

## Article

# Exploring Residents' Perceptions towards Tourism Development—A Case Study of the Adjara Mountain Area

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**Abstract:** Tourism development involves both positive and negative impacts on economic, social and natural environments, which represent essential pillars for sustainable development. It is in this context that the present research was conducted in the Adjara Mountain area of Georgia aiming to identify residents' perception towards tourism development. An online survey was conducted among 620 residents. The data collected were analyzed by descriptive statistics and principal component analysis. As such, the results of the principal component analysis led to a two-factor solution: "positive effects" and "negative effects". Older and more educated respondents perceived the impacts of tourism development more positively compared to the younger group and to the less educated one. A statistically significant difference was found between females and males regarding their perception of the positive impacts of tourism development. The study represents a first step in investigating the residents' perception towards tourism development in the Adjara Mountain region, and the results could constitute a starting point for future tourism strategies in the area.



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**Keywords:** tourism impacts; sustainable tourism development; local community perceptions; mountain tourism

## 1. Introduction

Over the last few years, tourism has become an increasingly popular field due to its numerous outcomes affecting life quality in local communities [1]. The attention granted to tourism development is even more significant because of its tremendous opportunities for sustainable development of these rural communities [2] from economic, social and environmental perspectives. Commonly, tourism development is highly complex and multi-dimensional; specifically, it is related to current issues and approaches of a social, environmental, cultural and economic nature. Previous studies have confirmed that tourism development is vital to sustainable economic growth of countries worldwide. It has already been established that the impact of tourism has a lasting effect on economic development reliant on sustainable development; therefore, there is a direct connection between tourism development aspects and socio-economic growth [3].

The sustainable tourism development rate impacts the possibility of competitive business in the country directly and indirectly, both in developed and developing countries. Additionally, tourism development has a positive effect on quality of life for the population in the region, presenting the local population with numerous opportunities [4,5].

Regarding tourism field-wide opportunities from a global perspective, mountains are popular tourist destinations. As such, tourism development aspects and opportunities specific to countries' characteristics are linked to the climate, biodiversity, natural constraints,

culture, traditions and economic activities of destinations [6]. Thus, the complexity of the tourism sector—particularly mountain tourism—largely depends on specific features of the area. It is related to various activities influenced by the specific traits of the environment and the cultural heritage of the destination. This corollary, in turn, leads to both negative and positive impacts of tourism development on the natural environment and local communities [7,8].

Due to its nature, mountain tourism also represents a complex issue in itself. Thus, it requires particular strategies tailored to a specific destination. Moreover, tourism strategy is also essential to devise a shared vision and related tools with locals. Accordingly, a mixed-method approach is applied for involving the local community in a shared development strategy. Mountain tourism is considered unique potential tourism, enhanced by the demand for more sustainable and nature-based solutions. In mountain tourism, local actors provide active support and co-participation [9]. In general, mountainous regions, in most cases, are of utmost complexity in terms of making political and economic decisions [10].

The local community makes a crucial contribution to optimizing the local tourism process. Therefore, increasing the local community's interest in developing complex and flexible tourist products represents the leading aspect of tourism development [11]. The lack of a coherent strategy for promoting and capitalizing on the local tourism potential, including lack of financial support, staffing, and qualification, is a problematic issue in most cases [11].

Georgia provides many opportunities to develop sustainable tourism with diverse resources (unique natural resources, landscape, diverse ecosystems, historical and cultural monuments, ethnographic abundance etc.). Notably, the pursuit of active policies to promote tourism by the central government over the past two decades has substantially changed the dynamics of development for the better [12]. As for the Adjara region, there are different types of tourism, including sun and beach tourism, eco-tourism, bird and raptor watching tourism, rural tourism, wine tourism, ski and mountain resorts etc. [13].

According to tradition, hospitality is one of Georgia's specific traits [14], particularly in the Adjara Mountain region. It should be noted that the potential of the mountain landscape of the Adjara Mountain region is high, although, overall, Adjara is distinguished by different recreational resources that support development of several types of tourism [15]. Previous studies highlighted that tourism development does not cause severe ecological problems for the natural environment of the Adjara Mountain region currently [16], supporting the environmental pilon for its sustainable development. Moreover, the Adjara Mountain region is of great interest for both local and international visitors in recent years due to its picturesque landscapes and existing natural resources [17]. Therefore, based on this diversity of resources, development of recreational tourism will be one of the important segments for the mountainous regions of Adjara. In particular, its ecology, food production, culture and traditions support the opportunity to achieve sustainable development tourism. Tourism will also play a significant role in reducing depopulation of mountain areas and enhance sustainability. Therefore, management of mountain heritage becomes a priority and perhaps tends to create new opportunities towards beneficial effects on the local economy. Moreover, the mountain part of Khelvachauri, Shuakhevi, Keda Shuakei and Khulo municipalities includes mountainous settlements of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara. Thus, overall, increasing attention needs to be granted to the role of mountain tourism development in the economy of the Adjara region, but also at the national level in view of coherent strategies required for development of mountain tourism. These strategies should consider the above-mentioned natural heritage, cultural traditions and the local population's socio-economic aspects in connection to the location, sustainable development, community-based characteristics and experiences.

Alongside its cultural and natural appeal, the Adjara area exhibits high potential for agritourism development [18]. However, insufficient tourism development and low service quality are problematic issues in the mountain region of Adjara. At the same time, it was shown that there is a need for enhanced usage of information technology skills for tourism

providers in the Adjara Mountain region to create more opportunities for information, popularization and dissemination of existing tourist products [17]. Moreover, it is required to study high-risk-related problems for further development of Adjara Mountain tourism [19].

Previous studies [16–19] from the Adjara Mountain area primarily focused on tourism potential and less on the local residents' attitudes and support for tourism development. As community represents an important factor for tourism development in a region, the aim of the current research was to investigate the perception and support of local communities from Adjara Mountain area towards tourism development. In this respect, the following research questions arise: how do residents from Adjara region perceive tourism development impact? Which are the factors that influence the residents' perception towards tourism development in the mountain area? Furthermore, the impact of socio-demographic characteristics and their influence on perceived impact of tourism development were investigated, offering valuable information for future development strategies and improvement regarding management of this destination. The paper is structured into six main parts. The introduction is followed by a section focused on the literature review of tourism development impacts. The third section presents the research area and methodology used to achieve the research objectives. The fourth section is dedicated to the results, followed by the discussion section. The paper ends with the conclusion.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Impacts of Tourism Development

Tourism in developing countries can enhance economic benefits, in particular for the rural population [7], and create new opportunities for those communities that do not have sufficient knowledge and finances [7] to participate in tourism development without external support [20].

Tourism is an economic activity affecting all pillars of sustainability, not only the economic one. Any systematic approach should accept that the effects of tourism activity are both positive and negative [21]. Implicitly, diverse studies on residents' perceptions on tourism development obtain various results, both of approval [22–24] and of disapproval [25–28]. Tourism is viewed as being an important development factor [29–31] but generates externalities on the environment [32] and society [33].

Development of tourism in the mountain regions can lead to degradation of the natural environment (air pollution, pressure on land use and infrastructure, changes in mountain ecosystems) on one hand, and it might be a direct threat to the livelihoods (living environment) and culture of residents [34,35]. There are possibly numerous negative impacts based on tourism development: in particular, changes in the natural ecosystems and the climate, but also negative issues related to heritage and cultural identity. Minimization of the negative impact exerted by tourism development can be addressed through cooperation between governmental and non-governmental organizations for environmental protection and sustainable tourism development [35].

Alongside these negative impacts related to tourism development in rural and mountain areas, there are also positive outcomes of an economic and environmental nature, which are significantly influential for the residents' overall satisfaction regarding tourism development. Positive economic and social impacts are related to creation of new jobs, economic benefits to local residents and local businesses, improvement of living standards and development of new recreation facilities [36,37]. Tourism development could serve as a pivotal opportunity to balance natural resource conservation and economic development, but, before starting tourism development, strategic plans need to be established and political decisions made, in particular to increase the motivation of the local population to participate in tourism development [38].

Thus, positive effects will be approached first from an economic point of view. There are diverse studies aiming to observe the impact of tourism on the local economy, and this is obvious so long as tourism is, essentially, an economic activity, an indissoluble part of the local economy [14].

Secondly, the economic benefits should not be estimated without looking at the social and environmental effects that tourism generates [39]. For instance, local tourism development creates jobs for the community [40], with positive economic and social consequences alike [9]. Diverse studies have approached the subject of the effects of local tourism development in social terms [41]. They observed that the increase of tourism activity generates resources that can be used for improving social conditions [42]. Moreover, the inherent interaction with tourism increases residents' level of knowledge [43], offering them new perspectives in life. Furthermore, one of the major consequences is that the local traditions are promoted [2].

The positive environmental effects of local tourism are not ignored by scholars, addressing not only to authorities [44] but also tourism products suppliers [45], residents [39] and travellers [46]. Tourism development can raise awareness of local natural resources [47] and the need for their conservation [48].

However, tourism development could also be a significant cause of negative effects on each sustainability pillar. Mainly, if one pillar is unevenly developed compared to the others [49], their equilibrium is disturbed. Uninhibited development of tourism can generate inhibition in other sectors of economy, in redirecting limited local resources to tourism or simply because, by comparison to tourism, other economic activities become unattractive [50].

The negative social impacts on communities due to tourism development are even more complex. Over-tourism is one of the issues that generates local conflict [51] because of the different perceptions about tourism services [51]. Other scholars observed that development of tourism generates a negative impact on tourism destinations' cultural identity and heritage [52], while others [53] consider an increase in crime rate, shortage of goods for residents and local price increasing as being the most detrimental effects that should be avoided. Overall, uncontrolled tourism development can be a factor in reducing the social effects on the quality of life [54].

Finally, the negative environmental effects of tourism are a constant subject of interest for research, demonstrating that environmental issues have not been neglected in the process of tourism development [55,56] because environmental characteristics are major factors that generate tourist demand [57], while pollution generated by tourism activity is seen to be the key challenge in this respect [58].

**Hypothesis 1.** *Residents perceive the positive impacts of tourism development more strongly compared with the negative ones.*

## 2.2. Residents' Support towards Tourism Development

Community participation is highly important, and it can be considered a key dimension of CBT (community-based tourism) development, specifically for developing countries [59,60]. In addition, the reported outputs of previous research on residents' perception on local tourism development have indicated differences in perception in terms of gender [61–63], age [31,63–65] and education [2,66,67]. These differences generate diverse levels of community involvement from residents in the decision-making process regarding local tourism [68–70], while studies have revealed [71,72] that, the higher the implication, the greater the positive effects on community. Aiming at sustainable tourism and community development could turn negative outcomes into positive ones by using an integrated view of sustainability pillars [49].

Studies suggest that community participation provides the unique opportunity to reveal the existing challenges for tourism development. Moreover, involvement of residents enhances the local community and supports preservation of traditions and cultural resources [73,74]. This in turn leads to sustainability of tourism resources, where community participation has decisive importance for tourism development, including rural tourism [75]. Based on the local experience, residents are the keepers of helpful knowledge

regarding their destination; therefore, using residents' potential positively affects tourism development. Other studies have also confirmed that local community involvement is considered a major tool for rural community development and local residents' potential, including the local experience, enhancing the opportunity for sustainable tourism development [51,76].

Community involvement in the tourism development process exerts a high economic and social impact (job creation, enhanced entrepreneurship and more developed local economies) [77]. Residents' attitudes and support for tourism development are directly linked to its perceived benefits [78–80]. Comprehension of the factors that influence the local residents' support towards tourism development is an important key development factor that might be further used to motivate them to be more active. Residents' support for tourism development is highly influenced by their socio-demographic characteristics [81], with age and gender considered to be two important factors that affect local residents' attitudes and perceptions toward tourism development [71,82]. Similarly, educational level and professional skills influence the ability of residents to understand the implications of tourism development [72].

Regarding age and education differences, studies reveal an indirect and faint correlation between the age and the way residents estimate the quality of tourist basic services [23]. Moreover, one study observed that, once age increases, the critical perception of the positive tourism effects is amplified [83], but elder persons better recognise the potential benefits of the development of tourism in the region [2].

Gender is another issue that differentiates residents' perception on tourism development as significant differences were observed between men and women on diverse aspects of sustainability [84]. Women are inclined to perceive any changes related to tourism development more negatively [85] alongside related consequences (crime, noise, traffic jams) [28], so they are more likely to oppose tourism development than men [60].

Education is, nevertheless, a subject that influences the perception of residents on tourism development [86]. The higher the level of education, the higher the positive perception on tourism development [87] and the impression that tourism can help them increase their life quality [88]. Moreover, scholars have revealed that residents acknowledged the importance of local education for future development [89].

**Hypothesis 2.** *There is a difference between genders in terms of tourism development perceptions.*

**Hypothesis 3.** *There is a difference in terms of tourism development perceptions across residents' age.*

**Hypothesis 4.** *There is a difference in terms of tourism development perceptions across residents' education level.*

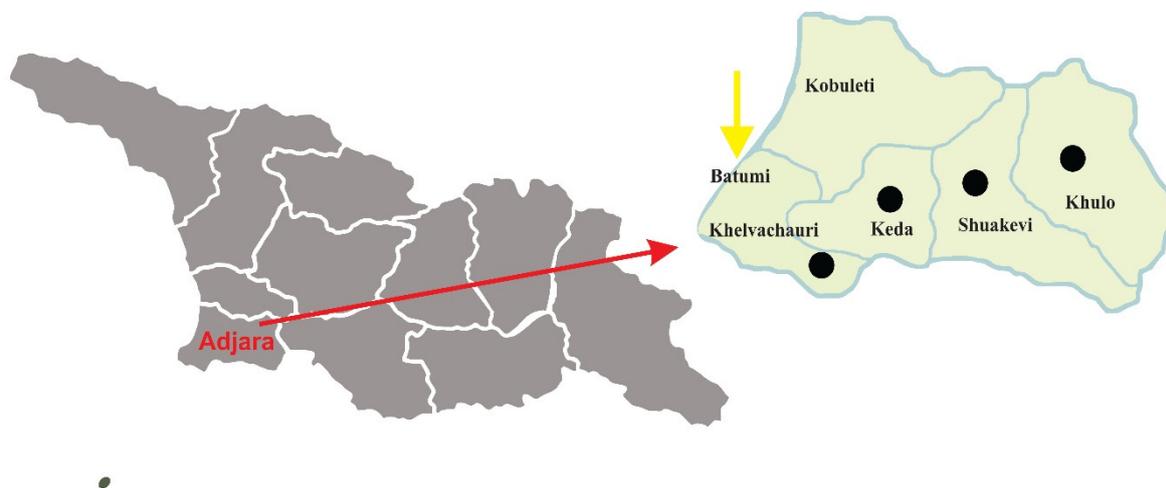
**Hypothesis 5.** *Residents' support for tourism development is influenced by the perceptions of tourism development impacts.*

### 3. Materials and Methods

#### 3.1. Research Area

The research was conducted in the Adjara Mountain area (the mountain part of Khelvachgauri, Keda, Shuakevi and Khulo). This area is recognized for its natural and cultural attractions. From the total number of tourists in the Adjara region, around 3% of them visit the Adjara Mountain area (Figure 1). Tourism plays an important role in the region, ensuring 10% of the jobs in the area and 6% of the gross added value. The Adjara Mountain municipalities are appealing to visitors during spring, summer and autumn. Skhalta Gorge (Khulo municipality) is mostly visited during these three seasons. In particular, agri-, eco- and cultural tourism are its most significant dimensions. Moreover, it should be noted that Khulo municipality has the development potential for a large ski resort. Beshumi is also a popular destination for local tourists (as a summer resort), while Goderdzi

(Khulo Municipality) resort is appealing year-round (especially to winter sports tourists). Moreover, a ski resort opens in winter in Gomarduli (Shuakhevi municipality), and many visitors tend to visit Makhuntseti waterfall (in Keda municipality). Keda municipality also borders the protected territory of Machakhela. Notably, most visitors are interested in local wine and cuisine, the life of the local people and their traditions, historical monuments, cultural heritage and extreme mountain tours in the area [90].



**Figure 1.** Positioning of the research area.

According to the latest data, 100 accommodation unit facilities can be found in the Adjara Mountain area, with a total number of 503 rooms. This indicates that each unit has 5 rooms on average. In this context, it can be stated that tourism activity in the region is generally oriented towards small businesses or family businesses (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Distribution of accommodation tourism facilities.

Type of Accommodation	No. of Hotels	No. of Rooms	No. of Beds-Places
The number of hotels in resorts in the mountainous area of Adjara	20	204	612
The number of family hotels/cottages in Khelvachauri mountain area	17	62	173
The number of family hotels/cottages in Keda	19	62	151
The number of family hotels/cottages in Shuakhevi	29	117	303
The number of family hotels/cottages in Khulo	15	58	151
Total (hotels, family hotels, cottages)	100	503	1390

Source: [90].

### 3.2. Survey Design

The survey instrument ensured collection of the following data: (i) the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents (gender, age, education, duration of residence); (ii) tourism development impacts; (iii) support for future tourism development. In order to evaluate tourism development impact, a set of 14 items adapted from previous studies [7,91] was used. Each of the 14 items were evaluated on a Likert type scale, where 1 means strongly disagree and 5 means strongly agree. Each of the participants in the survey was informed

about the purpose of the research, and informed consent was obtained. Cronbach's alpha was 0.78, indicating that the scale used in this study is reliable [92]. The research instrument was pre-tested through a face-to-face survey on a sample of 10 respondents from the research area in order to check the validity and reliability of the items used to evaluate the perception towards tourism development impact. Due to health restrictions, the research was further conducted online via Google forms from February to May 2022. The questionnaire was distributed by e-mail to local authorities and specialists from the research area and through social media in order to achieve the required sample size.

### 3.3. Sample Size

The residents from the research area represented the target population. The simple random sample method with a confidence level of 99% and 5% margin of error was used to determinate the sample size. In the end, 620 questionnaires were validated. The sample size met the requirement of subject-to-item criteria for principal component analysis of at least 5:1 but no less than 100 [93]. The majority of the respondents were female (56.2%), with university degree (70.8%) and less than 30 years old (57.1%) (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Profile of the respondents.

Characteristic	Frequency (%)
Gender	
Female	349 (56.2%)
Male	271 (43.8%)
Age	
18–30 years	354 (57.1%)
>30 years	266 (42.9%)
Education level	
Secondary (8 classes)	13 (2.1%)
Vocational	63 (10.1%)
High school	105 (16.9%)
University degree	439 (70.8%)

### 3.4. Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted by using the SPSS 26.0 software package (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA). Descriptive statistical analysis was used to analyze the socio-demographic profile of the respondents and as preliminary analysis for tourism development impact. The skewness and kurtosis values were within  $[-2; +2]$ , and, taking into consideration that there was a large sample (over 500 subjects), the distribution was considered to be close to normal [94]. Moreover, the 14 items were subject to principal component analysis with Varimax rotation in order to reduce the variables to a smaller number of components. Factors with an eigenvalue higher than 1 and factor loading higher than 0.5 were considered significant and included in the analysis [92]. The *t*-test was carried out to determine if there are any significant differences regarding the perceptions towards tourism development impact in terms of gender and age. Furthermore, convergent validity was accessed towards average variance extracted (AVE) and construct reliability (CR). Convergent validity was determined by factor loadings  $\geq 0.5$ , AVE  $\geq 0.5$  and CR  $\geq 0.7$  [92,95]. Independent *t*-test was used to determine if there are any differences in the mean of positive and negative effects perceptions between female and male and between younger and older persons. The correlation coefficient was used to identify if there is any link between education level and perception of tourism development impacts. Furthermore, binary logistic was employed in order to identify to what extent perception

of tourism development impact and demographic characteristics influence residents' desire to have a business in tourism and to share their culture with visitors.

#### 4. Results

##### 4.1. Perception towards Tourism Development Impact

The set of 14 items (Table 3) used to evaluate residents' perception towards tourism development was subject to principal component analysis with Varimax rotation, and a two-factor solution resulted, which explained 61.33% of the variance. The Bartlett test of sphericity was significant (Chi-square = 3825.500,  $p = 0.000$ ), providing support for data validity. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin overall measure of sampling was 0.908, indicating that the data were appropriate for principal component analysis [92].

**Table 3.** Perception of tourism development impact.

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
The development of tourism increases crime rate	2.141	0.8444
Tourism development will increase environment pollution (air, water, soil)	2.200	0.8012
The development of tourism determines litter quantity increase	2.247	0.8006
The development of tourism is associated with the loss of traditions	2.029	0.7701
Tourism is an opportunity for development	4.251	0.6567
The development of tourism increases life quality for the community	4.227	0.5973
Tourism development increases the production and sale of local products	4.359	0.5989
The development of tourism will contribute to the development of new tourist areas	4.348	0.5540
Tourism development will create new jobs	4.390	0.5943
Tourism development ensures the protection and conservation of natural resources	3.980	0.7617
Tourism development ensures the restoration and preservation of historic buildings	4.209	0.7081
The development of tourism will increase the level of awareness and education of the residents	4.203	0.6499
The development of tourism will facilitate the implementation of a variety of cultural events	4.220	0.6016
Tourism will help popularize Georgian culture	4.379	0.5846

The internal consistency of the 14 items and the reliability of the data were tested using Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha = 0.788$ ), exceeding the recommend threshold of 0.6 [92] (Table 2). The composite reliability (CR) of the two components was above 0.7, with an average variance extract (AVE) higher than 0.5 [92]. Furthermore, Harman's single-factor test was employed to verify the presence of common method bias, explaining 45.05% of the variance below the suggested 50% threshold [95].

The first component, "positive effects", accounted for 42.43% of the variance and grouped 10 items, with a reliability coefficient of 0.926 (Table 4). The items grouped in the first component are related to the positive socio-economic and cultural impact of tourism development. In the end, development of new tourist areas ( $4.34 \pm 0.554$ ) will lead to new jobs ( $4.39 \pm 0.594$ ), which will ensure an increase in the residents' quality of life ( $4.22 \pm 0.597$ ). At the same time, respondents consider that inhabitants will be more aware of tourism importance in their community ( $4.20 \pm 0.649$ ) and more businesses might be set up since local producers will have more opportunities to sell their products ( $4.35 \pm 0.598$ ). Actions related to protection of the natural environment and conservation ( $3.98 \pm 0.761$ ) and restauration of heritage will be performed ( $4.20 \pm 0.720$ ).

**Table 4.** Factors affecting residents' perception towards tourism development.

Eigenvalue	Variance %	Factor	Item	Factor Loading
6.2	42.43	Positive effects $\alpha = 0.926$ mean = 4.23	Tourism development will create new jobs	0.811
			The development of tourism will contribute to the development of new tourist zones	0.809
			The development of tourism will increase the level of awareness and education of the residents	0.797
			The development of tourism will facilitate the implementation of a variety of cultural events	0.792
			The development of tourism increases the quality of life of the community	0.791
			Tourism will help popularize Georgian culture	0.768
			Tourism development ensures the restoration/preservation of historic buildings	0.755
			Tourism development increases the production and sale of local products	0.753
			Tourism is an opportunity for development	0.742
			Tourism development ensures the protection and conservation of natural resources	0.639
2.3	18.90	Negative effects $\alpha = 0.823$ mean = 2.16	Tourism development will increase environmental pollution (air, water, soil)	0.872
			The development of tourism determines litter quantity increase	0.845
			The development of tourism increases crime rate	0.757
			The development of tourism is associated with the loss of traditions	0.675
Total variance %	61.33			
Cronbach's alpha	$\alpha = 0.788$			

The second component, "negative effects", accounted for 18.90% of the variance and consisted of four items, with a reliability coefficient of 0.823. The respondents do not necessarily consider that tourism development in their region would have negative effects ( $2.16 \pm 0.670$ ). Among the four items related to this component, the one related to air and water pollution has the highest factor loading (0.872), with a mean of  $2.20 \pm 0.801$ , while the increase in litter in the area has a factor loading of 0.845 and a mean of  $2.24 \pm 0.800$ . However, it is known that development of tourism activity in a region leads to crime increase in the area, but the respondents from the research area do not agree with this ( $2.14 \pm 0.844$ ). The lower scores registered by the negative impact, compared with other similar studies, might be explained by the fact that tourism activity in the region is in the incipient stage and the inhabitants are willing to develop this kind of activity.

Furthermore, an independent *t*-test was run in order to see if there are any differences between the means encountered by males and females in terms of the two components (Table 5).

**Table 5.** Results of *t*-test analysis.

Dependent Variable	Means		<i>t</i> -Value	<i>p</i> -Value
	Female	Male		
Positive effects	4.19 ± 0.428	4.28 ± 0.528	2.103	0.036 *
Negative effects	2.24 ± 0.653	2.09 ± 0.683	2.43	0.015 *
	Less than 30 years	More than 30 years		
Positive effects	4.18 ± 0.532	4.25 ± 0.457	1.16	0.108
Negative effects	2.26 ± 0.605	2.14 ± 0.693	1.84	0.066

\*—significant at 0.05.

**Ho1:** There is no difference between male mean and female mean regarding the perception of positive effects of tourism development.

**H1a1:** There is a significant difference between male mean and female mean regarding the perception of positive effects of tourism development.

It was noticed that males (4.28 ± 0.538) perceived tourism development more positively than females (4.19 ± 0.428), with significant differences between the two groups  $t(435) = -2.101, p = 0.036$ . The null hypothesis was rejected.

**Ho2:** There is no difference between male mean and female mean regarding the perception of negative effects of tourism development.

**H1a:** There is a significant difference between male mean and female mean regarding the perception of negative effects of tourism development.

Regarding the second component (negative effects), females perceive more negative impacts (2.24 ± 0.653) compared to males (2.09 ± 0.683), with significant differences between the two groups  $t(494) = 2.437, p = 0.015$  (Table 5). The null hypothesis was rejected.

**Hob1:** There is no difference between younger and older respondents' mean regarding the perception of positive effects of tourism development.

**H1b1:** There is a significant difference between younger and older respondents' mean regarding the perception of positive effects of tourism development.

**Hob2:** There is no difference between younger and older respondents' mean regarding the perception of negative effects of tourism development.

**H1b2:** There is a significant difference between younger and older respondents' mean regarding the perception of negative effects of tourism development.

At the same time, the differences between the group aged less than 30 years and the one aged more than 30 years were tested. The results revealed there are no statistically significant differences between the two groups ( $p > 0.05$ ). The null hypotheses were accepted. However, at first glance, the older group perceived the impact of tourism development more positively (4.25 ± 0.457).

Subsequently, correlation coefficient analysis was employed to identify if there is any link between education level and perceived impact of tourism development (Table 6). It was observed that, as the education level increases, the perception of the positive impact of tourism development is higher. The correlation coefficient indicated a direct weak link between the first factor of the principal component analysis and the education level ( $r = 0.113, p < 0.001$ ). No statistically significant correlation was found between perception of negative impact of tourism development and level of education ( $p > 0.05$ ).

**Table 6.** Correlation analysis.

Education Level	Means For Positive Effects	Means for Negative Effects
Secondary (8 classes)	3.84 ± 0.766	2.10 ± 0.630
Vocational	4.12 ± 0.630	2.39 ± 0.903
High school	4.19 ± 0.447	2.19 ± 0.763
University degree	4.27 ± 0.432	2.13 ± 0.584
Correlation coefficient	0.113 **	-0.059

\*\*—significant at 0.01.

#### 4.2. Support for Tourism Development

To determine residents' support for future tourism development, respondents were asked if they intend to set up a business in tourism (accommodation services) and if they want to share their knowledge about traditions to the visitors. Binary logistic regression was used to identify the extent perception of positive and negative impacts of tourism development and demographic characteristics influence residents' support for tourism development (Table 7). The results indicated that increasing negative effects perception of tourism development is associated with a reduction in the likelihood of assuring accommodation services. At the same time, residents older than 30 years were 1.720 times more likely to offer accommodation services than respondents under 30 years. At the same time, an increase in positive effects perception of tourism development is associated with an increase in the likelihood of sharing information about traditions to visitors.

Table 7. Binary logistic regression results.

Variable	Dependent Variable: "I Intend to Have a Guest House"				Dependent Variable: "I Want to Share Information about the Traditions to Visitors"			
	Odds Ratio	p-Value	95% CI		Odds Ratio	p-Value	95% CI	
			Lower	Higher			Lower	Higher
Positive effects	0.850	0.145	0.684	1.057	2.474	0.043 *	1.027	5.957
Negative effects	0.501	0.001 **	0.331	0.759	1.843	0.463	0.360	9.444
Gender (Male = 1)	1.049	0.864	1.001	2.955	0.606	0.655	0.068	5.432
Age (>30 years = 1)	1.720	0.042 *	0.605	1.820	1.805	0.618	0.177	18.412

\*— $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*— $p < 0.01$ .

#### 5. Discussion

The aim of this study was to identify the perception of residents from the Adjara Mountain area about tourism development. Principal component analysis led to a two-component solution related to the positive and negative impact of tourism development in terms of economic, social and environmental aspects. The results indicated that respondents perceive tourism activity as an opportunity for local community development and are less concerned about the negative impact of tourism development. As far as the positive effects of tourism development are concerned, respondents mentioned improvement of life standards ( $4.22 \pm 0.5989$ ) and employment opportunities ( $4.39 \pm 0.5943$ ) (Table 3), thus confirming the results of previous studies [29,30]. These positive aspects will ultimately lead to community support for tourism activity [31]. Similarly, creation of new tourist facilities ( $4.34 \pm 0.554$ ) and new opportunities to valorize local products ( $4.35 \pm 0.5989$ ) are other positive effects of tourism development perceived by the respondents that, in the end, raise the life standard of the local community [7,32].

It has been proven that tourism development has an impact on the natural environment, but, under proper development plans and well-implemented strategies, sustainable development of a tourism destination can be achieved with minimal losses [33] and protection and conservation of natural resources. In this study, on the one hand, respondents agreed that tourism development ensures protection and conservation of natural resources ( $3.98 \pm 0.761$ ). On the other hand, development of tourist products would increase the attractiveness of historical attractions, which, in the end, would lead to their restauration and preservation ( $4.209 \pm 0.7081$ ). Moreover, tourism development is perceived by the surveyed respondents as a tool for education due to the possibility of the visitors making contact with new cultures and having new experiences while raising local awareness on the importance of sustainable tourism development. The positive impact of tourism development is related

to the social, economic and natural aspects involved in sustainable tourism development as previous studies have also highlighted the local residents' positive attitude and support for sustainable tourism development [7,22,23]. Moreover, sustainable tourism development is linked to innovations, which enhance the competitiveness of tourism providers [24].

Alongside the positive effects of tourism development, there are also the negative ones related to pollution, crime rate and loss of traditions, which are perceived at a lower level compared to the positive benefits of tourism development [25,26]. The most common negative impacts on the environment due to tourism development are related to water and air pollution, biodiversity degradation and littering [7,27]. Tourism development in a destination and residents' support are directly linked to the positive economic and social benefits perceived by the local community and indirectly linked to the negative impact on the environment [28]. Respondents that have a negative perception of the impact exerted by tourism development tend to give less support to future development of the tourism industry.

Analysis on the influence of residents' socio-demographic profile on their perceptions of tourism development is considered to be important due to its specific influence on strategy development, which has to be adapted to the local realities [72]. In this context, the influence of Adjara residents' socio-demographic characteristics on the perceived impact of tourism development underwent further analysis. Previous studies revealed that there are differences between the respondents' gender and their perceived benefits for tourism development. Women revealed a more positive attitude towards the socio-cultural benefits of tourism development compared to men [60,61]. However, the results of the current research do not confirm the trends recorded in other studies, which might be explained by the fact that women are less involved in business activities in the research area, and it might prove more difficult for them to anticipate the positive impacts of tourism development compared to men. It is a general trend in the tourism sector for women to occupy lower levels in the organizational structure compared to men, with lower levels of remuneration and fewer career opportunities. At the same time, it is a part-time job for many of them, and they are the first affected by staff lay-offs due to technological updates and recession periods [62].

In terms of age, it was observed that older respondents perceive the impacts of tourism development more positively compared to the younger generation. Research pointed out that, generally, older residents ( $4.25 \pm 0.457$ ) and men ( $4.28 \pm 0.528$ ) support tourism development more [31,63,64], which was also noted in the current research conducted in Adjara Mountain area. Older residents are more supportive of tourism development as they perceive tourism development impact more positively [65]. The results of the current research are contrary to the findings Tomljenovic and Faulkner [96].

Education represents another variable analyzed in the context of tourism development impact [2,66]. The results of the research conducted in Adjara Mountain area revealed that, the more educated the residents are, the more positively they perceive tourism development impact ( $4.27 \pm 0.432$ ), as confirmed by the results of previous studies [2]. Low-level education represents one of the barriers for local communities to participate in tourism development and be part of the decision-making process [67,68], while this also affects their perceptions towards tourism development in a way that they are more critical of the impacts of tourism development compared with more educated groups [68].

Analysis of residents' support towards tourism development revealed the fact that elder residents are more motivated compared with younger ones to provide tourism services to visitors [31,63]. Moreover, a proactive attitude can be encountered in residents that perceive the impacts of tourism development more positively [7], being interested in presenting regional traditions to the visitors.

Studies regarding local community support for tourism development are important [97] since the success of tourism destination management depends on the residents' needs satisfaction as well [70]. At the same time, involving the local community in the development of the tourism process would increase public administration effectiveness [98].

Thus, the paper deals with an important topic related to tourism development in the Adjara Mountain area, highlighting community perception towards tourism development. These results can be used by the local bodies in order to establish a future development plan.

## 6. Conclusions

Overall, the rapid development of tourism in Georgia has created new opportunities, with the Adjara Sea coastline always contributing to the country's tourism development. During the last two decades, more attention was granted to reconstructing and creating the region's new social and tourist infrastructure. To this end, it was considered necessary to consider the Adjara Mountain region and reasonably utilize its natural and historical-cultural resources.

### 6.1. Theoretical Implications

The research revealed the influence of socio-demographic characteristics on the perception of the positive and negative impact of tourism development in a region where tourism is in its early stages and similar studies had not previously been conducted. The steps taken in this study may provide a more comprehensive overview by revealing the perceptions of local residents as key stakeholders towards a sustainably developed tourism destination. Moreover, this study provides more information regarding residents' perceived attitudes towards tourism development and represents the first such step in the research area. Based on these findings, local bodies could develop strategical programs in order to direct residents' support and involvement in development projects. In general, the findings of this research are in line with other similar studies in more developed destinations. The main contribution to the existing literature of the present research derives from the particularities of the research area, which is in the inception stage for tourist destination development. Studies approaching the same subject conducted in different destinations contribute to a better understanding of the residents' influence and importance for destination tourism development. This study is important as it acknowledges the essential role played by the local community for a sustainable tourism destination.

### 6.2. Managerial Implications

An analysis of residents' perceptions towards tourism development offers important insights for long-term strategies since there is a direct link between their perceptions and their future support for tourism. At the same time, it is important to underline that tourism development in the Adjara Mountain area is in its early stages and it is difficult to anticipate how supportive the residents will be in the long term.

In this respect, it is necessary to conduct a complex study of local tourism potential, identify opportunities for effective utilization, identify development trends and develop recommendations for successful tourism business development. Thus, analysis and development of recommendations related to the vision, strategy development and management of tourism development in the mountainous area of Adjara are very important in the tourism business and sustainable economic development of the region and the country. It may, therefore, become an additional opportunity to promote the country on the international tourism market. Notably, there are no similar studies regarding the Adjara Mountain region. The issues related to the development of tourism in the mountainous area are particularly unexplored in the case of the Adjara Mountain area (compared to other mountain regions of Georgia) based on historical aspects.

The results indicated that older residents are more supportive of tourism development compared to younger ones. Thus, programs to raise community awareness towards tourism development impacts, both negatively and positively, should be implemented in the region.

In conclusion, alongside existing challenges, the mountainous region of Adjara has an excellent opportunity to make a significant contribution to the economic advancement of this autonomous republic considering its diverse, unique resources. In addition, it will

play an essential role in the socio-cultural development of the local population and raise the standard of living.

It should also be taken into account that, in general, utilization of mountain resources often creates certain problems due to their particularly great vulnerability; thus, creating tourism infrastructure and increasing the number of visitors may be a challenge in many ways. Accordingly, in order to achieve sustainability, development of a strategic plan for development of tourism in the mountainous region of Adjara requires utilization of resources with maximum consideration for local community specificities. Thus, the problem needs to be addressed through a complex interdisciplinary approach. The more thoroughly the issues related to development of Adjara Mountain tourism are studied, the more opportunities there will be for correct vision, strategy development and protection of conditions for sustainable tourism development.

However, the current research is subject to several limitations. Due to the specificity of the research area, the results cannot be extrapolated to other tourist destinations. At the same time, the study focused on quantitative research, and, therefore, more thorough analysis should be considered by using qualitative analysis to gain a deeper understanding of the residents' perceptions and attitudes towards sustainable tourism development. Moreover, the present study focused just on some of the factors involved in tourist destination development. Future studies should focus on tourism service providers, local bodies and tourists' perceptions in such a way that sustainable tourism development could be achieved. In the end, it is recommended that research should deeply analyze tourists' preferences and behavior so that services could be adapted to their needs and the destination could gain a competitive advantage.

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