

Rural tourism and its impact on economic development—Case study Kosovo

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Abstract: Most researchers have recognized the importance of tourism for economic growth and have concluded that the growth of tourism can also affect the economic and socio-cultural development of society. Our study proves that this relationship can exist, as there is a very strong relationship between tourism and economic development, especially in GDP, which challenges the concept of tourism as an engine of economic development for developing countries such as Kosovo. Our results show that the relationship between GDP growth and tourism development has a bilateral and positive long-term causality. But the low level of tourism development in Kosovo during the years of the study (2010–2022), analyzed according to the Robuts model, shows that in our country during these 12 years the increase in GDP has influenced the development of tourism and not vice versa.

Keywords: rural tourism; economic development; GDP; Kosovo; Robuts model

1. Introduction

Tourism plays a very important role for transition countries such as Kosovo in creating, increasing and developing economic development (Shkodra et al., 2011). In recent decades, most researchers have argued that tourism can be considered as a tool for economic development in many regions of the world (Alcalá et al., 2024; Adedoyin et al., 2022; Brida and Segarra, 2020; Calero and Turner, 2020; Eyuboglu and Eyuboglu, 2019; Pulido and Cárdenas, 2021; Tang, 2021; Watson and Deller, 2022). Moreover, many contributions from the economic literature recognize the potential of tourism in this sense.

In in recent years, however, a critical line of research has emerged that addresses the relationship between these two dimensions, as the growth of tourism in some countries has not only failed to improve socioeconomic conditions, but has actually contributed to a decline in the level of prosperity in that society, as significant costs have been incurred.

Thus, there are two opposing points of view regarding the conception of tourism as an instrument for socioeconomic progress. Nevertheless, we must admit that there are always two sides to the coin. In other words, we can say that tourism is not a magic and automatic solution for all countries that want to increase their level of prosperity, but it is also not true that tourism is not capable of becoming an instrument for progress. In fact, tourism is an effective instrument of progress in many areas that expect a large number of visitors, although it is certainly an economic activity that has experienced great limitations in the development of this function in some countries.

It can therefore be said that tourism is an “opportunity” that can transform a certain area into a country with a good quality of life and a high standard of living. In addition to creating jobs, tourism also plays an important role in preserving the

country's culture and tradition.

Tourism as a massive social and economic phenomenon has found its expression in recent decades (Shkodra, 2022). At the same time, tourism is a very complex and important economic category with an extremely dynamic development and rapid and profound qualitative and quantitative changes.

Therefore, economic development is the results of a chronological process consisting of environmental activities, economic activities and socio-cultural activities, which we have illustrated in **Figure 1**.

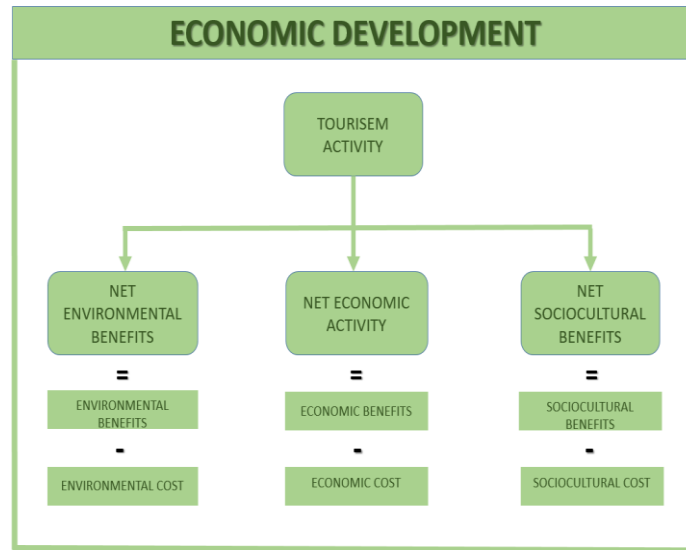


Figure 1. Chronology of economic development.

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

As a global economic phenomenon, tourism contributes to economic growth and the development of the global economy after the oil and chemical industries (Almeida García, 2015).

Therefore, the aim of this work is to analyze, through an empirical study in Kosovo, whether the growth of tourism activities that has taken place in the country in recent decades has contributed to the improvement of the level of economic development, and to verify whether this relationship is valid regardless of the initial socioeconomic status of Kosovo.

Therefore, the hypothesis of this research study is that the economic growth resulting from an expansion of tourism activities contributes to the improvement of a country's economic development.

2. Literature review

Tourism is one of the most important activities of modern man, which is constantly changing the political, economic, cultural, human life and lifestyle of people by greatly altering the image of the earth'. According to Esquivias et al. (2021), tourism is one of the new growth engines in Indonesia, creating a large number of jobs, earning foreign exchange, and boosting the economy

The activity of tourism as a massive social and economic phenomenon has been evident all over the world in recent decades. In this short period of time, tourism has

developed with a dizzying intensity (Wallace, 2004) and has become one of the greatest social features of modern humanity.

As far as rural tourism is concerned, its content has been well described in many studies. The nature of rural tourism is described by many researchers: Busby (2000); Dashper (2014); Hall et al. (2016); Koster (2019); Lane and Kastenholz (2015); Lee and Chang (2008); Nistoreanu (2019); Ohe (2020); Roberts (2001); Sharpley and Roberts (2004); Shkodra (2017a); Shkodra (2017b); Woods (2011). Some of the studies have focused on the importance of tourism, others on the impact of tourism on economic development, and still other on specific instruments and their impact on tourism development. Lee and Chang (2008) concluded, based on their analysis of a substantial number of countries, concluded that “unidirectional causality relationships exist between tourism growth and economic development in OECD countries, while bidirectional causality relationships were found between the two variables in non-OECD countries”. Based on these findings, the authors suggest that “all governments should commit to supporting the expansion of their tourism industries as much as possible, while also focusing on long-term policies. Apart from the regional effects, from a global perspective, all countries can benefit from tourism development and economic growth”.

Zenelaj (2013) shows in his study that there is a two-way causal relationship between the tourism industry and GDP growth and that this relationship between these two variables is maintained over a long period of time. The dynamic study of the relationship between the expansion of the tourism sector and economic growth over a long period of time shows a strong influence of the tourism sector on economic growth. Therefore, it is important and necessary for central and local governments, volunteer agencies and private volunteer organisations to become active partners to achieve tourism development that will contribute to economic development in general. This is confirmed by Liu et al. (2020), who conclude that the central government plays a guiding role by steering rural tourism in the desired direction, while the local government plays a serving role by directly managing tourism practises and coordinating with businesses and residents to provide services and solve problems. The synergetic interaction between central and local governments in China promotes the rapid development of rural tourism.

The impact of rural tourism on the local economy is a wide range of the most competent areas and activities of the tourism sector that need to be mobilized and have a direct impact on economic development (Guaita Martínez et al., 2019; Kovaçi, 2021) and opportunities created for better and sustainable economic development (Jehona et al., 2011; Shkodra et al., 2022; Shkodra, 2019; Ymeri et al., 2020).

According to Mura and Ključnikov (2018), rural tourism and agrotourism can be considered as the most promising business activities that can become a stabilizing factor for the economic and social development of rural settlements, as they are an essential part of regional development.

The benefits and impacts of tourism in the local economy are closely interrelated with other sectors and actors responsible for the economic development of the country (Laidler, 2012).

It is very important that the country provides the infrastructure, transport, security and a suitable environment for the development of tourism. Based on this I can assume

that tourism will become a leading sector with income and GDP growth, contributing to economic growth and the creation of new jobs. Assaf and Josiassen (2012) concluded that high performing countries have well established tourism industry. Sinclair (1998) suggested that tourism development requires not only a large amount of physical capital, but also more skilled labour, so the destination country should increase investment in human capital in the tourism sector. Dunn et al. (2002) argued that another major problem that affects the implementation of tourism in an area in some countries is crime and violence.

Assaker et al. (2013) have shown that infrastructure and environment have a direct and positive impact on the generation and income from tourism activities. According to these authors, this justifies that the countries that occupy the highest positions in the ranking of tourism competitiveness are industrialized countries with high organizational structures.

According to Caber et al. (2012) high service quality and customer satisfaction are appropriate determinants of a destination's competitiveness.

Consequently, both academic literature and most international organisations argue that tourism can become a tool for economic development in any area. However, it should be noted that without proper planning, tourism not only does not bring benefits, but can also contribute to environmental degradation, displacement of local communities, and the creation of precarious jobs. Accordingly, strategies, policies, and regulations, as well as effective implementation mechanisms, for tourism are needed not only to realise economic benefits but also to avoid its environmental and social impacts.

3. Materials and methods

Tourism is a crucial element for economic development and poverty reduction in developing countries, as it brings in foreign exchange, creates jobs and attracts visitors who improve the quality of life of rural populations, and serves as a means of poverty reduction in many developing countries.

The study on the impact of rural tourism on economic growth in Kosovo was conducted using quantitative analysis. The quantitative method was analyzed to obtain empirical results; therefore, it was necessary to test the hypothesized predictors with rural tourism and economic growth. The empirical results were used to provide some important recommendations for rural tourism and the countryside in the study to identify the relationship between rural tourism and economic growth. Secondary data sources were used to assess the impact of rural tourism on economic growth in Kosovo. The study analyzed time series data for the period 2010–2022 for the dependent variable, i.e., GDP, and independent variables: Tourist spending, the number of domestic and foreign visitors, domestic and foreign overnight stays, and rural tourism index, which are very important and influential for economic development. The data relate to rural tourism and were compiled from the World Development Indicators (WDI) database published of the World Bank, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, statistical offices, and the Kosovo Alternative Tourism Association.

The methods used in the study are as follows: the regression model which helps us to determine the strength and impact of the relationship between GDP and tourist

spending, the number of domestic and foreign visitors, domestic and foreign overnight stays and the rural tourism index, the model Robust and non-robust which will continue to make accurate predictions between GDP and the dependent variables, model Newton-Raphson/Marquardt we use to test the impact of tourism development on economic development and Granger test to show the direction of causality between GDP and spending by tourists.

Model layout:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \beta_4X_4 + \beta_5X_5 + \beta_6X_6 + e_i$$

Y: Economic growth (GDP)

X1: Expenditure of tourists

X2: Local visitors

X3: International visitors

X4: Nights of stay by domestic visitors

X5: Nights of stay by international visitors

X6: Rural tourism index

$$Y = -34.84919 + 0.083974X_1 + 0.644564X_2 + 0.374944X_3 + 0.533652X_4 + 0.238852X_5 + 0.090082X_6 + e$$

From the equation used throughout the study, we can see which of the factors included in the model affect economic growth and how they relate to each other.

4. Results and discussion

For this study, we used a panel data set for the rural places of Kosovo from 2010 to 2022. In order to study the relationship between rural tourism and economic growth, we first perform a descriptive statistical test for the variables that compose our sample, which in our case are analyses. The descriptive analysis was performed to examine the mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum of the variables in Kosovo which is show in **Tables 1** and **2** presents a summary of the regression analysis.

Table 1. Descriptive analysis.

Variables	Mean	standard deviation	min	max.
X1	1	1.72	0	5
X2	69	26.40	42	110
X3	97	63.40	30	193
X4	92	47.06	45	169
X5	165	108.2	46	322
X6	417	82.61	290	550

R-squared = 0.91 shows the strength of the relationship between tourism and GDP, a very strong relationship that shows that the more tourism there is in Kosovo, the more it will affect economic development, especially GDP. Since the coefficient of determination is very close to 1, we can say that this relationship is relatively strong.

When the independent variables are equal to zero, GDP is equal to -34.84919, where GDP will increase by 0.083974 for each additional increase in visitor spending and by 0.644564 for each additional unit of domestic visitors.

Table 2. Regression analysis.

Variables	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
C	-34.84919	7.079853	-4.922305	0.0079
X1	0.083974	0.154576	0.543255	0.6158
X2	0.644564	0.148409	4.343166	0.0122
X3	-0.374944	0.062765	-5.973814	0.0039
X4	-0.533652	0.102954	-5.183412	0.0066
X5	0.238852	0.041116	5.809251	0.0044
X6	0.090082	0.017309	5.204285	0.0065
R-squared	0.915068			
Adjusted R-squared	0.787671			
S.E. of regression	0.683002			
Durbin-Watson stat	2,599282			
F-statistic	7.182779			
Prob (F-statistic)	0.038535			

The coefficient -34.84919 is constant and has no economic significance. The indicator shows the change in GDP in the current year compared to the previous year. In other words, the expenditures made by the visitors in the previous year affected the increase in the GDP of the current year' in the amount of 0.083974 €. The value -0.533652 shows that the overnight stays of domestic visitors two years ago influenced the GDP of the current year in the amount of €0.533652. The number 0.644 shows that if tourism increases by €0.23 today, it is expected that GDP will increase by €0.644 after one year. The number 0.90082 indicates that if tourism increases by €0.23 today, GDP is expected to increase by €0.64 after two years.

Table 3. Correlation analysis.

	GDP	Expenditure of tourists	Domestic visitors	International visitors	Nights of stay for local visitors	Nights of stay for international visitors	Tourist index
GDP	1	0.334862	0.0649	0.026162	0.046429	0.090204	-0.045622
Expenditure of tourists	0.334862	1	0.388077	0.395545	0.307833	0.386651	0.119771
Domestic visitors	0.0649	0.388077	1	0.988127	0.980152	0.990231	0.74499
International visitors	0.026162	0.395545	0.988127	1	0.956965	0.989326	0.727089
Nights of stay for local visitors	0.046429	0.307833	0.980152	0.956965	1	0.96731	0.835303
Nights of stay for international visitors	0.090204	0.386651	0.990231	0.989326	0.96731	1	0.698956
Tourist index	-0.045622	0.119771	0.74499	0.727089	0.835303	0.698956	1

The correlation shows the relationship between GDP and tourist spending, the number of domestic and foreign visitors, the number of overnight stays by domestic and foreign visitors, and the tourism index. The regression is used to analyse how the change in the independent variable, in this case tourism expenditure, affects the dependent variable (GDP).

The **Table 3** shows the correlation coefficient shows that there is a moderate positive correlation between these macroeconomic parameters. In other words, we can say that any increase in GDP is explained by the increase in expenditure and vice versa. From the calculations, we can conclude that there is a moderate positive correlation between these two variables. This shows that as GDP increases tourist spending, the number of domestic and foreign visitors, overnight stays by domestic and foreign visitors, and the rural tourism index also increase to ascertain extent.

Table 4. Model robust and non-robust least squares.

Variables	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
C	-40.82406	3.747543	-10.89355	0.0000
Expenditure of tourists	-0.012201	0.081821	-0.149121	0.8815
Domestic visitors	0.761624	0.078556	9.695241	0.0000
International visitors	-0.408833	0.033223	-12.30577	0.0000
Nights of stay for local visitors	-0.629243	0.054496	-11.54658	0.0000
Nights of stay for international visitors	0.264989	0.021764	12.17578	0.0000
Tourist index	0.104285	0.009162	11.38199	0.0000
Robuts Statistis				
R-squared	0.684466	Adjusted R-squared	0.211164	
Rw-squared	0.989326	Adjusted Rw-squared	0.989326	
Akaike info criterion	31.32341	Schwarz criterion	34.2467	
Deviance	0.376668	Scale	0.146873	
Rn-squared statistic	179.366	Prob (Rn-squared stat.)	0.000000	
Non-robust Statistic				
Mean dependent var	0.876449	S.D. dependent var	1.482235	
S.E. of regression	0.869770	Sum squared resid	3.026002	

According to the Robuts model, in **Table 4** we find that the value of GDP decreases by -0.012201 units for each additional unit of spending by visitors, including overnight stays and local stays, GDP decreases by -0.629243 units, for each additional unit of overnight stays and local stays.

This confirms the fact that in our country, over these 12 years, the increase in GDP has influenced the development of tourism and not the other way round.

R-squared = 0.684466 shows the strength of the relationship between tourism and GDP. Since the coefficient of determination is close to 1, we can say that this relationship is relatively strong, but on the other hand, we need to see if this model is significant or if the coefficients are significant.

The model is used to make a comparison between two averages and proportions of small independent samples, i.e. between the average of GDP and the average of tourism expenditure, the number of domestic and foreign visitors, overnight stays by

domestic and foreign visitors, and the tourism index. The effects of GDP tend to produce higher results as GDP is a dependent variable and has statistically strong parametric parameters, while tourism expenditure, as an independent variable, has less strong parametric parameters.

Table 5. Model newton—Raphson/Marquardt.

Variables	Coefficient	Std. Error	z-Statistic	Prob.
C	-34.84919	7.079853	-4.922305	0.0000
Expenditure of tourists	0.083974	0.154576	0.543255	0.5870
Domestic visitors	0.644564	0.148409	4.343166	0.0000
International visitors	-0.374944	0.062765	-5.973814	0.0000
Nights of stay for local visitors	-0.533652	0.102954	-5.183412	0.0000
Nights of stay for international visitors	0.238852	0.041116	5.809251	0.0000
Tourist index	0.090082	0.017309	5.204285	0.0000
Mean dependent var	0.876449	S.D. dependent var		1.482235
Sum squared resid	1.865966	Root MSE		0.411866
Log likelihood	-7.914487	Akaike info criterion		2.711725
Schwarz criterion	2.964931	Hannan-Quinn criter		2.552114
Deviance	1.865966	Deviance statistic		0.466491
Restr. deviance	21.97019	LR statistic		43.09667
Prob (LR statistic)	0.000000	Pearson SSR		1.865966
Pearson statistic	0.466491	Dispersion		0.466491

According to the results in **Table 5**, we can say that in our country in these 12 years the growth of GDP has influenced the development of tourism and not the other way around. Therefore, we can conclude that the development of tourism in Kosovo should be taken seriously by institutions, as its development will affect the growth of economic development in general and the growth of GDP in particular.

We test the impact of tourism development on economic development using the Newton-Raphson/Marquardt model, which shows that GDP will increase by 0.083974 units for each additional unit of spending made by visitors, and GDP will increase by 0.644564 units for each additional unit of local visitor numbers.

Table 6. Pairwise granger causality test.

TOURISEM COST does not Granger Cause D(GDP)	8	0.07291	0.9313
GDP does not Granger Cause ATNB		3.04847	0.1894

In **Table 6** we used the Granger test because it shows the direction of causality between GDP and spending by tourists.

Since the probability for the H0 hypothesis is 0.9, we say that the expenditures made by tourists cause the increase in GDP. For the opposite hypothesis, we have a probability of 0.1, which is greater than 0.05, so we say that GDP is caused by tourists' spending on tourism development.

5. Conclusion

After all that has been said, it is very important that the responsible institutions in Kosovo find a common vision for the development of tourism, as tourism makes an important contribution to the economic development of the country.

On the other hand, the conditions for the development of tourism in Kosovo are very favourable: the culture of hospitality, interesting traditional customs (especially for foreigners), nature and mountain relief, cultural and historical monuments that favour the development of tourism.

Precisely because of the role of tourism in economic development on the one hand and the favourable potential of Kosovo for tourism development on the other we have analysed this report.

Our results show that the relationship between GDP growth and tourism development has a bilateral and positive long-term causality. This is because the R-squared has a value of 0.91, which shows the strength of the relationship between tourism and GDP.

However, the low level of tourism development in Kosovo in the studied years (2010–2022), analyzed according to the Robuts model, shows that in our country in these 12 years the growth of GDP has influenced the development of tourism and not vice versa that tourism has influenced GDP growth.

The need for of tourism development is also confirmed by the Newton-Raphson method, which shows that tourism development goes hand in hand with economic development, with GDP increas by 0.083974 units for each additional unit of expenditure made by visitors, and GDP increases by 0.644564 units for each additional unit of the number of domestic visitors.

This is confirmed by the Granger test, which shows that the expenditures made by tourist's increase GDP.

The existence of relationships between tourism growth and economic development and the fact that this relationship is only observed in tourism development, justifies the importance of infrastructure creation for tourism growth as an identify factor for economic development.

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