



The Role of Cultural Heritage in Sustainable Tourism Development: Balancing Preservation and Economic Growth

Alberta Tahiri¹, Mirjam Dibra², Idriz Kovaçi^{3*}, Bedri Millaku¹, Tatjana Dimoska⁴, Diellza Misini³

¹ Faculty of Management in Tourism, Hospitality and Environment, University “Haxhi Zeka” Peja, Peja 30000, Kosovo

² Department of Tourism, Faculty of Economy, University of Shkodra “Luigj Gurakuqi” Shkodra, Shkodër 4001, Albania

³ Faculty of Tourism and Environment, University of Applied Sciences in Ferizaj, Ferizaj 70000, Kosovo

⁴ Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality, St. Kliment Ohridski” University – Bitola, Ohrid 60000, North Macedonia

Corresponding Author Email: idriz.kovaci@ushaf.net

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to analyze how cultural heritage influences the development of tourism in the city of Prizren, as well as to assess the balance between preserving cultural values and promoting economic development. In this context, public policies and institutional frameworks that regulate the protection of cultural heritage will be examined, including heritage legislation, monument management plans and tourism development strategies. The role of local actors, such as the community of residents, local businesses and civil society organizations, in the process of heritage preservation and promotion will also be analyzed. The methodology will include analysis of strategic documents, interviews with representatives of relevant institutions and field observations to identify the concrete effects of tourism development on cultural assets. The current management practices of the tourist destination of Prizren will be studied to understand to what extent the principles of sustainability and heritage preservation have been respected. The sample includes a total of 79 respondents, who are divided into two main groups: tourists and city residents. The selection of respondents for this study was carried out using a combined method, which includes purposive and random sampling, in order to ensure a full representation of the various social and professional groups affected by tourism. This study has shown that, the active involvement of the local community emerges as a critical element to achieve successful heritage management and to develop a tourism model that is sustainable, inclusive and based on the preservation of authentic values. The study is expected to contribute to the academic and practical debate on the relationship between cultural heritage and sustainable tourism development, with a particular focus on the Kosovar context.

1. INTRODUCTION

Cultural heritage represents a fundamental element of the identity and historical continuity of a society. It includes not only architectural monuments and historical objects, but also the practices, traditions, language and way of life of the communities that created and preserve them. In the context of the city of Prizren, cultural heritage is an asset of exceptional importance, not only for its symbolic and historical value, but also for the economic potential it offers through the development of cultural tourism.

Prizren, as one of the oldest and richest cities in cultural heritage in Kosovo, has become an important tourist destination, attracting thousands of visitors every year. Monuments such as the Prizren Castle, the Albanian League of Prizren, mosques, churches, characteristic bridges, as well as international cultural festivals that take place there, are evidence of a living and dynamic heritage. However, in the face of increasing tourist interest, the city faces serious

challenges in maintaining a balance between promoting tourism and preserving the authenticity of its cultural heritage.

The economic development that tourism can bring is not without its drawbacks, especially in the absence of sustainable and protective strategies. The risk of commercialization of heritage, uncontrolled construction, lack of professional management and pressure on historical infrastructure are just some of the challenges that cities like Prizren face. This makes it necessary to have a balanced approach that takes into account the long-term preservation of cultural values, while encouraging economic and social development.

This paper aims to analyze how cultural heritage influences tourism development in the city of Prizren and to examine the challenges, opportunities and policies related to this process. The research focuses on identifying current practices of heritage management and tourism development, the role of responsible institutions and the involvement of the local community in these processes.

1.1 Research questions

To carry out this study and achieve its objectives, the following main research questions have been formulated that will guide the research process:

1. How does the cultural heritage of Prizren influence the attraction of tourists and the development of other economic sectors of the city?
2. What are the main challenges faced by local and institutional actors in preserving cultural heritage in the face of tourism development?
3. What is the role of the local community in managing cultural heritage and how does it influence the development of tourism in Prizren?

1.2 Hypotheses

Based on the purpose of the study and the formulated research questions, the following hypotheses have been defined:

Hypothesis 1: Prizren's cultural heritage has a direct and positive impact on attracting tourists and developing other economic sectors of the city, contributing to the increase in income from tourism and other related activities.

Hypothesis 2: The biggest challenges to balancing tourism development and cultural heritage preservation are the lack of coordination between local actors and responsible institutions, as well as the lack of a comprehensive and sustainable strategy for heritage management.

Hypothesis 3: Active involvement of the local community in decision-making and management processes for tourism and cultural heritage will lead to the development of more sustainable tourism and the more effective preservation of Prizren's cultural values.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The meaning and importance of cultural heritage

Cultural heritage includes all the values, beliefs, customs, artifacts and monuments that have been created by a society and that carry historical, artistic and social significance. This heritage is usually divided into two main categories: tangible and intangible. Tangible heritage includes buildings, monuments, archaeological objects and visual arts, while intangible heritage includes traditions, languages, music, festivals and traditional knowledge. As UNESCO [1] points out, "intangible cultural heritage includes the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills that communities, groups and individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage".

Cultural heritage is essential for preserving a nation's identity and for building a sense of belonging among its citizens. It constitutes not only a historical memory, but also a basis for economic development, through the promotion of tourism and creative industries. As highlighted by Throsby [2], cultural heritage has a dual value – as an economic value and as a symbolic and cultural value that cannot be measured in market terms alone.

The concept of cultural heritage is subjective and evolves over the years. It is subjective in the sense that cultural heritage consists of the good that the values that prevail in any society at a given time must be sensitive to be protected and preserved

as a legacy of the past for future generations. Cultural heritage has tremendous potential in terms of its contribution to improving the quality of life for people, understanding the past, helping territorial cohesion, promoting economic growth, opening up employment opportunities and supporting wider developments such as improvements in education and artistic careers [3].

In this sense, heritage should not only be treated as an asset to be preserved, but also as a means to promote sustainable development. This idea is also supported by Ashworth and Tunbridge [4], who emphasize that "heritage is always a process of selecting the values of the past for use in the present and the future".

According to Labadi and Logan [5], the use of heritage for tourism purposes requires a careful balance between the conservation of cultural authenticity and the need for public access and economic use.

Cultural tourism, which includes the values of cultural heritage, aims to contribute by focusing on the values of cultural heritage, its promotion and protection. Kosovo as a tourist region in terms of cultural heritage is divided into seven cultural heritage regions: Prishtina Region, consisting of 118 heritage cities, Prizren Region, consisting of 500 heritage monuments, Peja Region, consisting of 856 monuments of cultural and natural heritage; Mitrovica region, consisting of 64 assets; The region of Gjakova, consisting of 148 monuments of all categories; The region of Gjilan, consisting of 174 monuments placed under temporary protection; and the Ferizaj region consists of 130 assets on the list of Cultural Heritage for temporary protection [6].

In the context of Prizren, this debate takes on particular importance due to the high concentration of historical monuments and cultural wealth that characterize the city. Efforts for economic development through tourism often conflict with the need to preserve the authenticity and sustainability of heritage. Therefore, it is essential that public policies and urban planning be built on the principle of integrating cultural heritage into local development strategies, in order to ensure a comprehensive and long-term approach.

2.2 Cultural heritage as a component for the development of sustainable tourism

Cultural heritage has a profound impact on the development and management of tourism, providing opportunities for economic growth and the preservation of cultural identity. In this sense, cultural heritage and tourism are closely linked and can contribute to sustainable development when managed in an integrated manner. According to Richards [7], cultural tourism is a rapidly growing sector that involves the use of cultural heritage for tourism purposes, creating opportunities for economic development and heritage conservation.

The territory of today's Kosovo has an ancient history of civilization that is evidenced by archeological sites, fortifications, cities, sacred and profane monuments, monuments and natural landscapes that enable the development of cultural tourism. Among the most important potentials for the development of cultural tourism in Kosovo today are calculated: fortified settlements, archeological sites, old civic bazaars, sacred and profane monuments, caves, waterfalls, mountains, natural landscapes, etc. Although Kosovo includes a small territory, there are monuments with rich treasures that have special values of cultural and historical heritage. Also this region is rich in values of spiritual, material

and natural heritage that reflect traces of ancient civilization from tradition, culture and way of life from the early Neolithic period to today's creativity [8].

Prizren, as a city with a great wealth of cultural heritage, has great potential to develop cultural tourism. The city is home to important historical monuments, including the Ottoman-era Citadel, Bridges and mosques, as well as a number of festivals and cultural events that attract visitors from all over the world. According to Timothy [9], the development of cultural tourism is closely linked to the preservation of heritage, as visitors seek to experience the authentic history and culture of destinations. Therefore, Prizren can benefit from the development of cultural tourism if it is managed in a way that respects and preserves these important values.

Through sustainable tourism, there are opportunities to improve tourism infrastructure in the region and to protect cultural heritage from the risks of inappropriate changes or damage to cultural values. An important aspect is the involvement of the local community in the development and management of tourism, giving them the role of main actors in the promotion and preservation of cultural heritage [10].

However, to ensure that tourism development is sustainable, a careful balance must be struck between tourism promotion and cultural heritage conservation. According to Ashworth and Tunbridge [4], one of the main challenges of cultural tourism is the compatible management of tourist visits and the conservation of cultural monuments and assets. They emphasize that tourism development must be carried out without damaging the authenticity and historical value of these assets, which can only be achieved through careful planning and close cooperation between public institutions, local organizations and the private sector.

Another important aspect of sustainable tourism development is the involvement of the local community in the process of preserving and promoting cultural heritage. As Labadi and Logan [5] point out, community engagement is an essential component in ensuring that the benefits of tourism are distributed equitably and sustainably. This local community engagement also helps to preserve the authenticity of destinations and contributes to a sense of belonging and pride in the cultural values of the area.

Developing sustainable tourism in Prizren requires a careful balance between promoting tourism and preserving cultural heritage. This requires proper planning and close cooperation between various local and international stakeholders, ensuring that the economic benefits of tourism are harnessed in a responsible and sustainable manner.

2.3 Challenges of preserving cultural heritage in the context of tourism

At a time when tourism is growing rapidly, the challenges of preserving cultural heritage have become increasingly apparent. While tourism can bring significant economic benefits, it can also have negative impacts on the preservation of cultural monuments and assets. Damage to cultural heritage due to mass tourism is a concern that many tourist destinations are experiencing, including important cities such as Prizren.

According to Pai et al. [11], one of the main challenges of preserving cultural heritage in the context of tourism is managing the flow of visitors. Mass tourism often turns cultural destinations into mass attractions, exposing them to damage and degradation. This can occur due to heavy traffic, uncontrolled interventions in historical structures, and the lack

of protective measures for cultural assets.

The challenges of preserving cultural heritage in the context of tourism are numerous and complex. While tourism can bring economic benefits and opportunities for development, it also poses a threat to cultural heritage if managed without sustainable strategies.

2.4 Public policies and strategies for the development of sustainable tourism and the preservation of cultural heritage

Public policies and strategies for sustainable tourism development are important to ensure a balance between tourism and cultural heritage preservation. The aim of these policies is to promote tourism as an engine of economic development, while protecting the cultural assets of a country. In the context of Kosovo and the city of Prizren, which has a rich cultural and historical heritage, tourism development policies are closely linked to the preservation of cultural heritage, and this requires an integrated and sustainable approach.

An important aspect of public policy is the establishment of a legal and institutional framework for the protection of cultural heritage. For example, Kosovo has adopted laws and strategies for the protection of cultural heritage, which provide the framework for the protection and management of cultural assets. According to the World Heritage Watch Report 2019 [12], legislation for the preservation of cultural heritage should be harmonized with tourism development policies to ensure that cultural assets are not damaged by tourism development. This requires close cooperation between local and central authorities, heritage organizations, and tourism operators.

An important example of a strategy for sustainable tourism development is the Kosovo Tourism Development Plan 2020-2025, which aims to develop tourism in a sustainable manner, linking it to the preservation of cultural and natural assets. This plan emphasizes the importance of preserving cultural heritage as a priority and promotes an integrative approach that includes all stakeholders, including local authorities, tourism associations, and the community. According to the Ministry of Industry, Entrepreneurship and Trade [13], the implementation of this plan requires close cooperation between different institutions and the use of local resources to support tourism development, thereby preserving cultural heritage. Tourism constitutes an important and influential sector in the economy, creating multiple uses and benefits. This sector, among other things, generates income, creates jobs, influences the creation of state infrastructure, as well as promotes cultural exchanges between host countries and visitors.

In conclusion, policies and strategies for sustainable tourism development and cultural heritage conservation are essential for a balanced development that promotes tourism but also protects cultural assets for future generations. These policies should include a comprehensive and integrated approach that engages all stakeholders and ensures sustainable management of heritage and tourism.

2.5 The impact of tourism on the local economy and the preservation of cultural heritage

Tourism development has a significant impact on the local economy, creating employment opportunities and increasing incomes, but it can also cause pressure on cultural assets and

the environment. In this context, it is important to understand how tourism can contribute to economic development without damaging cultural heritage, ensuring a balance between economic growth and the preservation of cultural assets.

According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO) report [14], while tourism can bring significant economic benefits, it can also cause pressure on cultural assets, resulting in damage to historical sites and loss of authenticity of cultural destinations. The need to both protect and present sites generates major challenges in the complex and challenging balance of competing or overlapping goals and responsibilities. This is particularly important for destinations like Prizren, where cultural heritage is a key element of the city's identity and an important attraction for tourists.

Ultimately, while tourism can bring significant economic benefits to the local community, it is essential that its development is planned and managed in a sustainable manner to preserve cultural heritage and ensure a sustainable balance between economic development and the preservation of cultural assets.

2.6 Public policies and institutional approaches to preserving and promoting cultural heritage through tourism

Public policies and institutional approaches play a key role in the protection, conservation and promotion of cultural heritage, especially when these goals are closely linked to the sustainable development of tourism. In the last decade, there has been an increase in efforts by state institutions and international organizations to develop strategic frameworks that allow for the preservation of cultural values, while at the same time encouraging economic development through cultural tourism [15].

In the Kosovo context, cultural heritage policies are still developing and face numerous challenges, including the lack of adequate funding, institutional capacity and community support. However, in recent years, some positive steps have been taken through the adoption of laws and strategies aimed at protecting cultural monuments and destinations. The National Strategy for the Development of Culture 2017–2027, for example, highlights the importance of integrating heritage into economic development policies through cultural [16].

The cultural heritage of Kosovo is the expression and creativity of life realities developed over a period of more than eight thousand years, from prehistory to the present day. This wealth inherited with unique artistic, aesthetic, historical values and traditional characteristics is illustrated by the rich diversity of architectural, archaeological, movable and spiritual heritage, as well as the rich cultural landscape [17].

The case of Prizren serves as a good example to understand the connection between public policies and cultural heritage in practice. As a city with an extraordinary historical and architectural wealth, Prizren has benefited from projects aimed at restoring historical monuments and promoting it as a tourist destination. The project “Cultural Heritage as a Driver for Intercommunity Dialogue and Social Cohesion” supported by UNDP in collaboration with local institutions, demonstrates the importance of institutional involvement in the preservation and promotion of heritage [18].

Public policies and institutional approaches have the potential to create a favorable environment for the development of sustainable cultural tourism, but their success depends on effective implementation, the engagement of local

stakeholders, and the integration of heritage into long-term development plans.

The practice of sustainable cultural tourism involves aspects related to over-glomerulation and loss of authenticity which are affecting the daily life of the local population, as well as the culture and heritage of the respective areas. The development of sustainable cultural tourism ensures good conservation practices, along with an authentic interpretation in support of local economies [19].

Sustainable cultural tourism emphasizes protecting and valuing cultural heritage while ensuring that tourism activities respect the environment and the integrity of local cultures. For it to be genuinely comprehensive, sustainable cultural tourism must be integrated into national development strategies, aligning tourism goals with broader sustainable development objectives [20].

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research methodology

The research methodology of this work is based on a quantitative approach, with the aim of analyzing the interrelationship between cultural heritage and tourism development in the city of Prizren, focusing on the challenges and opportunities to balance cultural preservation with economic growth. The quantitative approach combined with documentary analysis and direct observation enables an integrated and consistent approach to understanding this complex relationship.

3.2 Instruments and techniques for conducting research

An important technique used is direct field observation, which was carried out in the most important cultural and tourist areas of Prizren. Through this technique, it was possible to identify the way in which heritage assets are managed, the level of their maintenance, the impact of tourist infrastructure and urban interventions in historical areas. The observation also helped to assess the interaction between the local community and tourists, as well as the effects of tourism on the life and socio-cultural environment of the city.

The questionnaire was constructed in a structured manner, including closed and open-ended questions, which aimed to measure attitudes on the challenges and opportunities of balancing cultural heritage preservation and economic development through tourism. The questionnaires were distributed physically and electronically, via email and online forms, to enable a wider coverage of respondents and a more efficient return of responses. Measures were taken to guarantee the anonymity and confidentiality of participants, in accordance with ethical standards of scientific research. Closed-ended attitudinal items were measured using a three-point ordinal scale: Yes, No or Partially. This scale was selected to ensure clarity for respondents and facilitate participation among diverse educational backgrounds. Internal consistency of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, treating the three-point scale as ordinal. All multi-item constructs demonstrated acceptable reliability ($\alpha \geq 0.65$), which is considered adequate for exploratory social research using short ordinal scales. Given the use of a three-point ordinal scale, slightly lower alpha values are expected and remain acceptable in exploratory studies. Content validity

was ensured through an extensive review of relevant literature.

The questionnaire was reviewed by experts in tourism and cultural heritage studies, leading to minor wording revisions.

3.2.1 Data collection and analysis techniques

Data collection was carried out through two main techniques: a structured questionnaire, which was distributed to a selected group of tourists and residents in the city of Prizren, and the analysis of existing literature, which included academic sources, strategic documents, and reports from local and international institutions.

The data collected through the questionnaire were processed and analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis methods, such as percentages, averages, and distribution of responses, with the aim of identifying participants' perceptions and attitudes regarding the impact of tourism on cultural heritage and the economic benefits it brings.

3.2.2 Selection method

The selection of respondents for this study was carried out using a combined method, which includes purposive and random sampling, in order to ensure a full representation of the various social and professional groups affected by tourism. Data were coded and analyzed using specialized statistical software. Responses from the three-point assessment scale (Yes / Partially / No) were numerically coded and summarized using descriptive statistics, with results presented primarily as percentages and graphical figures. This approach enabled a clear visualization of response distributions and overall trends in respondents' perceptions.

3.3 Sample selection

The study used a purposeful recruitment strategy in the country, targeting two groups directly selected from tourism development and cultural heritage in the city of Prizren: tourists and local residents. Data collection was conducted on-site at key cultural and tourist sites, including the Prizren Castle, museums and major cultural monuments, as well as in nearby public spaces within the historic city center.

Data were collected over a specific time period during June–July during peak visitation hours to ensure exposure to active tourism flows. Recruitment was done in two main groups as:

Tourists: individuals visiting Prizren for recreational or cultural purposes during the data collection period.

Local residents: individuals residing in Prizren for at least one year.

Exclusion criteria included individuals under 18 years of age and respondents who did not wish to provide informed consent.

The final sample consisted of 79 respondents, of whom 55 were tourists and 24 were local residents. Within each group, efforts were made to ensure diversity in age, gender, and educational level. Given voluntary nature of participation, the sample does not constitute a fully probabilistic random sample; however, respondents were approached systematically at predefined locations, ensuring balanced representation of tourists and local residents.

3.4 Respondent demographic statistics

A total of 79 respondents participated in the study. Their demographic data are presented in the table below:

Gender of Respondents

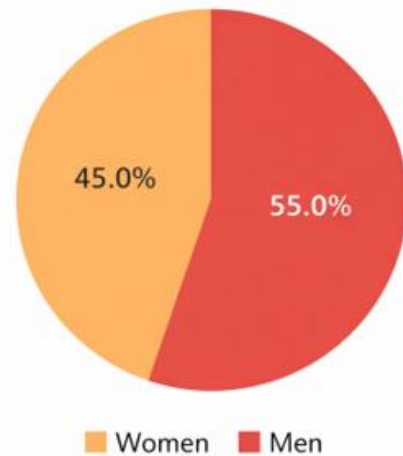


Figure 1. Demographic data of respondents by gender
Source: Author's survey data.

Figure 1 shows the gender breakdown of respondents. 45% of them are women and 55% are men. This close ratio shows an attempt at equal gender inclusion in the research, which is important for analyzing the different perceptions that men and women may have regarding tourism and heritage.

Age of Respondents

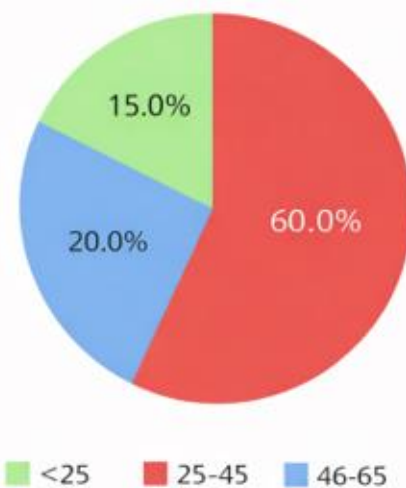


Figure 2. Demographic data of respondents by age group
Source: Author's survey data.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of respondents by age group. As can be seen, the vast majority (60%) are in the 25–45 age group, which represents the most active and engaged group in economic and cultural activities. The 46–65 age group accounts for 25%, while young people under 25 represent 15% of the total, reflecting the lower involvement of this age group in tourism and cultural heritage issues.

Figure 3 presents the educational level of the respondents. 40% of them have completed high school, 35% have higher education (Bachelor/Master/PhD), and 25% have primary education. This breakdown helps to understand the impact of education on how individuals perceive sustainable development and cultural heritage in Prizren.

Respondents' Education Level

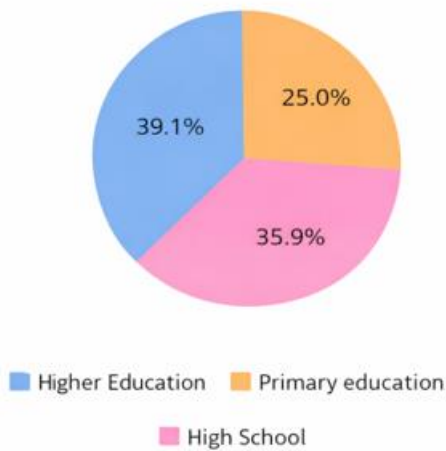


Figure 3. Demographic data of respondents by level of education

Source: Author's survey data.

Respondents' Employment Status

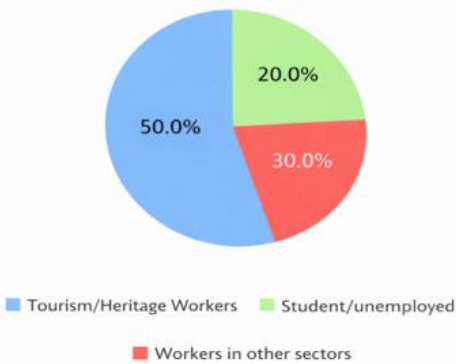


Figure 4. Demographic data of respondents by employment status

Source: Author's survey data.

Figure 4 shows the employment status of the respondents. Half (50%) are employed in the tourism or cultural heritage sector, 30% are employed in other fields, and 20% are students or unemployed. This breakdown illustrates the level of direct or indirect involvement of the respondents in the research topics.

Geographical Affiliation of Respondents

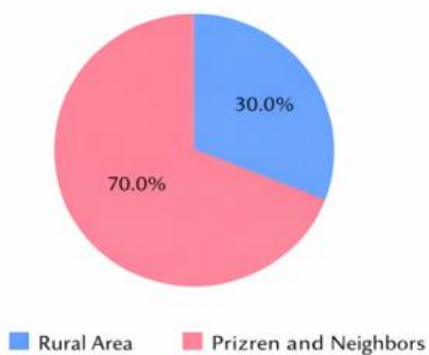


Figure 5. Geographic affiliation

Source: Author's survey data.

Figure 5 reflects the geographical area from which the respondents come. The majority of them are from the city of Prizren and the surrounding areas, which are also more involved in tourism activities and the preservation of cultural heritage. The inclusion of respondents from different areas helps in the comparative analysis of perceptions by locality.

4. RESULTS FROM RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following are the results analyzed from the closed questions conducted with 79 respondents, through the relevant graphs and with a detailed explanation for each question:

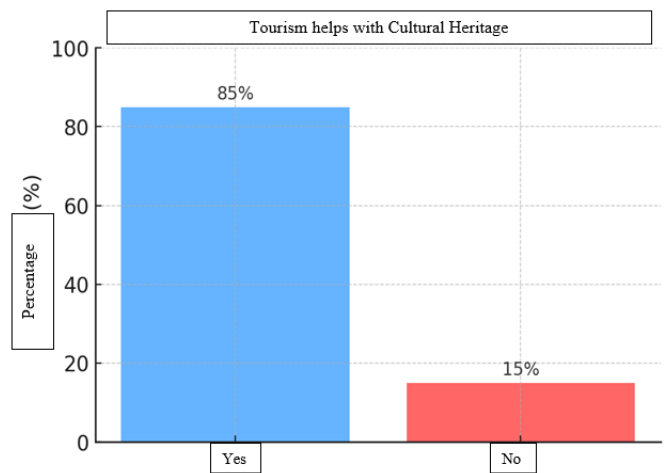


Figure 6. Tourism helps cultural heritage

Source: Author's survey data.

Figure 6 shows that about 85% of respondents answered “Yes”, while 15% answered “No”. These results show that a large majority of respondents perceive tourism development as an opportunity to protect and promote the cultural heritage of Prizren. They see tourism as an important tool to raise awareness of the importance of heritage and to keep it alive for future generations.

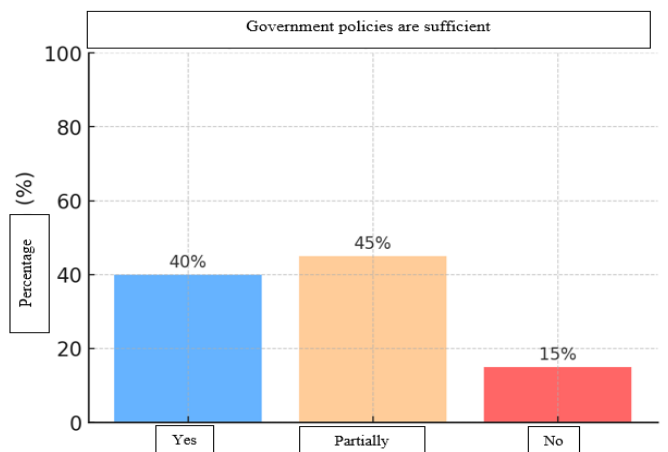


Figure 7. Government policies on cultural heritage

Source: Author's survey data.

Figure 7 shows that about 40% of respondents answered “Yes”, 45% “Partially” and 15% “No”. This result suggests that, while some individuals see government support as sufficient, a significant portion believes that current policies are incomplete or not implemented effectively. This variation

indicates the need for improvements in tourism development policies and strategies in Kosovo.

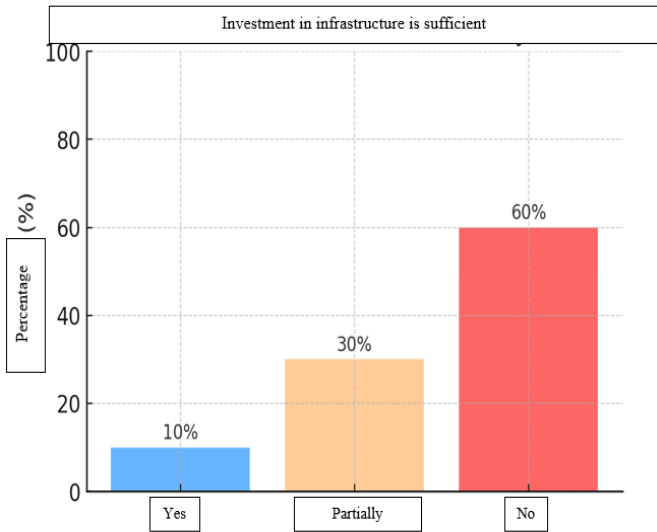


Figure 8. Investment in infrastructure
Source: Author's survey data.

Figure 8 shows that about 60% of respondents answered “No”, 30% “Partially” and 10% “Yes”. The results suggest that the majority of respondents believe that the infrastructure is not sufficient to support tourism development in Prizren. They consider infrastructure as a key factor for improving the tourist experience and as an obstacle to increasing the number of visitors.

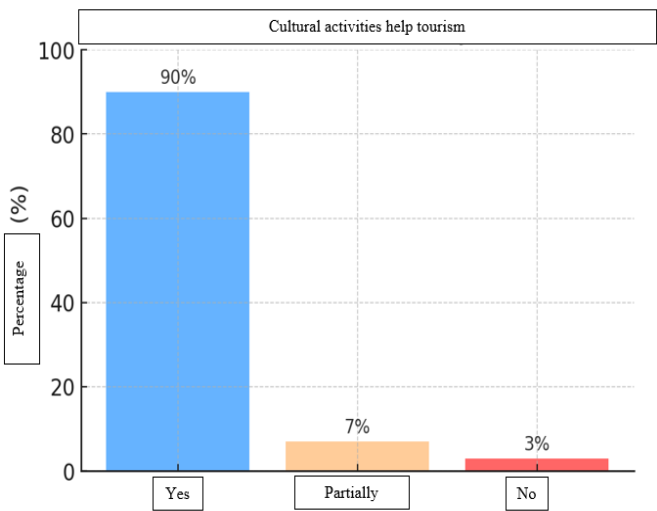


Figure 9. The connection of cultural activities with tourism
Source: Author's survey data.

Figure 9 shows that about 90% of respondents answered “Yes”, 7% “Partially” and 3% “No”. This result shows that such cultural activities and heritage events are valued as an opportunity to attract tourists and promote the rich culture of Prizren. Festivals and exhibitions are seen as an opportunity to bring cultural heritage to life and increase tourism.

Figure 10 shows that about 70% of respondents answered “Yes”, 20% “Partially” and 10% “No”. This result suggests that a significant portion of respondents believe that tourism development has helped preserve the cultural traditions of Prizren, but there are still certain challenges in integrating tourism with traditional and authentic practices. They believe

that heritage preservation is still an ongoing process that requires increased commitment.

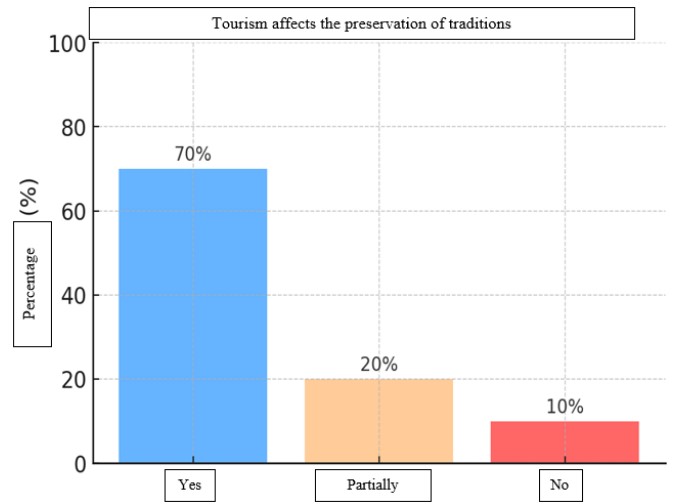


Figure 10. The impact of tourism on the preservation of traditions
Source: Author's survey data.

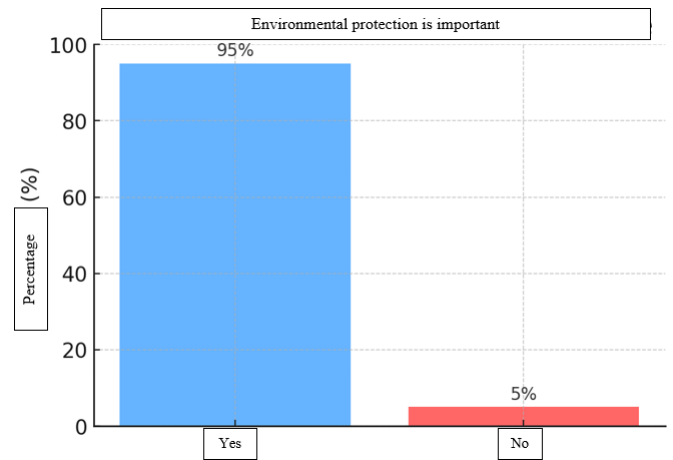


Figure 11. Environmental protection and its connection with cultural heritage
Source: Author's survey data.

Figure 11 shows that about 95% of respondents answered “Yes”, while 5% answered “No”. This result shows a high awareness among respondents of the importance of preserving the environment and nature as part of tourism development. Environmental protection is seen as a key element for sustainable tourism and to ensure that tourism development does not have negative impacts on the nature and natural resources of Prizren.

Figure 12 shows that about 80% of respondents answered “Yes”, 15% “Partially” and 5% “No”. This result shows that the majority of respondents believe that tourism has contributed to the creation of new job opportunities for local residents. The majority of individuals perceive tourism as a potential source of employment, especially in the service sectors, restaurants, tourist guides and cultural activities.

The results of the closed questions indicate a strong positive perception of the opportunities that tourism offers for the preservation of cultural heritage and sustainable development in Prizren. However, there are still some concerns regarding infrastructure, government policies, and balancing

development with the preservation of traditions and the environment.

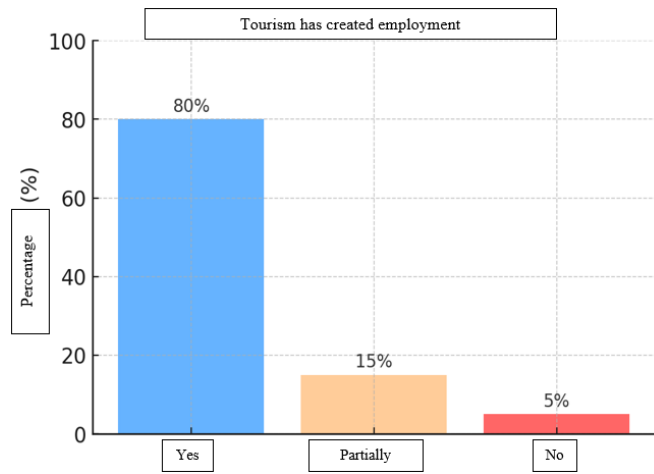


Figure 12. Impact of tourism on employment
Source: Author's survey data.

5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The results of this study show a strong connection between cultural heritage and tourism development in the city of Prizren, clearly supporting and arguing the hypotheses set at the beginning of the research. The following discussion is based on the analysis of the data collected from the questionnaire, as well as on the existing literature.

Hypothesis 1 assumed that the cultural heritage of Prizren positively influences the attraction of tourists and the economic development of the city. The results of the closed questions support this hypothesis: a significant percentage of respondents (around 90%) stated that cultural heritage plays a key role in attracting tourists.

Hypothesis 2, which relates to the challenges of heritage conservation in the face of tourism development, is confirmed through the responses where the majority of respondents identified the lack of inter-institutional cooperation and a unified strategy as the main obstacles.

Hypothesis 3 focuses on the role of the local community in preserving and promoting heritage. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that 85% of respondents believe that involving local citizens in decision-making would help develop sustainable tourism and preserve cultural values.

In summary, the empirical results and literature analysis support all the hypotheses put forward. They emphasize that tourism development and cultural heritage preservation in Prizren require more inclusive policies, coordinated strategies, and active community involvement to guarantee a sustainable future for the city as a cultural and tourist destination.

A closer comparison between the cultural and tourist areas analyzed in this study reveals noticeable differences in their perceived role, management, and tourism pressure. Highly frequented sites such as the Prizren Fortress and central cultural monuments were consistently associated with strong tourist attraction and economic benefits, reflecting their symbolic value and visibility within the city's tourism image. In contrast, less central or less promoted heritage sites, including smaller museums and peripheral historical areas, appeared to receive lower levels of attention from visitors and

were perceived as having more limited economic impact, despite their cultural significance.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusions of this study clearly show that the cultural heritage of Prizren constitutes an irreplaceable asset, not only in terms of history and identity, but also as an important potential for the socio-economic development of the city. However, this potential is not fully exploited due to the lack of a structured, integrated and sustainable approach to heritage management and tourism development.

Although the current survey measures perceptions rather than actual financial figures, official tourism statistics from the Kosovo Agency of Statistics (KAS) [21] show clear growth in tourism activity, which is strongly associated with increased economic activity in the hospitality and service sectors. According to KAS data for 2024, Kosovo registered a total of 698,068 visitors, with 60.6% foreign visitors and 39.3% domestic visitors, reflecting a notable increase compared to previous years. The total number of overnight stays reached 1,522,890, of which 54.3% were by foreign guests, indicating both increased visitation and extended stays. These upward trends in tourist arrivals and overnight stays suggest enhanced tourism demand, which is commonly linked to higher spending on accommodation, food, transport, and related tourism services, providing contextual support for *Hypothesis 1* regarding the economic role of cultural heritage attractions in Prizren [21].

The active involvement of the local community emerges as a critical element to achieve successful heritage management and to develop a tourism model that is sustainable, inclusive and based on the preservation of authentic values. The creation of platforms for civic participation in planning and decision-making on heritage issues would enable a stronger sense of collective ownership and strengthen responsibility for the preservation of these assets.

This study confirms that the potential of cultural heritage to serve as a driver of economic development is great, but can only be realized if its protection and promotion are treated as intertwined processes. Developing a strategic approach, which considers heritage not as an obstacle, but as a source of development, is essential for the future of Prizren as a cultural and tourist destination of regional and wider importance.

To ensure sustainable tourism development in Prizren and to protect the city's cultural heritage, it is essential that responsible institutions draft and implement an integrated strategy for cultural heritage management, which should be long-term, comprehensive and based on international best practices.

Improving the legal and institutional framework is also an essential step.

Another important recommendation is to educate and raise awareness among citizens and visitors about the importance of cultural heritage.

Likewise, investments in tourism infrastructure must be balanced and guided by the principles of heritage protection. Finally, it is necessary to build the professional capacities of the staff of heritage and tourism institutions through continuous training, international exchanges and cooperation with experts in the field.

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