

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

THE IMPACT OF TOURISM IN ANDORRA: THE PERCEPTION OF RESIDENTS

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1. INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVE

The Principality of Andorra is one of the small states in Europe, with mountainous relief, located in the heart of the Pyrenees, between France and Spain, covering an area of 468 km² and boasting a growing population that reached 81,588 inhabitants in 2022 (Department of Statistics, 2022). Mass tourism, which was established in the country in the sixties of the last century, was primarily oriented towards commerce, with the added attraction of winter sports.

The impact of tourism on the Andorran economy is very relevant, as it strongly influences most economic sectors, especially commerce, construction, and leisure and sports activities. In 2022, Andorra received 8.4 million visitors (Department of Statistics), and the services sector, closely linked to tourism, employed 86.3% of the salaried workforce. Thus, its behavior is decisive in the national economic dynamics.

Recently, there have been manifestations of polarity in Andorran society, showing expressions both for and against tourism and its different development models. Therefore, studies focused on the positive and negative impacts of tourism can be especially relevant for public managers. It is essential to assess the attitude of residents, an aspect that has attracted academic attention in recent decades, considering the local population as an interest group that cannot be left out of tourism planning processes (Aguiló and Rosselló, 2005; Andriotis and Vaughan, 2004; Ap, 1992; Gursoy *et al.*, 2002; Jurovski, 1994; Sharpley, 2014; Sorcaru *et al.*, 2022; Williams and Lawson, 2001).

In the case of Andorra, it is expected that the presence of a high number of tourists and their interaction with residents in a limited territory will generate significant impacts,

sparkling interest in conducting this study. On the other hand, there is no evidence that any study has been carried out on the attitude or perception of the population residing in Andorra.

In recent decades, the study of residents' opinions has garnered academic attention. Numerous studies having been published in this regard as it is widely recognized that planners and entrepreneurs must take into account the opinions of the host community to ensure the long-term sustainability of the industry (Sharpley, 2014; Sorcaru *et al.*, 2022; Williams and Lawson, 2001). Furthermore, residents' attitudes can directly influence tourist satisfaction (Davis *et al.*, 1998; Royo and Ruiz, 2008).

Currently, two theoretical frameworks dominate research on community attitudes toward tourism. Social exchange theory states that residents evaluate tourism based on the trade-offs it entails. The value is determined by the expected benefits or the costs produced in exchange for the services and resources provided. The theory of social representation originates from the work of Moscovici (1988) and explains how people understand the world around them. The world is constructed by knowledge, images, values, and meanings about reality.

The host population typically recognizes the economic benefits of tourism, with the economic dimension being the primary driver of positive attitudes among residents, while negative perspectives are associated with sociocultural and environmental impacts (Almeida *et al.*, 2015; Andriotis and Vaughan, 2003; Liu and Var, 1986). Social and cultural benefits are perceived positively by residents (Muresan *et al.*, 2021), albeit to a lesser extent than economic benefits.

2. CONTEXT

Tourist use of the Andorran mountains has occurred in both the summer and winter seasons. Tourist activity has become the most significant economic phenomenon of the 20th century, and the country has organized its territory around tourism, a key factor that explains the socioeconomic dynamics characterized by a significant flow of immigration, attracted by services and construction (Lluelles, 2022). The country's tourism model exhibits advanced signs of maturity, necessitating the diversification of the tourism offer to adapt to the needs and tastes of visitors (Garcia and Lluelles, 2022).

3. METHODOLOGY

The population universe to which the questionnaire is directed is the population residing in Andorra. To streamline the sample operationally, it was limited to residents aged 18 and above. To collect the data, a questionnaire was completed by the respondents themselves. A total of 465 questionnaires were gathered, with 93 having incomplete data. Therefore, of all those collected, only 372 questionnaires were taken into account, all of them with valid data. This sample incurs a 5% error at a 95% confidence level. A quantitative methodology was employed, relying on survey responses where residents express their opinions or attitudes using a five-point Likert scale (from 1, totally disagree, to 5, totally agree).

The questionnaire was divided into six major sections, including the collection of the participant's sociodemographic profile, their attitude toward tourism in Andorra, taking

into account aspects related to tourism sustainability across three dimensions: economic, sociocultural, and environmental. Additionally, it assesses their satisfaction with the country's tourism model and their perception of the specific impact that tourist activities in Andorra have on climate change.

The questionnaire also includes a qualitative section where respondents, if they wish, can comment on any relevant aspect regarding the economic, social, and environmental sustainability of Andorra's tourism model. A total of 81 respondents participated in this voluntary section and provided qualitative comments for the survey.

The data have been analysed using a univariate descriptive analysis.

4. RESULTS

The respondents to the survey belong to a group settled in the country, as evident from the fact that more than half were born in Andorra and that more than 60% of those born abroad have lived for more than 20 years. It should be noted that the age group structure of the sample is similar to the age group structure of the population in 2021. The majority falls within the age group between 45 and 64 years (44.35%), followed by the group between 30 and 44 years (28.76%). At the extremes are the age range between 18 and 29 years old (13.98%) and the group over 65 years old (12.9%). Among those surveyed, women predominate, comprising 66.9%, and active workers who earn their income outside the tourism industry. 76.61% have completed university studies, and the vast majority are familiar with the concept of sustainable tourism.

Concerning the items related to the attitude towards tourism, those receiving the highest scores on a Likert scale of 5 options are as follows: "tourism is positive for the country's economy," with an average rating of 4.56; "tourism has a negative impact on the country's mobility," with a value of 4.41; "tourism generates job opportunities and professional development for the country's population," with a value of 4.36. Despite these positive aspects, respondents perceive the absence of a professional career, as well as the lack of job stability and salary compensation in the sector, as negative aspects. It should be noted that the items "tourism is positive for the country's economy," "Andorra allocates a significant proportion of the territory to tourist activities," and "it generates job opportunities and professional development" are the ones with the least disparity of opinions among the respondents, with standard deviations of 0.676, 0.720, and 0.777, respectively. On the contrary, the item "tourism contributes to the loss of Andorran identity," with a standard deviation of 1.278, is the one with the greatest dispersion of opinions.

Some studies suggest that residents' attitudes are influenced by three categories or impacts: economic, sociocultural, and environmental (Gursoy *et al.*, 2002). Therefore, these three areas were taken into account when analysing the results of the survey. In the environmental field, most of those surveyed consider that they do not perceive benefits from tourist activity; they believe that tourism is not more environmentally friendly than other economic sectors and that it does not help to maintain and protect natural spaces. In contrast, respondents understand that the social and cultural impacts constitute a considerable benefit derived from tourism activity.

The impacts associated with economic benefits are perceived as the most positive. The most relevant items are that tourism “is positive for the economy” and that it “generates job opportunities and professional development for the population.” Despite these positive aspects, respondents view the absence of a professional career and the lack of job stability and salary compensation in the sector as negative aspects.

The results obtained in relation to social benefits, specifically the fact that residents positively evaluate the beneficial influence of tourism on the services offered to the community, as well as on cultural activities, align with the findings of Andereck and Vogt (2000).

Among the perceived costs of tourist activity, its negative influence on the environment stands out. The vast majority of those surveyed consider that a significant proportion of the territory is allocated to tourist activities, making it the most negative aspect of tourism among those collected in the survey. Furthermore, a large portion of respondents believe that tourism activity consumes a substantial amount of resources, such as water and energy, contributing to the degradation of the environment and ecosystems.

Social costs are perceived to generate the least impact as a consequence of tourist activity. According to the respondents, neither citizen security nor national identity is particularly affected by the tourism phenomenon. Despite this, the vast majority agree that tourist activity contributes to the saturation of the road network.

The economic costs of tourist activity, related to the increase in the cost of living and real estate speculation, are also perceived as high. This fact is confirmed by previous studies, such as that of Andereck *et al.* (2005) and Brunt and Courtney (1999). Almost 40% of the population surveyed expressed disagreement with the salary level, job stability, and professional career in the tourism sector.

An important sector of the population is critical of the country’s tourism model, with 42% expressing dissatisfaction. Only 30% consider the attitude of tourists who visit Andorra to be respectful. The vast majority believes that the country is excessively dependent on the tourism sector (90%) and that there is excessive seasonality in the arrival of visitors (80%). Almost half of those surveyed (48.7%) believes that Andorra does not follow a sustainable tourism model.

5. CONCLUSION

There is a sense of dissatisfaction with the tourism model among a significant part of the population, who are also critical of the attitude of tourists, which they consider disrespectful. The majority acknowledges excessive seasonality in the arrival of visitors and the country’s enormous dependence on the tourism sector. In general, residents perceive a positive impact on the economic aspect. Regarding the social and cultural impact, the prevailing perception is that tourism contributes positively in these areas. The population perceives that tourist activity exerts a negative environmental impact due to the consumption of resources and environmental degradation.

The present study fills a gap in the literature since, despite Andorra being a tourism-oriented country, there are no previous studies that analyse the attitude of residents towards this activity. The perceptions of the population must be taken into account because their opinion is necessary to develop and maintain sustainable tourism in the long term.