Article

Towards Sustainable Tourism Development in Urban Areas: Case Study on Bucharest as Tourist Destination

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Abstract: The issues of tourism sustainability and urban development have become major priorities for public policy makers across the globe. Today, maybe more than ever, there is a need for managing sustainable tourism development, and this cannot be attained without taking into account environmental problems and their global dimension. Various problems and requirements of society and of the development of urban areas may be solved by transforming the cities into attractive tourist destinations. Therefore, this study explores how sustainable tourism development in urban areas can be basically achieved and managed. The paper discloses some success factors for managing sustainable tourism development in urban areas and emphasizes a case study regarding Bucharest, the capital of Romania, as a tourist destination. The originality and value of this study consist of identifying the main ways of developing sustainable tourism in Bucharest based upon empirical research conducted with the aid of a survey. The findings of this study may be helpful for upcoming research in the area of managing sustainable urban tourism development.

Keywords: sustainable tourism development; urban areas; urban development; tourist destination; tourism management

1. Introduction

Nowadays, maybe more than ever, there is a need for managing sustainable tourism development, and this cannot be attained without taking into account environmental problems and their global dimension. There are many problems and needs of society and of the development of urban areas that may be solved by transforming the cities into attractive tourist destinations. Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore how sustainable tourism development in urban areas can practically be achieved and managed.

Sustainable development is a multidimensional concept, which is related to the environment and resources as well as to the population and industrial and agricultural production [1]. A sustainable behavior of consumption is the key element of long-term development [2] (p. 143). Therefore, achieving sustainable development implies solutions aiming at the same time at the social, political, economic, demographic, and technical fields [1]. Sustainable development may be achieved if it relies on the harmony between economic progress and the boundaries of nature, particularly between the quantity and the regeneration time of natural sources, human-made emissions, and the neutralization capabilities of nature [3].

Therefore, to be more specific, the focus and purpose of this study is to identify the main success factors for managing sustainable tourism development in urban areas, based on a literature review and on a case study regarding Bucharest as a tourist destination. The research was conducted using evidence provided by conceptual papers, research papers, and literature reviews, as well as books and internet sources. In order to answer the research question, we have first revealed some modern approaches in defining sustainable tourism. Secondly, the study disclosed some success factors for managing sustainable tourism development in urban areas. Thirdly, we have emphasized a case study regarding Bucharest, the capital of Romania, as a tourist destination with an eye to identify the main ways of developing sustainable tourism in Bucharest based upon empirical research conducted with the aid of a survey. In order to answer the research question, we have analyzed the published sources, and we have evaluated and interpreted the empirical data collected through the questionnaire created.

The contribution this paper will make to the literature and practice derives from the logical connections of the arguments and counter-arguments for identifying the success factors for managing sustainable tourism development in urban areas, as well as from the possibility of using the findings in comparative urban studies or in order to conceive a strategy for developing Bucharest as a sustainable tourist destination.

2. Modern Approaches in Defining Sustainable Tourism

There are many approaches and ways of defining the concept of sustainable tourism that can be found in the literature, and many of them start the inquiry by making a transition from the concepts of sustainability or sustainable development. The abundance of definitions, meanings, and implications will be further reviewed in order to reveal the essence of the sustainable tourism concept.

Sustainable development may be defined as an all-embracing concept which involves all aspects of human activity and in which all the nations of the world should be involved in Zaharia *et al*. [4] (p. 159). Moreover, it is seen as one of the major challenges of modern evolution. In order to achieve sustainable

development, there is a need to identify the main causes of environmental degradation firstly, to assess its size secondly, to find reasonable solutions to counteract it thirdly, and to reduce its negative impacts on economic and social life fourthly [5] (p. 99).

As Rifkin [6] asserts, a significant impact into the 21st century will be the Third Industrial Revolution, which will radically change all facets of working and living. The social, economic, and political life of the previous industrial revolutions based on fossil fuels was characterized by a conventional top-down organization of society. However, this type of organization is rapidly changing, and new distributed and collaborative relations emerge as a foundation of the green industrial era [6].

The concept of sustainable tourism emerged in the early 1990s, by connecting sustainable development ideas and principles with tourism. This new concept, at that time, was quickly accepted and promoted by many international and national organizations. For instance, the International Union for Nature Conservation, World Federation for Nature Protection, and the European Federation of National and Natural Parks defined sustainable tourism in 1991 as development, marketing, and management of all forms/types of tourism taking into account the natural, social, and economic environment and preserving the natural and cultural resources for future generations [7,8]. From this definition it follows that tourism (ecotourism, green tourism, rural tourism, business tourism, urban tourism, *etc.*) should be based on the principles of sustainable development [9] (p. 250). Currently, there is a strengthening of political concerns for nature conservation due to the aggravation of environmental problems and due to the acknowledgment of the importance of maintaining the quality of the environment for future generations [5] (p. 100).

According to the World Tourism Organization, the development of sustainable tourism responds to the present needs of tourists and to those of the host regions, and also protects and increases future chances and opportunities. Through sustainable tourism, all resources can be managed so as to satisfy needs and to maintain cultural integrity, biological diversity, ecological dimensions, and the life system [10]. Accordingly, sustainable tourism can be defined as a form of tourism that takes into account present and future impacts (economic impact, social impact, and environmental impact), and responds to the various needs of tourists, industry, and local communities, as well as the environment [11] (p. 85).

Tourism sustainability is a complex concept because it has a latent, relative, and multidimensional nature [12] (p. 277). The multidimensional nature of tourism sustainability is based on three distinct sustainability dimensions: environmental, social, and economic sustainability [13] (pp. 5–6). As a result, sustainable tourism must undertake the environmental, social, and economic principles of sustainability (Figure 1) [14] (p. 3). This way the synergy effect is produced at the level of tourism sustainability. As a general rule, synergy means that certain features occur within the whole system without occurring in any of the subsystems [15] (p. 68).
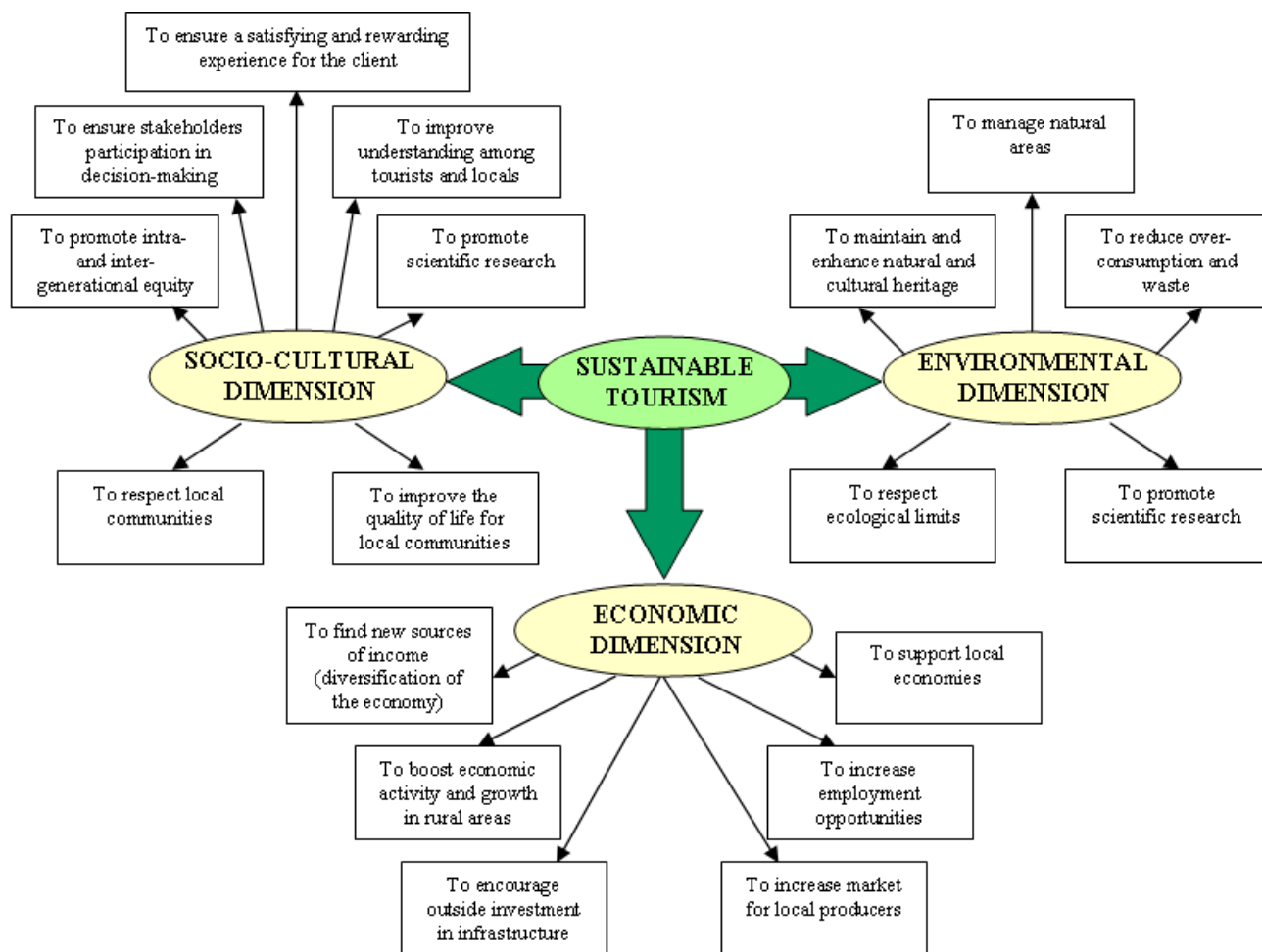
To ensure a satisfying and rewarding experience for the client

To ensure stakeholders participation in decision-making

To improve understanding among tourists and locals

To promote intra- and inter-generational equity

To promote scientific research

SOCIO-CULTURAL DIMENSION

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSION

To manage natural areas

To maintain and enhance natural and cultural heritage

To reduce over-consumption and waste

To respect local communities

To improve the quality of life for local communities

To respect ecological limits

To promote scientific research

ECONOMIC DIMENSION

To find new sources of income (diversification of the economy)

To support local economies

To boost economic activity and growth in rural areas

To increase employment opportunities

To encourage outside investment in infrastructure

To increase market for local producers

Figure 1. Principles of sustainable tourism. Source: Adapted from White *et al.* [14] (p. 4).

Sustainable tourism covers all types/forms of tourism: conventional mass tourism, cultural tourism, mountain tourism, seaside tourism, spa tourism, business tourism, medical tourism, rural tourism, urban tourism, *etc.* Regardless of the type or tourism activities, they should take on the principles of sustainable tourism: (1) the local community should initiate the tourism activity by its own means, maintaining control over tourism development in the area; (2) tourism should provide jobs to the residents, thus improving the quality of life; (3) the accepted international standards in tourism should be used when the guidelines for tour operators, for monitoring the impact of various tourism activities, and for setting the acceptability limits for different areas are established; (4) educational and training programs to improve management in the area of protecting natural and cultural resources must be implemented [16].

3. Success Factors for Managing Sustainable Tourism Development in Urban Areas

Nowadays, cities must assume an important role in addressing environmental problems. They are innovation, efficiency, investment, and productivity centers, but they are also an important cause of climate change. The solutions to sustainable development and global climate change are to be found in the ecological urbanization of cities. Therefore, the campaigns and projects carried out by urban managers in order to reach the sustainable development of regions, cities, and rural areas around are becoming extremely important these days [9] (p. 254).

The role of urban areas in sustainable development is more and more recognized at a global level. Providing services to residents and businesses, creating jobs, stimulating research, and development within and outside the economic sector are only some of the functions of the cities. However, these functions are not only limited to administrative boundaries of cities, but they also create benefits for the whole region in which cities are included. A success condition for a modern city is to demonstrate that it meets the environmental requirements [17] (p. 379).

Even if local socio-economic development is achievable and accelerated in urban areas, these are, at the same time, places of environmental problems [18] (p. 79). Cities are special local environments, and the manner in which they should be governed and managed is determined by their features [19] (p. 31). A feasible urban development strategy should include elements relating to the image and brand of the city, elements which will ensure a competitive advantage for the local community [20] (p. 734). Today, business organizations and not-for-profit organizations, among which is the government, need to create and maintain permanent and effective mechanisms which to enable them to adjust in a timely manner in order to respond to trend changes that characterize the environment in which they perform [21] (p. 7).

In this context, the local authorities, along with other partners (stakeholders), may establish the strategy for sustainable urban development and the suitable forms of assistance [17] (p. 383). Today, a new paradigm is emerging, in which the individual is recognized as a partner of the public administration, being referred to as a "stakeholder" [22] (p. 41). This partnership of urban stakeholders may lead to the development of urban areas through integrated urban transport systems for the accessibility and mobility of citizens, as well as environmentally friendly buildings that use renewable energy [17] (p. 383). Nowadays cities are operating on a global market, competing with other urban areas around the world for investments, residents, and tourists, and thus there is a need for competitiveness [17] (380). When tourists are choosing their holidays packages they make comparisons, evaluate the possible destinations, and estimate the benefits and drawbacks of each one as a potential holiday destination [23] (p. 808). The tourists have the liberty to set up their personal itineraries to follow; however, they are not free to interfere in the natural course of the environment they are visiting [24].

The negative ecological, economic, and social effects of tourism may be lessened through professional urban management [10] (p. 256). It is important to mention that [19] has identified a relatively clear distinction between urban management, with reference to the officials executing the policies, and urban governance, which refers to additional components [19] (p. 34). The author has concluded in his article that urban management is a reform of city administration and that its task is to create equilibrium between social and economic development, which have a fragile coexistence [19].

Tourism enhancement implies planning, development, management, and continuous improvement [25]. The continuous improvement process should be applied to all forms of tourism, whether we are referring to urban tourism, resorts, rural and coastal areas tourism, or mountains and protected areas tourism [12]. Recreational activities may be developed within natural areas and may bring significant revenues both to those who manage them and to the local communities. Tourism is one of the few economic sectors through which sustainable development of these areas can be achieved, and ecotourism is the most accepted form of sustainable tourism for any country or region of the world [10] (p. 256). Small tourism enterprises have the potential to help tourism destinations to progress towards sustainability objectives because of their numerical dominance, their central role in human activities, and their increasing importance within the framework of sustainable tourism development [26] (p. 575).

One of the main barriers to achieving sustainable tourism refers to the difficulty of measuring the sustainability level of a tourism destination. This barrier has hindered the decision-making processes and made it difficult to encounter the needs of the tourism destinations [12] (p. 278). Achieving sustainable tourism means taking the effects and needs into account in its planning and development [11] (p. 85).

Furthermore, one of the main challenges in achieving sustainable tourism is to fill the existing gap between the stages of planning and implementation. The stage of planning includes the design of methodologies, tourism policies, and technological know-how. The stage of implementation refers to the execution of tourism projects and plans by public agencies and tourism companies [12] (p. 279).

In order to plan and manage sustainable tourism development there is a need for thorough insight into the present levels of sustainability or at least sustainability performance, because this is a precondition for designing effective and efficient policies [13] (p. 4). The definitions of sustainability indicators must take into account the interconnectivity in the tourism system and must reflect the distinctive environmental, economic, and socio-cultural attributes of the destination or entity to which they would be applied [26].

Development of information and communication technologies has created the premises for better collaboration and communication between tourism organizations, on one hand, and between them and their clients (the tourists), on the other hand [27] (pp. 84–85). According to [28], it is predicted that the Internet will be the key to future management of the tourism sector, in the sense that only the companies that will use the technology to identify the customer needs and to respond to them will survive on the market [28] (p. 501). There is a need to apply some innovative technologies within the tourism sector, since certain services are still based on outdated and unsuccessful methods. The investments should focus on developing the infrastructure in the tourism sector, mainly the major structures such as airports, retail centers, theaters, museums, hotels, and conference centers, which may influence the visible and invisible impact of the tourism sector on the environment [24] (p. 127). Tourism companies with a well-designed website have access to a vast tourism market, and they can offer their services to a wide range of clients both at the national and international level [28] (p. 492).

Information and communication technologies may be used by the companies to increase service flexibility and adaptability to the needs of the clients [27] (pp. 84–85). For instance, consistent with [29] (p. 133), through the Web, the museum "breaks" the traditional value chain in the sense that it enhances its role from being just a "commodity" with value added to the local tourism services to becoming the catalyst of an innovative "niche" supply developed around the cultural event. Moreover, if effectively integrated in the service process, new technologies could actively support the development of strategies related to innovation, collaboration, and value co-creation, playing a key role in providing competitive services [27] (p. 85).

4. Case Study Regarding Bucharest as a Tourist Destination

4.1. Data and Methodology

Bucharest, the capital of Romania, was included in the online contest "The Best City to Visit Travel Tournament 2013 Championship" initiated by the site Foxnomad to designate the city visited in 2013 by the blogger Anil Polat [30]. Even though Bucharest did not win the final online contest, it still remained

the second destination to visit according to the voters. This is not surprising if we are taking into account the variety of places of interest for tourists in Bucharest such as museums, parks, administrative buildings, restaurants, clubs, *etc.* The Romanian capital fought hard against and defeated Aswan, Rome, Cape Town, Edinburgh, and Granada and it was finally eliminated by another Romanian city, Sibiu [30].

The urban essence that makes Bucharest a unique city, with its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, must be found in business urban life, as well as in resident and tourist life [31] (p. 277). Therefore, the approach of the sustainable urban tourism development should start from the people, from the residents and tourists. They should be partners of the government, of the public administration, of the policy-makers. Consequently, we assert that the opinion of residents and tourists matters because they are the beneficiaries of the public and private services provided. When choosing a destination, the tourists are searching for those services that best suit their needs.

Furthermore, we argue that any policy or strategy in the area of sustainable urban tourism development should start from the needs and desires of the people and should be connected to the principles of sustainable development. Thus, we assert that the method we used in our research was the best approach in this context.

In order to identify people's opinions regarding the main ways of developing sustainable tourism in Bucharest, we have created a questionnaire which was applied between 14–17 March 2013 at Romania's Tourism Fair. The questionnaire used was constructed based on a five-level Likert scale of increasing intensity where 1 indicates strongly disagree (very badly) and 5 designates strongly agree (very good). The sampling method was random and 236 subjects, residents aged 18 and over, participated in the research.

Most of the respondents are aged between 18 and 25 years (34% of the respondents), followed by respondents aged between 36 and 45 years (26% of the respondents), respondents aged between 26 and 35 years (25% of the respondents), respondents aged between 46 and 55 years (11% of the respondents), and respondents aged over 55 years (4% of the respondents). Regarding gender, 56% of the respondents are female, while 44% of them are male. The research adequately reflects gender distribution in Bucharest in statistical terms.

The information collected was processed using Microsoft Excel 2003, both for centralizing and analyzing data.

The next section of the article briefly presents the results of the survey, emphasizing people's opinions regarding the main attractions of Bucharest as tourist destinations, recreational facilities and sources of information about them, institutions involved in promoting sustainable tourism in urban areas, and the role of education in promoting sustainable urban tourism.

4.2. Results of the Survey

4.2.1. Tourist Attractions and Places to Visit

With reference to the main tourist attractions of Bucharest (Figure 2), among the responses to the question "What comes to mind when you think about the main attractions of Bucharest as a tourist destination?" the most common answer of the respondents was "Palace of Parliament (People's House)", with 21% of all persons surveyed. In second place came "Dimitie Gusti National Village Museum", with 13% of the respondents, followed by "Grigore Antipa Natural History Museum", with 12% of the

respondents. Less than 5% of persons surveyed associated the attractions of Bucharest with churches or parks.

For example, Dimitrie Gusti National Village Museum has a website only in the Romanian language. Therefore, we strongly recommend the translation of museums' official websites not only in English, but also in other foreign languages, so as to increase information availability and to attract a bigger number of foreign visitors. Furthermore, museums may rely on multimedia information systems in order to redesign their traditional services and to promote new cultural experiences. Multimedia information systems allow museums to involve a worldwide network of potential visitors in the production of the cultural service [32] (p. 407).
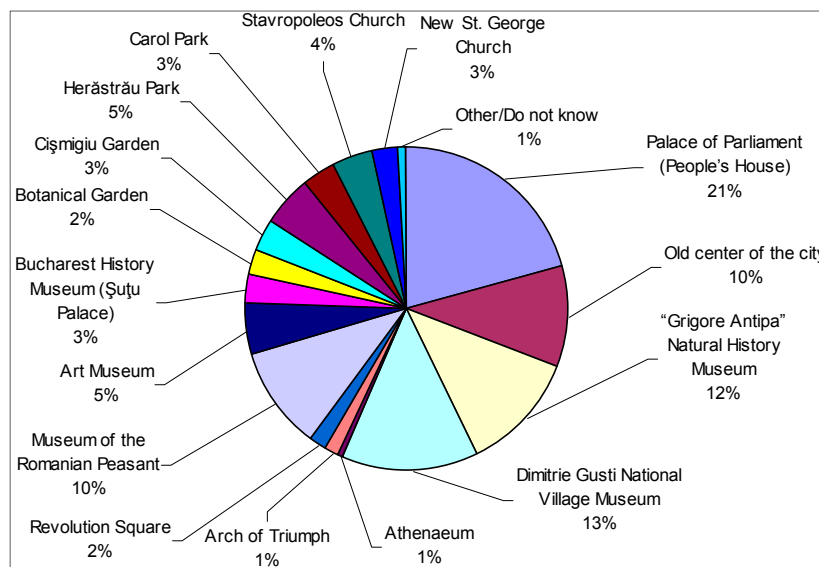
Figure 2. Main tourist attractions in Bucharest. Source: Authors, based on the survey.

Organizing different festivals and other cultural events in the city may be another way of attracting tourists [33] (p. 19).

Regarding the preferences of the respondents (Figure 3), among the responses to the question "What do you like to visit in Bucharest?" the most common answer of the respondents was "museums", with 45% of the responses, followed by "buildings" together with "historical center", each accounting for 19% of respondents. At the opposite pole, the "parks" are preferred only by 4% of the respondents.
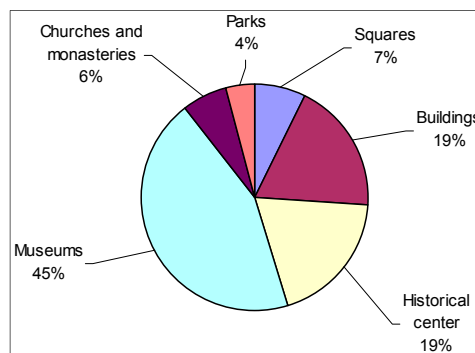
Figure 3. Types of places chosen by the respondents to visit in Bucharest. Source: Authors, based on the survey.

The heterogeneousness of the Romanian museums may help in playing an important role in educating visitors as long as there are appropriate management and marketing strategies implemented. Moreover, these strategies may benefit the development of information and communication technologies so as to lead to providing competitive cultural services [32] (p. 408).

On the topic of the recreational facilities (Figure 4), 10% of the respondents appreciate them as "very good", 43% as "good", 22% as "neither good nor bad", 19% as "bad", and 6% as "very bad".
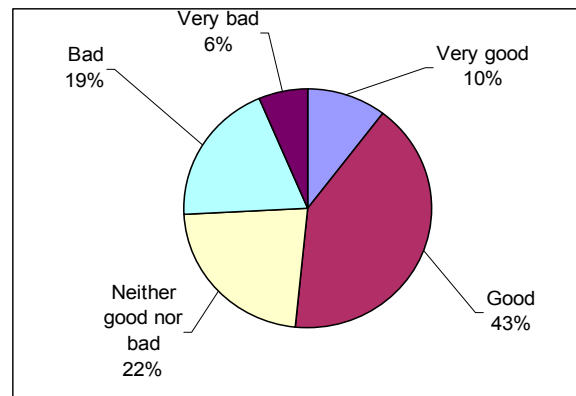
Figure 4. Recreational facilities in Bucharest. Source: Authors, based on the survey.

4.2.2. Sources of Information

The Internet is the main source of information regarding tourist destinations (Figure 5) for the respondents participating in the study, with 88% of them choosing it. Way behind as information source are television (9%), radio (2%), and newspapers (1%).
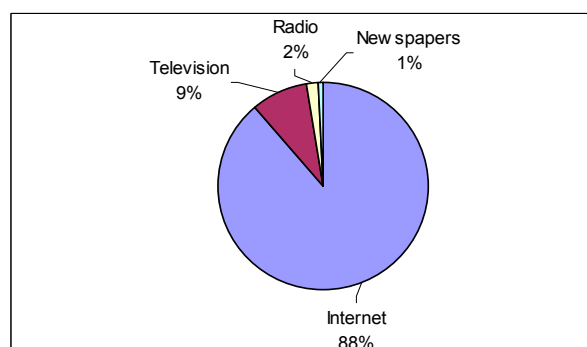
Figure 5. Sources of information regarding tourist destinations. Source: Authors, based on the survey.

4.2.3. Ways of Developing Sustainable Tourism in Bucharest

Regarding the role of institutions in promoting sustainable tourism in urban areas (Figure 6), a majority of respondents (60%) consider that the public administration (regional and local public authorities −36% and central public authorities −24%) are in the best position to implement programs to promote and develop sustainable tourism in urban areas. In second place came the non-governmental organizations (19% of the respondents), followed by citizens (16% of respondents).
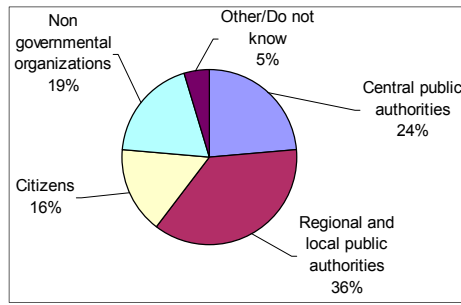
Figure 6. Institutions involved in promoting sustainable tourism in urban areas. Source: Authors, based on the survey.

Public authorities may create an urban brand in order to attract tourists, and to convince them to recommend the city to other visitors [34] (p. 132).

According to the performed study, the educational activities on environmental issues contribute to achieving sustainable urban tourism for 60% of the respondents, of which 11% strongly agree and 49% agree (Figure 7).
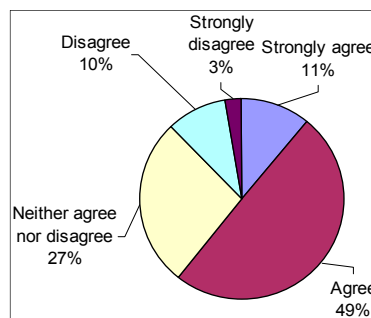

Figure 7. Important role of education in achieving sustainable urban tourism. Source: Authors, based on the survey.

The main ways of developing sustainable tourism in Bucharest (Figure 8) are the limitation of waste and environment degradation, as well as the integration of tourism into planning (both with 18% of respondents). In addition, applying better management based on sustainable urban tourism strategies is seen as a way of developing sustainable tourism in Bucharest by 15% of the respondents, followed by educating people and maintaining the natural and cultural heritage (both with 14% of the respondents).

Figure 8. Ways of developing sustainable tourism in Bucharest. Source: Authors, based on the survey.

Ecological education aims to increase the awareness and understanding of the relationships between people and nature in order to maintain a balance between the present requirements and the future needs [5].

Also, sustainable tourism in Bucharest may be developed through respecting ecological limits (10% of the respondents), developing sustainable recreational activities (6% of the respondents), and visiting the city by foot, by bike, or using the touristic bus (5% of the respondents).

The public authorities may analyze the deficiencies and barriers faced in the process of strategic planning of sustainable tourism in Bucharest, and they may identify the main problems and may indicate the development priorities.

5. Discussion

The results of the survey reveal that there are some points worth highlighting. On one hand, the capital city may be a good destination for cultural tourism due to the heterogeneousness of the museums and other cultural places and events (festivals, concerts, *etc.*) that can be organized. On the other hand, there are many actions that need to be done in order to promote Bucharest as a cultural tourist destination. For instance, increasing information availability, the translation of official websites into English and other foreign languages, and using multimedia information systems are only some of the recommendations to redesign the traditional services and to promote new cultural experiences for tourists.

Another idea emerging from the data analyzed is that the Internet is the main source of information regarding tourist destinations. Therefore, we strongly recommend using the advantages of the Internet to attract tourists, and to further involve them in the production of tourist services. Social networks like Twitter or Facebook may be used to promote Bucharest as a tourist destination due to rapid dissemination of information. Not unintentionally, we have presented the results of the blog online contest "The Best City to Visit Travel Tournament 2013 Championship" in the beginning of Section 4 of this article. Such online contests or ways of interaction attract people, and may be used within the strategies to promote tourist urban destinations.

The public administration is in the best position to implement programs, policies, and strategies to promote and develop sustainable tourism in urban areas. These strategies may benefit the development of information and communication technologies so as to lead to providing competitive services. Public authorities may create an urban brand in order to attract tourists and to convince them to recommend the city to other visitors.

The main ways of developing sustainable tourism in Bucharest identified by the respondents suggest that they care about the environment, as well as about the natural and cultural heritage.

On the basis of what has been revealed above, we may bring the paper to a close by saying that it may be appropriate to find a way to apply better management based on sustainable urban tourism strategies. The public administration, the residents, and the private companies, as well as other stakeholders, play an important role in this endeavor. The development of Bucharest as a sustainable tourist destination is possible only if there is a real partnership between all actors more or less involved in tourist activities.

6. Conclusions

This study has revealed some success factors for managing sustainable tourism development in urban areas and has emphasized a case study regarding Bucharest, the capital of Romania, as a tourist destination. The main conclusions of this study may be summarized as follows: (1) among the success factors for managing sustainable tourism development in urban areas, the strategic planning plays an important role; (2) sustainable tourism development in Romania may be achieved through developing urban areas as touristic destinations; and (3) the subjects comprised in this study appreciate that sustainable tourism development in Bucharest may be achieved in different manners.

The originality and value of this study consist of identifying the main ways of developing sustainable tourism in Bucharest based upon empirical research conducted with the aid of a survey. These ways of developing sustainable tourism in Bucharest are the following: limitation of waste and environment degradation, integration of tourism into planning, practice of better management based on sustainable urban tourism strategies, education, preservation of the natural and cultural heritage, avoidance of exceeding ecological limits, and development of sustainable recreational activities. Any policy or strategy in the area of sustainable urban tourism development should start from the needs and desires of the people and should be connected to the principles of sustainable development.

Our current experience advises us that there is no panacea for successful sustainable urban tourism development. The findings of this study can inform future research on urban sustainability by using them in comparative studies or as a starting point for developing policies and strategies in the field. We suggest that further research should be done in the direction of identifying the opinions of the representatives of the public administration and of tourism organizations, and to use them along with the findings of this study to conceive a strategy for developing Bucharest as sustainable tourist destination. Another direction for future research could be to replicate the survey in various cities from different regions in order to find out how local culture may influence the approach of sustainable urban tourism and what its effects are (if any) on the development preferences.

Author Contributions

Andreea Zamfir and Razvan-Andrei Corbos designed the research and identified the logical connections of the arguments and counter-arguments; Andreea Zamfir collected the data; Razvan-Andrei Corbos organized the data; Andreea Zamfir and Razvan-Andrei Corbos analyzed the data; Andreea Zamfir and Razvan-Andrei Corbos wrote the paper. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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