

Painted houses - a genesis for local rural cultural heritage and augmentation of a tourism-based community? A KPA analysis in Ciocănești Commune, Romania

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ABSTRACT: Whereas, numerous studies have analyzed cultural objectives with lengthy histories turned into tourism attractions, either in urban or rural settlements, the present research is focused on study the interaction between tourism with the augmentation of local cultural heritage (LCH) based on painted houses after the famous inscribed eggs, internationally known and traditional costumes, in a Romanian mountain village. To this end, the paper examines knowledge, perception and attitude (KPA) of local community in the case of Ciocănești village, located in Northern Romania, using a survey on 171 residents. In order to test our hypothesis, descriptive statistics and stepwise regression method were applied in SPSS v17. The results revealed that the knowledge about local heritage and how it should be preserved and capitalized in the tourism industry are relatively high, but they may be improved for a sustainable tourism development through the augmentation of education and experience acquired in the residence area. While good knowledge influence positively the perception, the gaps between expectations for local heritage impact on tourism development result perception in a negative way. The positive perception generates a protective attitude for the local heritage but less proactive in tourism business. Hence, a real need was raised by locals to receive financial support by EU specific instruments of funding of sustainable tourism. This case study could be an example of augmentation of tourism based on the sustainable action of local heritage conservation for other rural community. In the same time, it reveals the needs for the improvement of heritage tourism management.

KEY WORDS: local community, cultural heritage, tourism, Romania, KPA.

1. Introduction

Over the last decades, tourism has become a desirable alternative for development of local rural communities. In many instances, tourism has turned into the main factor of welfare improvement, thus resulting in the development of tourism-based communities (CBTs) (Wang et al., 2016; Lee and Jan, 2019). The ingenuity of entrepreneurial initiatives has led to the emergence of numerous models of CBTs based on the capitalization of natural or anthropogenic heritage advantages or creating the new attractions drivers. It is largely argued that UNESCO heritage sites interact positively with tourism industry, confirming the paradigm: that the Worldwide recognition boosts tourism (Buckley, 2004; Yang and Lin 2011; Patuelli and Mussoni, and Candela, 2012; Lupu, Brochardo, and Stoleru, 2018). The mutual relations between attractions and tourism were noticed even in case of conventional cultural heritage which plays the role of driving force for a destination (Pereira Roders, 2011) or vice versa (Firth, 2011). But, in the same time, such dual forces must be managed carefully in order to avoid emergence on conflicting interactions among heritage and tourism purposes (Bianchi, 2002; Mckerker, Ho, du Cross 2005; Zang, 2010; Zang et al., 2014). This is much more feasible in the current context of sustainable development of tourism which fully supports principles of maximizing the benefits towards the environment, tourists, economy or local communities (Budeanu et al., 2016; Lozano-Oyola et al., 2019) and reducing the negative effects to ensure a balanced relationship between stakeholders (Zang et al., 2006). In such context, a CBT which develops tourism using heritage in a sustainable way may secure much more their benefits. Otherwise, according to the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC, 2013), the direct or indirect participation of the local/host population in touristic activities is regarded as an eligible condition for destination sustainability (Mathew and Sreejesh, 2017), within some financial benefits remain in destinations (Matei et al., 2014).

Definitely the engagement of the population can increase the success, especially when the community itself supports the development of tourist activities. Nonetheless, according to the social exchange theory the individuals will become engaged in a certain activity only if the expected benefits generated by the activity outweigh the costs involved (Andriotis and Vaughan, 2003; Sharpley, 2014; Jaafar et al., 2015). Therefore, the support for tourist activities, and implicitly the engagement of the local community in these activities is conditioned by the perception of the population regarding the associated benefits and costs (Nunkoo and Ramkissoon, 2011). Moreover, the degree to which members of the community are aware of the value of certain heritage elements which can boost tourism development is reflected in their perception and attitude towards the need to preserve and capitalize this heritage (Lee, 2003).

Overall, the tourism destination will evolve according to these aspects related to knowledge, perception and attitude towards the existing heritage, whereas in the long term the development of the destination will contribute to an increase in the degree of recognition and awareness of the patrimonial values underlying tourism development.

Thus, the aim of this study is to examine the interaction between tourism with the augmentation of local cultural heritage (LCH) based on painted houses after the famous inscribed eggs, internationally known, and traditional costumes, in a Romanian mountain village.

The objectives of this study include: examine the heritage and tourism genesis of Ciocănești rural community, Romania; analyzing the correlation between traits of local community members (i.e. age, education etc.) and their knowledge, perception and attitudes towards preserving and

capitalizing the local cultural heritage through tourism in a sustainable way; and, identifying recommendations for sustainable development as CBT.

This research will serve to improve in a sustainable way the management both of cultural heritage and tourism in Ciocănești village or other similar rural areas.

2. Literature review

Tourism destinations are characterized by various degrees of attractiveness generated by either natural or anthropogenic factors, including heritage, tourist infrastructure, activities, accessibility etc. (Matei *et al.*, 2019). Numerous theories attempting to define the concept of tourism attractiveness focus mainly on its effect on tourist satisfaction (Formica and Uysal, 2006; Cho, 2008), whereas others emphasize the quality and uniqueness provided by some of these factors (Lee *et al.*, 2009; Ariya *et al.*, 2017; Ribaudo and Figini, 2017). While natural factors, when present, include conditions which can be capitalized and converted to attractors depending on the available organizational capacity and know-how, anthropogenic factors can generate attractions pertaining to the cultural spectrum and create attractiveness regardless of the presence of natural resources required for tourism.

The literature provides a variety of studies focusing on UNESCO World Heritage sites and their implications in terms of tourism which have revealed useful aspects for understanding and managing the local heritage of a destination. A relevant aspect identified by Ribaudo and Figini (2017) and Canale *et al.* (2019) is linked to the role of the UNESCO label in increasing or acting as a guarantee for the attractiveness of a destination. Gravari-Barbas (2018) states that the formal recognition of a site by including it in the UNESCO World Heritage List can become a driver for tourism development through association with quality, and authenticity (Ryan and Silvanto, 2011). Fu (2019), Aykan (2013) and Poullos (2014) demonstrate in their studies, tackling the management of UNESCO sites for tourism, that heritage management must be focused on the involvement of the host community, particularly if the latter are custodians and/or associated users. Landorf (2009) confirms that the engagement of the local community ensures a superior rate of success in terms of sustainable development due to the priority of their role compared to government stakeholders, and experts, which solely act as facilitators (Li *et al.*, 2020).

The degree of involvement of the local community in the development of tourism activities has been a topic of great interest for researchers, resulting in numerous studies. Some of them analyze the perception of the population regarding the tourism development (Long *et al.*, 1990; Andreck *et al.*, 2005; Pappas, 2008; Hsieh *et al.*, 2017; Meimand *et al.*, 2017; Yeniasir and Gökbulut, 2018) or the impact of tourism on community members, both individually and collectively, from an economic, cultural and social perspective (Long *et al.*, 1990; Kim *et al.*, 2013). These studies underline the close connection established between the positive perception of the community regarding tourism development and its support for tourism, and emphasize the link between the type of perception and the historical development of tourism within a destination according to the life cycles of the tourism product (Zang *et al.*, 2006). Lee (2013) investigates the variables which determine different perceptions of the same phenomenon, referring to individual characteristics (age, education, income, time spent in the community, migration experience, tourism knowledge, level of interaction with tourists, attachment to the community, community involvement etc.). The extent to which the community acknowledges its heritage and recognizes its value is considered a critical factor which determines the attitude towards the need to preserve and capitalize this heritage (Nyaupane and Timothy, 2010).

Knowing that a community is not neither static nor homogeneous group (Gursoy *et al.*, 2002); its attitude differs depending on the traits of community members. A good degree of awareness

regarding the attitude and perception of the local community in terms of tourism development becomes thus very important for the sustainable management of the tourism destination in the medium and long term. The participatory management of the cultural heritage, which is based on community engagement in the process, has proved to be very successful in many local tourism destinations (Tas et al., 2009; Chirikure et al., 2010).

The recognition of the value and authenticity of elements of local culture requires knowledge and awareness and this is considered as a first step in the process of capitalization in the tourism industry (Deacon and Smeets, 2013).

3. Methods and Materials

3.1. Study area

Ciocănești commune which is located in the northern part of Romania and the northern sector of the Eastern Carpathians was founded in the 15th century (Bălan, 1939), albeit it was inscribed in official documents in 1774 (Pașcanu-Tătaru, 2007). At the time, it was known for lead mining and other traditional activities which included sheep and cattle breeding, forest logging and rafting on Bistrița Aurie (Grigorovitză, 1908). The administrative status of Ciocănești has undergone numerous changes. The most recent was in 2002 (Law No. 430/2002), when the village became a commune together with Botoș village by dividing the commune of Iacobenii. Consequently, the population can be tracked accurately only after 2002. Therefore, the number of inhabitants increased till 2010 at 1516 followed by a decrease until 2019 to 1448 inhabitants (NIS, 2020). For this period, the migration rate varied, being around 4 persons yearly, but the arrivals were higher than departures. In 2019, migration rate was 7‰ (NIS, 2020), which expresses the positive changes in this rural area. The economic function of the village has also undergone changes which were reflected in the evolution of the population. It is common knowledge that during the communist regime the majority of the local population was employed in the mining sector (the manganese mines in Botoș village) and forest logging. Following the downfall of communism, the mining sector and the industries were restructured or declined nationwide, which led to the closure of local mines in Botoș, in 2003 (Matei et al., 2016). In turn, the population reacted to these shifts by temporary or permanent departures for work abroad (Saghin et al., 2017). Under these circumstances, the development of tourism activities which steadily evolved during the past 15 years can be regarded as a form of resilience of the community to such economic changes. Tourism development in Ciocănești relies heavily on the heritage created by the community, which highlights the ingenuity of local people and sets it apart from any other village in Romania. This creation began on a small scale in 1950 when the first house was decorated with traditional motifs inspired by symbols typical for painted eggs and traditional costumes. These motifs were transferred to the outer walls of local houses and in time this practice became norm, and even mandatory after 2004, when Ciocănești was declared a museum village (Local Act no. 39/2004), (Fig. 1).



Figure 1 Museum of Ethnography. A model of painted house in Ciocănești commune, Suceava, Romania. Source: museographer Marilena Niculiță.

3.2. Questionnaire design

Considering the particularities of the case study, a semi-structured questionnaire was built by the authors in collaboration with colleagues from the social sciences of the University of Suceava, in 2019. It contained four sections (Sn) as the followings: in S1 we tested knowledge through five questions; S2 measured perception by nine questions; S3 dedicated to residents' attitude build in eight asks and the last; S4 about socio-cultural profile and general information of the respondents. Of these, eight used a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very little) to 5 (very much), whose internal consistency coefficient was good, with a Cronbach's Alpha 0.802, four applied binomial format, other four were open-ended questions and the rest with multiple choice.

3.3. Sampling and data collection

The questionnaire was applied face to face in Ciocănești village, in the last two weekends of July 2019, to the inhabitants at the extent that they were found and were available to answer questions. The application of the questionnaires complied with the European academic and legislative requirements, in order to present the purpose of the study, to respect the personal data of the respondents and to obtain the oral approval to take part in the survey. The resulting sample consists of 171 persons, each represent a household, with 5% confidence interval of the total 610 houses. In the same time, the sample is slightly proportional to the structure of the total population by gender, age and education, and comprises mainly respondents from Ciocănești village, which is the stronghold of painted houses compared to Botoș (Table 1, Fig. 2).

3.4. Data analysis

The survey data were manually centralized in Microsoft Xcel 2010 and imported in SPSS v.17, where Statistical descriptive (frequency, compare mean, Chi square) and stepwise regression equation were applied.

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of sample. Source: Extract from SPSS output.

Variable	Item	%	Variable	Item	%	Variable	Item	%
Gender	Male	51.5	Education	Primary	8.8	Age groups	18-20	29.8
	Female	48.5		Gymnasium	22.8		21-40	43.9
Household owner	Yes	87.7		Vocational	17.5		41-60	19.3
	No	12.1		High school	37.4		61-80	0.6
Residence	Ciocănești	88.9		Graduate	11.1		+80	6.4
	Botoș	11.1		Postgraduate	2.3			

Source: SPSS Output

The map of houses density in Ciocănești commune was carried out using the Spatial analyst tool (Point density) from a Geographical Information System (GIS) software which enabled the visualization of the distribution and densities of cultural heritage houses. These buildings were initially vectored using the insertion tools of photos taken on site with embedded GPS location (Soft Locus map 3.42.0). The map background illustrates the land use/land cover according to Corine Land Cover 2012, European Environmental Agency (EEA).

Statistics of the tourism were calculated based on data from the National Institute of Statistics, 2020.

4. Results

4.1. Cultural heritage and tourism statistics. Is Ciocănești a CBT?

The painted houses of Ciocănești, decorated with this unique exterior design using inscribed eggs models and traditional costumes, represent unique elements of local identity, an expression of the ingenuity, artistic sense and need for beauty of the inhabitants, which, in several years, became the community traditional cultural heritage. It is considered a response of the community to cultural, ethnic and historical factors, being closely conditioned by the natural environment. Ciocănești architectural achievement is singular in the landscape of Bucovina. Among the total of 530 households (INS, 2011), almost 400 have the painted mansions including administrative, cultural or social units (Mayor hall data, 2020). As top of local initiatives are the establishment of the local ethnographic museum which exhibits archaic artifacts reminding also to visitors long gone or endangered occupations (such as blacksmithing, weaving, carpentry), the Museum of Painted Eggs and Țăran Leontina Museum House. At present, nearly all these houses are located along the main road of Ciocănești village (Fig. 2). Due to these attributes, the village was included, celebrated and awarded as one of the most beautiful colorful destinations in Europe together with Lalipie (Poland), Oberammergau, (Germany), etc. In 2014 the village was declared a cultural village of Romania by The Ministry of Tourism inside a competition called "The most beautiful village in Romania" (ro.ambafrance.org).

Throughout this period of outer walls painting, numerous events were revived or created which are now nationally and internationally recognized and allow the local community to express their spiritual wealth and honor the old traditions of Bucovina. These events are linked to ancient occupations: "pluta" rafting ("Rafting week on Bistrița Aurie"), egg painting at Easter ("the National festival of painted eggs"), fishing and cooking trout ("the National trout festival"), shepherding ("Răscolul stâniilor" Festival of Botoș village) and winter holiday traditions ("Festival of ancestral traditions and customs").

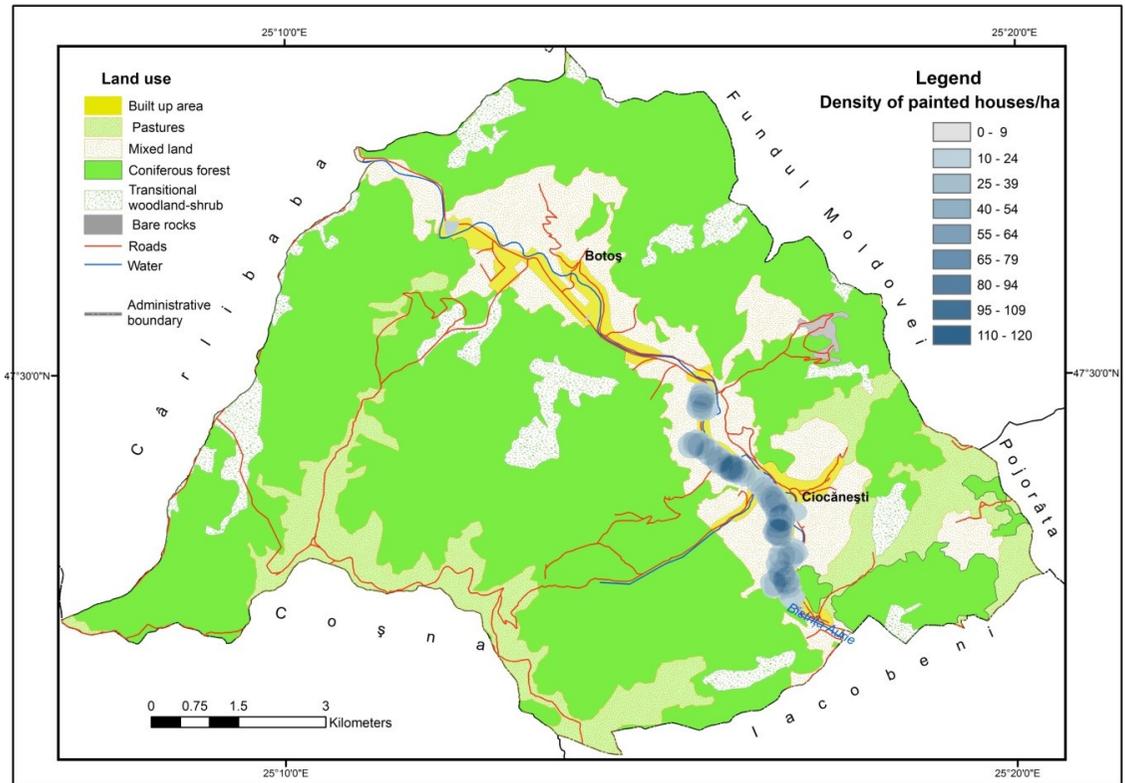


Figure 2 Density of painted houses (no/ha) and land use in Ciocănești commune, Suceava, Romania. Processed in GIS, after the field observations.

In this context, while there are some economic activities in Ciocănești based mainly on dairy processing and wood logging, tourism is steadily growing and could become the best alternative for sustainable development of the commune. But, the entrepreneurial initiatives in tourism are rather at the beginning. Statistics show only 8 units (guesthouses, villas) built and approved thus far offering ca. 34000 available bed-days (NIS, 2020). Although the number of tourists has increased significantly from 12 in 2002 to 1903 in 2019 (about 160 times) and the length of the stay has reached 2.5 days on average, accommodation facilities remain underused, with an occupancy rate of just 13%. However, based on estimated data of Mayoralty (2020), it is likely that the number of tourists is higher (between 5000 and 10000 during the festivals), as some tourists are in transit, despite the low quality of roads, or opt for accommodation with local relatives and friends or informal structures (rented rooms) which are not recorded statistically. The percentage of employees in tourism is almost 15% and 2% in heritage management. Data about the financial profit from tourism or capitalization of heritage were not available. Given the above, it can be concluded that the commune does not yet function as a CBT.

4.2. KPA analysis for LCH and ST in Ciocănești community

The *K level* expressed by the frequency data indicates that nearly all respondents (93.4%) had correct information regarding the national recognition of their village as the most beautiful cultural village of Romania in 2014, which they linked to the presence of traditional motifs on the exterior walls of houses (64.4%), also known among the local people as “facades with motifs” (“façade cu pui” – 9.4%). Although these architectural elements originate in the egg painting

tradition, the respondents consider that the most specific events are the “Trout Festival” (56.1%), and then “Painted Eggs Festival” (38.0%). The sustainable development K reaches remarkable values, as 59.1% of local people believe that the architectural tradition of Ciocănești is an element of sustainable development.

The main factors regarded as critical for sustainable cultural development are the preservation of architecture (59.1%), followed by the conservation of the local folk costume, which is considered very beautiful (12.3%), the continuation of folk traditions (8.3%), traditional occupations etc., whereas the major factors limiting the development of the village is the road access (46.2%) (Table 2).

Table 2 Statistical structure of Knowledge, measured in terms of Frequency. Source: Extract from SPSS output.

Heritage K	%	Sustainable Tourism (ST) K	%
<i>Cultural village 2014</i>		<i>Elements of ST</i>	
Yes	93.6	Local architecture	59.1
No	6.4	Beauty of folk costume	12.3
<i>Museum village</i>		Local food	2.9
Folk motifs on walls	68.4	Handicraft	6.4
Folk costumes	2.9	Traditional activities	7.6
Facades with motifs	9.4	Traditions	8.3
Handicraft traditions	10.5	Folk events	2.3
Open air museum	4.1	No answer	1.2
Painted eggs	0.6	<i>Factors hindering ST</i>	
Folk tradition	2.9	Roads	46.2
<i>Festivals</i>		Jobs	5.3
Trout	56.1	Infrastructure	17.5
Painted eggs	38.0	Low resources	10.5
Răscolul oilor (shepherding)	0.6	Lack of promotion	2.9
Traditions	2.9	Emigration	1.2
Rafting	1.2	Low involvement LA	9.4
No answer	0.00	No answer	5.3

Therefore, in order to achieve this dichotomy and a total knowledge index (TK) the answers were coupled into two groups: “good” (score 2), and “poor” (score 1). Thus, “good” TK is as high as 7.05% whereas the remaining 20.05% accounts for “poor” TK.

According to the demographic structure, “good” TK are to be found at postgraduate, graduate and vocational, to elder respondents e, and females, while the “poor” TK I men (Fig. 3).

The *perception* measured by the Compare mean score according to the 1 (very poor) to 5 (very good) scale (Table 3) indicates poor levels of perception regarding the role and importance of cultural heritage for tourism, for the success of imposing local initiative in architecture by painting houses with traditional motifs, the impact of tradition revival, the image of Ciocănești for national tourism, or as an advantage for valorization through tourism. However, greater scores were assigned by respondents to the continuation of local initiatives in architecture, the possibility to develop a business in tourism and the perception of personal usefulness as a result of involvement in local scale activities.

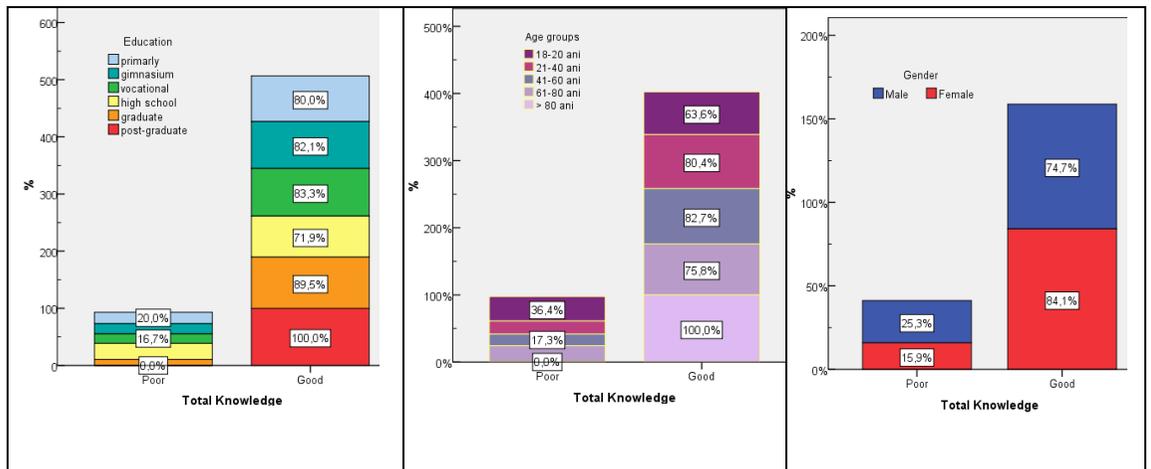


Figure 3 The structure of TK by education, age and gender.

Table 3 Descriptive statistics of the Perception variables measured by Compare mean.

Source: Extract from SPSS output.

Variables (P)	Mean	Median	Stdv
Role of cultural heritage for tourism development	1.47	1.00	0.814
Imposed local initiative in architecture	1.47	1.00	0.821
Continuing Ciocănești architecture	2.76	1.00	2.651
Impact of tradition revival	1.44	1.00	0.752
Importance of CA in tourism development	1.44	1.00	0.820
Image of Ciocănești for national tourism	1.52	1.00	0.897
Local image for international tourism	1,71	1.00	1.033
Cultural village is an advantage in promotion/valorization	1.00	1.00	0.00
Possibility to dev.TB	3.26	3.00	1.186
Financial status better in recent years	3.82	4.00	1.409
Perceive appreciation as useful for what you are doing?	2.13	1.00	1.462

The statistical association between TK index and each variable using the Chi-Square test reveals almost total statistical significance between the two categories of variables (Table 5).

The *attitude* towards participating in the preservation of the cultural heritage shows that 59.6% of the local population would like to own a house built and decorated according to the specific architecture of the village, while 31% want a traditional house, which refers to the same thing. For the construction, the inhabitants would prefer local materials (73.1%), which is in accordance with the principles of sustainable development at local scale.

Whereas the degree of participation in the cultural life is significant (75.4%), the engagement in tourism business is considerably lower, at 25.1%. The respondents which are engaged in tourism activities do not indicate any obstacles in their development (83%), but suggest that more involvement is required from local authorities in applying for and obtaining structural funds.

Table 4 Association between index of Total Knowledge and perception (Confidence interval 95%).
Source: Extract from SPSS output.

Question	Chi-Square	df	P
Heritage score	10.133	4	0.038
Local initiative for building houses in accordance with the specific architecture	14.935	4	0.005
Continuing the project of building according to Ciocănești architecture characteristics	17.332	10	0.067
Impact of tradition revival on the development of Ciocănești commune	14.334	4	0.006
Role of local cultural heritage in the sustainable development of the commune	13.729	6	0.033
Actions taken for creating the image of Ciocănești for national tourism	10.104	5	0.072

The analysis of the stepwise regression model shows that the predictive factors which determine an attitude prone to engagement in tourism activities are age (experience) and education, but not TK. Therefore, predictors for business in tourism (which become constant in the model) include education (1. Constant: $B=4.123$, $t=10.226$, $p=0.000$; Studies: $B=-0.489$, $t=-2.188$, $p=0.030$), age (2. Constant $B=2.219$, $t=8.275$, $p=0.000$; Age $B=0.342$, $t=2.303$ and $p=0.023$) and masculinity, where R Square for education is 0.124 and $p=0.01$, and R Square for age is 0.168 and $p=0.43$. This attitude towards involvement in such a business has a positive effect and is correlated in terms of perception with an improvement of the financial status during recent years as a result of tourism development in Ciocănești and the opportunity to engage in the future in a tourism-related activity (Table 4).

Table 5 Constructed regression model based on attitude towards developing a business in tourism.
Source: Extract from SPSS output.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	1.280	0.22		14.200	0.000
· Improvement of financial status	0.123	0.22	0.400	5.572	0.000
2 (Constant)	1.123	0.104		10.919	0.000
· Improvement of financial status	0.96	0.24	0.312	4.024	0.000
Future business in tourism	0.77	0.28	0.212	2.741	0.007

Additionally, we applied a regression model which indicates that the attitude towards involvement in the local life (constant) is linked only to the positive perception of the population and that this involvement was appreciated (Constant $B=1.722$, $t=26.885$, $p=0.000$, appreciation ($B=0.123$, $t=4.906$, $p=0.000$)).

5. Discussion

The K level is high both cumulatively, as well as in relation with each tested variable. Slight differences were noted between genders, with female respondents exhibiting a higher level of

knowledge compared to the male population. This could be linked to the fact that architectural motifs were introduced by a woman and continued by other women of the community. The level of knowledge is, predictably, more elevated in the population with university degrees compared to the total sample and also, those having vocational study, knowing that many of them are wood carpenters or builders. The inhabitants are mostly aware and in agreement regarding the title awarded to Ciocănești village in 2014, but disagree regarding other aspects, including the importance of some events, the content of the local cultural heritage etc. They are also good connoisseurs of elements related to sustainable tourism, and the importance of LCH in sustaining tourism. They were alarmed by poor accessibility.

The level of knowledge generates both positive and negative perceptions. The latter are related to the idea that the initiative of decorating the outer walls of their houses with motifs has not yielded maximum results thus far and many respondents believe that more involvement is needed in the future. However, the positive perception generated by their own experiences is that opening the village for tourism has led to an increase in the standard of living and also in the willingness to start a tourism business.

The attitude towards the type of house they would build is in accordance with the level of knowledge and the local laws, but in opposition with the perception, since only half of respondents would prefer the typical architecture of Ciocănești. However, they would choose, to a large extent, to use local materials for house construction, which is both a requirement of sustainable development for lowering the carbon footprint, and an adaptation of mountain households to the available resources. Although the respondents do not explicitly perceive the revival of traditions in a positive manner, they have participated in specific local events, even as organizers, and have a good perception regarding the importance of their involvement. The adaptation to the new context of the commune which stimulates tourism and tourism-related activities is beneficial according to approx. a quarter of respondents who declared that they have experience in this field and the problems they encountered were minor. Nonetheless, the possibilities of sustainable development of the commune based on tourism are perceived as reduced, due to the fact that they require access to structural funds and the involvement of local authorities.

6. Conclusion

By applying the KPA model in order to analyze the relationship between LCH and Ciocănești commune – a place widely recognized for the creation and preservation of material and immaterial cultural heritage – we tested the hypothesis according to which a high level of awareness regarding cultural heritage and its value for tourism typically determines a positive attitude towards tourism development. Whereas the inhabitants of Ciocănești are rather knowledgeable when asked about the local heritage, support its preservation (to which they are willing to take part actively by using local construction materials to build typical houses decorated with traditional motifs) and credit the idea of development based on tourism and entrepreneurship, they remain captive to the mentality that local authorities and the state have the decisive roles in the process. However, their perceptions regarding the visible beneficial effects of tourism lead to a very favorable attitude towards tourism development and generate engagement of the local community in organizing events which act as elements of immaterial potential for tourism and we did not involve financial investments.

The analysis of KPA differences according to certain personal characteristics confirms the role of the variables such as education level, age in term of experience and gender in shaping knowledge,

perception and attitudes towards the need to preserve and opportunities to capitalize the local cultural heritage.

The community of Ciocănești is still in the early stages of fully recognizing and valorizing its cultural heritage, but the inhabitants are already aware of the benefits of tourism development as an alternative or complementary activity to their more traditional occupations, albeit they need a confirmation of their role in the development of the commune. In this regard, they need help in learning to access funds for tourism business using different European or national instruments (Starts-up, structural funds etc.). Furthermore, this study underlines that the active engagement of inhabitants, boosted by their positive perceptions regarding the potential benefits of tourism and their own roles in development, should be the focal point of future strategies of tourism development.

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