

# Strategies for Developing Ecological Tourism in Mehedinți County

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## Abstract

Practicing responsible tourism in Mehedinți County is very important because it allows for the protection of the environment but also for the valorisation of the natural and cultural resources of this area. In this region, numerous ecotourism activities can be carried out, including visiting some of the objectives that we encounter, namely the Iron Gates National Park, the Danube Boilers, the Lilac Forest at Ponoarele, etc. Our study shows that Mehedinți County stands out for a multitude of strengths, namely: natural diversity, the beauty of the landscapes, the preservation of traditions, local gastronomy, etc., but there are also weaknesses that need to be improved, such as the difficult access to certain areas, the lack of human resources specialized in ecotourism.

**Keywords:** development strategies, ecological tourism, environmental protection

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## 1. Introduction

In Romania, ecotourism has gained popularity due to the country's natural wealth and biodiversity. It plays a crucial role in nature conservation and in the development of local communities by involving them in sustainable tourism activities. In the specialized literature, there are several studies that analyse ecotourism in various regions of Romania [1,3-6]. In Manea's opinion, the development of ecotourism activities involves several socio-economic benefits, namely:

- more jobs are created (either in the tourism sector or in other sectors), which can encourage young people to stay in the area;
- it stimulates the economy in the area by developing infrastructure and various services offered in the tourism field;
- it can also stimulate the economy in rural areas by offering agricultural products that can be used in tourism services;

- through the development of infrastructure, benefits can also be observed within the local population;
- peripheral regions can be developed through capital insertions;
- intercultural relations are improved. [7].

According to the World Tourism Organization, sustainable tourism refers to the following aspects:

- *quality* - sustainable tourism must provide a valuable experience for tourists, enhancing the quality of life of the host community, can reduce poverty and protect the environment;
- *continuity* - sustainable tourism ensures the exploitation but also the continuity of the natural resources it uses and preserves the culture of the community that hosts visitors by offering them pleasant experiences;
- sustainable tourism ensures a *balance* between the needs of the tourism industry, those involved in protecting the environment and the local community, with economic and social benefits. [8,9]. Drobeta-Turnu Severin, due to its position at the exit of the Danube into the gorge and due to its social-historical and cultural objectives, constitutes a polarizing centre of the Mehedinți tourist industry [10].

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## 2. Materials and methods

In this paper, we applied a questionnaire, thus collecting responses regarding the sustainable development of the area in order to formulate some effective development strategies. In our study, we analysed and described the ecotourism activities that can be carried out in Mehedinți County by tourists.



**Figure 1.** Map of Mehedinți County  
(Source://<https://pe-harta.ro/mehedinti> [11])

## 3. Results and discussion

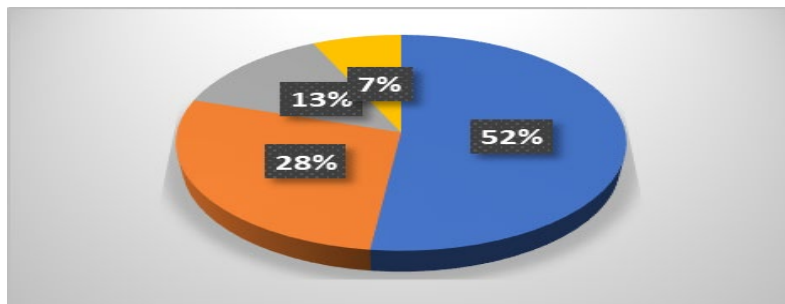
From the analysis of the respondents' answers, we observed that 52% of the respondents are between 18-25 years old, 28% are between 36-50 years old, 7% are under 18 years old, and 13% are between 26-35 years old (Figure 2).

The second question referred to the occupation of the respondents and from Figure 2 it can be seen that 68% are employed and 32% were students or pupils.

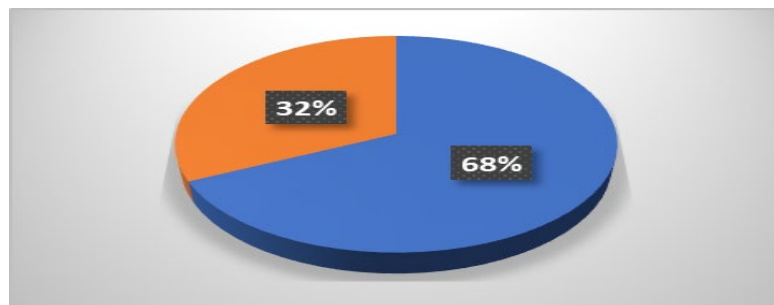
From Figure 4, we observed that in terms of the gender of the respondents, 76% were women and 24% were men. Women were more interested in this study as we can see from the analysis of the responses. Most of the time, they are the ones who plan their families' vacations and are interested in everything that is healthy for their family

Regarding the question referring to the environment of origin, we observe from figure 5 that 65% of respondents come from urban areas, and 35% come from rural areas.

When asked about the concept of eco-tourism, we note that 96% of respondents answered yes, 3% said no, and 1% said no/did not answer. Although most respondents answered that they are familiar with this concept of eco-tourism, we observed that when tourists visit these areas, they do not consider the environment when they travel.



**Figure 2.** Distribution of respondents by age



**Figure 3.** Distribution of respondents by occupation

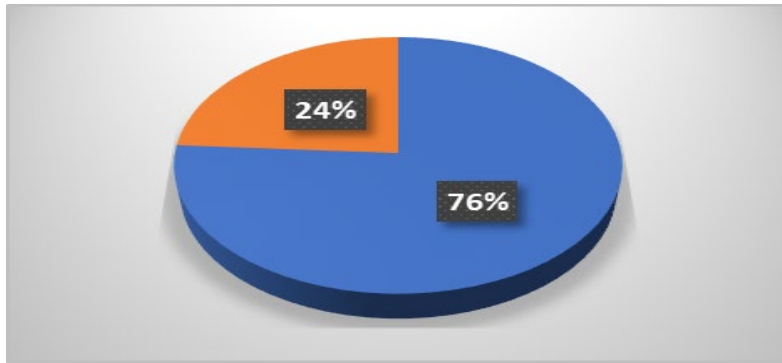


Figure 4. Distribution of respondents by gender

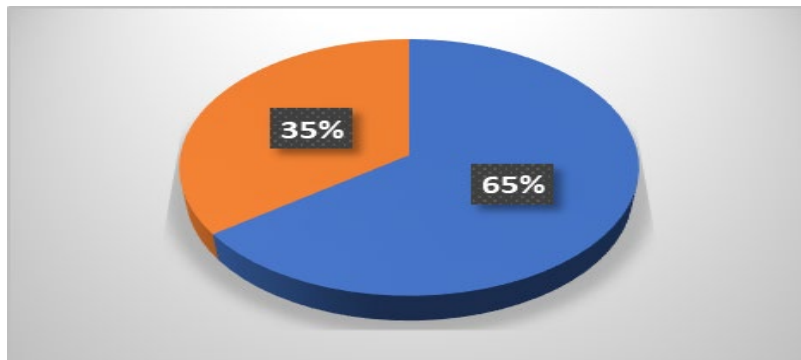


Figure 5. Distribution by environment of origin

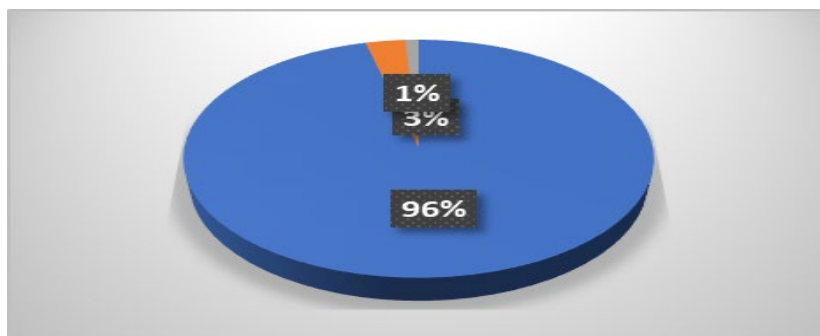


Figure 6. Distribution according to the concept of ecological tourism

Question number 7 refers to visiting the county for tourist purposes, we note that 72% of respondents took the opportunity to visit certain objectives in the area.

When asked what are the most important types of attractions that you have visited in this area, we noticed that 68% of respondents consider the most important attraction they have visited to be the Danube Boilers, 21% visited the Severin Medieval Fortress, 10% the Iron Gates Natural Park, 1% the Ponicoava Cave. From the analysis of the responses (Figure 8) we observe that visitors are interested in visiting the Danube Boilers where they can take boat trips to the Big Boilers and the Small Boilers

visited the county for tourist purposes, and 28% did not visit the county for tourist purposes, but but can also admire the beauty of the Danube River and the spectacular landscape.

The area needs to be better promoted and some environmental protection strategies need to be implemented.

Respondents also answered the question of how important they think environmental protection is when traveling? 71% consider it very important, 25% answered important, and 4% answered not very important. From Figure 9 we note that most respondents are aware of the importance of environmental protection when traveling.

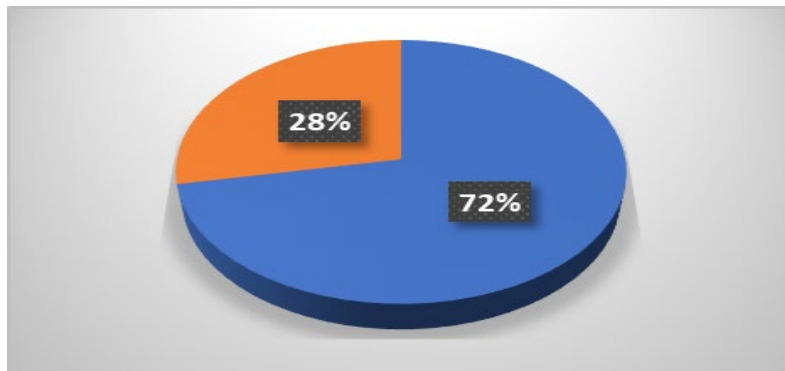


Figure 7. Distribution of responses after visiting the county for tourist purposes

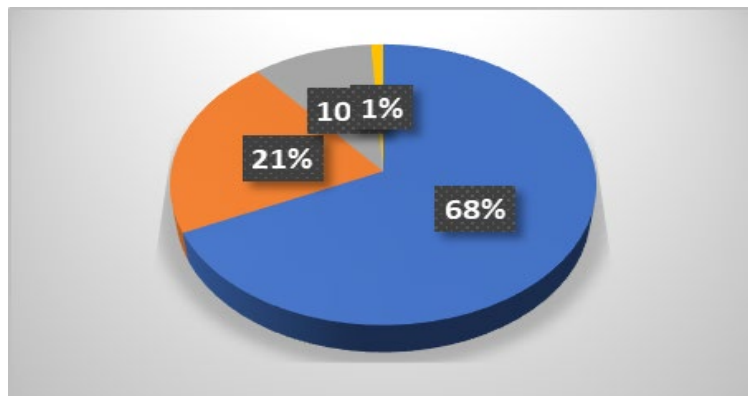


Figure 8. Distribution of answers by the most important attractions visited

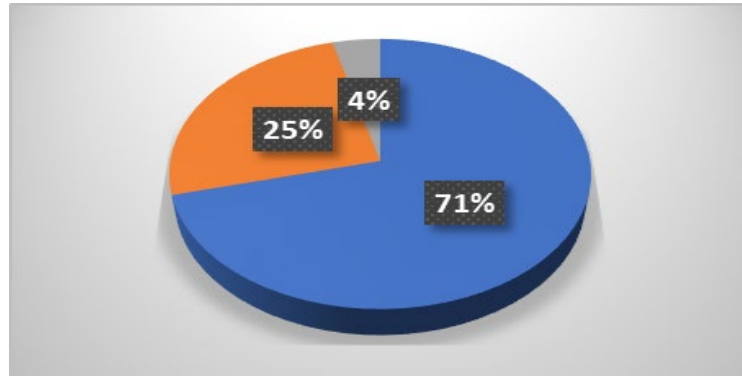


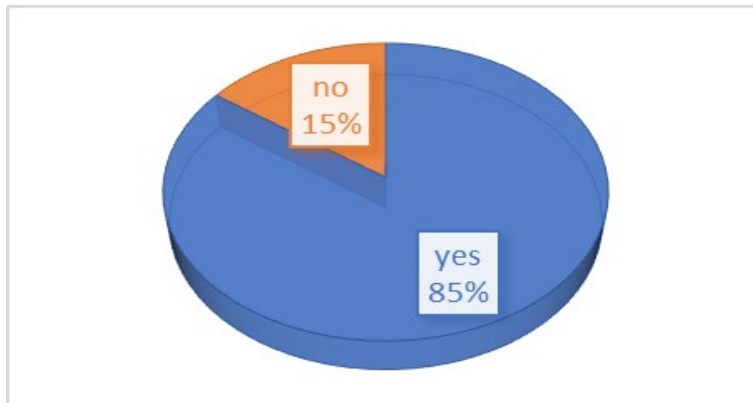
Figure 9. Distribution of answers according to the importance of protecting the environment

In Figure 10, we presented the respondents' interest in participating in ecotourism activities, thus 85% answered affirmatively, they are interested in participating in such activities, and 15% answered negatively, not being interested. Among the main ecotourism activities, respondents chose, based on their preferences, one of the most representative for them, namely: nature walks, bike rides, boat rides, admiring the landscape while observing the flora and fauna of the area, participating in various traditional activities that respect environmental protection.

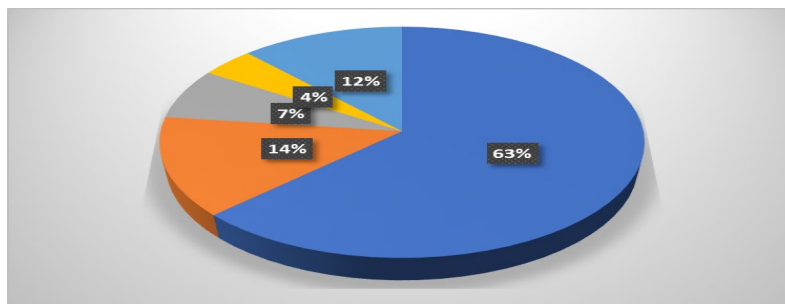
From Figure 11 it can be seen that 63% prefer to take walks in nature, 7% prefer bike rides, 12% prefer to camp in natural areas, 4% observe flora and fauna, and 14% prefer to participate in traditional activities. Most of the time, tourists want to know the traditions and customs of a particular region, and the community hosting such events must revive popular traditions [9]. The questionnaire included a question regarding the main weaknesses of the development of ecotourism in Mehedinți County. From the analysis of the responses, we observe that 52% answered poor

infrastructure, 26% lack of promotion, 9% answered lack of investment and 13% believe that

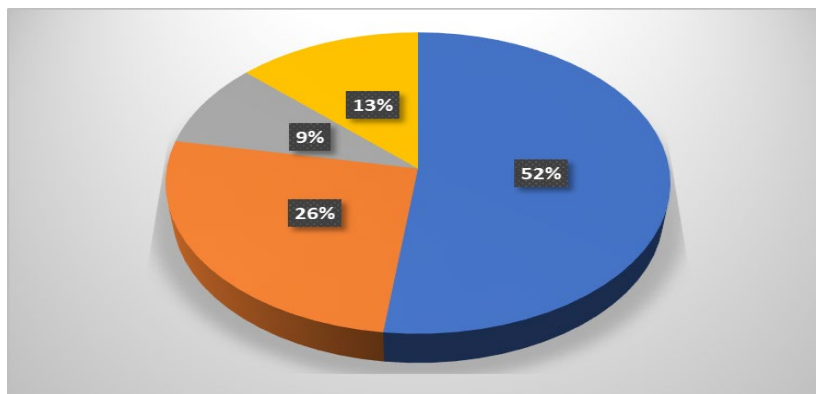
the lack of community involvement affects the development of eco-tourism in Mehedinți County.



**Figure 10.** Distribution of responses after participation in ecotourism activities



**Figure 11.** Percentage share by main preferred ecotourism activity

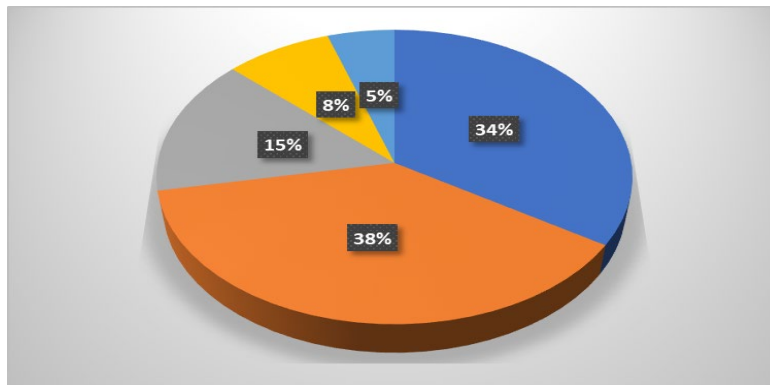


**Figure 12** Distribution of answers by area weaknesses

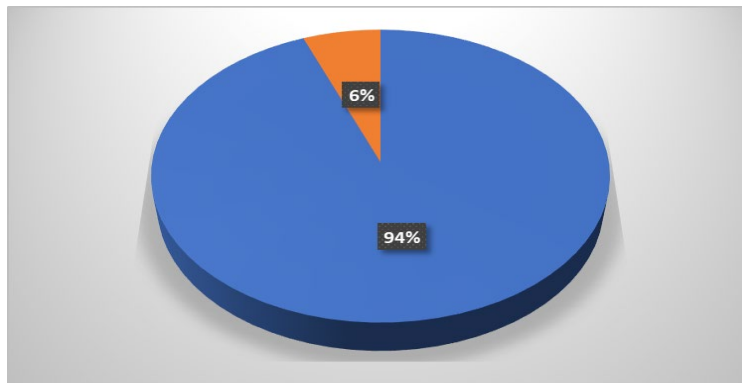
The questionnaire included a question regarding the strategies that respondents consider necessary for the development of ecological tourism in Mehedinți County. From Figure 13 it can be seen that 34% consider that the development of access infrastructure is necessary, 38% consider promotion one of the most effective strategies for the development of the area, 15% consider that ecological education of visitors is important, 8%

responded the development of ecological accommodation spaces, and 5% responded the development of.

When asked about the respondents' interest in participating in certain volunteering and promotional activities, 94% of respondents answered yes and only 6% answered no. Citizens' involvement in promoting the area and participating in various environmental protection activities is important.



**Figure 13.** Distribution of responses according to the development strategies needed in the area



**Figure 14.** Distribution of responses by interest in participating in ecotourism promotion activities

Figures 15 and 16 present the most important tourist attractions in Mehedinți County, namely the Danube Boilers and the Face of Decebal. However, intensive promotion of these and other

attractions, both nationally and internationally, is necessary, which will lead to the development of Mehedinți County.



**Figure 15.** The Danube Boilers in Dubova (Mehedinți County)

Source: <https://locuridinromania.ro/judetul-mehedinti> [12]



**Figure 16.** Decebal's face (Mehedinti county)

Source: <https://locuridinromania.ro/judetul-mehedinti> [13]

#### 4. Conclusions

From the analysis of the answers, we note that visitors are interested in visiting the Danube Boilers, where they can take boat trips to the Big and Small Boilers, but they can also admire the beauty of the Danube River and the spectacular landscape. The area needs to be better promoted and some environmental protection strategies need to be implemented.

Among the main ecotourism activities, respondents chose, based on their preferences, one of the most representative for them, namely: nature walks, bike rides, boat rides, admiring the landscape while observing the flora and fauna of the area, participating in various traditional activities that respect environmental protection.

Local actors in Mehedinți County must get involved in implementing strategies to promote sustainable tourism and minimize the impact of tourism on the environment, but citizens must also participate in environmental protection activities.

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