



The Relationship Between Host Community And Tourism Development: Tripoli-Lebanon as a Case Study

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Abstract: This study examines the dynamic relationship between tourism development and the host community, highlighting the dual potential of tourism to generate socio-economic opportunities while posing cultural and social challenges. Emphasizing the principles of sustainable tourism, the research underscores the importance of community participation, acceptance, and equitable benefit-sharing in ensuring tourism initiatives are both effective and inclusive. Tripoli, Lebanon's second-largest city, serves as the focal point of this inquiry due to its underutilized yet abundant cultural and historical assets, including urban heritage from various historical eras, traditional markets, and natural coastal features. Despite these advantages, the city remains economically marginalized, with high unemployment and a socially conservative population, conditions that make it a critical case for examining community-centered tourism strategies. Drawing on data from a structured survey of 1,000 residents across Tripoli's diverse districts, the study assesses local perceptions, awareness levels, and preferences regarding different forms of tourism development. The findings reveal strong support for culturally aligned tourism types, such as family, eco-, and cultural tourism, while highlighting localized resistance to nightlife-oriented models. By integrating quantitative data with contextual analysis, the study offers actionable insights for policymakers and development planners aiming to harness tourism as a catalyst for sustainable urban revitalization that respects the socio-cultural fabric of the host community.

Keywords: Host Community, Tourism Development, Sustainable Development, Tripoli-Lebanon

1. Introduction

Tourism has emerged as a significant catalyst for economic growth and social transformation, particularly in developing countries. It contributes substantially to gross domestic product (GDP), employment generation, and infrastructure enhancement, and is increasingly regarded as a strategic avenue for poverty alleviation and inclusive development (UNWTO, 2023; World Bank, 2017). Recognized by the World Bank as a foundational pillar of prosperity in low- and middle-income economies, tourism is no longer perceived merely as a leisure industry, but as a multidimensional force with far-reaching social, economic, and environmental implications (Michaud, 1992; World Bank, 2017).

The tourism sector stimulates job creation, improves transportation and public services, promotes cultural exchange, and attracts foreign investment (WTTC, 2022). Nonetheless, these benefits are accompanied by potential drawbacks. Unregulated tourism development can lead to cultural commodification, environmental degradation, and heightened social tensions (Butler, 1980; Smith, 1995). Scholars have long emphasized this duality, noting that tourism can function as a vehicle for community empowerment and economic revitalization, while simultaneously posing risks of social disruption and community marginalization (Ap & Crompton, 1998; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2012).

Central to the sustainability of tourism is the relationship between host communities and tourism development. The attitudes, values, and participation levels of local populations are critical determinants of whether tourism evolves as a community-embedded, sustainable initiative or as an externally imposed, extractive industry. This interplay is particularly salient in culturally conservative and economically fragile settings, where local norms may conflict with certain forms of tourism infrastructure or tourist behavior (Chambers, 2000; Zhang, 2006).

This study explores these dynamics through a case study of Tripoli, Lebanon, an urban center with extensive historical and cultural assets that remains economically marginalized and underdeveloped in terms of tourism infrastructure (Sultan, 2009; Ginzarly & Teller, 2016). As Lebanon's second-largest city, Tripoli features a rich architectural heritage, traditional markets, and coastal and archaeological landmarks. However, despite its assets, the city continues to suffer from inadequate tourism investment, high unemployment, urban poverty, and regional disparities (Le Thomas, 2009; Sultan, 2019).

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Cultural conservatism further complicates the landscape. In Tripoli, forms of tourism that involve nightlife, alcohol consumption, or Western-style entertainment often face social resistance (Habiba & Lina, 2023). As a result, aligning tourism development with community expectations is not only beneficial but essential. Projects that disregard local values may face rejection, poor utilization, or even social backlash.

Accordingly, this research is guided by the following questions:

- What are the socio-economic impacts of tourism on the host community in Tripoli?
- In what ways does the host community influence tourism development in the city?
- How can sustainable tourism be effectively implemented in Tripoli?
- Which types of tourism are most culturally and economically suitable for Tripoli?
- Do attitudes toward tourism vary across geographic regions or socio-demographic groups?

By addressing these questions, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of tourism–community interactions in culturally sensitive and economically disadvantaged urban environments. It also seeks to offer actionable insights for policy-makers, NGOs, and development planners committed to fostering inclusive, sustainable tourism in Lebanon and similar contexts.

2. Literature Review

Tourism development has long been positioned as a strategic lever for economic revitalization and social transformation, particularly in regions facing structural challenges. However, contemporary discourse increasingly emphasizes the role of host communities as active agents rather than passive recipients of tourism development (Ap & Crompton, 1998; Gursoy et al., 2002). In line with the principles of sustainable tourism, there is growing recognition that community engagement, cultural compatibility, and socio-economic inclusion are critical for ensuring long-term success and local legitimacy (UNWTO, 2013; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011).

2.1. Tourism, Sustainability, and Community Support

Sustainable tourism encompasses more than environmental protection; it incorporates socio-cultural sensitivity and equitable benefit distribution. Theoretical models such as Butler's (1980) Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) and Doxey's (1975) Irridex highlight how community attitudes evolve based on perceived tourism impacts. Social Exchange Theory (SET) further posits that local support hinges on a community's cost-benefit evaluation, residents will endorse tourism only if they perceive its benefits to outweigh its burdens (Ap, 1992; Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004).

Research has consistently shown that tourism, when aligned with community values and socio-economic needs, can foster job creation, cultural preservation, and urban renewal (Chambers, 2000; Zhang, 2006). However, when development overlooks cultural norms or excludes local participation, it often leads to social resistance, erosion of local identity, and unsustainable growth (Smith, 1995; Cazes, 1992). In culturally conservative contexts, such as in parts of the Middle East, the success of tourism strategies depends heavily on aligning development models with prevailing social and religious values (Habiba & Lina, 2023).

2.2. Tourism Development in Tripoli: An Emerging Focus

Although Lebanon has historically prioritized tourism in cities like Beirut, Byblos, and Baalbek, the northern city of Tripoli remains underexplored in tourism scholarship despite its rich cultural heritage and socio-economic vulnerability. Several localized studies underscore Tripoli's potential for alternative tourism models but rarely examine the role of community attitudes.

For instance, Baba (2013) highlights ecotourism as a catalyst for sustainable development in North Lebanon, stressing the need for environmental stewardship and community inclusion. El Cheikh (2020) emphasizes participatory planning in waterfront redevelopment, illustrating how stakeholder engagement can lead to more socially responsive urban design. Similarly, El Barazi (2009) focuses on heritage management in Tripoli's Old City, advocating for community-centered approaches to urban regeneration.

Other studies, such as Traboulsi et al. (2023), examine the impact of landscape interventions on urban liveability, while Ginzarly and Teller (2016) explore the integration of heritage and urban form along the Abou Ali River. Together, these works demonstrate Tripoli's untapped tourism potential and the architectural and cultural richness of its neighborhoods. However, none of these contributions sufficiently addresses how local communities perceive, prioritize, or condition tourism development, particularly in light of Tripoli's religious conservatism, high poverty rates, and socio-spatial fragmentation.

2.3. Identified Gap and Study Rationale

Despite growing literature on tourism planning and heritage revitalization in Tripoli, the relationship between tourism and host community perceptions remains under-theorized and empirically underexplored. Existing studies tend to focus on physical assets, planning processes, or environmental concerns, while overlooking the socio-cultural dimensions that shape local attitudes toward tourism.

This gap is especially significant in Tripoli, where local acceptance may hinge not only on the economic benefits of tourism but also on its compatibility with deeply held cultural norms. As such, this study addresses a critical need by investigating how residents of Tripoli perceive various forms of tourism, what socio-demographic and geographic factors shape their views, and how this awareness can guide more sustainable and inclusive development strategies. By foregrounding community perspectives, this research offers both theoretical and practical contributions to the literature on tourism in culturally sensitive and economically marginalized urban settings.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative case study design to examine the relationship between tourism development and the host community in Tripoli, Lebanon. The primary objective is to explore the perceptions, preferences, and awareness of local residents toward various forms of tourism and their potential socio-economic impacts.

The study population comprises residents of Tripoli, a city with an estimated population of approximately 800,000. A sample of 1,000 citizens was selected to represent various districts within the city. Given the large population size, a 10% sample (80,000 individuals) was deemed impractical due to time and resource constraints; thus, a reduced but diverse random sample of 1,000 was employed to ensure representation across different demographic and geographic segments of the population. The sampling approach was simple random sampling, allowing for equal participation opportunities among residents from all socio-economic backgrounds.

The primary data for this study were collected through a structured questionnaire, designed specifically to explore the perceptions, attitudes, and awareness of residents in Tripoli regarding tourism development. The instrument consisted of both closed-ended and multiple-choice questions, enabling the researchers to gather quantifiable data suitable for statistical analysis. The questionnaire was divided into several sections. The first section captured respondents' demographic characteristics, including age, gender, educational background, and place of residence. Subsequent sections focused on residents' perceptions of tourism's economic and social impacts, their willingness to accept tourism-related infrastructure (such as hotels) in their neighborhoods, and their preferences for different types of tourism suitable for the city (e.g., cultural, eco, family, or night tourism). Additionally, the instrument included questions aimed at assessing the level of tourism awareness among the local population, particularly in relation to Tripoli's historical and cultural assets. The questionnaire was developed in accordance with the study objectives and was administered in person to ensure clarity, improve response rates, and obtain geographically diverse input across various districts in Tripoli.

Responses were compiled and analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages. The data were visualized through graphs and pie charts to highlight patterns of preference and awareness. Additionally, cross-tabulations were employed to examine the relationship between demographic variables (such as age, gender, educational level, and place of residence) and respondents' support for tourism development.

4. Results

This section presents the key findings of the study based on the responses of 1,000 residents from across eight districts of Tripoli. The results are organized around five major areas: (1) demographic profile, (2) attitudes toward tourism, (3) preferred types of tourism, (4) tourism awareness, and (5) geographic variation in perceptions.

5.1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

The sample included a balanced representation of genders (52% female, 48% male) and a wide range of age groups: 18–25 years (28.5%), 26–40 years (37.2%), 41–55 years (24.3%), and over 55 years (10%). Educational attainment varied, with 25% holding a university degree, 20% with secondary education, 18% with technical/vocational training, and 5% being illiterate. Respondents were proportionally distributed across eight regions of Tripoli, with the highest representation from Abou Samra (16.3%) and El Mina (15.2%).

5.2. Attitudes Toward Tourism and Infrastructure

A significant majority of respondents expressed support for tourism development in Tripoli. When asked if they were open to tourists visiting their neighborhood, 89% responded affirmatively, while only 11% indicated opposition (see Figure 1). Acceptance of hotel development was also high, with 82% in favor and 18% opposed (Figure 2). This suggests broad-based support for tourism infrastructure, though some local sensitivities remain.

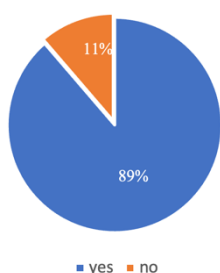


Figure 1: Community acceptance of tourists in local neighborhoods.

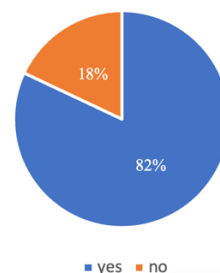


Figure 2: Resident attitudes towards hotel development in their area

Cross-tabulation by gender indicated slightly higher support among women (97.6%) compared to men (92.6%), while age-wise support was highest in the over-55 age group (100%) and lowest among the 18–25 age group (93.6%), although differences were minor (Table 1). Educational attainment showed a positive correlation with tourism acceptance; all respondents with primary, technical, and graduate-level education supported tourism, while support among illiterate individuals was notably lower (75%).

Table 1: Cross tabulation between gender, age, educational Level, and support for tourism in Tripoli

	Tourism		Total
	yes	No	
Gender			
Men	92.6%	7.4%	100.0%
Women	97.6%	2.4%	100.0%
	95.2%	4.8%	100.0%
Age			
18-25	93.6%	6.4%	100.0%
26-40	96.7%	3.3%	100.0%
41-55	94.4%	5.6%	100.0%
Over 55	100.0%		100.0%
	95.0%	5.0%	100.0%
Educational level			
Illiterate	75.0%	25.0%	100.0%
Primary	100.0%		100.0%
Intermediate	95.8%	4.2%	100.0%
Secondary	90.0%	10.0%	100.0%
Technical Education	100.0%		100.0%
University	95.9%	4.1%	100.0%
Master/Phd	100.0%		100.0%
	95.6%	4.4%	100.0%

Source: Calculated by the author

5.3. Preferred Types of Tourism

Respondents were asked to rank their preferences for different types of tourism in Tripoli. The most favored forms were family tourism and cultural tourism, each receiving over 75% support. These were followed by eco-tourism and seaside tourism, which received moderate support (Figure 3). In contrast, nightlife tourism was the least supported, with fewer than 15% of respondents in favor, reflecting the city's conservative social fabric.

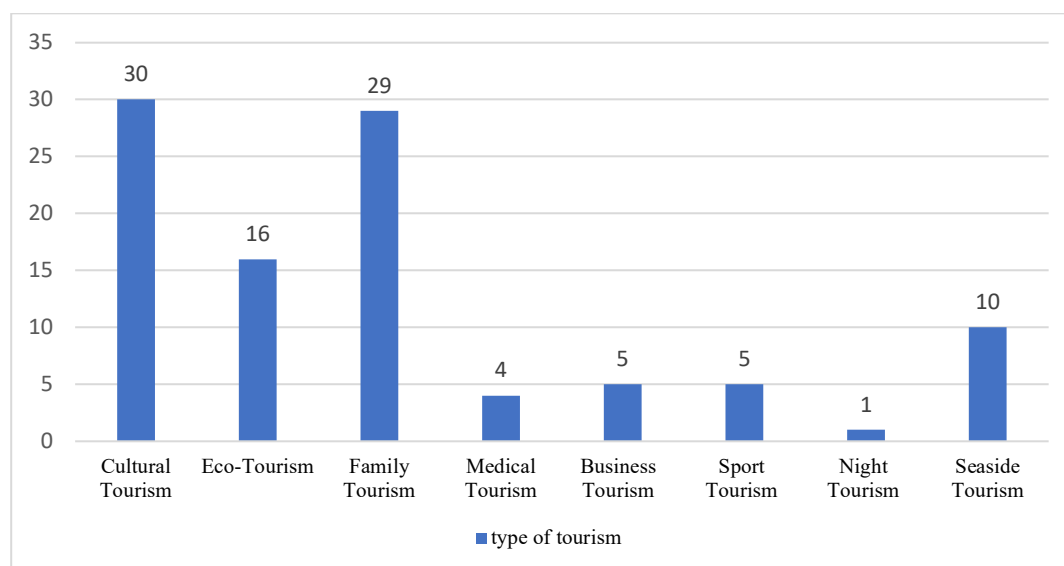


Figure 3: Types of Tourism Most Preferred by the Population. Source: field survey conducted in Tripoli (2025).

Acceptance of business, sports, and medical tourism was also relatively low, suggesting that these niches may not align well with public expectations or perceived community benefits.

5.4. Tourism Awareness and Economic Prioritization

Respondents were asked to identify which economic sectors they believed should be prioritized for development. Tourism emerged as the most frequently cited sector (27%), followed by industry (20%), education (20%), and trade (18%) (Figure 4). This indicates that residents view tourism not only as a cultural asset but also as a key economic engine.

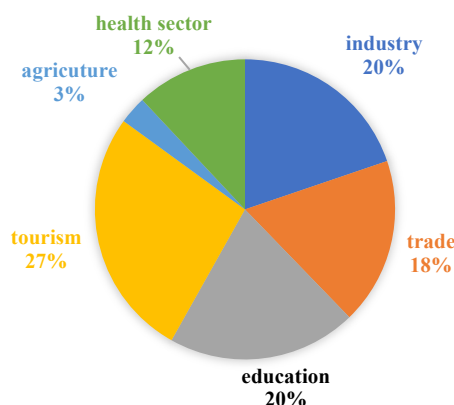


Figure 4: Perceived Priority Economic Sectors in Tripoli.

Further questions revealed high levels of tourism awareness: 84% of respondents identified Tripoli as a city with tourism potential, and 68% reported regular or occasional visits to the Old City. However, 36% had never visited the Citadel of Tripoli, a major historical site, suggesting a potential gap in local engagement with cultural heritage.

6. Geographic Variation in Perceptions

Spatial analysis revealed significant differences across Tripoli's districts in terms of tourism acceptance and openness to tourism-related infrastructure.

Table 2 shows the variation in resident attitudes toward tourists in their neighborhoods. The highest levels of acceptance were found in Qobbe and Zahrieh (100%), followed by New Tripoli (98%) and Dam w Farez (92.9%). In contrast, the Old City (76%) and Abou Samra (80%) recorded the lowest levels of support.

Table 2: Community Acceptance of Tourists by District

Place of residence	Tourists		Total
	yes	No	
Abou Samra	80.0%	20.0%	100.0%
Qobbe	100.0%		100.0%
Tabbaneh	89.5%	10.5%	100.0%
Old City	76.0%	24.0%	100.0%
New Tripoli	98.0%	2.0%	100.0%
Mina	82.7%	17.3%	100.0%
Dam Farez	92.9%	7.1%	100.0%
Zahrieh	100.0%		100.0%

Source: Calculated by the author

These findings suggest that while overall support is high, there are pockets of cultural sensitivity and caution, particularly in historically conservative or economically strained areas such as the Old City.

Regarding acceptance of tourism infrastructure, residents were also asked whether they supported the establishment of hotels in their neighborhoods. The responses, summarized in Table 3, closely mirror those regarding general tourism acceptance.

Qobbe and Dam w Farez expressed full support for hotel development (100%), while New Tripoli (91.5%), Tabbaneh (88.2%), and El Mina (88.8%) showed strong approval. However, Zahrieh (58.3%) and the Old City (69.6%) demonstrated considerable resistance to hotel projects, with 41.7% and 30.4% of residents in those areas opposing them, respectively.

Table 3: Community Acceptance of Hotel Development by District

Place of residence	Hotels		Total
	Yes	No	
Abou Samra	71.4%	28.6%	100.0%
Qobbe	100.0%		100.0%
Tabbaneh	88.2%	11.8%	100.0%
Old City	69.6%	30.4%	100.0%
New Tripoli	91.5%	8.5%	100.0%
Mina	88.8%	12.2%	100.0%
Dam Farez	100.0%		100.0%
Zahrieh	58.3%	41.7%	100.0%

Source: Calculated by the author

These findings highlight the need for geographically nuanced planning. While some neighborhoods are highly receptive to tourism infrastructure, others, often those with strong historical or religious identities, may require targeted awareness campaigns or development models that emphasize cultural preservation.

7. Discussion

The findings of this study offer important insights into the complex relationship between host community perceptions and tourism development in Tripoli, Lebanon. The results support the broader theoretical consensus that the success of tourism initiatives depends significantly on community engagement, cultural compatibility, and perceived socio-economic benefits (Ap & Crompton, 1998; Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011).

Overall, the high levels of acceptance for both tourism activity (89%) and hotel infrastructure (82%) across Tripoli underscore a broadly positive attitude among residents toward tourism development. These findings align with Social Exchange Theory (Ap, 1992), which posits that communities are more likely to support tourism when they anticipate net benefits. In Tripoli's context, marked by high unemployment and underinvestment, tourism is viewed not only as a cultural asset but as a vital economic opportunity.

However, this support is not unconditional. The community's strong rejection of nightlife-oriented tourism (less than 15% support) reflects Tripoli's conservative social fabric. This affirms previous research in similar socio-religious contexts where alignment with local cultural values was essential for tourism acceptance (Chambers, 2000; Habiba & Lina, 2023). Consequently, tourism strategies must be carefully designed to avoid conflict with prevailing norms, prioritizing culturally acceptable forms such as family, eco-, and cultural tourism.

The slight variation in support across demographic categories, especially higher acceptance among women and older adults, suggests nuanced motivations. Women may associate tourism with increased employment flexibility or improved services (Zhang, 2006), while older participants may perceive tourism as a means to revitalize heritage and community spaces. Education level was also strongly correlated with tourism acceptance, consistent with literature that links higher education with increased awareness of tourism's benefits and reduced susceptibility to misinformation (Gursoy et al., 2002; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011).

These demographic patterns should inform targeted communication and awareness strategies. For instance, customized engagement with less-educated or younger residents could close perception gaps and strengthen overall community support.

The preference for family, cultural, and eco-tourism highlights an opportunity to position Tripoli as a destination that leverages its unique assets while remaining socially inclusive. The city's architectural heritage, traditional markets, and coastal biodiversity are well-aligned with these tourism types. These findings reinforce earlier studies advocating for alternative tourism models in Tripoli, such as Baba's (2013) work on ecotourism and El Barazi's (2009) focus on heritage-based development.

However, the relatively low engagement with existing heritage sites, including the fact that 36% of respondents have never visited the Citadel of Tripoli, signals a disconnect between community identity and cultural awareness. This gap suggests the need for local heritage education and tourism literacy initiatives to build a stronger foundation for resident-led tourism promotion.

The spatial disparities in tourism acceptance across Tripoli's districts reflect the socio-economic and cultural heterogeneity of the city. While support was strongest in districts with newer infrastructure and commercial orientation (e.g., Qobbe, New Tripoli), more historic or densely populated areas like the Old City and Zahriyeh expressed notable resistance. These findings echo arguments by Ginzarly and Teller (2016) that place-based planning must account for the socio-spatial dynamics of urban heritage zones.

This variation underscores the necessity of adopting a decentralized, participatory approach to tourism development in Tripoli. Rather than a uniform master plan, localized strategies should be co-designed with residents, especially in culturally sensitive areas. Awareness campaigns, urban preservation projects, and investment in community tourism can help address resistance and ensure equitable benefit distribution.

The findings of this study offer meaningful contributions to both theoretical frameworks and practical tourism development strategies. Theoretically, the research affirms the relevance and applicability of Social Exchange Theory, Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model, and culturally embedded planning approaches in the context of underrepresented urban centers in the Global South. By focusing on Tripoli, a city often overlooked in mainstream tourism discourse, this study extends the geographical and cultural boundaries of tourism scholarship, highlighting the necessity of context-specific analyses that account for socio-cultural conservatism and economic marginalization. Practically, the results underscore the importance of aligning tourism initiatives with local community preferences, particularly by promoting culturally compatible forms such as family, cultural, and eco-tourism. Inclusive planning processes, especially in heritage-sensitive areas like Tripoli's Old City, are essential to ensure legitimacy and long-term sustainability. Additionally, the study reveals a need to strengthen tourism awareness among residents, particularly the younger population, to foster stronger heritage engagement. Finally, demographic variations in tourism attitudes suggest that policy design and communication strategies should be tailored to specific groups, with implications for tourism workforce development, destination marketing, and

spatial planning. Together, these insights support a more participatory, culturally responsive, and equitable approach to tourism development in cities with complex socio-cultural dynamics.

8. Policy Recommendations

Building on the findings of this study, a series of strategic interventions is proposed to strengthen tourism development in Tripoli, with particular emphasis on fostering community engagement, cultural preservation, and sustainable planning. These recommendations are designed to address gaps in local awareness and participation, especially among populations living in heritage-rich but underdeveloped areas of the city.

City-wide campaigns should be launched to raise public consciousness about the multifaceted economic and social benefits of tourism. These campaigns must highlight tourism as a catalyst for employment, infrastructure development, and cross-cultural exchange.

Given the comparatively lower levels of support for tourism and hotel development in areas such as the Old City and Zahriyeh, targeted interventions are essential. Campaigns should emphasize how tourism can revitalize these neighborhoods, generate local income, and improve public services, without compromising historical authenticity.

Programs should be implemented to increase residents' knowledge of Tripoli's rich cultural and architectural legacy, especially within the Old City. Promoting a sense of custodianship can enhance preservation efforts and increase community pride in heritage sites.

Educational institutions should be engaged to facilitate regular excursions to local landmarks, accompanied by guided tours and interactive learning. This would foster intergenerational knowledge transfer and embed historical consciousness among young people, who showed lower awareness in the survey.

These recommendations aim to bridge the current gap between Tripoli's cultural assets and its underutilized tourism potential, thereby promoting a more inclusive and resilient tourism strategy that reflects community values and aspirations.

9. Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between the host community and tourism development in Tripoli, Lebanon, an economically marginalized yet culturally rich urban center. Using a city-wide quantitative survey, it assessed residents' perceptions, awareness, and preferences regarding various types of tourism and infrastructure development. The findings reveal a high level of public support for tourism, particularly when aligned with the city's cultural values and when it offers clear economic benefits.

Family tourism, cultural tourism, and eco-tourism emerged as the most supported types, while nightlife tourism received the least acceptance, reflecting the city's conservative social fabric. Demographic factors such as educational level and geographic location significantly influenced attitudes: newer districts and more educated respondents showed stronger support, while the Old City and adjacent neighborhoods expressed more hesitation, particularly regarding hotel development. Although 84% of residents view Tripoli as a touristic city, a substantial segment, especially among younger respondents, remains disengaged from key heritage landmarks such as the citadel.

These results underscore the critical need to bridge the gap between Tripoli's cultural assets and community engagement. Awareness campaigns targeting youth, underserved neighborhoods, and heritage-rich areas like the Old City and El Mina are essential to building local pride, fostering cultural appreciation, and encouraging broader public involvement in tourism.

Tourism has the potential to serve as a catalyst for economic revival in Tripoli by stimulating other sectors such as trade, handicrafts, and transport. However, for this development to be sustainable, it must be inclusive and community-centered. Residents must be active participants in shaping the tourism narrative, welcoming visitors, protecting heritage, and embracing their city's touristic potential.

By foregrounding the voices of the host community, this study contributes both to academic literature and local policy discussions on sustainable tourism. It highlights the necessity of socially inclusive strategies that treat tourism not merely as an economic driver but as a platform for civic engagement, cultural preservation, and long-term urban development. Tripoli deserves to become a vibrant tourist hub, one that reflects both its historical significance and the aspirations of its people.

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