



Multi-Stakeholder Perceptions on the Environmental Impacts of Tourism in Durrës, Albania

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Received: 5 January 2026 / Revised: 20 February 2026 / Accepted: 3 March 2026 / Published: 25 March 2026

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Doi: 10.56345/ijrdv13n114

Abstract

This study is based on questionnaires addressed to 82 businesses, 35 institutions and 149 citizens in Durrës as, through the perceptions of different actors, it aims to examine the impacts that tourism has on the environment of this city. The data have collected the perceptions of different actors on the environmental challenges in this territory. The methodology of this paper uses Nvivo exploratory methods such as, word cloud, cluster similarity modeling and word frequency query. From our study, we have identified that tourist waste and ecosystem degradation are the most common problems encountered among the actors questioned. The cause for this is the lack of proper implementation of the law and poor management in environmental protection by institutions. Of course, the environmental impacts shown do not stem only from the tourist flow, but mostly from the lack of infrastructure and poor local governance. In a longer term perspective, we suggest improving waste management systems, better inter-institutional monitoring and coordination, and environmental protection education for different cohabitants.

Keywords: sustainable tourism, multi-actors; waste, pollution, management, Nvivo

1. Introduction

In recent decades, the economic development of tourism in Albania has outpaced the capacities of governance and environmental monitoring. As a result, the environmental effects of tourism are posing problems in the Albanian coastal areas. Urban infrastructure is not developed enough to cope with the pressure of growing tourism. Waste management systems are unable to assimilate the significant accumulations of waste. Furthermore, natural ecosystems are increasingly damaged and degraded.

The main problem that led to this study was the rapid growth of tourism in Durrës without enough environmental and institutional management to keep pace with it. As tourism expanded, concerns such as pollution, waste accumulation, urban pressure on the coastal area, and ecosystem degradation became more visible. In this context, the study began from the need to better understand how these environmental problems are perceived by the main groups affected by tourism development in Durrës.

We have been asked how different actors in society might perceive the impacts of tourism on the environment. We

believe that analyzing multi-stakeholder discussions is essential to identify the problems that tourism development brings to the environment and to highlight possible solutions at the institutional, economic and social levels.

To analyze and interpret the issues raised in our study, we combined techniques such as word cloud, cluster analysis diagrams, word frequency query and matrix coding queries in Nvivo. These are exploratory techniques at a qualitative level. Data were collected from three groups of interviewees such as individuals, businesses and institutional representatives. All questionnaires were used in the coastal and urban area of Durrës. Specific objectives of the study are: (1) identify the main environmental problems associated with tourism (2) compare similarities and differences across groups (3) explore the role of environmental management, institutional action, and policy implementation in addressing these challenges; and (4) to provide an analytical basis for recommendations for more sustainable tourism in Durrës.

The research questions we seek to address are (a) the perceptions that individuals, businesses, and institutions have about the environmental effects of tourism; (b) the similarities and differences of these perceptions towards pollution, urban pressure, and quality of life; (c) policies and regulations for tourism management and environmental protection, based on the above perceptions. The paper is organized into five-chapter, introduction, reviews the relevant literature on tourism impacts, the methodology explains techniques used in the analysis. The fourth section discusses the main findings for each stakeholder group and compares their perceptions through qualitative analysis and final section presents the main conclusions, policy recommendations, and the limitations of the study.

2. Literature

In recent times, tourism ranks among the most rapidly expanding sectors of the global economy. A 2015 study of 12 Mediterranean countries identified a bidirectional causal link between tourism and economic growth, suggesting that policymakers should prioritize tourism development to foster higher growth (Bilen et al., 2015). In a Romania-focused study, Badulescu et al. (2020) found a bidirectional causal relationship between economic activity and the number of international tourist arrivals. The role of tourism in the economic development has also been analyzed in a study of the Spanish economy. In this study, Balaguer and Cantavella (2002) show that economic growth in Spain has responded to persistent expansion of international tourism during the last three decades. Tourism is an economic force, the development of which brings about significant positive and negative impacts on society and the environment (WTO, 2005). According to Gössling (2002), tourism affects the global environment by changing land cover and use, energy use, biotic exchange and extinction of wildlife, exchange and spread of diseases and changing the perception and meaning of the environment through travel.

Some research on the tourism-environment relationship is based on individuals' perceptions of the impacts that tourism brings to the economy, society and the environment. These impacts can be positive and negative. Tourism boosts the economy, increases employment and enriches social and cultural life. On the other hand, it is associated with an influx of people, traffic, pollution, crime and an increase in the cost of living (Andereck et al., 2005).

Part of the literature examining sustainable tourism is based on the stakeholder approach. This perspective has been increasingly developed since it was first reviewed by Freeman in 1984. A supporter of this approach is Byrd (2007) who has identified four stakeholder groups which he has named as present visitors, future visitors, present host community and future host community. Waligo et al (2013) say that stakeholders are very important for sustainable tourism and their involvement makes it easier to implement sustainable tourism.

Regarding the Durrës district, the environmental problems that appear in different areas of this district are: various types of pollution such as landfills, chemicals, ports, hydrocarbons, hill erosion, lack of a sewage network, risk of river flooding, accumulation of urban waste, marine pollution from river flows, destruction of sand dune habitats and fragmentation of hill habitats (Nika & Skëndaj, 2021).

This study is a continuation of previous works exploring the impacts of tourism in the Durrës region and coastal area (Lika D., Gashi J., Prendi L., Subashi D., Jaho D., (2025), now including a multi-actor and comparative perspective. In this case, we used a qualitative analysis through the Nvivo software. This software can store, manage and analyze qualitative data (Bazeley & Jackson, 2019).

The hypotheses raised based on the reviewed literature and the reality of the city of Durrës are as follows:

H1: Individuals, businesses, and institutions have the same feelings about pollution resulting from tourism, ecosystem destruction, and waste management.

H2: Individuals and businesses perceive that tourism brings a decline in the quality of life and urban pressure, while institutions are concerned about management, coordination between institutions, and the implementation of environmental legislation.

H3: The proximity of actors' contact with tourist flows influences their perceptions of the impacts of tourism on the environment; for individuals and businesses, the problem focuses on waste, noise, congestion, infrastructure, etc., while institutions engage in structural impacts such as damage to biodiversity, protection of natural areas, etc.

H4: Compatibility between stakeholders' perceptions is positively related to the desire for cooperation and embrace of sustainable tourism policies and environmental governance.

3. Methodology

Two types of questionnaires were used to carry out this work. Those for citizens and businesses focus on the environmental impacts of tourism, waste management, urban pressure and quality of life. Data for this type of questionnaire were collected from 149 citizens and 82 businesses. On the other hand, the questionnaires on the structural challenges of environmental management and policy implementation were addressed to a selected group of institutional representatives who play a role in tourism and environmental management. The target area of the actors is the coastal and urban area of Durrës. The data collected are intended to provide this work with a qualitative and comparative framework. We transcribed and explored the responses from the questionnaires in NVivo (Lumivero), which is a software that works with qualitative and mixed data. The respondents were selected from the coastal and urban area of Durrës, as this is the part of the city most directly exposed to tourism activity and its environmental effects. This study include citizens, businesses, and institutional representatives. Citizens and businesses were chosen because they experience these impacts, while institutional representatives were included due to their role in environmental management. We initially created a coding scheme based on the literature reviewed on tourism impacts and multi-sectoral approaches. This process was done by combining deductive-inductive approaches. We first built general categories such as pollution, urban pressure, quality of life, environmental governance, etc., and then moved on to sub-categories according to the formulations given by the interviewees. We coded each of the stakeholder groups separately. In this way, the structure of the separate projects in Nvivo is preserved and the way is opened for subsequent comparisons. The analytical techniques used by Nvivo are: (i) word cloud that displays words based on their use in the text being analyzed, illustrating them in different sizes according to the frequency with which they are used (Atenstaedt, 2012); (ii) cluster analysis diagrams that show similarities and differences between issues (Lumivero Guide); (iii) word frequency query which gives the weight of each word according to the frequency with which they are mentioned in the interview (Mitcheltree, 2021); (iv) matrix coding queries which highlight the similarities and differences between the interviewed actors (Mortelmans, 2024) . The use of these procedures in our paper aims to build an analytical framework that can help further studies and policy development.

Table 1: Methodological framework of the study

Methodological component	Description
Study area	The study was conducted in the coastal and urban area of Durrës
Stakeholder groups	citizens, businesses, and institutional representatives.
Selection of respondents	Citizens and businesses were selected because they experience the environmental impacts of tourism in everyday life and local economic activity, while institutional representatives were included because of their role in tourism and environmental management.
Data collection tool	Two types of questionnaires were used. The first was addressed to citizens and businesses. The second was addressed to institutional representatives.
Sample	Data were collected from 149 citizens, 82 businesses, and 35 institutional representatives involved in tourism and environmental management.
Nature of data	The study generated qualitative and comparative data based on stakeholder perceptions.
Data processing	NVivo (Lumivero), a software used for qualitative and mixed data analysis.
Coding approach	The coding process combined deductive and inductive logic.
Main coding categories	Main categories included pollution, urban pressure, quality of life, environmental governance, and related sub-themes.
Analytical strategy	Each stakeholder group was coded separately in order to preserve the structure of the material and enable later comparison across groups.
NVivo techniques used	The analysis used word clouds, cluster analysis diagrams, word frequency queries, and matrix coding queries.
Purpose of analysis	These procedures were used to identify recurring themes, compare stakeholder perspectives

4. Analysis of Results

In this section, we present the results of our analysis based on word cloud, cluster analysis diagrams, and word frequency query techniques. We describe these results for each stakeholder group separately and finally compare their perceptions of the impacts of tourism on the environment through matrix coding queries.

4.1 Impacts of tourism on the environment according to individuals

We asked individuals the research question of what impacts they had observed most frequently on the environment from tourism. Figure 1 illustrates a cluster analysis diagram for this group. This analysis is based on the codes generated from the individuals' responses. It highlights the issues mentioned most frequently and groups them according to their proximity to their context.

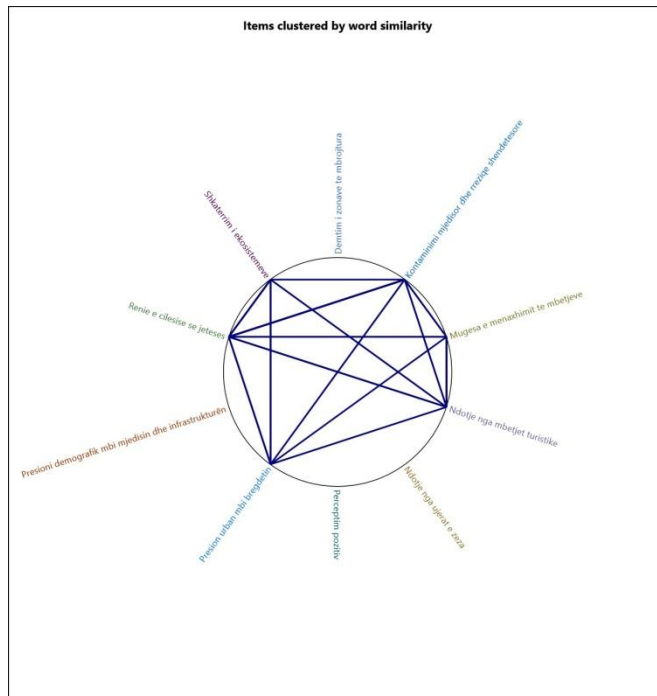


Figure 1 Items clustered by word similarity
Source : Authors and use of NVivo program

According to this analysis, three thematic groups were created: (i) environmental pollution and infrastructure, which includes pollution from tourist waste, pollution from sewage, lack of waste management, and environmental and food contamination; (ii) urban and demographic pressure, which includes demographic pressure on the environment and infrastructure and urban pressure on the coast. Both of these codes are related to the pressure resulting from population growth and construction without a regulatory urban plan in the coastal and urban areas of Durrës; (iii) destruction of ecosystems and life, which includes the degradation of biodiversity and the decline in the quality of life. These codes are positioned further away on the map, but come indirectly from pollution and urban pressure.

The word cloud analysis performed for individuals is presented in Figure 2. It shows that the words “pollution”, “air” and “waste” are the ones that are mentioned the most. This highlights the concern of individuals over the pollution caused by tourist activities, the lack of planning and the laxity of waste management. The terms “environment”, “tourism” and “areas” direct these concerns to tourist and coastal areas. Individuals are particularly sensitive to air pollution, territory,

Table 2, which reflects the frequency analysis of codes for businesses, suggests that the emphasis in this case is on “pollution from tourist waste” with 17.9%, “decline in quality of life” with 14.2%, and “destruction of ecosystems from tourist construction”, also with 14.2%. In the last places we have “positive perceptions of the impact of tourism”, “destruction of biodiversity”, “health risks” and “increased cost of living”. Without a doubt, institutional interventions should prioritize perceptions with high percentages.

Table 2 Word frequency query for businesses

Topic code	Percentage (%)
Pollution from tourist waste	17.90%
Decline in the quality of life in the community	14.20%
Destruction of ecosystems by tourist construction	14.20%
Environmental and food contamination	10.40%
Urban pressure on the coast	8.50%
Lack of waste management	6.60%
Pollution from sewage	6.60%
Positive perception of the impact of tourism	6.60%
Expenditure of natural resources	5.70%
Destruction of biodiversity	4.70%
Sanitary infrastructure and health risks	2.80%
Increase in the cost of living	1.90%

Source: Authors and use of the Nvivo program

4.3 Impacts of tourism on the environment according to institutions

Cluster analysis for the institutions illustrated in Figure 5 reveals that problems are perceived in three areas, based on the blue connections. It is clear that the institutions argue about poor local environmental management, the negative impacts of mass tourism and urban activities, and pollution from transport and the lack of waste treatment infrastructure.

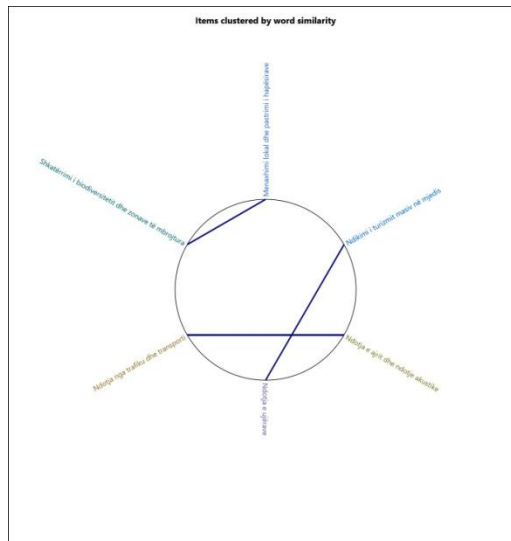


Figure 5 Items clustered by word similarity

Source: Authors and use of the Nvivo program

In the word cloud analyses for this group of actors, we have a concentration of the terms “pollution”, “law enforcement” and “institutions”. This leads us to think that institutions face difficulties in environmental management and more efficient policy implementation (see Figure 6).



Figure 6 Word cloud analysis for institutions
Source: Authors and use of the Nvivo program

All this is also supported by the frequency analysis of the codes in Table 3, where it is highlighted that for institutions, the lack of local management, different types of pollution, and damage to protected areas and biodiversity constitute the main problems of environmental tourism.

Table 3 Word frequency query for institutions

Thematic Code	Percentage (%)
Local management and cleaning of spaces	25.80%
Destruction of biodiversity and protected areas	25.80%
Air pollution and noise pollution	12.90%
Water pollution	12.90%
Pollution from traffic and transportation	12.90%
The impact of mass tourism on the environment	9.70%

Source: Authors and use of the Nvivo program

4.4 Hypotheses discussion

H1 is partially supported, as all three stakeholder groups point to pollution, waste, and ecosystem degradation as key environmental concerns, even if they do not stress them in the same way.

H2 is supported, since citizens and businesses speak more about quality of life and urban pressure, while institutions focus more on management, law enforcement, and coordination.

H3 is supported, because citizens and businesses are more affected by visible everyday problems such as waste, traffic, and noise, whereas institutions highlight broader structural challenges.

H4 is partially supported, as the three groups share several common concerns; however, cooperation for sustainable policies was not examined directly in the study.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

We conducted this study to examine the main impacts of tourism on the coastal and urban areas of Durrës. Our study was based on interviews conducted with three groups: individuals, businesses and institutions. The analysis of the responses was done through exploratory Nvivo techniques such as Word cloud, cluster similarity modeling and code frequency analysis. These qualitative analyses made it possible to identify the most recurring and problematic issues for each group, which, at the end of our study, we have summarized in Table 4.

Table 4 Summary of the three qualitative analyses for the three groups of stakeholders

ISSUE	INDIVIDUALS	BUSINESSES	institutions	Notes
Pollution from tourist waste	+	+	+	The most dominant theme, shared concern about lack of management and increased influx
Destruction of ecosystems/biodiversity	+	+	+	Damage to natural areas due to construction and lack of control
Urban pressure and construction on the coast	+	+	+	Reported as a threat to infrastructure and quality of life
Decline in quality of life	+	+	-	Particularly highlighted by the community and local businesses
Lack of waste management	+	+	+	One of the main factors of pollution, highlighted in all groups
Air pollution / noise pollution	+	-	+	Institutions and individuals mention it; businesses mention it less
Water pollution / wastewater	+	+	+	Structural problem affecting public health and ecology
Mass tourism and its impact on the environment	+	+	+	Businesses and institutions attribute it to a lack of regulation and planning
Food contamination and health risks	+	+	-	More prominent in the discourse of residents and businesses than at the institutional level
Expenditure of natural resources (water, forests, land)	+	+	-	They deal more with individuals and businesses, not with the direct focus of institutions
Increasing cost of living in the community	-	+	-	Mentioned only by businesses as an indirect consequence of tourism
Positive perception of tourism development	+	+	+	Very little present in all three groups; perceptions are dominated by negative concerns
Weakness in the implementation of environmental policies/laws	-	-	+	Only institutions identify it as a structural problem
Lack of inter-institutional coordination and oversight	-	-	+	Institutional concern about weak cooperation in planning

Source: Authors

The perceptions of the actors clearly show that the increase in tourist activity in the coastal and urban areas of Durrës is followed by a series of recurring challenges such as pollution from tourist waste, degradation of ecosystems, urban pressure on infrastructure, decline in the quality of community life and water pollution. In contrast to each other, these groups of actors give different weight to the above issues. Individuals focus on the reduction in the quality of life and the overloading of public spaces. Businesses emphasize the costs and reputation of the tourist destination and institutions on the structural weaknesses of local management, law enforcement and institutional coordination.

In summary, we recommend that future policies for sustainable tourism in Durrës should aim at strengthening waste management infrastructure, rigorous enforcement of building regulations, increased cooperation between local units, environmental agencies and the private sector, increased and enforced standards on land, air and water pollution, rigorous control aimed at preserving ecosystems and biodiversity. Our intervention with these recommendations can be effective for Durrës not only to cope with increasing tourist flows, but also to fill its own gaps in waste management, uncontrolled urbanization and the lack of effective oversight mechanisms. This study can be a good exploratory basis for further qualitative and quantitative research. It can also help in regulatory improvement aimed at the balance between tourism development, environmental protection and increased quality of life in Durrës.

Limitations of the paper.

1. It is based on the perceptions of the actors.
2. The study focused only on Durrës, so the findings cannot be fully generalized to other areas.
3. The size is small and composition of the sample, especially for institutions. For this reason, future studies should include larger samples and more objective environmental indicators.

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