

Evaluation of the Quality of Tourist Destination for a Sustainable Development: Case Study Vlore Region, Albania

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Abstract: In the market economy, it is very important that businesses, regardless of the sector in which they operate, be oriented towards the consumer to guarantee their sustainability in the market. Being customer-oriented means evaluating the changing needs and wants of customers and meeting them better than competitors. The aim of this paper is to evaluate a tourist destination from the point of view of local and foreign tourists, with the aim of designing strategies that enable the sustainable development of the destination. Tourist evaluations are a crucial source of information for the development of a tourist destination that the management's responsible authorities must take into account when developing strategies and policies. The methodology used in this study has been desk research and empirical research. The QUALITEST tool was used to evaluate the tourists' levels of satisfaction with the services in the Vlore Region destination based on quality indicators. The data was collected during the period May-August 2022, and the tool used for data collection was an online questionnaire distributed through email, phone, and social media. Database with the contacts of tourists is provided by tourism businesses. SPSS software was used for data processing.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the level of satisfaction of tourists for each indicator of the quality of the tourist destination, the assessment of the importance of the quality indicators that tourists consider when choosing a tourist destination, as well as the assessment of the reasons for not visiting a destination referred to the quality of the tourist product offered. The findings of this study are essential to be taken into consideration by the responsible authorities for a better management of the tourist destination in the Vlore region. This study provides a missing model of tourist destination evaluation by tourists for the region of Vlore, which is very necessary to evaluate the current strategy being implemented and adapt it according to the needs of tourists. Also, this paper will serve as an output of the authorities responsible for the management of tourist destinations, emphasizing the importance of market research to assess the situation and then draw up strategies that best meet the needs and wants of tourists.

Keywords: evaluation of quality indicators, responsible authorities, sustainable development, tourist destination management, tourist satisfaction.

1. INTRODUCTION

In a competitive market of tourist destinations, their effective management is necessary to ensure benefits for the community and sustainability on the one hand, as well as maximising the tourist value for tourists on the other. Destination management consists of the coordinated management of all the elements that make up a destination (attractions, amenities, accessibility, human resources, image, and price) (World Tourism Organization, 2007). Based on a well-designed and well-implemented strategic plan, the management of the destination aims to serve the interests of its local actors as well as tourists.

A good management of tourist destinations attracts more tourists, influences the attraction of that market segment that best suits the destination, provides new jobs, and protects the

natural, cultural, and historical heritage as well as the environment. The two main goals of destination management are (Carter *et al.* 2023):

- Maximising tourism benefits for the destination.
- To ensure sustainable tourism for a long period of time.

The management of the tourist destination aiming at sustainable tourism enables the development of the destination in terms of (World Bank, 2017):

- Improving the growth of income from tourism
- Protecting the community and ensuring a sustainable life
- Reduction of seasonality
- Distribution of benefits from tourism even in areas not visited by tourists
- Increasing the knowledge and image of the destination

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- Ensuring long-term sustainability

Protection of cultural and natural assets that are at risk of being destroyed by tourism.

Since the tourist offer of a destination consists of various elements that include the tourist product, attractions, accessibility, security, human resources, cleanliness, information, image, and quality, which are the responsibility of the local actors of a destination (Sotiriadis and Shen, 2017), cooperation between stakeholders (local authorities, private sector, civil society, experts of tourism and marketing) involved in the planning and management of these elements is very critical in increasing the competitiveness of the tourist destination (England, V. 2012).

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the quality of tourist destination from the point of view of tourists, with the aim of planning and managing the tourist destination based on those elements that are most valued by tourists. As previously mentioned, the object of study is the region of Vlora, Albania, as a tourist destination for visitors from other countries in the region and beyond.

Referring to the literature on the importance and benefits of evaluating the quality of tourist destination from the point of view of tourists, as well as the lack of a study in the Vlora region to evaluate the quality of tourist destination, this study will be valuable for the management authority of the destination in the evaluation of the quality and in the design of the management strategies of the destination in accordance with the demands of the tourists.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourism destination management refers to the strategic management of a destination's planning, development, and marketing efforts to enhance the overall tourist experience. This process involves the coordination of various stakeholders, including tourists, local residents, businesses, and the environment, to ensure that the needs of all stakeholders are met (England, V. 2012).

The evaluation of the tourist destination from the point of view of the tourists serves us in the recognition of the tourist products, which are the features of the tourist destination. The elements of the tourist product that must be evaluated by tourists and which were taken into consideration in the drafting of the questionnaire addressed to tourists visiting the Region of Vlora are: tourism facilities, heritage and culture, landscape and countryside, built environment, access and transport, and visitor services (England, V. 2012).

The tourism sector operates within a dynamic environment that undergoes continuous transformations. These changes are driven by various factors, including industry growth, increased competition, and evolving tourist expectations and preferences (Hartman *et al.* 2020). Additionally, the negative impacts of tourism, which have become subject to increasing debate, necessitate the involvement of multiple stakeholders and various levels of government in formulating effective policy solutions to address the associated challenges. In order to accomplish the objectives, it is imperative for the local stakeholders of a destination to actively engage in a collaborative network that fosters productivity.

Recent studies emphasize the importance of cooperation between stakeholders for the most effective management of the destination as a main component of destination governance (Sotiriadis & Shen 2017), as well as promoting ways for the local community to have more responsibility in the management of the destination. The governance of a destination requires cooperation, collaboration, and integration between local authorities responsible for managing the destination, private enterprises, and public institutions, as well as between tourism policies and community interests.

The management of tourist destinations is being developed in response to the growing need for systematic, multidisciplinary, and cross-sectoral strategies for the development of tourism at the local, regional, and national levels (Marinov and Kazandzhieva, 2023). In a broad sense, the management of tourist destinations is a modern concept of activities at the micro, national, regional, and local levels through which stakeholders fulfil their individual and organizational obligations in a coordinated manner, aiming at the implementation of policies at the macro level. In a narrow sense, the management of tourist destinations can be defined as the coordinated management of all the elements of the tourist destination system on the basis of partnership and a shared vision among the stakeholders.

The development of technology has enabled, in general, all tourist sites to become accessible, influencing the increase in competition between tourist destinations. In these conditions, the image of tourist sites, the quality of tourist services, and customer satisfaction are essential in the design of management strategies for tourist destinations and successful marketing (Travar *et al.* 2022). Referring to various studies on the evaluation of the quality of tourist services from the point of view of tourists, the factors that affect the quality of tourist services in a destination are tourist attractions, accessibility/transport, and accommodation. Tourist attractions refer to the natural, cultural, and historical resources of a tourist destination, which are very important to evaluate the attractiveness of the destination (Kotler *et al.* 2020). Accessibility is important because the easier the accessibility of a destination, the greater the possibility of tourism development. If a product is not accessible, it has no value.

To maintain a competitive position in the market, it is important to evaluate the satisfaction of tourists (Kotler *et al.* 2020). Referring to the comparison of their expectations with their perception of the quality of tourist services as a result of their experience.

There are several studies on the evaluation of the quality of the tourist destination. According to Vajčnerová *et al.* (2012), the evaluation of the quality of the tourist destination is based on the analysis and importance of the key variables of the quality of a destination. 4 dimensions were taken into consideration instead of 20 quality factors, which are: - Attractions, Services, Marketing management, Sustainability and cooperation. The objective of the study is to create a model for evaluating the quality of a destination on the basis of analyzing the importance of quality indicators of tourist destination. In this study one of the methods used to evaluate the quality of tourist destinations is the European system of integrated quality management (IQM). The model was initiated by the European Commission on the basis of published

studies that provided the results of the best quality management practice in selected European destinations.

The indicators of the quality of the tourist destination are used to evaluate the quality of the destination with reference to the satisfaction level of the tourists for each indicator (Vajčnerová *et al.* 2013). Based on the results of this research for the destinations taken in the study, the customer satisfaction is most influenced by the factors of Natural attractions, Accommodation, Uniqueness of destination and Transport accessibility for one destination and by the Image of destination, Friendly welcome by local inhabitants, Cultural and social attractions, Natural attractions and Uniqueness of Destination for another destination. These factors are taken into consideration in the evaluation of the quality of the tourist destination for the Vlora region.

Another interesting study related to the management of the quality of a tourist destination in the context of tourist satisfaction shows the relationship that exists between the indicators of the quality of a tourist destination, the overall satisfaction of tourists and their expectations (Vajčnerová *et al.* 2014). The results of the study show that those factors for which consumers are very satisfied and their expectations are met do not have a strong impact on overall satisfaction, compared to those factors where expectations are not met but have a strong impact on overall customer satisfaction.

Other studies related to the evaluation of the quality of a tourist destination specify the prerequisites of a destination for implementing Integrated quality management (IMQ) and to demonstrate the possibilities for using the methodological approaches of the Qualitest tool in the tourist destination (Vajčnerová, I. 2011). The obtained results show problematic utilization of Qualitest in full extent and the necessity to modify it for its use in the conditions of the Czech Republic destinations.

In their study Aydın, Ü. N. A. L., & Özgürel, G. (2021) aimed to determine the perceptions of tourists who visited Istanbul about the service quality of the destination and the intentions to revisit it within the field of "bleisure" tourism, which is a type of innovative tourism.

As a result of the research, quality of indicators like tourist activities and attractions of destinations, the level of hospitality of destinations, the accommodation facilities and food and beverage services, general tourist prices, general cleanliness and protection of destinations, transportation possibilities were determined as main indicators in the assessment of destination service quality.

Foris *et al.* 2018 in their study aimed to review the evolution of the quality approach in tourism where one of these models was the quality approach in tourist destinations. In accordance with this perspective, the European Commission in 2003 launched a specific model for quality management in tourist destinations, namely integrated quality management (IQM), in order to support sustainability and quality-oriented approach in an integrated manner. For this reason, some evaluation tools were created by the European Commission, namely QUALITEST and ETIS, aiming to help European tourist destinations become more competitive. The results of this comprehensive review are useful for tourism coordination structures at the national and regional level, as well as

for academics and researchers, to better understand the trends in quality approach and to optimize their actions related to quality.

The tourism industry in Albania occupies a special place in the economy and is an important resource for the country's development (Albanian Investment Development Agency, 2022). The development of the tourist product is one of the important factors in the development of tourism in Albania. From a geographical point of view, the tourist product is spread over most of the country's territory. Based on the current trends of the world tourism market, Albania's main challenge is to develop the tourism product to be of better quality, to be more proactive towards the market, and to have consistency in the quality of services and destinations in different geographical areas.

According to Tase and Lulaj (2022), Albania has been positioned among the roster of nations possessing significant potential in terms of natural, historical, and cultural assets. In terms of the density of cultural monuments, it holds the second position in the Mediterranean region.

Albania offers opportunities for many different types of tourism, including cultural and natural tours, hiking, biking, rafting, and many other activities in the framework of rural tourism, sports and adventure tourism, natural tourism, and coastal tourism (RisiAlbania, 2014). In the framework of the development of tourism in Albania, adventure tourism is one of the newest forms of tourism in the country, where tourists are more and more oriented towards types of adventure sports and outdoor activities favoured by the natural resources available in Albania (Pazari *et al.* 2020). Some of the most widespread forms of adventure tourism are hiking, trekking, mountaineering, mountain biking, rafting, canoeing, kayaking, horseback riding, skydiving, underwater diving, cave exploration, etc.

Focused on the tourist attractions offered by the region of Vlora, as well as taking into account the importance of the sustainable development of tourism, local actors must cooperate for the best possible management of the tourist destination, ensuring quality for tourists as well as the sustainable development of tourism.

3. THE METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

The objective of this study is the evaluation of the quality of a tourist destination referring to the evaluation of the indicators of the quality of a destination according to the tourists' experience. The methodology of research used to achieve the aim of the study has been desk research and empirical research. First of all, the research is based on a review of the literature related to tourism destination management based on its evaluation by tourists. The questionnaire was used as the principal means of gathering data and was recognized as a prevalent technique for data collection in empirical research. The questionnaire has been carefully developed with a particular emphasis on the research objective, which relates to the assessment of the tourist destination as perceived by domestic and foreign tourists. One of the most important principles in the development of the tourist questionnaire was the integration of variables that exhibit a direct correlation with the tourism industry. The development of the ques-

Table 1. Arrivals of foreigners in Albania by purpose of travel, 2018-2022.

Description	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Arrivals of foreign citizens	5,926,803	6,406,038	2,657,818	5,688,649	7,543,817
I. Personal	5,839,626	6,304,845	2,542,494	5,588,400	7,437,477
1. Holidays, visit to relatives, etc.	5,639,818	6,094,889	2,457,446	5,411,591	7,067,487
2. Health treatment	276	658	1,437	1,504	2,392
3. Religious	778	794	326	488	495
4. Transit	198,754	208,504	83,285	174,817	367,103
II. Business and professional	87,177	101,193	115,324	100,249	106,340

Source: Institute of Statistics of Albania 2022.

tionnaire is grounded in an extensive review of literature regarding tourism matters (Stange, J., & Brown, D. 2014).

Furthermore, the questionnaire's content has been subjected to consultation with experts in the relevant research field. In the questionnaire's testing phase, interviews were carried out with tourism experts to enhance the comprehension of the questions. As a result, some questions were improved with the right terminology.

The questionnaire was designed to collect data regarding the evaluation of a tourist destination and addressed citizens and tourists that have visited this tourist destination. The first section of the questionnaire, designed for both foreign and domestic tourists, helps gather general information related to the study's population, including the tourists' city or state of origin, age, gender, and education level. In addition, the questionnaire includes questions to gather information about the means of transport utilized by tourists to reach the destination, type of accommodation, stay duration, peak seasons, reasons and information sources that prompt tourists to visit the destination, their satisfaction level regarding the destination touristic offer, and determinants that impact the decision to select the destination. The model used to evaluate the quality of the tourist destination is Integrated Management Quality (IMQ) and the tool used to evaluate consumer satisfaction related to the quality indicators of a destination is Qualitest (Qualitest, E.C., 2003), (Cismaru, L. 2015). To evaluate the level of tourist's satisfaction regarding what the tourist destination offers, the Likert scale was used from 1 to 5 (1- Very Dissatisfied, 2- Dissatisfied, 3- Average Satisfaction, 4- Satisfied, 5- Very Satisfied). To evaluate the importance of variables for tourists when choosing a tourist destination, Likert scales 1-4 (1-not at all important, 2-not important, 3-important and 4-most important) were used. The survey aimed at tourists was created using Google Forms and subsequently disseminated via various channels, including telephone, email, and social media. Database with the contacts of tourists is provided by tourism businesses.

This study will contribute to the improvement of existing knowledge and future studies in order to evaluate the quality of tourist destination in Vlore Region and to determine tourists' intention to visit the destination again. Also, there is little knowledge from the management authorities of the destination regarding the evaluation of the tourist destination

and there are no researches or studies in Vlore Region related to it.

4. ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

Referring to the evaluation of the tourist destination of the Vlora region, the object of study were local and foreign tourists who visited this destination. The ratio of foreign tourists and domestic tourists interviewed is approximately 27% to 73%. The data was collected during the period May–August 2022, and the tool used for data collection was an online questionnaire. If we're talking about local visitors, people who reside in various Albanian cities provide their opinions on the tourist destination of the Vlora region. 20% are local tourists living in the Albanian capital, Tirana; 25.2% of respondents are from the city of Vlora; and 15.3% are from Fier. The rest of the tourists are from different cities in Albania, with a lower percentage. The appraisal of the tourism site included foreign tourists hailing from Italy, Germany, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Greece, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Kosovo. Based on data provided by the Institute of Statistics for Albania (INSTAT) (2022), it is seen that the majority of foreign tourists, accounting for 91.7%, originate from the European Region. Within this region, a significant proportion of 81.7% may be attributed to tourists hailing from the Southern Europe region. In recent times, there has been a notable increase in the attention of tourists hailing from the United States, Asia, and particularly China. This surge in interest has indirectly stimulated the advancement of many forms of tourism, with a particular emphasis on historical and cultural tourism. The purpose of travel for foreign visitors or tourists is for personal and business reasons as well as for other reasons. If we refer to the data from the Institute of Statistics for Albania for the year 2022, "Arrivals of foreigners in Albania by purpose of travel", (Institute of Statistics for Albania (INSTAT), 2022), we conclude that 93.6% of foreign visitors or tourists come to Albania for holidays or to visit relatives, with a lower percentage for other purposes such as health treatment, religious, transit, and business (Table 1).

According to the age group, 15% of tourists who have completed the questionnaire belong to the age group 15-24 years old, 29% belong to the age group 25-34 years old, 17% belong to the age group 36-45 years old, 18% belong to the

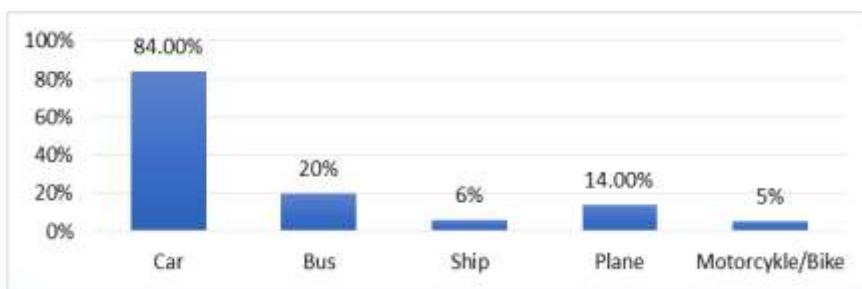


Fig. (1). Means of transport used by tourists.

Source: authors' Calculation.

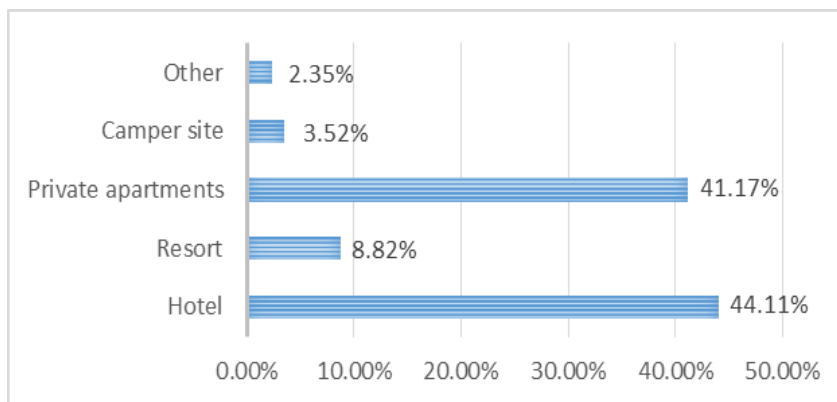


Fig. (2). Types of accommodation used by tourist.

Source: Authors' Calculation.

age group 45-54 years, 10% belong to the age group 55-64 years, and 11% over 65 years old. For older age-groups the percentage of tourists who have completed the questionnaire decreases. According to the Institute of Statistics for Albania, “Survey on tourism holiday and trips 2021”, (Institute of Statistics for Albania (INSTAT), 2022), the largest percentage of tourists arriving in Albania for 2021 belongs to the 25-34 age group. Albania is visited by people of all ages, however, the demographic range of 25 to 54 years of age makes up a significantly larger number of visitors.

If we refer to the gender of the interviewees, 55% of them belong to the female gender and 45 are male. The means of transport that tourists use to arrive to the destination are different (Fig 1), but mostly use cars 84 % of them, 14% of interviewers use airplane, buses (20%), and a low percentage use other means of transport as ships (6%), motorcycles / bikes (5%),

According to the Institute of Statistics for Albania, “Tourism in Figures, Albania 2021” (Institute of Statistics for Albania (INSTAT), 2022), foreign nationals entering our country through airlines occupy an average of 13.4% of total entrance those entering our country via sea routes occupy an average of 3.6% of total entrance, and those entering in our country through land occupy the largest share with 82.9% of total entrance for the period of 2021. To get to Albania, and especially the Vlora Region, tourists rely on a variety of modes of transportation, but road travel accounts for the vast majority of their journeys.

Tourists use all the possibilities of accommodation (Fig 2), but a greater percentage of them use accommodations

from relatives and friends, hotels, and apartments for rent, and a low percentage use resorts or other forms of accommodation. If we refer to the Institute of Statistics for Albania, “Survey on tourism holiday and trips 2021”, (Institute of Statistics for Albania (INSTAT), 2022), we conclude that accommodation to friends and relatives is one of the most used types of accommodation (47%), followed by the hotel category, 29.9% of tourists, and 10% of tourists are accommodated in private rented apartments. The development of technology has made it easier for tourists to find different types of accommodations.

Fig. (3) shows that 34.7% of tourists who visited the destination stayed 1-3 nights, 34.1% of tourists stayed 4-7 nights, while 31.2% of tourists more than 7 nights. The average stay of tourists is 5.6 nights, the goal is to increase the number of nights spent by tourists at the destination. Referring to the Institute of Statistics for Albania, for the year 2021 the average number of nights of stay of foreign tourists is 4.3 nights. If we make a comparison with previous years, we have seen an increase in the number of nights of stay for foreign tourists in Albania, especially in the Vlora Region.

Most part of the tourist have arrived in the destination self-organized, using the online accommodation platforms, social media, their experience, recommendations of friends and relatives, and a small percentage of 5.5% of them have arrived organized through an agency.

The reasons for visiting the tourist destination of the Vlora region are different (Fig. 4). 78% of tourists visit this tourist destination for coastal and maritime tourism, 31.2% for the beauty of the landscape and nature, 20% for entertain-

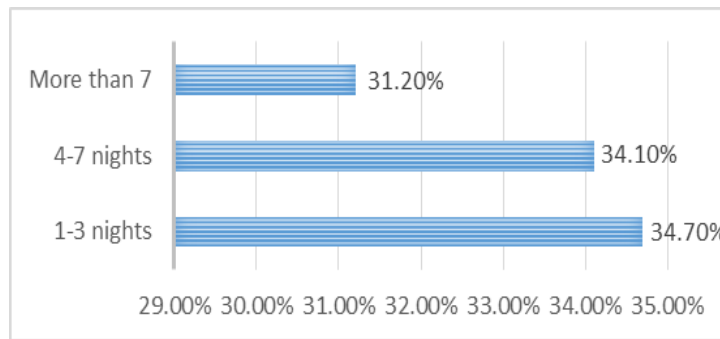


Fig. (3). Nights of staying in the destination by tourists.

Source: Authors' Calculation.

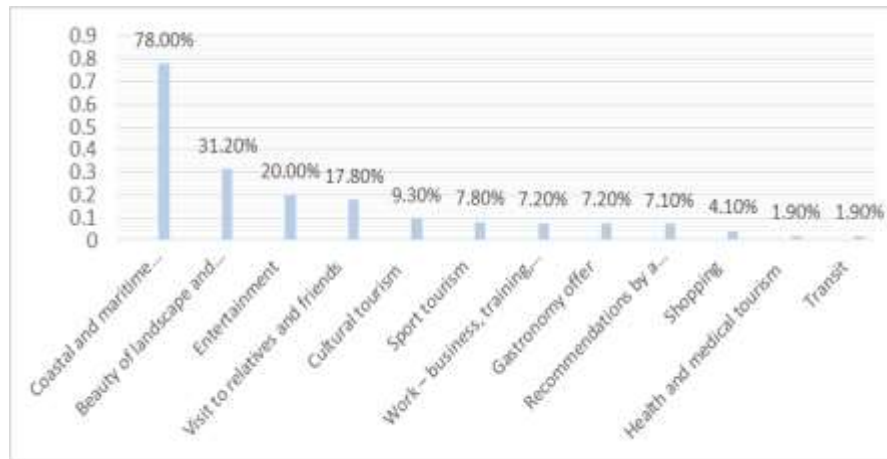


Fig. (4). Reasons to visit the touristic destination.

Source: authors calculation.

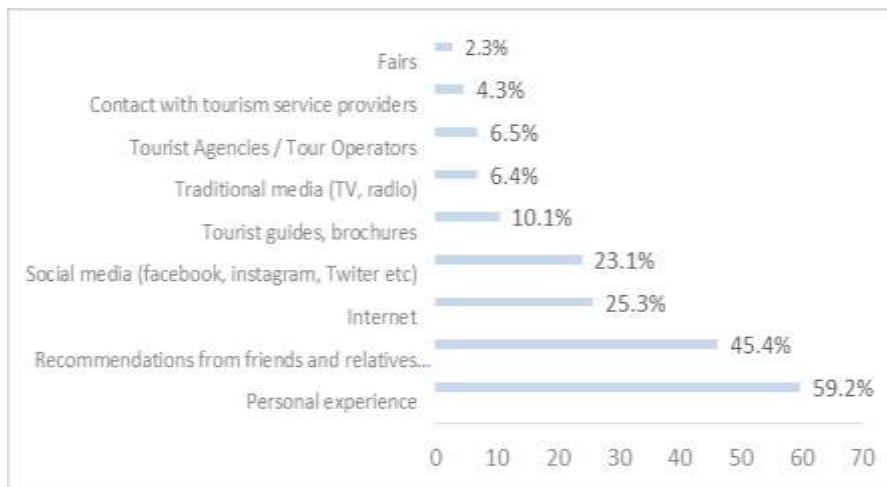


Fig. (5). Sources of information used to arrive in destination.

Source: authors calculation.

ment, 17.8% arrive at the destination to visit relatives and friends. Other reasons to visit this tourist destination are cultural tourism (9.3%), work (7.2%), and sport (7.8%).

Albania is appreciated by many operators and international visitors for its nature and beautiful landscapes. Natural and rural areas in Albania offer opportunities for rural, mountain tourism, ecotourism, and outdoor activities (rafting, parachuting, mountain biking, fishing, trekking, moun-

taineering, hiking, horseback riding, touring, study, etc.). Some of these activities are the main motives for trips by foreign visitors to natural areas.

According to the question “Which are information sources used to arrive in destination” (Fig. 5), the sources of information most used by tourists to reach their destination are previous experience, recommendations from relatives and friends, the Internet, social media (Facebook, Instagram,

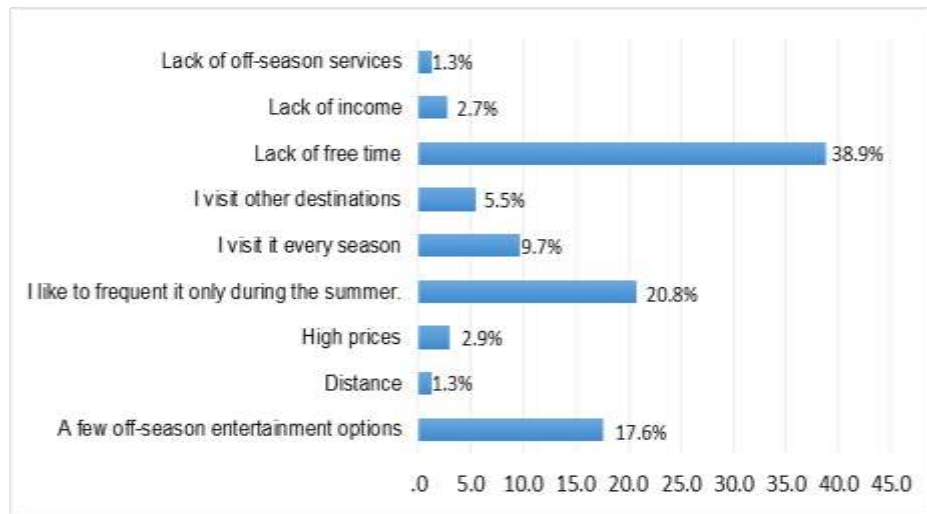


Fig. (6). Reasons for not visiting the destination in other seasons.
Source: Authors' calculation.

Twitter *etc.*) and tourist guide. Other sources of information such as traditional media, travel agencies, communication with service providers at the destination or fairs have little use by visitors as a source of information to choose a tourist destination. Tourist expectations that are created by personal experience as well as word of mouth communication are one of the most reliable marketing communication tools. These are the elements of communication that tourism businesses should take into account when designing marketing strategies.

Referring to the time period to visit this destination, 96.5% of the respondents prefer the summer season, 22% the spring season, 15.8% the autumn season, and 12% the winter season. Although Albania is characterized by a typical Mediterranean climate with 250 sunny days, tourism is characterized by seasonality, where the main goals of the visit are coastal and maritime tourism, natural tourism, and cultural tourism, and these visits are focused only on the summer season. Based on the data of the Institute of Statistics, seasonality is characteristic of Albania, and it is a challenge not only for the authorities responsible for managing the destination, but also for tourist businesses, in order to extend tourist demand throughout the year.

According to the answers of the interviewees (Fig 6) about the reasons for not visiting this destination in other periods of the year, a large percentage of interviewees emphasize: the lack of free time due to work or school obligations; the desire to visit the location during the summer and have no possibility to take vacations in other seasons; the lack of entertainment options outside of the tourist season.

Other reasons that influence visitors to not visit the destination in other seasons of the year a small percentage of the interviewees emphasize: they visit other destinations; high prices; lack of income; lack of destination services in other seasons; the distance of their residence from the destination. These are the reasons that challenge the authorities responsible for destination management as well as tourist businesses to consider the increase in entertainment opportunities for

tourists as well as services offered in other seasons of the year.

To evaluate the level of tourists satisfaction regarding what the tourist destination offers, the Likert scale was used from 1 to 5 (1- Very Dissatisfied, 2- Dissatisfied, 3- Average Satisfaction, 4- Satisfied, 5- Very Satisfied). Table 2 presents the values for each variable related to the mean and standard deviation. Referring to the climate, natural beauty, and landscape, tourists have rated it 5 (a median score of 5), which means they are very satisfied. Cultural tourism, local hospitality, lodging, pedestrian areas, banking services, catering services, shops, local gastronomy, and information received prior to arrival are additional aspects of the tourist offer that visitors have rated as satisfactory (median score 4). Cultural tourism is a strong point, but it is not the main purpose of the destination visit. To increase the number of nights staying at the destination, a combination of tourist attractions from travel agencies is needed. Tourists value satisfactory accommodations, which include hotels, resorts, and rental apartments. It also refers to the level of service and comfort offered by the accommodations. Local gastronomy has been evaluated as satisfactory by tourists because it not only offers the traditional fresh food produced in the area but also fits the requirements of tourists in cooking different cuisines.

Interviewers rate, with an average level of satisfaction (median score of 3), the ability to inform tourists about the destination, the availability of tour operators, and their level of knowledge of foreign languages (Table 3). Road infrastructure, local traffic, and parking spaces: respondents rate an average level of satisfaction (median score 3) while being dissatisfied (median score 2.5) in terms of parking spaces.

Local traffic is evident during the season, as we do not have an extension of the tourist season throughout the year, while road infrastructure has improved in recent years as a result of investments made in road reconstruction to facilitate the connection of destinations. However, more needs to be done in this regard. It is evaluated with an average level of satisfaction (median score of 3), the general organization of

the tourist destination, and the quality of urban design, parks, and green areas. More needs to be done to organize the spaces between buildings, their connections to neighborhoods and the city, green spaces, opportunities to choose means of transport, entertainment activities, preserving the city's identity, protecting and preserving natural, cultural, and historical values, and better coordination and communication between decision-makers at the central or local government levels, tour operators, and businesses operating in the sector. The evaluation of beach cleanliness and regularity, overcrowding, water quality, environmental protection measures, and safety by tourists indicates a moderate level of satisfaction, as evidenced by a median score of 3.

Table 2. Variables evaluated by the tourists' level of satisfaction regarding the tourist destination.

	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
Climate	3.95	5.00	1.472
The beauties of the landscape	4.05	5.00	1.487
Cultural and historical heritage	3.54	4.00	1.306
The hospitality of the residents	3.48	4.00	1.333
Information received before your arrival in the destination	3.35	4.00	1.177
Pedestrian zones	3.41	4.00	1.266
Shops	3.46	4.00	1.301
Souvenir	3.48	4.00	1.284
Accommodation	3.54	4.00	1.302
Opening hours of banks and shops	3.56	4.00	1.230
Opening hours of catering services	3.50	4.00	1.260
Catering services	3.40	4.00	1.260
Local Gastronomy	3.59	4.00	1.335

Source: Authors' calculation.

Table 3. Variables evaluated with average level of satisfaction by tourists regarding to tourist destination.

	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
Access to touristic information	3.26	3.00	1.196
Informing tourists in the selected destination	3.27	3.00	1.132
Availability of tour operators	3.13	3.00	1.155
Tour operators' knowledge of foreign languages	3.29	3.00	1.184
Road infrastructure	3.23	3.00	1.249
Local traffic	2.76	3.00	1.248
Car parking	2.65	2.50	1.213

Overall organization of the touristic destination	3.28	3.00	1.131
The quality of urban design	3.08	3.00	1.204
Parks and green areas	3.35	3.00	1.306
Cleanliness and orderliness of beaches	3.27	3.00	1.245
Overcrowding of people on the beaches	3.11	3.00	1.202
Water quality and shower areas	3.20	3.00	1.219
Environmental protection measures	3.04	3.00	1.258
Safety	3.17	3.00	1.209
Entertainment activities	3.38	3.00	1.241
Sport Activities	3.27	3.00	1.294
Sailing offer	3.35	3.00	1.319
Quality-Price rate	3.16	3.00	1.368

Source: Authors' calculation.

Despite the fact that some of the variables that assess the tourist offer in the destination were ranked at an average level of satisfaction, of the total number of tourists surveyed, 89% of them want to visit this destination again. The potential offered by the destination is usable throughout the year, but the lack of good destination management limits their use in a short season.

To evaluate the importance of elements for tourists when choosing a tourist destination, Likert scales 1–4 (1–not at all important, 2–not important, 3–important and 4–most important) were used. In choosing a tourist destination, the elements that tourists list as very important (median score 4) are landscape and nature, quality of service, accommodation service, climate, security, and tranquilly (Table 4). Elements that rank important (median score 3) by citizens in choosing a destination are sports activities, parks, the urban environment, entertainment, and shopping. For the purpose of managing the quality of the tourist destination, it is necessary to compare the satisfaction level of the tourists with what the destination offers with the importance of the factors that they consider when choosing a tourist destination.

While respondents are unsatisfied with parking spaces, they are moderately satisfied with road infrastructure, local traffic, the standard of urban design, and green spaces. Tourists also are moderately satisfied with variables such as, beach cleanliness, overcrowding, water quality, environmental protection, safety, entertainment, sports, sailing, and the quality-price ratio as average.

When selecting a tourist destination tourists prioritize certain factors, including the natural environment and landscapes, the level of service provided, the quality of accommodations, the prevailing climate, as well as safety and security. Other factors that tourists consider when choosing a tourist destination evaluated important by them include: sports activities, parks, the urban environment, entertainment, and shopping.

Based on the comparative analysis, we conclude that the variables for which tourists are moderately satisfied have a

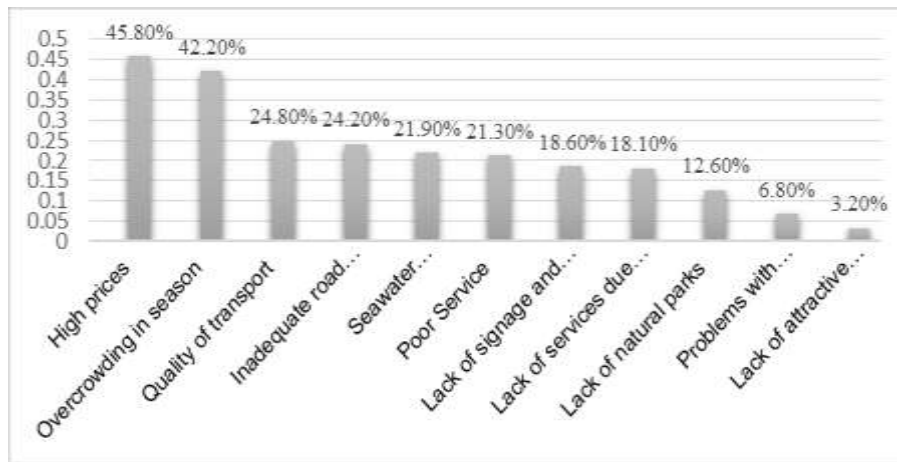


Fig. (7). Percentage of tourists according to the reasons for not visiting the destination.
Source: Authors' calculation.

great importance for them in choosing a tourist destination. Authorities responsible for the management of the tourist destination should improve the quality of those variables for which tourists have an average level of satisfaction but have a great importance for them in choosing a tourist destination.

Table 4. Importance of factors to be considered in choosing a destination.

Factors to be considered while choosing the destination	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
Sports activities	2.93	3.00	0.783
Landscapes and nature	3.62	4.00	0.673
Quality of Service	3.55	4.00	0.662
Accommodation services	3.59	4.00	0.668
Climate	3.48	4.00	0.682
Entertainment in the night life	2.99	3.00	0.825
Parks	3.36	3.00	0.696
Urban environment	3.29	3.00	0.702
Silence and Tranquility	3.54	4.00	0.756
Personal Safety	3.66	4.00	0.649
Shopping	3.15	3.00	0.813

Source: Authors' calculation.

Referring to the tourists surveyed, 93.4% of them are positive about the recommendation of this destination to their friends and relatives. A low percentage of 1.7% would not want to recommend it to others, and 4.9% are neutral.

The main reasons why tourists would not want to visit this tourist destination (Fig 7) are related to high prices, overcrowding during the peak season, quality of transport, inadequate road infrastructure, seasonal tourism-induced sea pollution, the quality of services during seasonality, and a lack of parks. It is the duty of the managing authorities of the destination to evaluate the tourist offer from the point of view of tourists and to take into consideration the improve-

ment of the quality indicators of the tourist offer in the design of the management strategy of the tourist destination for a sustainable development.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This paper focuses on the evaluation of the tourist destination from the visitors' perspective. Vlora Region is one of the most beautiful and rich areas in Albania, with a long coastline that has a diversity of forms that has directly influenced the climate and types of tourism development. It has the highest tourism potential in the country, due to its natural and cultural resources. Tourism is one of the sectors with the highest priority in the region, as it can play a key role in generating awareness and support for the preservation of local natural and cultural heritage as well as economic prosperity through tourism.

Coastal and maritime tourism make up the largest part of tourism's products. This type of tourism in Albania has a seasonal character, and as a result, most of the accommodation structures in the coastal area face seasonal difficulties in operation. In these conditions, the effects of seasonality focused only on coastal and maritime tourism should be mitigated through the development of other forms of tourism in order to extend seasonality.

Taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the development of technology is a challenge for many tourist accommodation businesses to meet the needs of tourists at the right time.

The challenge for the authorities responsible for managing the destination remains the increase in the nights of stay of the tourists in Albania, which is oriented towards a higher-quality and more diverse tourist product for all age groups.

The tourism industry in Albania has faced challenges in developing adequate infrastructure to respond to various segments of tourism demand, including modern congress centers, amusement parks, recreational facilities, golf courses, marinas and other facilities. This has hampered the country's ability to take full advantage of its natural, historical and cultural attractions and to support tourism growth over time.

Also, in Albania, there are no centers for the development of mountain and adventure tourism, entertainment diving centers, bicycle paths, etc., which will position Albania in the tourism market of special interest. In the design of the management strategy of the tourist destination, the orientation of the tourist industry should be towards satisfying the needs of tourists as well as the use of information technology to reach tourists as quickly and easily as possible.

Climate, natural beauty, and landscape are important for a tourist destination's competitive advantage and need to be managed for long-term growth.

To encourage existing tourists and attract new ones, the responsible authorities of the destination management should face with different challenges as follow:

- Improving or increasing the quality-price ratio.
- Extending the tourist season to avoid overcrowding in the summer season
- Taking measures to improve public transport at the destination
- Improving road infrastructure to visit tourist attractions that are difficult for tourists to access.
- Improving the quality of service offered to tourists
- Adding as many green spaces as possible and preserving natural parks, marine, and natural landscapes
- Control and preservation of the quality of sea water from abuses that may occur from leisure ships or accommodation units located near the sea.

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