

Article

Fostering Urban Destination Prosperity through Post COVID-19 Sustainable Tourism in Craiova, Romania

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Abstract: In accordance with the 2030 Agenda, the prosperity of tourist destinations holds a crucial role in the sustainable development of urban areas. Tourism represents an imperative solution in transitioning from survival to success after the COVID-19 pandemic. The stakeholders in the field should introduce new tourism forms that enable a more comprehensive strategy for managing and developing responsible tourism, bringing into focus new skills, resources, and levels for change to develop resilience, urban community satisfaction, and the unique intrinsic attraction of each tourist destination in Romania. This study develops a model of prosperity for urban tourist destinations, which can be applied to medium-large cities in Romania. We propose for the city of Craiova the use and identification of four spheres of sustainability, which in turn have a set of 17 indicators. The research method used to determine the indicators has two stages: (1) the analysis of the specialized literature to identify the appropriate indicators for an urban destination and (2) statistical analyzes and interviews with internal stakeholders (residents), which present their tourist perspective of the city. This article tackles an innovative concept, called prosperity and innovation in Craiova tourism, which can be implemented in all tourism niches and brings new development perspectives that correspond to the norms of sustainable development and their direction towards sustainability. The article addresses the concept of prosperity in tourism and contains information about: the definition of prosperity, the concept of prosperity (an engine of innovation in tourism and its implications), but also perspectives for a prosperous tourism policy in Craiova tourism.

Keywords: sustainable development; prosperity; innovation in tourism; performance; post COVID-19; urban tourist destinations; Craiova tourism; sustainable tourism



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1. Introduction

According to Kasser et al. (2007), the term “prosperity” is defined as the capacity to stimulate economic growth via consumption [1]. The integration of such a concept, “prosperity in tourism”, in the elements of travel packages, would enhance the economic development of tourist resorts/urban tourist destinations in Romania, attracting significant flows of foreign tourists, allowing them to pay the full price for the services offered by service provider units [2]. Tourism services that focus on sustainability are a solution for the tourism and hospitality industry in the post-SARS-CoV-2 period (2022–2030) [3], as mostly tourism companies made significant efforts to improve production and control costs of production of customized tourist packages due to the economic changes resulting from the outbreak of the coronavirus [4].

On the other hand, in the context of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, sustainable tourism such as ecotourism can represent a viable and flexible solution for economic recovery [5] of the development and valorization of new destinations [6]. Tourism services in the rural and urban areas of ecotourism destinations in Romania, have positive effects for hotel managers as well as for the local population in the protected area [7].

Changes in tourism were not always innovative, nor have they managed to change anything in the course of history, but they can represent a real mechanism of improvement, redefinition, and renewal in time and space for any urban destination, mountain, spa, and seaside tourist destination in a region and even a county in Romania. This mechanism works due to a simple principle called tourist torus, which is the engine of innovation in tourism. This engine is based on an equally simple and efficient principle based on two elements: tourist objectives and tourists.

However, this new branch of the economy can recover sufficiently to ensure sustainability in order to achieve sustainable growth and to make the transition from a classic tourism to a sustainable tourism; a “leap” is not necessary, instead, the secret is awareness through everything we do. Nowadays, the countries that were once tourism pioneers are also facing rapid continuous development, signalling the consequences of this fact, while the position of European leaders engaged in tourism is threatened as the distances are starting to decrease. What is there to be done, given how things are evolving? The answer to the question is change, and the best example is the engine of a car that is damaged and overwhelmed by the situation, no longer yielding, and that must be replaced with an efficient, refined, and environmentally friendly one. The same must be carried out in tourism. “Innovation prospects in a prosperous tourism” includes information related to the context of innovation and what impact it has on tourism.

Innovation happens rapidly and unexpectedly for tourism (a fundamental feature in the Romanian tourism economy) in strategy, policy, but also in the development of sustainable tourism in search of increased competitiveness for products, companies, and urban tourist destinations [8,9]. Thus, there is a growing literature on tourism innovation relations at the level of products and tourist destinations [10–18], but there were found few works on tourism and prosperity assessment added to national development and innovation strategy and policy or the connections between prosperity development strategy and prosperity innovation policy for urban tourism destinations [9,19,20] and the relationships between prosperity policy and tourism innovation policy.

There is a phenomenon at the moment called “lack of mobility innovation in tourism”, which raises some conceptual questions about the real and symbolic representations of inequality and differentiation expressed in the mobility of leisure and tourism. In the subchapter “An Innovative Approach to Prosperous Tourism”, we show a detailed model for a prosperity-oriented economy, e-commerce strategies as an innovative tool, solving the problems of productivity and growth of developing SMEs, the effect of prosperity on tourists, the Venus Project [21], and the first steps in building a different tourism. It is about innovation at another level and the analysis of a viable vision and strategies; prosperity equals performance.

The level of development already reached a high level. The success of innovation is to avoid its transformation into trivial, routine things. The economy needs an effective prosperity-oriented model to improve the low productivity of the tourism workforce. Therefore, with this model, we can achieve things to ensure a sustainable future so that the generations to come enjoy the same environment as ours, or a cleaner one, and, most importantly, prosperity. Now, it is time to be aware of the danger and to act on the negative consequences that will follow if we continue to live this way, or the situation will become critical if we do not understand the danger now and we continue to develop the current situation.

We consider that relevant to this research article is the new approach, knowing that in the future, the tourism industry, the so called hospitality industry, will be challenged to provide increased value for money, either by reducing costs based on innovation, imperative changes in production processes, and marketing of tourist packages or through product modifications offering prosperous and varied tourist experiences for tourists, such as multi-options, tourists being selective, quality conscious, and sometimes saturated with “selling dreams” contained in purchased tourist packages.

Additionally, the new model applied for the sustainability of a destination was subject to an imperative analysis and thematic interviews related to the purpose of research, being totally different from previous models approached in research: two actors involved in the tourist act, tourists and local communities, acting as a balance on the prosperity of the components involved.

2. Literature Review

In November 2019, the first city in the world where COVID-19 was detected was Wuhan [22]. Thus, at the beginning of 2020, as a result of the outbreak of SARS-CoV-2, almost every country on Earth gradually began to stop travel and issue quarantine orders, severely affecting tourism and sightseeing in urban tourist destinations, which eventually led to a monotonous lifestyle with limited activities of practicing tourism and daily routine due to working from home [23–34]. This highly contagious virus [35] was considered devastating for the tourism and hospitality industry in 2020 [36–40], the alarming manifestations induced by COVID-19 had extremely negative effects on mental health, the well-being of the staff engaged in tourism, and also on the population [41]. Before the onset of the coronavirus in January 2020, the tourism industry was experiencing continuous expansion [42]. The tourism can be considered a segment with a growing workforce; and on the other hand, tourism organizations were forced by the onset of SARS-CoV-2 to make staffing reductions in order to manage staff costs in hostels and even travel agencies [43].

As a result of the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, a very large number of employees in the tertiary activity sector (tourism) struggled with remarkably increased levels of job turnover nationally and globally [44]. Among the most affected industries during the economic and health crisis between 2020 and 2022 was home-sharing, also known as collaborative tourism [45], to which transit tourism, event and festival tourism, and cultural tourism can be added. The only hope for tourism growth during the COVID-19 pandemic was represented by the online platforms [46], which significantly contributed to the recovery, decongestion, and revitalization of the tourism and hospitality industry between 2020 and 2023.

Prosperity represents one of the main economic indicators [47] fundamental in achieving the development of sustainable and innovative tourism for medium-large urban destinations in Romania. Thus, for prosperity in the context of an urban tourist destination, it is predictably necessary to attract safety, prosperous conditions regarding the comfort of residents and also of tourists, unique experiences that are at the same time of a clearly superior quality to each tourist [48], spectacular landscapes from an aesthetic and visual point of view, the valorization of the ecosystem environment (terrestrial and aquatic) of the destination, and an increased standard of effectiveness through the appropriate evaluation and planning of strategies, policies, tourism development, and management plans for each tourist destination.

Tourism that enhances urban tourism destination prosperity and harmony includes a set of important topics of sustainable tourism development and innovation, such as strengthening socio-economic foundations, group communication with stakeholders, and socio-cultural and professional contacts within tourism organizations, the political and historical domain, safety, responsible corporate necessity (the business sector), mutual understanding and equity for peace in their complex causal relationships [49], but also partnerships and collaborations. The presence of urban tourist destinations on the entire surface of the Earth increases the sales capacity of the tourist packages that they produce and thus results in a significant increase in the economic and community prosperity of the geographical space [50].

A big part of the tourism development implies tourism and community development, competitiveness, and societal prosperity. This is why more and more cities and countries are heading for tourism as an important element in their economic portfolio. Differentiating poverty from prosperity includes cultural and equity issues, which are highly studied, especially for developing nations, and reflected through social impact, community involvement,

and pro-poverty tourism [51–54]. In richer nations, there are examples from Australia [55] and the USA [56–58].

Innovation, the creation of new tourist products, and the development of new tourist activities/services represent three extremely important elements for achieving tourist prosperity in Craiova compared to other urban areas such as Slatina, Târgu Jiu, and Drobeta Turnu Severin. Thus, as an imperative process in tourism, innovation refers to the applicability of new policies and credible strategies after COVID-19, effective organizational methods and adequate planning, but also to the offering of revolutionary tourism products and services or ways of providing these products of a tourist area, such as a mountain, spa, or seaside resort. The rapid implementation of information and communication technologies (ICT) as a repercussion of the start of the coronavirus in 2020, had a positive influence on the way in which tourism and its complementary activities were reorganized and developed [59]. The revitalization and personalization of innovative tourism products were as well correlated with the needs and wishes of every tourist who wanted to visit an urban tourist destination, as in the case of the old centre of the city of Craiova, Oltenia Region.

Moreover, sustainable innovations allow tourism firms the opportunity to put into practice multiple perspectives to assimilate ingenious methods to raise and develop business environments in ways that subtly diminish negative social and environmental actions, issuing possible advantages or innovative particularities for medium and long-term economic development [60,61]. At the same time, innovation in the field of food represents a very important parameter for restaurants, terraces, cafes, and confectionery to have better (efficient) post-COVID-19 performances in the near future [62].

Given the accelerated dynamism of the environment, businesses have no alternative but to focus their activities productively and efficiently [63]. This can be achieved with the help of an innovative strategy [64–66]. Innovation, according to researchers, represents the provisional process of measures and processes to modernize and correct the performance of tourism products and services to multiply the perceived effectiveness of consumers or users [64,65]. The innovative solutions that appear in the management processes become an integrated part and often a prerequisite for a medium-large urban tourist destination (such as the city of Craiova, Oltenia Region) to obtain a competitive advantage [66], compared to other urban destinations from Romania. Innovative tourism destinations can be described in terms of constituting a response to the ubiquitous uncertainty in a highly competitive tourism market for services, unique tourism offers, personalized tourism packages, and unforgettable tourism experiences. More precisely, the internal and external tourist market is being transformed by the new uncertainties resulting from the potentially transformative reconfigurations of post-COVID-19 information technologies, especially the internet; in addition, the tourism industry tries to integrate controls that will reduce such uncertainties regarding the competitiveness of urban tourist destinations [67].

3. Materials and Methodology

3.1. Field of Interest

Craiova, the county seat of Dolj (Figure 1), is a “hub of urban growth in the Oltenia development region” [68], with a mixed economic profile and numerous complementary services. It has a reduced tourist functionality [69], with multiplier values for the 2022–2030 period of sustainable development and innovation of the urban destination regarding the overall economic growth of the Oltenia Region.

From a demographic perspective, it has approx. 300,000 inhabitants and is located in the central-southern part of the Oltenia region, remarkably spanning for over six centuries. It represents a considerable hub of urban growth for the entire region [70].

Craiova is located in a relatively low-lying plain area, part of the vast Romanian Plain. Bearing in mind that it is located in a relatively low plain area, it does not present visually and aesthetically impressive landscapes compared to a city in a mountainous area, but on the other hand, the existence of terraces led to the establishment of small hills that delimit the city [71].

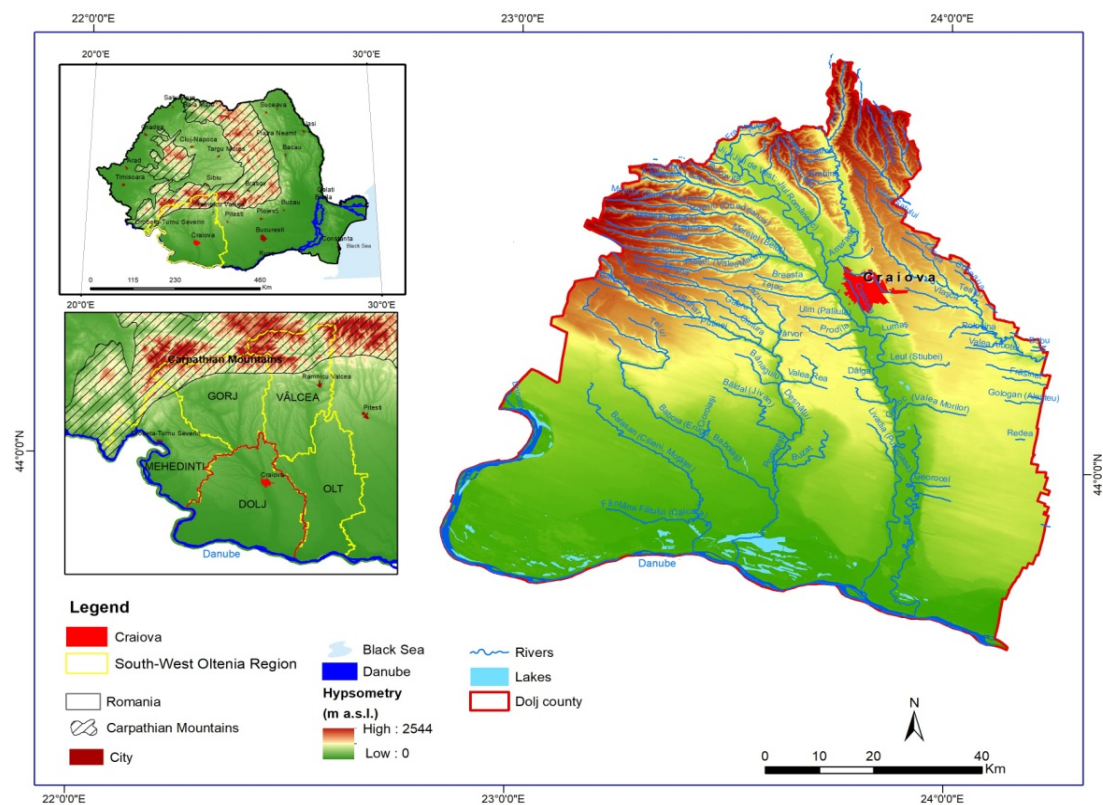


Figure 1. Localization of Craiova in the local, regional, and national context. Source: authors' processing using ArcGIS 10.7.1.

3.2. Data Sources

We address the issue of prosperity, which is generally an important dimension of economic tourism rarely examined internationally. In an era characterized by digitalization and technological innovation in economic activities, rapid industrialization, and their consequences on the environment, the only solution for tourism to maintain its upward trajectory in the global market and ensure continuity for future generations is to become sustainable [72]. This means being a nucleus from a social, economic, political, and environmental perspective in sustainable development. Digitalization brought about certain changes in consumer perspectives when it comes to purchasing tourism products [73]. The blockade caused by COVID-19 encouraged the population to shift towards online shopping and the use of electronic platforms. Delivery techniques gradually saw increases on a monthly basis during the coronavirus pandemic [74–77].

Tourism is a sector where we constantly meet the need to recruit new staff, hence the notions of “workplace learning” and “practical training”. The exchange of knowledge available outside the workplace is included in the innovation mechanism. As Walder said, “once a company is able to share its information with another group, then we can talk about increasing productivity, because this knowledge exchange supports innovation and also ensures that implementation takes place” [78].

Qualitative and quantitative research methods were used in the present study to fulfil the objectives of the research: (1) consolidation of specialized literature, (2) proposing a model of the prosperity of urban destinations in Romania, (3) identification of indicators on the four spheres of sustainability that can be applied to medium-large cities in Romania, and (4) investigating the forms of tourism that can bring prosperity to the sphere of attractiveness in the city. Thus, with regard to the qualitative research methods that were used, we have the analysis of documents and the development of a new paradigm by proposing a relatively new concept, prosperity in tourism, through desk research [79–81], and for the quantitative research methods we used the statistical–mathematical analysis.

Following the application of the four objectives of the research, the determination of a model of the prosperity of urban destinations resulted. As a working method or data collection method, for a qualitative evaluation of the information presented in the study, the authors used the qualitative interview with open questions [82] and closed questions. The opinion poll consisted of asking questions to a sample of 384 people (internal stakeholders—residents) from the municipality of Craiova during April–May 2023. The purpose of the applicability of the interview consisting in seven short questions (Appendix A) was represented by the search for spontaneity in the responses of the residents of the city of Craiova to the questions asked by the authors [83,84], in terms of forms of tourism, which would represent an innovation of the prosperity brought to Craiova tourism. The interview wanted to underline only the main tourist issues relevant for the city in the allocated time, following that in future research, the interview is to be expanded and maybe transformed in a questionnaire on broader tourism discussion about the city and ways of process improvements according to the residents' perception.

The residents of the city were asked to answer short questions through face-to-face interviews lasting approximately 5–7 min. The sample size was determined using Morgan's table [85] and population size $m = 289,971$ by domicile on 1 January 2023, with an error of 5.0% and a confidence level of 95%. The data of the interview applied in the city of Craiova, were analyzed with SPSS Statistics software 15.0 version. The methodology used in this research included two important statistical analyzes: the chi-square test and correlation analysis using Pearson's correlation coefficient.

Chi-square test: It was used to investigate the association between two nominal variables. In this case, the chi-square test was used to determine if there are significant differences between the variable "gender of respondents" and the variable "visiting tourist attractions in Craiova". The results of the test indicate that there is a significant association between the two variables.

Correlation analysis with Pearson's correlation coefficient: It was used to assess the relationship between two continuous variables, in this case, between the variable "age category" and the variable "perception of religious and museum tourism". The results of the analysis show that there is a significant positive correlation between the two variables, indicating that the perception of religious and museum tourism varies depending on the respondents' age category.

Both analyzes were conducted using the statistical software SPSS and provided valuable insights into understanding the relationships between the variables studied in the context of tourism in Craiova. The case study is that of the city of Craiova, which serves as a model for evaluating the tourism of prosperity [86]. The "interview method" is a perspective that can be interpreted, and yet it places maximum importance on natural, cultural, and historical activities [87]. Individual interviews are conducted through face-to-face discussions between the authors and the residents of Craiova. The authors chose the individual interview method due to the undeniable benefit of this research method by minimizing the negative influence of some respondents in a group, which can occur in group interviews [88].

3.3. Research Hypotheses

Tourism is a dynamic industry that plays a crucial role in the economic and cultural development of a region. Understanding tourists' preferences and behaviours is essential for creating effective strategies to promote and enhance tourist experiences. This research aims to investigate various aspects of tourism in Craiova, a vibrant city in Romania, by testing the following research hypotheses (Table 1):

Table 1. Research hypotheses.

Number	Hypotheses
H1	There is an association between age category and tourist preferences in Craiova.
H2	There are significant differences in visiting tourist attractions in Craiova based on gender.
H3	There is a positive correlation between the age category of respondents and their perception of religious and museum tourism as innovations brought by tourism in Craiova.
H4	There is an association between the occupation of the respondents and the reasons they want to spend a weekend in Craiova compared to other cities.

Source: processed by authors.

By testing these hypotheses, the research aims to identify and evaluate the relationships and differences between various variables studied in the context of tourism in Craiova (Table 2).

Table 2. The variables used in the research.

Hypotheses	Variables
H1	Gender Forms of tourism
H2	Gender Visiting the tourist attractions in Craiova
H3	Age category The perception of religious and museum tourism
H4	Reasons why they want to stay and spend a weekend in the Craiova area

Source: data processed by the authors in Microsoft Excel 2010 Spreadsheet Software.

Specifically, it seeks to determine if there is an association between age category and tourist preferences, if there are significant differences in visiting tourist attractions based on gender, if there is a positive correlation between the age category of respondents and their perception of religious and museum tourism as innovations brought by tourism in Craiova, and if there is an association between the occupation of the respondents and the reasons they want to spend a weekend in Craiova compared to other cities.

To perform the correlation analysis, it was necessary to transform the qualitative variables “age category” and “the perception of religious and museum tourism” into numerical variables, so that they could be compared and analyzed mathematically.

The assignment of numbers for the age categories was as follows (Table 3): “19–30 years” was assigned the number 1; “31–45 years” was assigned the number 2; “46–65 years” was assigned the number 3; and “over 65 years” was assigned the number 4.

Table 3. Assignment of numerical values to qualitative variables.

Number	Age Category
1	19–30 years old
2	31–45 years old
3	46–65 years old
4	over 65 years old
Number	The Perception of Religious and Museum Tourism
1	No
2	Yes

Source: data processed by the authors in Microsoft Excel 2010 Spreadsheet Software.

With this assignment, the age categories were converted into numerical values, allowing for correlation analysis with other numerical variables.

Similarly, for the perception of religious and museum tourism, we performed a numerical assignment, where: “No” received the number 1; and “Yes” received the number 2.

4. Results

After a thorough investigation of the literature in terms of prosperity, basically achieving the first objective of the study, in the following subsections a prosperity model was proposed for the medium-large urban tourist destinations in Romania, i.e., showing the second objective of the research in Section 4.1. There was identified a set of indicators for the four spheres of sustainability, with applicability to medium-large cities in Romania, representing the third objective of the research underlined in Section 4.2. The results of the study are concretized in Section 4.3, which researched the forms of tourism that can generate prosperity in the sphere of attractiveness of an urban destination, with a case study on the city of Craiova, Romania, achieving the last objective of the paper.

Recently, in 2015, the United Nations (UN) established the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, elaborating 17 sustainable development goals, requesting the action of each country to work simultaneously toward poverty eradication, promote prosperity (from the perspective of the social and economic sphere), and protect nature, i.e., the environment [89].

The eradication of poverty, despite the fact that the development of prosperity requires a knowledge of the links between the political sphere, the social environment, the economy and culture sphere and the possibility in which they influence environmental sustainability, the general prosperity of urban areas, and social inclusion [90,91].

The 2030 Agenda set an action plan for the benefit of the planet, population, and prosperity by defining 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) and 169 targets to be achieved by 2030 [92,93]. They reflect a very extensive international effort of cooperation and collaboration to create sustainable societies [94] that are more uniform (roughly equal), more abundant (prosperous), and more protected (secure) from a security point of view [95]. The 17 goals for sustainable development—2030 horizon are: SDG₁—no poverty, SDG₂—zero hunger, SDG₃—health and well-being, SDG₄—quality education, SDG₅—gender equality, SDG₆—clean water and sanitation, SDG₇—clean and affordable energy, SDG₈—decent work and economic growth, SDG₉—industry, innovation and infrastructure, SDG₁₀—reduced inequalities, SDG₁₁—time and sustainable communities, SDG₁₂—responsible consumption and production, SDG₁₃—climate action, SDG₁₄—aquatic life, SDG₁₅—land life, SDG₁₆—peace, justice and effective institutions, and SDG₁₇—partnerships for achieving the goals.

Mainly, the development of sustainable tourism is a necessity for the successful implementation of the medium-term (2030) and long-term (2050) sustainable development goals (SDGs) for all forms of sustainable tourism for economic, social, cultural, and ecological viability [96,97]. Thus, the sustainable development of tourism that provides socialization, well-being, opportunity for socio-economic development, and environmental protection, offers the best ways to improve people’s lives [98,99]. Authors paid limited attention to the contribution of sustainable development in tackling essential issues such as sustainable livelihoods and overall prosperity [100]. We suggest that researchers engage in discussions about the role of sustainability and conduct a comprehensive impact evaluation based on empirical research, which examines both the favourable and unfavourable consequences of sustainability on the overall well-being of urban tourist destinations.

4.1. Prosperity Pattern Indicators of a Sustainable Urban Destination

Knowing the link between the practice and analysis of forms of sustainable tourism, the prosperity of the urban tourist destination and the development of sustainable tourism requires a well-integrated, solid, and systematic documentation based on specialized literature. In this way, we consider that the proposed indicators constitute a viable basis

for the prosperity of medium-large cities in Romania (example: Craiova), for a proper capitalization of forms of sustainable tourism. Prosperity indicators of tourist destinations contribute to the detection of possible irregularities and possibly form a fundamental basis for investigating, studying, and practicing the sustainable development of medium-large urban tourist destinations in Romania [101,102], in correlation with the goals of sustainable development—Agenda 2030. By examining the sustainability of the impact through the 17 proposed indicators, we hope that this information will help decision makers (town halls, tourism agencies, and local communities) to integrate the four spheres of sustainability in sustainable development plans, projects, and policies. Therefore, the indicators properly and adequately help the decision-makers in identifying the syncopations regarding the economic, social, environmental, and cultural aspects that exist in the territory, in order to optimize the sustainability of activities based on sustainable tourism. This research developed an optimal set of 17 indicators for a sustainable tourism of medium-large cities in Romania, obtained and adapted from the existing literature and validated by experts in economic, social, environmental, and tourism development. They are focused on the four spheres of sustainability (social, economic, environmental, but also the attractiveness of the city) with a significant impact on the prosperity of any tourist destination.

4.2. The Prosperity of the Urban Tourist Destination Craiova

Social prosperity in the tourism activity sector was and is appreciated by experts as a phrase that correlates very easily with the competitiveness of urban tourist destinations [103–106]. As a result, the competitiveness of tourist destinations influences social prosperity, because it increases the economic income of the local population, conserves tourism resources in a sustainable way, creates new employment opportunities, social welfare [106–108], and increases the quality of life of the population within urban destinations (example: the city of Craiova), but also offers tourists unique experiences in terms of the tourist potential of urban tourist destinations [109].

The prosperity of the urban tourist destination Craiova is represented by two important actors for sustainable territorial development: (1) the population and (2) tourists/visitors of the urban area. Thus, it is observed what are the main advantages for tourists (visitors), who practice prosperity tourism, and on the other hand, the benefits of the local population are also mentioned (Table 4). Prosperity in tourism can generate benefits for: tourist destinations, urban centres (such as: Craiova, Timișoara, Cluj, Sibiu, Vâlcea, etc.), mountain resorts, spa and seaside resorts. On the other hand, prosperity in tourism generates rural and urban economic growth as well as cultural exchanges between foreign tourists and the local population, but also a very generous involvement from local authorities. Even so, prosperity in tourism can also have negative effects; for example, the degradation of protected areas, tourist and ecotourism destinations, degradation of ecosystems and the environment, and disruption of local communities and resources. In order to minimize the effects of the negative impact on prosperity in tourism and to drive innovative sustainable development, it is important to properly plan, manage, and evaluate tourism activities of practicing tourism in medium-large urban destinations in Romania.

Table 4. Comparative analysis of prosperity for tourists and population.

Item. No.	Tourists/Visitors	Population
1.	Accumulation of knowledge	Growing revenue
2.	The opening of the horizon	Accumulation of material goods
3.	Spiritual enrichment	Promotion of culture and traditions
4.	New gastronomic experiences	Impeccable reception/hospitality
5.	Exploitation of tourist resources	Stabilization of the local economy

Sources: processed by authors.

Innovation implicitly determines the growth of prosperity through tourism in all segments of beneficiaries: local communities, tour-operators, the environment, and the tourist destination itself. Prosperity is synonymous with well-being, abundance, safety,

and comfort, which are all vital elements for a quality tourism act with major benefits in the definition and sustainability of an urban tourist destination.

From an overall tourism perspective, research hypotheses for prosperity depend on the social sphere, economic development, the well-being of the population, and the stability of tourism agencies that can create new tourism products for a satisfactory prosperity of the city of Craiova. According to the Agenda for Sustainable Development (Horizon 2030), prosperity includes equality (synonymous with justice and fairness) or the possibility for all individuals to enjoy a fulfilled life in the four spheres of sustainability plus in the technological sphere and that of digitization, and the improvement that takes place in accordance with the protection of the environment within medium-large urban tourist destinations in Romania [90,110]. All important aspects of prosperity must be taken into account, the prosperity model proposed by [111] and applied by [112] and ref. [110] was simplified, adapted, and developed for tourist destinations such as Craiova.

The model of the chosen destination includes four spheres of sustainability: (1) social sphere, (2) economic sphere, (3) environmental sphere, according to the principles of sustainable development, to which is also added the (4) sphere of city attractiveness. As a focus, the prosperity model of a sustainable urban destination incorporated four spheres:

1. Social sphere: this sphere is a combination of the six sub-indices of (a) population, (b) labour force, (c) standard of living, (d) education, (e) health, and (f) culture.
2. The economic sphere: within it there are two sub-indices of (a) services and (b) tourism, as an extremely important branch for the sustainable development of the city.
3. Environment sphere: this sphere is a necessity for the well-being of the city population and measures air pollutants including (a) nitrogen monoxide (NO), (b) nitrogen oxides (NO_x), (c) nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), (d) sulphur dioxide (SO₂), (e) atmospheric ozone (O₃), and (f) noise pollution.
4. The sphere of the attractiveness of the city: this last sphere combines the three sub-indices of (a) culture and sightseeing, (b) investigating the forms of tourism that can bring prosperity to the city in this sphere (example: religious and museum tourism as an innovation for the prosperity of Craiova tourism), and (c) tourist satisfaction.

According to the authors Cucculelli and Goffi (2016), the “fulfillment or enjoyment of tourists and the charm of the tourist destination” [113] plus soul contentment represent three fundamental parameters that drive the capacity of a tourist destination (in this case the city of Craiova) to enrich the prosperity of the inhabitants for the medium and long term, to preserve its existing tourist market, to maximize the profitability of local businesses, and to attract an international flow of tourists to the analyzed destination. Thus, the last sphere of sustainability, i.e., city attractiveness, was added to the original model of prosperity; it is an extremely important parameter for the prosperity of the city, for the local community and tourists (visitors) through economic and sustainable environmental and social growth [114,115]. Figure 2 depicts the prosperity model for the tourist destination Craiova, and it is singular because (1) it was not analyzed before in the present context, (2) it focuses on the innovative sustainable tourist destination, and (3) it pays attention to the prosperity measured in its four spheres of sustainability.

Prosperity implies a new post-COVID-19 paradigm, which takes into account the development of the four spheres of sustainability and the maintenance of balance and fairness relationships between the four spheres. The four spheres lead us to define sustainability, a fact that determines a flow of benefits for the local community (of the city of Craiova) and, on the one hand, advantages for visitors. We believe that it is necessary to change the way of vision and action for the prosperity of medium-large urban destinations in Romania, and can start from a new philosophy that establishes the principle according to which “sustainability does not belong to the prosperity of tourist destinations, but prosperity also belongs to the sustainability of the geographical space”. On this foundation, all actions of the individual must be in correlation with the principles and objectives of sustainable development, for a prosperous society with innovation actions and performance on the proposed indicators.

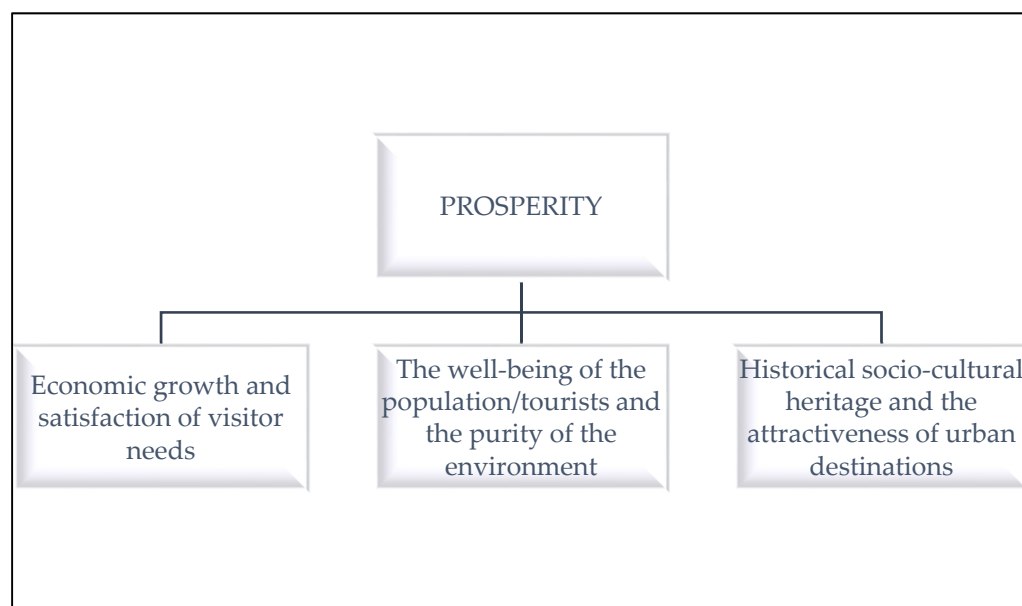


Figure 2. Model of city prosperity. Source: processed by authors.

4.3. Analysis of the Interview on Forms of Tourism from a Prosperity Approach

The primary objective of this analysis is to gain valuable insights into the preferences and behaviours of potential tourists in the context of tourism in Craiova from the residents' perspective. By exploring various aspects of the respondents' choices and perceptions, we aim to shed light on the factors that influence travel decisions and leisure activities in the city. The interview was designed to capture valuable information related to the respondents' gender, age group, occupation, visits of tourist attractions in Craiova, preferences for different forms of tourism, and perceptions about the impact of religious and museum tourism on Craiova's tourism development.

4.3.1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Residents

The presented data indicate that 145 male and 239 female respondents were surveyed regarding their gender. This shows a significant difference in the gender distribution among respondents, with a predominance of females in the studied sample.

A total of 174 respondents fall into the age group "19–30 years old". This is the largest age group and may represent a significant perspective from the part of the younger population of Craiova. A total of 116 respondents fall into the age group "31–45 years old". This is the second-largest age group and suggests that there is a significant number of middle-aged respondents. A total of 70 respondents fall into the age group "46–65 years old". A total of 24 respondents are "65 years old" or older. This group represents the smallest percentage of respondents.

Understanding their occupation can provide insights into their interests and preferences related to tourism and can help develop specific tourist packages or offers tailored to different occupational groups.

The relevant data from the responses regarding the respondents' occupation indicates a diversity in their professional fields (Table 5). This diversity in occupational backgrounds suggests that the study captured perspectives and travel preferences from a wide range of socio-professional categories.

Table 5. Occupational structure of residents (respondents).

Occupations	Number of Residents (Respondents)
Hospitality professionals and managers	48
Health professionals	11
Teaching professionals	93
Administration and finance professionals	14
Information and engineering professionals	17
Clerical support workers	23
Student	154
Retirees	24

Source: data processed by authors.

4.3.2. Analysis of the Interview on the Tourism in Craiova City

In the post-COVID-19 period, tourism activities need to be revitalized and adapted to meet the tourist demands and preferences of tourists in the acquisition of innovative and sustainable tourism packages, in terms of the development of Romanian tourism [116]. Tourist attractions are the most important elements, with a significant impact on the development of tourism activities [117], due to the attractiveness of destinations [118], as well as their visual and aesthetic impact on tourists visiting destinations in Romania.

The question of the visits to Craiova as a main tourist attraction focuses on the respondents' perception and perspective on the tourist experiences that Craiova city can supply. The results can provide information about their familiarity with local tourist attractions and can indicate opportunities for promoting lesser-known places.

The data show that the majority of respondents (355) visited tourist attractions in Craiova although they are residents, while a smaller number of participants (29) stated that they did not visit any tourist attraction in the city (Table 6). This information can be interpreted to suggest that Craiova has significant tourist potential, and most tourists who visit the city are interested in exploring its attractions and tourist sites.

Table 6. Forms of tourism that can be developed in the city from the residents' perspective.

Forms of Tourism	No. of Respondents (Residents)
Business tourism	9
Leisure and recreation tourism	32
Shopping tourism	23
Cultural tourism	221
Sports tourism	10
Urban tourism	89

Source: data processed by authors.

The question of which form of tourism can bring benefits to tourism in Craiova, provides respondents with the opportunity to list specific types of tourism that they consider beneficial for tourism in Craiova. It can offer insights into their tourism preferences and interests.

The relevant data from the responses regarding the forms of tourism that would bring benefits to tourism in Craiova show a variety of preferences and tourist interests. This is due to the development of tourism through the organization of festivals and cultural, artistic, and sport events in the centre of Craiova, such as Mihai Viteazul Square and Nicolae Romanescu Park, the organization of Craiova Municipality Days, the International Shakespeare Festival, Easter Fair, Christmas Fair, and more. One form of tourism that would bring significant benefits to tourism in Craiova is cultural tourism, which encompasses history, culture, and cultural attractions. Examples include the Marin Sorescu Theatre, Colibri Theatre, Elena Farago Memorial House, Constantin Vălimărescu House, University House, Vorvoreanu House (currently the Metropolitan Palace), Amza Pellea Memorial House, Carol I National College, and the University of Craiova. In a recent study, it is stated that technology represents a form of culture [119], which means that cultural tourism

is a combination of unforgettable experiences, cultural diversity, acquiring new knowledge and transformation, and access to events, festivals, and tourism fairs. The majority of respondents believe that cultural tourism (81), museum tourism (70), and religious tourism (59) would bring significant benefits to the development and innovation of the urban tourist destination, the city of Craiova.

The conservation and valorization of the tourism heritage [120] and the economic potential for the development of cultural tourism are globally recognized. They are present in all strategies and policies for sustainable development in many cities in Romania and around the world. The focus is on strengthening the cultural specificity and the experience of tourists [121] who engage in urban tourism in the historic centre of Craiova in connection with the forms of tourism mentioned by the residents of Craiova.

Event tourism sometimes involves activities that require individuals to travel outside their place of residence to another city in order to participate in an event and exchange new insights with other professionals in the field [122]; the city of Craiova in recent years placed increasing emphasis on the organization of events and festivals [123] as a marketing tool for the tourism promotion of the city, but also for attracting a consistent number of international tourists.

In addition to the other recreational activities generated by cultural tourism, events, and shopping, local culinary experiences (gastronomic tourism) offer multiple possibilities of connection with the civilization, traditions, and culture [119] of the urban tourist destination (for example cities in Oltenia—Târgu Jiu, Râmnicu Vâlcea, and Drobeta Turnu Severin) or the ecotourism destinations. In close correlation with culinary gastronomy, travels dedicated to wine regions blend together to create the tourism product known as wine tourism [124].

Museums are defined in the specialized literature as “a mechanism for telling the truth about the recent past” [125] of our ancestors; from the cultural–historical perspective, it represents “one of the most common commemoration projects following conflicts, repression or human rights violations” [126] from antiquity to the present day. Thus, visiting museums can allow direct contact (before COVID-19, in 2015–2019) and indirect contact (during the ongoing period of COVID, 2020–2022) through virtual platforms with the fundamental values of the post-conflict regime [127]. In a 2019 study, visitors stated that the museum’s role is as a “place of memory in post-communist transitional justice” [128].

The question of the preference to visit Craiova during weekends to the detriment of other cities focuses on the reasons that could influence potential tourists to choose to spend a weekend in Craiova instead of other destinations. The responses can provide information about the strengths and attractiveness of Craiova as a tourist destination.

Visiting the historical centre of Craiova and the accommodation facilities are two essential elements in the formation of the tourist product offered to tourists, which must differentiate itself from others offered by competitors, ultimately forming the so-called brand image [129]. In the context of sustainable and regional development, the number of accommodation establishments (especially hotels) significantly increased in the last decade [130]. If in 1990 there were 12 accommodation establishments, by 2010 there were 23, and in 2019, the number of registered accommodation establishments reached 49, including 28 hotels, 3 hostels, 2 motels, 2 tourist villas, and 14 guesthouses [131]. From a social, environmental, and economic perspective, tourism and hospitality activities [132] taking place in recreational and entertainment areas (such as Nicolae Romanescu Park, the Botanical Garden, and the Craiova Zoo) can bring significant benefits to the well-being of both residents in Craiova and non-residents.

The relevant data from the responses regarding preferences for spending a weekend in Craiova compared to other cities show a variety of reasons and tourist attractions that can attract visitors to the city (Figure 3). A significant number of respondents mentioned that they would like to spend a weekend in Craiova to visit tourist attractions (116) and museums, such as the Oltenia Museum (50). This indicates that the cultural heritage and tourist attractions in Craiova are highly attractive to visitors, and they are interested in

exploring the city's history and culture. Additionally, some respondents mentioned that they would like to spend a weekend in Craiova to visit the Nicolae Romanescu Park and the Botanical Garden (50), take a walk in the old city centre (43), or visit churches (49). These reasons indicate the appeal of the city's natural landscape, architecture, and spirituality to tourists. Other reasons mentioned in the responses include cultural and artistic events (37), as well as watching a show at the Marin Sorescu Theatre (9). Some respondents also mentioned that they would like to go shopping in Craiova (3).

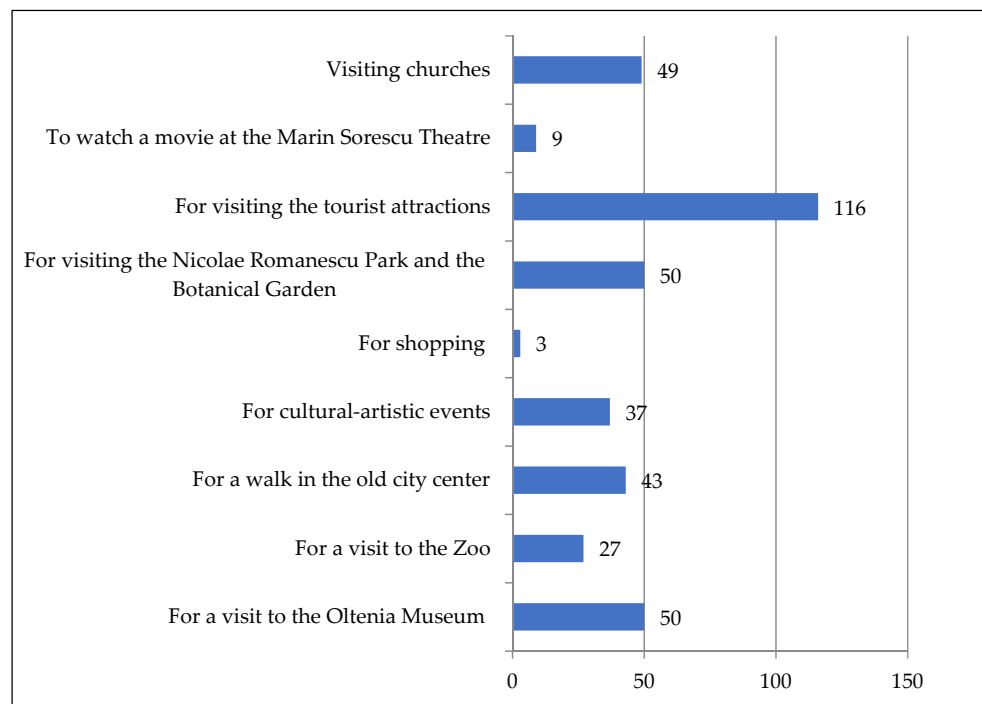


Figure 3. Preferred activities during weekend in Craiova. Source: data processed by the author in Microsoft Excel 2010 Spreadsheet Software.

The question explores respondents' opinions regarding the potential of religious and museum tourism in bringing prosperity to Craiova. The results can indicate the level of interest and appreciation for these forms of tourism in the context of local development.

The data show that the majority of respondents (333) consider religious tourism and museum tourism as innovations that contribute to the prosperity of tourism in Craiova. On the other hand, 51 respondents answered that they do not consider these types of tourism as innovations contributing to the prosperity of tourism in the city.

These results indicate a predominantly positive perspective on religious and museum tourism in Craiova. Those who view these forms of tourism as innovations contributing to the prosperity of tourism may appreciate the cultural and historical value that these attractions and tourist experiences bring. Museums currently stimulate local communities to examine their own past in order to convey experiences and memories related to Romanian history and the wars that took place, making them centres of civic engagement and repositories of community memory [133,134].

4.3.3. Interview Results

The research hypotheses were analyzed using the chi-square test and correlation analysis with Pearson's correlation coefficient, a symmetric measure using Phi and Cramer's values, as follows.

Hypothesis 1. *There is an association between age category and tourist preferences in Craiova.*

This hypothesis aims to evaluate whether there is a connection between the age group of tourists and their preferences regarding tourist attractions and activities in Craiova. The research focuses on identifying significant differences among different age categories and their preferences, with the purpose of providing a deeper understanding of tourist preferences and needs based on age groups.

The results of the chi-square (Table 7) test show that there is a significant correlation between the respondent's gender and their preferred form of tourism ($p < 0.001$).

Table 7. Chi-square tests for categorical variables related to hypothesis 1. Source: data processed using the SPSS statistical software 15.0 version.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-Sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	83.072 ^a	12	0.000
Likelihood Ratio	88.547	12	0.000
N of Valid Cases	384		

^a. 10 cells (38.5%) counted less than 5, the minimum expected count being 1.13.

This means that there is a significant association between the two variables, and the respondent's gender influences their preferences regarding the form of tourism.

The calculated p -values for the Pearson chi-square and likelihood ratio tests are both smaller than the standard significance level of 0.05, indicating a significant relationship between gender and tourism preferences. It should be noted that although there is a significant correlation, it does not provide information about the direction or strength of this correlation. Further analysis may be necessary to better understand the nature and magnitude of the relationship between the respondent's gender and their tourism preferences.

The value of Phi is 0.465. This symmetric measure with a value between -1 and 1 indicates the strength and direction of the correlation between the two nominal variables: "Gender" and "Form of Tourism". A Phi value of 0.465 suggests a moderate correlation between the respondent's gender and their tourism preferences (Table 8).

Table 8. Symmetric measures for nominal correlations related hypothesis 1. Source: data processed using the SPSS statistical software 15.0 version.

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	0.465	0.000
	Cramer's V	0.465	0.000
N of Valid Cases		384	

The value of Cramer's V is also 0.465. Cramer's V is another symmetric measure used to evaluate the association between two nominal variables and is a more robust version of Phi. A V value of 0.465 also indicates a moderate correlation between the respondent's gender and their tourism preferences. For both symmetric measures, the approximate significance (Approx. Sig.) values are very small (0.000). This indicates that the correlation value between the variables (0.465) is so significant that it is highly unlikely to be due to chance. Therefore, we can reject the null hypothesis that there is no correlation between the respondent's gender and tourism preferences and confidently support the presence of a significant correlation between the two variables.

Hypothesis 2. *There are significant differences in visiting tourist attractions in Craiova based on gender.*

This hypothesis examines whether there are significant differences between men and women regarding their visits to tourist attractions in Craiova. The goal is to determine

whether tourists' gender influences how they explore and visit the city's tourist attractions, providing insights into travel preferences and specific interests based on gender.

Out of the total of 239 surveyed females, 231 stated that they visited tourist attractions in Craiova, while 8 stated that they never visited (Table 9). Out of the total of 145 surveyed males, 124 stated that they visited tourist attractions in Craiova, while 21 stated that they never visited. In total, out of the 384 respondents, 355 stated that they visited tourist attractions in Craiova, while 29 stated that they never visited. These data allow us to observe a clear trend: the majority of respondents, regardless of gender, visited tourist attractions in Craiova.

Table 9. Cross-tabulation of visiting the tourist attractions in Craiova by gender. Source: data processed using the SPSS statistical software 15.0 version.

		Gender		Total
		Female	Male	
Visiting the tourist attractions in Craiova	No	8	21	29
	Yes	231	124	355
Total		239	145	384

The number of respondents who visited the tourist attractions is much larger than the number of respondents who have not. To assess whether there are significant differences between the genders of the respondents and the visiting of tourist attractions in Craiova, the chi-square test was used for the nominal data.

The results of the chi-square test indicate that there is a significant association between the variable "Visiting tourist attractions in Craiova" and the variable "Gender". The *p*-values are very small (all being 0.000), suggesting that the observed differences between females and males regarding visiting tourist attractions in Craiova cannot be attributed to chance and are statistically significant.

Furthermore, additional statistics provided by SPSS show that the Pearson chi-square value is 16.028, and the likelihood ratio value is 15.552 (Table 10). These values indicate that there are significant differences between the observed distribution of visiting tourist attractions in Craiova based on the gender of the respondents and the expected distribution if there were no association between these two variables. Moreover, the Fisher's exact test statistic shows that the exact *p*-value for the test is 0.000 for both tails (two-sided and one-sided), suggesting an extremely significant association between the gender of the respondents and visiting tourist attractions in Craiova. All these results indicate that the gender of the respondents has a significant impact on the decision to visit or not the tourist attractions in Craiova.

Table 10. Chi-square tests for categorical variables related to hypothesis 2. Source: data processed using the SPSS statistical software 15.0 version.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-Sided)	Exact Sig. (2-Sided)	Exact Sig. (1-Sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	16.028 ^b	1	0.000		
Continuity Correction ^a	14.473	1	0.000		
Likelihood Ratio	15.552	1	0.000		
Fisher's Exact Test				0.000	0.000
N of Valid Cases	384				

^a. Computed only for a 2 × 2 table. ^b. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 10.95.

The Phi value is −0.204. This measure of association indicates a weak negative association between the two variables (Table 11).

Table 11. Symmetric measures for nominal correlations related to hypothesis 2. Source: data processed using the SPSS statistical software 15.0 version.

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	−0.204	0.000
	Cramer's V	0.204	0.000
N of Valid Cases		384	

In other words, there is a tendency to have fewer respondents who visit tourist attractions in Craiova based on their gender. However, the association is weak, meaning there is no strong correlation between the two variables. Cramer's V value is 0.204, which is the same as the Phi value. It also indicates a weak association between the two variables. Cramer's V is often used for 2×2 contingency tables and is a measure of association between nominal variables.

The Approx. Sig. values (0.000) indicate that the association between the two variables is statistically significant, meaning there is a real association and it is not due to chance. This means there is a significant relationship between the gender of the respondents and visiting tourist attractions in Craiova, but this relationship is weak. In conclusion, there is a statistically significant but weak association between the gender of the respondents and visiting tourist attractions in Craiova.

Hypothesis 3. *There is a positive correlation between the age category of respondents and their perception of religious and museum tourism as innovations brought by tourism in Craiova.*

This hypothesis explores the existence of a positive correlation between the age category of respondents and their perception of religious and museum tourism as innovations brought by tourism in Craiova. The research focuses on identifying whether older tourists have a stronger perception of the cultural and religious values associated with tourism in the city and whether these perceptions vary based on age groups.

This process of numerical assignment allowed the transformation of qualitative variables into numerical variables to conduct the correlation analysis, using mathematical and statistical methods to examine the relationship between age category and the perception of religious and museum tourism. The Pearson correlation coefficient is 0.153, and the p -value (Sig. value) is 0.003. These results indicate a positive and statistically significant correlation between the age category of respondents and their perception of religious and museum tourism as innovations brought by tourism in Craiova (Table 12).

Table 12. Correlation analysis performed using the Pearson correlation coefficient. Source: data processed using the SPSS statistical software 15.0 version.

		Age Category	The Perception of Religious and Museum Tourism
age category	Pearson Correlation	1	0.153 **
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.003
	N	384	384
the perception of religious and museum tourism	Pearson Correlation	0.153 **	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.003	
	N	384	384

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As the age category of the respondents' advances, their perception of religious and museum tourism as innovations brought by tourism in Craiova becomes stronger. The p -value of 0.003 is smaller than the significance level of 0.01, which means that the association is statistically significant at the 0.01 level, indicating that this correlation is not a

result of chance or random occurrence. In conclusion, there is a positive and statistically significant correlation between the age category of respondents and their perception of religious and museum tourism as innovations brought by tourism in Craiova.

Hypothesis 4. *There is an association between the occupation of the respondents and the reasons they want to spend a weekend in Craiova compared to other cities.*

This hypothesis investigates the existence of an association between respondents' occupation and their reasons for choosing to spend a weekend in Craiova over other cities. The aim is to identify whether tourists' professional occupation influences their leisure preferences and activities chosen during a weekend in Craiova, providing relevant information to understand the factors guiding travel decisions of different professional groups.

The results indicate a significant association between the analyzed variables. Here is how you can interpret each of the provided values: The value of chi-square is 325.194. The larger this value, the greater the difference between the observed and expected distribution, suggesting a significant association between the occupation of the respondents and their reasons for spending a weekend in Craiova compared to other cities (Table 13).

Table 13. Chi-square tests for categorical variables related to hypothesis 4. Source: data processed using the SPSS statistical software 15.0 version.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-Sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	325.194 ^a	170	0.000
Likelihood Ratio	252.596	170	0.000
N of Valid Cases	384		

^a 182 cells (91.9%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 0.01.

Asymp. Sig. (2-sided): This value represents the probability (p -value) associated with the chi-square test. In this case, the value is 0.000, which means that the p -value is smaller than the conventional significance level (usually 0.05). This suggests that there is a significant association between the occupation of the respondents and their reasons for spending a weekend in Craiova compared to other cities. The results indicate a significant association between the occupation of the respondents and their reasons for spending a weekend in Craiova compared to other cities. Considering the very low values of the p -value, we can reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is a significant correlation between the two variables. The Phi coefficient measures the association between the two nominal analyzed variables. Its value is 0.920. With a Phi coefficient of 0.920, we can conclude that there is a very strong association between the two variables, the occupation of the respondents, and their reasons for spending a weekend in Craiova compared to other cities (Table 14).

Table 14. Symmetric measures for nominal correlations related hypothesis 4. Source: data processed using the SPSS statistical software 15.0 version.

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	0.920	0.000
	Cramer's V	0.291	0.000
N of Valid Cases		384	

The Cramer's coefficient has a value of 0.291, suggesting a moderate association between the two variables. The results indicate a strong association between the occupation of the respondents and their reasons for spending a weekend in Craiova compared to other cities, and this association is supported by the high values of the Phi and Cramer's V coefficients. In other words, occupation can be an important factor in determining

leisure preferences in Craiova, and this aspect should be taken into consideration in the development of tourism policies and strategies for the city.

5. Discussion

5.1. Technological Innovation, a Major Force for Economic Growth

In a framework that evolves with the speed of light, new trends and innovations appear in every industry and are maintained all the time, the tourism industry being no exception. The travel industry provides long-term services. Being one of the largest industries globally, tourism has the ability to improve according to new trends, as do the preferences and needs of tourists. This constant need to adapt to new trends makes the concept of innovation a concern for tourism stakeholders.

For an idea to be deemed innovative, it needs to be economically feasible to replicate and meet a distinct requirement. According to Philia Tounta, a tourism consultant and ambassador from Crete, Greece, innovation entails the intentional use of information, creativity, and initiative to extract greater or alternative value from resources [135].

The categories of innovation in tourism and their implications: (1) innovation of tourism products with the latest and revitalizing post-COVID-19 tourist packages, (2) innovation in processing and digitization through new methods of providing tourist packages, (3) logistics renewal with new methods to provide services or products to customers, and (4) tourism market innovation focusing on new marketing methods and consumer behaviour.

Innovation can be generated by “a mind open to innovation, which could possibly base its business strategy on this process. In other words, innovate”, according to Ms. Andrada Crângus, an expert in business, marketing, communication and social media consultancy for tourism companies. Let us imagine if there were another form of electric energy now as an innovation; using “clean energy”, such as technologies based on photovoltaic panels and wind propeller systems, as well as other alternative systems generating enough energy to cover global consumption, everything would take place in a much cleaner, more efficient, and sustainable environment [136].

5.2. The Relevance and Importance of Prosperity in Developing Products for Sustainable Tourism

The production and marketing of tourist services and products does not meet the same criteria as the marketing and production of industrial services and products. The particular characteristics of tourism frequently present limitations or problems that can serve as vulnerabilities to increase the expressed value of product prosperity. It is therefore necessary to put in place a medium- and long-term strategy to improve attractive tourism services and products, as well as new method of streamlining in a struggle to regain at least some of the space allocated for pricing. As we know, a destination is formed around natural or man-made attractions, attractions on which tourism depends largely. Unique mountain landscapes, cottages with windows full of flowers, incomparable monuments, and outdoor facilities used by restorers are just some of the attractions that are part of the so-called “destination product”.

The geographical feature is essential to the product and cannot be “reinvented” just about anywhere. Local destinations simply cannot reposition themselves on the market with another location other than their original one. For instance, a seaside resort cannot be turned into a city of art. Because of this, an idea of a tourism product is currently very difficult to implement because it must be scalable. This is because the scalability of a product is largely determined by the resources to create a prosperous business model. In any case, innovation carries significant risks.

5.3. New Development Directives in Tourism Marketing

This technological innovation led to the emergence of a new form of business among tourism stakeholders, known as “e-tourism”. With the advent of ‘e-tourism’, it was necessary to develop new ways of managing tourism; thus was born e-marketing, which

brought with it new information services for customers, “coaching”, but also new forms of network organization.

The two vectors in the market, demand and supply, must be in balance to generate sustainable development. The most efficient tool is the torus of the market, which practically ensures balance and generates a wide development on all fields of tourism.

The one who easily complies with all the mechanisms of market functioning that goes up and down at any scale of the market is the torus, representing the pattern that remedies and balances the market phenomenon in tourism. Maintaining harmony between supply and demand is all we need to generate sustainable marketing. A tourism product should be seen as a total product, i.e., integral, which includes diversified materials (goods) and intangible tourism products (services) and numerous partial tourism products (being the results of a primary tourism offer that generates the human result, which is labour).

If the main idea of marketing, for example, food in food production, is observed as diversified tourism products; it implies that a tourism product operator not only offers the guest food and drinks as partial tourism products, but he/she makes the guest feel satisfied quantitatively, qualitatively, aesthetically, ethnologically, gastronomically, and in any other way. Including the accompanying partial intangible tourism products, i.e., services, which will eventually trigger an increase in room and board expenses, especially in secondary expenditures. Thus, this marketing model must be implemented in any tourism niche, ensuring a sustainable tourist flow in order to achieve a truly sustainable tourism.

5.4. *The Effect of Prosperity on Tourists*

To achieve the effect, we must use an index such as “competitiveness”, which is a complex concept applied in many fields, especially economics, but also used in tourism. Thus, the study focused on innovation, which is one of the factors that can increase the prosperity of a destination, making tourism business more productive.

We consider the use of the Internet an incipient concept representing the first bases of innovation in modern technology. So, that being said, innovation is not just an engine of competitiveness, but a more relevant notion. This key factor, namely innovation, which changed the way we see business, now has a major impact on the effect of prosperity on tourists. Thus, we can say that an increasing number of tourists will constantly come to meet their needs in a tourist destination/urban area (as in the case of the municipality of Craiova).

Therefore, with these well-developed techniques, one will see great changes in the mentality of tourist entities that will obviously lead to positive effects on the prosperity of tourists and implicitly will open new ways of perception for tourism in the future. The great engineer, Jacque Frasco, is the one who founded a non-profit organization that makes known a new socio-economic model that uses science and technology, called the “Venus Project” [21], for social improvement and for a more sustainable civilization, building a different tourism entitled “Innovation at another level”.

Nowadays, more than two-thirds of the population of developed and developing countries live in urban areas, and it seems that this share continues to expand.

The development of current cities will cause the social, economic, and territorial development, so we must take into account the cultural, architectural nature, the uniqueness, the powerful forces of social inclusion, and the outstanding possibilities of economic development.

6. Conclusions

On the basis of recent studies, new strategic plans can be created to meet the requirements of the tourist demand as well as the tourist supply, for the sustainable and innovative development of medium-small urban tourist destinations in Romania. Attention must be directed mainly to avoiding the pressure generated on the environment by tourists, so the chosen strategies will have to respect the principles and objectives of sustainable development (ODD). At the same time, Romanian cities present authenticity, standing out

for the architecture of buildings, the hospitality of people, the gastronomy, and last but not least, the simple way of living life. All these elements should be combined in the form of an image for each individual tourist destination.

According to the data obtained in the conducted study, it was shown that the possibility of implementing the concept of prosperity in tourism can be achieved and has an impact on the sustainable tourism development.

As innovation progresses through the proposed measures, sustainable development strategies, and sustainable transport, the documentation and the efficient assessment of the range of experiences will certainly have a significant impact on the revitalization of transport for sustainable tourism in medium-large cities in Romania (for example, the city of Craiova).

Given the current situation, it seems that niche tourism will lose a lot of ground in the face of new trends. The reasoning of this hypothesis is related to the fact that crowded places will be avoided by tourists, who prefer quieter, wilder areas and smaller groups given this very adaptable virus. Supporters of sustainable tourism hope that this year's environmentally friendly travel will be in high demand. Some research also reveals that the Romanian population is open to sustainable nature tourism compared to other years. The proof lies in what is written above, when many tourists reconsidered travelling within the country.

During these turbulent times, people were watching the pandemic situation around the world with great interest, and the areas that could manage the situation caused by coronavirus very well certainly stood out.

The research findings provide valuable insights into the tourism preferences and behaviours of respondents in Craiova, Romania. Through the analysis of various hypotheses, we gained a deeper understanding of the relationships and differences between different variables related to tourism in the city.

Hypothesis 1, which proposed an association between age category and tourist preferences, was supported by the data. The results indicate that the age category of respondents influences their preferences regarding the forms of tourism.

Hypothesis 2 suggested significant gender-based differences in visiting tourist attractions in Craiova. The statistical analysis revealed a strong association between gender and the choice to visit tourist attractions, indicating that gender plays a significant role in influencing tourism decisions.

Hypothesis 3 explored the correlation between respondents' age category and their perception of religious and museum tourism as innovations brought by tourism in Craiova. The findings demonstrated a positive and significant correlation, suggesting that older respondents have a stronger perception of religious and museum tourism as innovative aspects of tourism in the city.

Hypothesis 4 aimed to identify an association between respondents' occupations and their reasons for choosing to spend a weekend in Craiova compared to other cities. The results reveal a significant association between occupation and weekend preferences, indicating that respondents' occupations influence their choices in leisure activities.

The statistical analysis involved the use of the chi-square test, correlation analysis with Pearson's correlation coefficient, and other appropriate methods. These methodologies enabled us to draw meaningful conclusions and make informed interpretations of the data.

The study underlines the importance of understanding tourists' preferences and behaviours in the context of Craiova's tourism industry. The findings provide valuable insights for tourism stakeholders and policymakers to develop targeted strategies for promoting and enhancing tourism experiences in the city.

Limitations of the study include the sample size and the focus on a specific geographical region. The second limitation is that the research is not duplicated by interviews as used in other methods, such as the Delphi method. The third limitation is the category of stakeholders interviewed in the study. The prosperity is of real interest, and for planning in the future, some other categories of stakeholders from Romania (foreign investors, professional

associations, trade unions, service providers, and local communities) may be included and interviewed in order to have more complete results in the case of tourism activity.

The research directions that the team of authors will focus on will be, first of all, the deepening of the research, expanding the informational and occupational sphere of the respondents, also calling on tourism specialists (tour operators, company managers, directors of travel agencies, and organizations specialized in tourism) and university staff.

The second direction of the research will focus on an interview related to the main motivational directions of the respondents related to the idea of the benefits of tourism in Craiova, highlighting their personality, thinking, experience, cultural prosperity, and personal development.

The contribution of the interview to the current research provides a realistic diagnosis of tourism in Craiova. With the obtained results, tourism specialists and local authorities can establish new directions for development, enhance existing effects, and, most importantly, can introduce new innovative tourism products that add value and have remarkable effects on the prosperity of Craiova municipality.

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Appendix A. Structure of the Interview

1. Your Gender?

Male

Female

2. Which age group do you belong to?

19–30 years' old

31–45 years' old

46–65 years' old

over 65 years' old

3. Your occupation?

4. Have you visited tourist attractions in Craiova?

Yes

No

5. What forms of tourism do you think would bring benefits to tourism in Craiova?

6. Why would you like to spend a weekend in Craiova compared to other cities?

7. Do you consider religious tourism and museum tourism to be innovations that contribute to the prosperity of tourism in Craiova?

Yes

No

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