

The Perception of Tourism Entrepreneurs in Bukovina Region on Green Economy and Sustainability

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Abstract

Today, environmental protection has become a global concern, with every country obliged to implement laws and actions to protect the environment and promote sustainable development. One of the solutions to this problem is the implementation of environmental protection measures in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Following the analysis of the level of knowledge, we observed that the transition to the green economy through the adoption of sustainable tourism requires an innovative process, which may be the result of the introduction of new actions, strategies, and technologies. In order to implement sustainable practices in organizations, it is essential to have entrepreneurs who are dedicated to finding the best options and ways to implement ideas that comply with the three principles of sustainable development. In January-March 2024, a survey was conducted among tourism entrepreneurs (accommodation and catering establishments, associations) in Bukovina region on the implementation of green economy principles for creating sustainable businesses.

Key words: green economy, entrepreneurship, sustainability, Bukovina

J.E.L. classification: Q32, Q56

1. Introduction

The importance of tourism in the growth process of a country and its social, economic and regional implications highlight the importance of providing modern knowledge in entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial management and innovation.

Entrepreneurship is often linked to economic growth and progress, increasing the quality of life and creating new employment opportunities, technological progress being the key factor of success in a community. Entrepreneurship is seen as the main driver of economic development because it produces expansion and acts as a means of transformation and creativity.

Being aware of the impact that entrepreneurship and tourism can have on the economy and its importance in the tourism industry, we believe it is timely to explore this topic in order to increase knowledge in this area.

Entrepreneurship in green tourism is a neglected area both in the literature and in the economic press, however, encouraging entrepreneurship in green tourism is crucial as it can stimulate sustainable social and economic progress by exploiting more efficiently the tourism potential of Romania.

Although there is great ecotourism potential in our country, green tourism faces many challenges, such as: lack of cooperation at local level, insufficient promotion at national and international level, underdeveloped ecotourism infrastructure, labour migration, low number of people well trained in this field and a legal framework that does not meet the requirements of local services.

SMEs are leaders in the green transition process, connecting the visitor to place by creating experiences with a critical role to play.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, tourism development in many countries and destinations was economically, socially and environmentally uneven, often due to rapid and unplanned growth in tourist numbers. The tourism industry now has an opportunity to create stronger political momentum to lead the transition to green tourism business models and to promote the greening of the entire tourism value chain, involving a wide range of processes and actors.

2. Literature review

When starting out as an entrepreneur, the tourism entrepreneur faces a number of challenges. All organisations face such problems because of their partial dependence on the environment.

The tourism industry is of particular importance in many economies of the world, both in terms of revenue generated and as a provider of jobs, foreign exchange earnings, and a source of entrepreneurial dynamism and a means of stimulating regional development (Țigu, 2012).

In recent years, the issue of sustainable entrepreneurship has coagulated multiple research interests due to the fact that it integrates three main pillars, i.e. human resources (people) management, concerns for the protection of the planet and economic efficiency supported by profit (Hapenciuc et al., 2015).

Butnaru and Ștefănică (2018) have shown that the relationship between tourism and the environment is of particular importance, with the protection and conservation of the environment representing the primary condition for the development of tourism.

This complicated link develops in two ways: the natural environment, with its resources, is essential for tourism, and tourism can affect both positively and negatively the environment, changing its elements.

The focus on a green economy, where the value of products and resources is maintained for as long as possible, and waste production is reduced, has become a priority for authorities, business, research institutions and non-governmental organisations.

Thus, there are over 100 definitions of the green economy in the literature, centred around key concepts such as sustainable development, the 4R framework (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Recover), the systems approach (micro, meso, macro), the waste hierarchy (Kirchherr et al., 2017).

The Nusa Dua Global Environment Forum recognized UNEP's leadership role in promoting the concept of a green economy (Allen, Clouth 2012;) that leads to improved human well-being and social justice while significantly reducing environmental risks and deficiencies, at the same time. time is low-carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive (UNEP, 2010).

The principles of the green economy represent a new and sustainable approach to economic growth, which prioritises environmental protection and sustainable development.

Based on the principles of a green economy, special attention is paid to issues such as: the implementation of renewable and alternative energy sources, industrial waste management, environmental protection and the use of "green" technology (Gribincea, 2019). All these elements are closely related to environmental management, which is aimed at reducing the negative impact on the environment, improving the environmental performance of the enterprise, and, increasing economic efficiency and reducing waste generation and recycling (Gribincea, 2019).

Therefore, green growth corresponding to the concept of green economy inevitably leads to sustainable development (Kasztelan 2017, Ohotina 2016). However, it is necessary to continue to carry out certain tasks for the development of global models and scenarios to assess strategies for national 'green economy' and 'green' growth (Kasztelan 2017).

The environmental policy followed by a hotel must be continuously monitored together with the achievement of revenue or occupancy indicators. Results can only be seen if operating standards are maintained, with a reduction in unjustified consumption of: water, energy or fuel; with the disposal of household waste to the sewer. Results can also be observed through measurement: by comparing consumption with other periods in the past and also by measuring the reaction of customers to an environmentally friendly attitude (Nistoreanu, 2003).

Major changes are needed for businesses of all sizes in all parts of the tourism ecosystem, such as the transition to a green economy, which aims to generate a sustainable economic system by fundamentally reducing resource consumption and waste and decoupling natural resource extraction from increased economic activity and well-being (OECD, 2021, UNEP and World Bank, 2021).

Figure no. 1. Definitions of the green economy



Source: https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00N3C5.pdf

Over the last twenty years, awareness of sustainability in business has grown. Traditionally, companies focus on offering products and services that meet customer requirements and can be sold at competitive prices to make a profit.

In a society with limited resources, damaged ecosystems, human-induced climate change and exclusive economic growth, the traditional role of business can no longer ensure sustainable development.

The successful transition to more sustainable tourism through the application of green economy principles will depend on active public-private collaboration and partnerships, intergovernmental cooperation, effective policies and policy and financing instruments.

3. Research methodology

The objective of this paper is to investigate the awareness of “green economy” concept in Bukovina region and to assess the importance of green economy for the tourism sector and the lives of people. To address the objective of the research of determining the opinions of tourism entrepreneurs on the green economy and the actions they are implementing in terms of sustainable tourism development to facilitate the transition to a green economy, this research employed a combined methods approach, which included a literature review and the development of an online questionnaire.

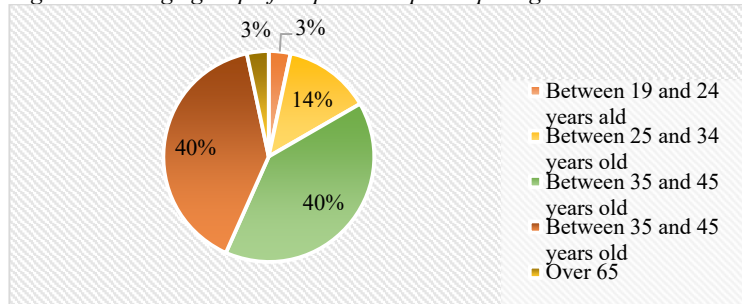
This research was conducted through a questionnaire that was distributed among entrepreneurs in Bukovina region of Romania. The survey was conducted during January-March 2024. The questionnaire was completed by 30 tourism entrepreneurs. The questionnaire included items about gender, age, position in the organisation, and the county where the organisation operates.

4. Findings

In this section, we present the most relevant results of the questionnaire conducted among tourism companies. The interpretation of the results of the questionnaires conducted in an area with a particularly valuable tourism potential, Bukovina, has led to significant findings.

As mentioned in the previous section, the questionnaire was conducted among tourism entrepreneurs (accommodation establishments, food establishments, and associations) in the Bukovina region, during January-March 2024. The purpose of the investigation was to examine the state of development and the implementation of green economy practices within tourism companies.

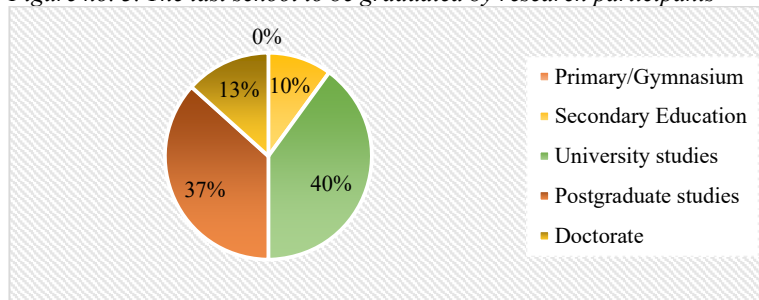
Figure no. 2. Age group of respondents participating in the research



Source: own processing

Out of the total of 30 respondents, most respondents were aged between 35 and 45 (40%, i.e. 12 respondents) and between 46 and 65 (40%, i.e. 12 respondents). There were 4 respondents aged between 25 and 35 and one representative each for the age categories between 19 and 24 and over 65.

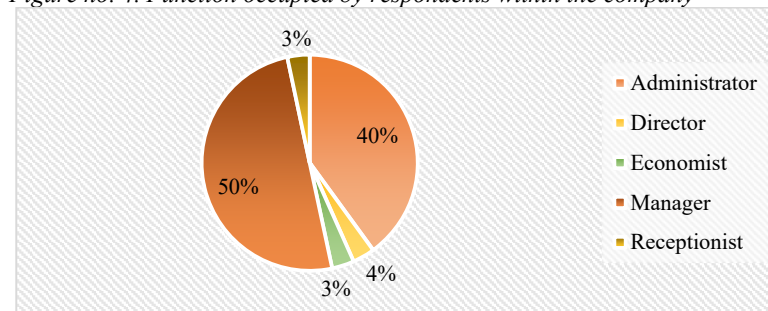
Figure no. 3. The last school to be graduated by research participants



Source: own processing

Figure no. 3 highlights that the majority of respondents (77%) have university education (12 respondents) and postgraduate studies (11 respondents), followed by those with doctoral studies (13%). Only 3 of the respondents have secondary education, which suggests that the majority of tourism entrepreneurs in Bukovina region have a high level of education.

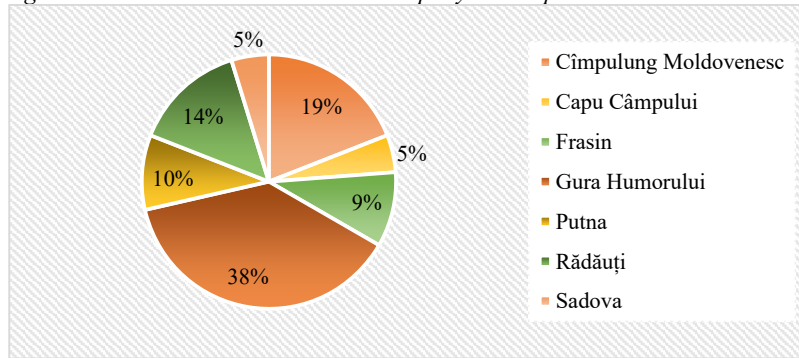
Figure no. 4. Function occupied by respondents within the company



Source: own processing

Furthermore, Figure no. 4 underlines that half of the respondents are managers – 15 respondents, 40% are administrators – 12 respondents and the other 3 respondents have the function of director, economist and receptionist.

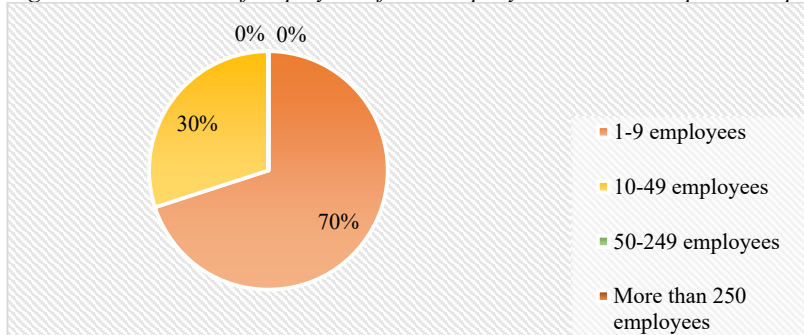
Figure no. 5. The location where the company's headquarters are located



Source: own processing

The structure of the sample according to the territorial distribution includes companies operating within Suceava County. The highest representation is observed in Gura Humorului (38%), Campulung Moldovenesc (19%), and Radauti (14%). On the other side, we highlight a low representativeness in Sadova and Capu Campului villages (5%).

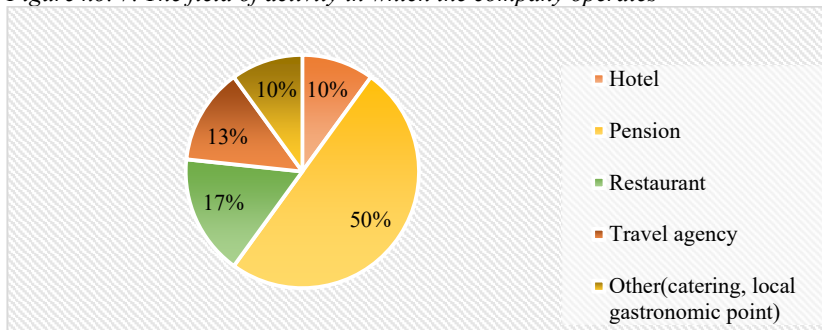
Figure no. 6. Number of employees of the company in which the respondent operates



Source: own processing

In terms of the number of employees, Figure 1 shows that most of the tourism companies included in the study are micro-enterprises and have up to 9 employees (70%). The remaining 30% of tourism companies have between 10 and 49 employees.

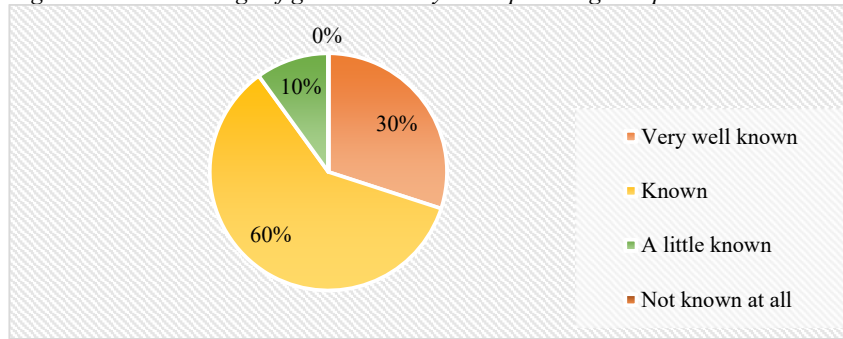
Figure no. 7. The field of activity in which the company operates



Source: own processing

Regarding the field of activity, 50% of the tourism companies operate as pensions and 17% as restaurants. Furthermore, another important proportion of the responses indicates that 13% of the tourism companies are travel agencies and 20% have catering activities or are a local gastronomic point.

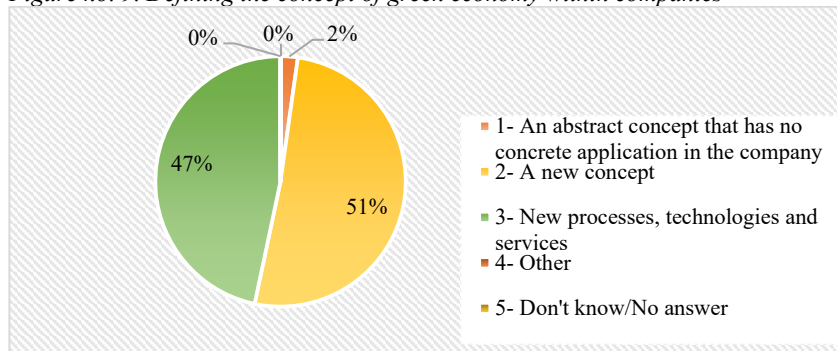
Figure no. 8. Knowledge of green economy concepts and green products/services



Source: own processing

In order to identify the degree of perception of the principles on green economy, one question of the survey sought to identify whether entrepreneurs are aware of the notion of green economy and green products/services. The results highlight that out of 30 respondents, 27 (90%) are well and very well aware of these notions, and the other 3 (10%) respondents have only heard about these concepts.

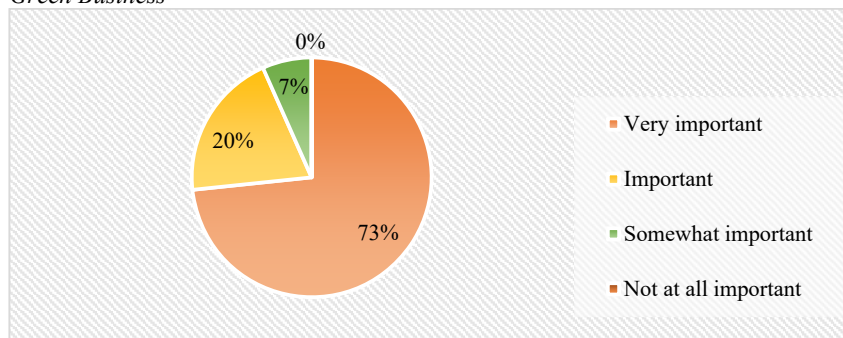
Figure no. 9. Defining the concept of green economy within companies



Source: own processing

The largest share of respondents (51%) consider that green economy concept is a new concept based on reducing the negative impact of economic activity on the environment (Figure no. 9). Another 47% of the respondents consider that green economy includes new processes, new technologies or new types of services.

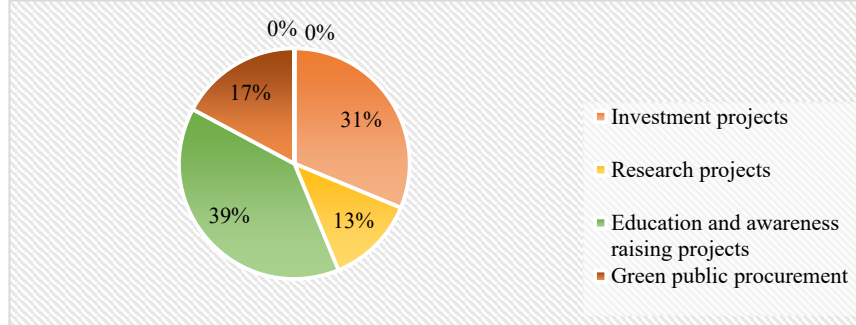
Figure no. 10. The importance of the professional training of a tourism manager for the development of a Green Business



Source: own processing

The respondents have stated that the professional training of tourism managers is very important (73%) and important (20%) for the development of a green business. Only 7% of the respondents consider that a professional training is not a basis for developing a green business. We can conclude that the majority of those surveyed consider that professional training would be useful for managers and are open to such an opportunity for their businesses.

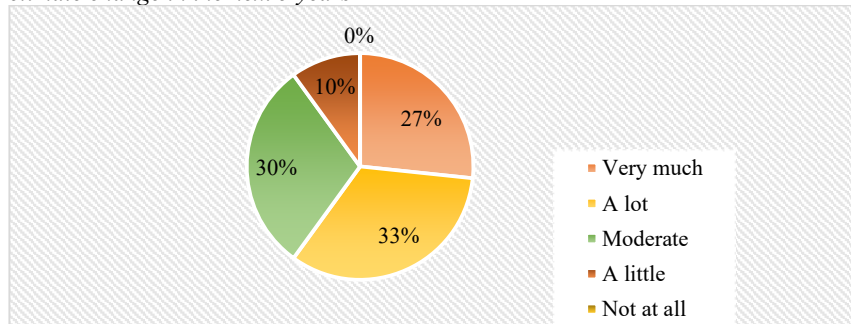
Figure no. 11. Tools that can facilitate the implementation of the green economy in Romania



Source: own processing

Furthermore, we examined a set of tools that can facilitate the implementation of the green economy in Romania. The results underline that 39% of the respondents consider that education and the awareness of educational projects could facilitate green economy development and implementation. Likewise, 31% of the respondents are of the opinion that investments in different projects are also important, followed by green public procurement (17%).

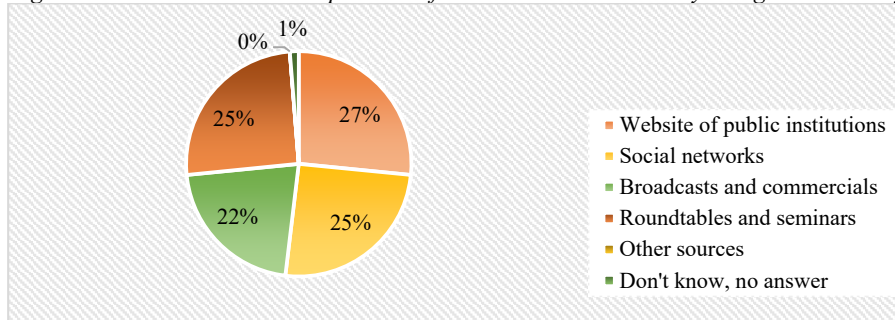
Figure no. 12. The degree of company involvement following the transition to a green economy and climate change in the next 5 years



Source: own processing

Around 60% of the respondents have agreed that the transition to a green economy and climate change will influence their business strategies and processes in the next five years, while 40% of the respondents consider that these changes will not impact them.

Figure no. 13. Methods used to provide information on sustainability and green economy



Source: own processing

Figure no. 13 shows the most effective ways to inform entrepreneurs in Bukovina about sustainability and the green economy. The websites of the institutions (27%), the social networks (25%) and round tables (25%), and the broadcasts and commercials (22%) are the most effective methods for providing information on sustainability and green economy.

5. Conclusions

The green economy transition introduces a new approach to economic growth that focuses on sustainability and on minimizing the negative effects of economic activities on the environment and society.

The results indicate that the tourism entrepreneurs that responded to the questionnaire operate in Gura Humorului (38%), Campulung Moldovenesc (19%), Radauti (14%), Putna (10%), Frasin (9%), Capu Campului (5%) and Sadova (5%).

Furthermore, the most significant results of the questionnaire employed in Bukovina region lead to the following conclusions:

- The perception of green economy principles by tourism business representatives has shown a positive development;
- Tourism companies want to receive more information on the environmental impact of green economy activities. Although respondents are aware of the concept of green economy, they argue that they do not have enough knowledge regarding green economy principles and how to implement them in their business processes;
- The vast majority of respondents consider that they need more knowledge and information on green economy and sustainability, focusing mainly on education and awareness raising projects, green investment projects and green public procurement as well as on the standards to be met and the methods to implement green economy principles;
- The most effective methods of informing entrepreneurs about the green economy according to the respondents would be institutional websites, social media, seminars or round tables.

Sustainability issues linked to eco-economic issues are a challenge for some entrepreneurs, who are aware of the need to address smart sustainable development.

“Greening the economy” is a new source of growth, a creator of decent jobs and a crucial strategy for eliminating poverty. The green economy offers opportunities for all countries, regardless of their level of development and economic structure.

Promotional campaigns should focus on describing the principles and values of the green economy, presenting new green economy models. The concept of the green economy in traditional media is not sufficiently promoted. Stronger promotional measures need to be taken, including at government level, so that the concept is known to the widest possible segment of the population.

These measures would provide a basis for facilitating the achievement of green economy objectives, such as waste reduction, resource efficiency and green economy projects.

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