NP Durmitor to include other regions in Montenegro or neighbouring countries would offer a broader perspective on tourism's social and economic impacts. Incorporating qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews with stakeholders, could also provide richer insights into local residents' underlying motivations and concerns.

5. Recommendation

Based on previous research, Table 8 outlines strategic recommendations for advancing tourism development, focusing on sustainability, community involvement, and environmental stewardship. It assesses each recommendation based on feasibility, cost, priority level, and implementation timeframe, ensuring a well-structured and actionable approach. These insights support policymakers and stakeholders in making informed decisions that promote economic growth while safeguarding natural resources and addressing local community interests.

Table 8. Strategic recommendations for tourism development.

Recommendations	Aspect	Term	Feasibility	Cost	Priority
Increase local community participation in tourism decision-making processes	Community engagement	Short	High	Medium	High

Table 8. Cont.

Recommendations	Aspect	Term	Feasibility	Cost	Priority
Develop and enforce regulations to ensure sustainable tourism growth	Sustainable tourism development	Long	Medium	High	High
Invest in eco-friendly infrastructure and transport systems	Infrastructure improvement	Medium	Medium	High	High
Implement conservation programmes to minimise environmental impacts	Environmental protection	Long	High	Medium	High
Support small local businesses and encourage local entrepreneurship	Economic benefits	Medium	High	Medium	Medium
Enhance education programmes on tourism benefits and environmental conservation	Education and Awareness	Short	High	Low	High
Protect and promote cultural heritage through tourism activities	Cultural heritage preservation	Medium	High	Medium	High
Strengthen collaboration between government, businesses, and local communities	Stakeholder collaboration	Medium	High	Medium	High
Implement visitor capacity management strategies to prevent over-tourism	Visitor management	Short	Medium	Medium	Medium
Establish clear policies to balance economic growth with environmental sustainability	Policy and regulation	Long	Medium	High	High
Utilise digital tools and innovative tourism technologies to improve visitor experience	Technology integration	Medium	High	High	High
Develop risk management strategies to mitigate adverse impacts of tourism	Risk management	Long	Medium	Medium	High
Expand job opportunities in tourism for residents, especially youth and women	Employment opportunities	Medium	High	Medium	Medium
Promote the national parks as year-round tourist destinations to reduce seasonal dependency	Tourism promotion	Short	High	Medium	High
Ensure tourism policies align with broader social and environmental sustainability goals	Social and environmental balance	Long	Medium	High	High
Encourage local authorities to create advisory boards with resident participation	Resident involvement in tourism governance	Short	High	Low	High
Implement green transportation options, such as electric shuttle services within the parks	Sustainable transportation initiatives	Medium	Medium	Medium	High
Provide training programmes for local businesses and entrepreneurs to improve service quality	Capacity building for local tourism operators	Medium	High	Medium	High

Table 8. Cont.

Recommendations	Aspect	Term	Feasibility	Cost	Priority
Establish conservation zones within the parks where tourist access is regulated	Biodiversity protection measures	Long	High	High	High
Develop mechanisms for continuously assessing tourism's economic, social, and environmental impact	Tourism impact monitoring systems	Medium	Medium	Medium	High
Expand the tourism offering with activities like guided nature walks and wildlife observation	Promotion of ecotourism and adventure tourism	Medium	High	Medium	Medium
Implement waste reduction initiatives, including recycling stations and sustainable packaging incentives	Waste management strategies for tourism areas	Short	High	Medium	High
Ensure emergency response systems within the parks are prepared for medical and environmental risks	Emergency preparedness for tourists	Short	High	High	High
Avoid over-commercialisation by ensuring tourism respects traditional lifestyles and cultural heritage	Preserving authenticity in tourism development	Medium	Medium	Medium	High
Integrate resilience measures in tourism planning to address climate change impacts	Climate adaptation strategies in tourism planning	Long	Medium	High	High

6. Conclusions

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the influence of socio-demographic factors on residents' attitudes toward sustainable tourism development in Skadar Lake and Durmitor National Parks. The results confirm that education, age, and gender significantly shape perceptions of tourism's economic, environmental, and social impacts.

The study's hypotheses were assessed through multiple regression analysis, one-way ANOVA, and Pearson's correlation. The findings of this study provide empirical evidence supporting the revised hypotheses. Hypothesis 1, which proposed that education level influences residents' perceptions of tourism, was partially confirmed, as education emerged as a key factor in shaping both positive and negative attitudes toward tourism. Hypothesis 2, which suggested that gender differences impact tourism perceptions, was strongly supported, with women displaying greater concern for environmental sustainability compared to men. Hypothesis 3, asserting that younger residents are more inclined to support tourism due to economic opportunities while older residents prioritise cultural preservation, was confirmed, highlighting generational differences in tourism perception. Finally, Hypothesis 4 which suggested that economic dependence on tourism shapes attitudes, was upheld, with individuals employed in tourism demonstrating more favourable views on its expansion. These results emphasise the importance of integrating socio-demographic factors into tourism policy and planning to foster sustainable and inclusive tourism development.

Comparative analysis between the two national parks revealed regional differences in attitudes toward tourism. Residents of NP Durmitor expressed stronger positive and negative opinions, likely due to the higher intensity of tourism activities in this region. In contrast, respondents from NP Skadar Lake displayed more enthusiasm for tourism devel-

opment, seeing it as an opportunity for economic growth and infrastructure improvements. These findings underscore the importance of region-specific tourism strategies catering to each community's needs and concerns.

This study underscores the vital role of local communities in shaping the tourism sector. Their active participation enriches visitor experiences and fosters mutual benefits for both residents and the broader economy. The government can create conditions conducive to sustainable growth in Durmitor and Skadar Lake National Parks by prioritising targeted tourism investments. Strengthening infrastructure, enhancing services, and increasing community involvement would generate more employment opportunities, elevate living standards, and help curb rural-to-urban migration—an ongoing challenge for many emerging tourist destinations in Montenegro.

Despite these national parks' immense potential, findings indicate that local residents remain underrepresented in the tourism planning process. While they possess valuable knowledge of their environment and a willingness to engage, their influence in decision-making remains limited. This highlights the need for a tailored, region-specific approach to tourism development in these areas.

For Durmitor National Park, where tourism is already well-established, efforts should focus on minimising negative impacts while promoting sustainable practices that protect the environment, cultural heritage, and traditional way of life. Enforcing strict environmental regulations, fostering community-led conservation efforts, and implementing responsible tourism strategies will be key to preserving the park's ecological integrity and long-term sustainability. In contrast, Skadar Lake National Park—still realising its full tourism potential—offers a unique opportunity to involve residents more actively in shaping its future. By harnessing their enthusiasm and deep-rooted knowledge, policymakers and tourism stakeholders can cultivate an inclusive, community-driven tourism model that balances economic development with environmental conservation and social well-being.

This study contributes to the existing literature on sustainable tourism by providing empirical evidence on how socio-demographic factors shape residents' attitudes. The practical implications of these findings suggest that policymakers and tourism planners should consider targeted educational programmes, participatory decision-making processes, and adaptive management strategies to ensure sustainable tourism development that aligns with the expectations and needs of local communities.

However, the study has several limitations. Its reliance on self-reported survey data may introduce response bias, and its cross-sectional nature does not account for changes in attitudes over time. Future research should consider longitudinal studies to track the evolution of local perceptions and expand the geographical scope to include additional regions in Montenegro and beyond.

Ultimately, the study highlights the importance of adaptive, locally focused tourism strategies that reflect the unique needs of each national park. By increasing local participation, enforcing sustainable tourism policies, and ensuring balanced economic growth, Montenegro can position Durmitor and Skadar Lake National Parks as exemplary destinations for responsible and community-centred tourism. This study reinforces the critical role of residents in shaping sustainable tourism strategies within protected areas. By demonstrating the influence of socio-demographic factors on tourism perceptions, the findings contribute to a growing body of literature advocating for community-based tourism models. The study emphasises the importance of enhancing local participation, improving educational outreach, and integrating community-driven approaches into tourism planning. Policymakers and tourism stakeholders must adopt more inclusive and participatory frameworks to ensure that tourism development aligns with economic aspirations and environmental conservation efforts.

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Appendix A Survey Questionnaire

1. General Information

1. Gender:
 - Male Female
2. Age:
 - Under 18 18–25 26–35 36–45 46–55 56 and above
3. Education Level:
 - Primary education Secondary education Higher education

2. Statements on tourism development and local residents’ role

In the following tables, please mark the numbers that best reflect your opinion regarding the listed statements.

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Tourism development negatively impacts local residents by altering local culture and traditions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tourism development changes traditional behavior patterns of local residents.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Tourism development harms the environment.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The degradation of cultural and historical heritage is a consequence of tourism development.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tourism development threatens biodiversity.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tourism development increases employment opportunities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tourism development increases the income of the local community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tourism development stimulates investment in the local community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tourism development requires a preserved environment, thereby enhancing its protection.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tourism development positively contributes to the preservation of cultural and historical heritage.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tourism development encourages infrastructure development.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There is support from local government or the state for residents engaged in tourism (loans, subsidies, donations).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local residents support each other in engaging in tourism.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local products are utilized in creating tourism offerings.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. Involvement of local residents in tourism planning and decision-making

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
When planning tourism development activities, we were consulted in some way by the local government.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
When important tourism development decisions were made in our local community, we were active participants in the decision-making process.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our suggestions and opinions were considered in the tourism development of our local community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Local residents are sufficiently involved in the tourism development process.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local residents have been/are currently involved in the development of tourism projects.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. Personal opinions and future engagement in tourism

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I want my place to be recognized as a tourist destination.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I believe that tourism development can bring many benefits to my local community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I want to be involved in tourism.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tourism is the industry of the future.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. The Importance of local residents in tourism development

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Every local resident is equally important for tourism development.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The opinions of local residents must be respected.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local residents know their local environment best.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local residents best understand the advantages and disadvantages of their local community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local residents receive education in the field of tourism.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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