

Submitted Abstract

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Abstract

Local development is known as a process that leads to an increase in the population's quality of life by improving economic, social and environmental conditions based on endogenous resources. However, effective local development can be more challenging inside natural protected areas, designated primarily as environmental protection/conservation tools. The present paper aims to analyse the attitude of the entrepreneurs and local population in relation to the local development initiatives before and after the COVID-19 pandemic in a village located in Piatra Craiului National Park. This protected area is placed in the central part of Romania, in the Southern Carpathian Mountains and comprises parts of several settlements. The population inside the park and in the immediate surroundings is over 30,000 people.

Magura village registered over 500 inhabitants on the last census, being the only settlement that lies entirely within the park. In recent years, in addition to the traditional economic activities (such as animal husbandry), there has been an increasing development of tourism activities, fostered by the outstanding natural landscape and the traditional way of life of the inhabitants. In this village and its surroundings, questionnaires were applied to the local population and entrepreneurs focused on the livelihood opportunities, the degree of local knowledge towards the Piatra Craiului National Park role and rules (including their compliance), and the potential obstacles and solutions for achieving effective development. Moreover, entrepreneurs' perception of their businesses and the main challenges identified in setting them up was approached. In terms of the local population, a distinct theme focused on assessing the potential entrepreneurial skills of individuals. Subsequently, in correlation with the current context, the degree to which the COVID-19 pandemic affects local businesses and especially the population quality of life was investigated. The results highlight specific differences between the population and entrepreneurs, the latter being more willing to understand and exploit the opportunities offered by the fact that the village is located in a natural protected area. Further on, the outcomes could bring significant contributions to the community by bringing out the need of the decision-makers to improve communication with local people and promote sustainable development methods.