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Understanding residents' perceptions of cruise tourism: Perceptual structures from Kotor, Montenegro

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Abstract
The aim of this study is to examine how residents' perceptions of cruise tourism in a spatially constrained heritage city are structured across multiple domains and which perceptual dimensions most strongly affect support for further cruise tourism growth. Using a resident survey in Kotor, Montenegro (N = 214), this study develops seven standardised composite indices and combines cluster analysis, MANOVA and hierarchical regression to reveal how perceptions cohere and what drives support for cruise tourism growth. Three distinct perceptual profiles are identified, Environmental Skeptics, Pro-economic Enthusiasts and Ambivalent Pragmatists, showing that residents do not align along a simple pro/anti continuum but through coherent configurations of perceived benefits, pressures and governance evaluations. The main contribution is demonstrating that social acceptance is strongly associated with perceived economic benefits and governance quality, while environmental/heritage concerns reduce support and spatial proximity and length of residence play a limited role. Crowding is strongly associated with environmental/heritage impacts but does not independently predict support once broader evaluative dimensions are considered. These findings reposition governance credibility and benefit distribution as central levers for social sustainability in smaller, heritage-sensitive cruise destinations.

Keywords: Cruise tourism, Local community perceptions, Social Impacts, Cluster analysis, Kotor, Montenegro

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1. Introduction

Cruise tourism has become one of the most dynamic segments of global tourism development, particularly in historic coastal cities where port infrastructure, cultural heritage and urban life interact within limited urban space (Pino & Peluso, 2015; Hoarau-Heemstra *et al.*, 2023; Tran *et al.*, 2025). While cruise tourism can generate economic benefits and enhance destination visibility, it also concentrates large visitor flows within short timeframes, often intensifying pressures on urban space, local infrastructure and everyday life (UNWTO, 2016; World Economic Forum, 2025). As a result, the social sustainability of cruise tourism has emerged as an important concern in contemporary tourism research.

The historic town of Kotor in Montenegro provides a particularly relevant context for examining these issues. Situated within the Bay of Kotor and characterized by a highly compact and historically layered urban structure, as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the most prominent cruise destinations in the Adriatic, Kotor has experienced rapid growth in cruise arrivals over the past decade (Božović & Avdić, 2025).

To adequately contextualize these local dynamics, Kotor must be examined within the broader framework of national tourism development. Tourism in Montenegro has recorded sustained expansion in recent years, reaching 2,613,306 tourist arrivals and 16,389,279 overnight stays in 2023, thereby surpassing pre-pandemic levels (Tourist Organization of Kotor, 2024). The sector contributes approximately 26% to national GDP (WTTC, 2023), underscoring the country's high dependence on tourism. At the same time, tourism demand is strongly spatially concentrated, with 94.3% of total overnight stays generated in the coastal region, which comprises only 11.5% of the national territory (MONSTAT, 2023). Such pronounced spatial concentration further intensifies development pressures in historically sensitive coastal destinations. Within this national framework of economic reliance and spatial concentration, Kotor represents one of the most pressure-intensive destinations (Figure 1). Tourist arrivals in the municipality increased from 139,573 in 2018 to 236,546 in 2023, accompanied by 1,293,632 overnight stays in 2023 (Tourist Organization of Kotor, 2024), reflecting substantial growth in stationary tourism. However, the structure of demand in Kotor is distinct. As the country's only cruise port operating exclusively as a port of call, the majority of cruise passengers remain in the destination for only a few hours. In addition to overnight tourists, the city receives a particularly high volume of short-stay visitors. Same-day visitors (cruise passengers and organized coach excursions) are estimated to outnumber stationary tourists by approximately four to one (Božović & Čaušević, 2024), intensifying spatial congestion within the UNESCO-protected Old Town, where physical capacity is inherently limited. The most direct cruise-tourism pressures are concentrated within the compact urban zone comprising the Old Town of Kotor, Dobrota and Škaljari. Based on the aggregation of planning units defined in the current municipal spatial-planning documentation, this directly affected area covers approximately 4.32 km² (Municipality of Kotor, 2009, 2013, 2020). According to the 2023 population census, around 12,081 residents live within this urban zone (MONSTAT, 2023), indicating that cruise-related pressures are concentrated within a relatively small area inhabited by a substantial share of the municipality's population.

Although cruise traffic temporarily collapsed during the COVID-19 pandemic (with only 9 ship calls and 3,009 passengers recorded in 2020), recovery has been rapid since 2022. By 2025, the Port of Kotor registered 483 cruise ship calls and 580,411 passengers (Port of Kotor, 2025), confirming the structural importance of cruise tourism within the city's visitor economy. Detailed data on cruise ship calls and passenger volumes for the period 2000-2025 are provided in Appendix A.

At the same time, Montenegro's strong economic reliance on tourism, combined with limited spatial capacity and governance challenges typical of small coastal states, has intensified debates around the

sustainability of tourism development. In this setting, the perspectives of local residents become central to evaluating long-term viability. Despite the growing visibility of these challenges, systematic quantitative research on residents' perceptions of cruise tourism in Montenegro and the wider Western Balkan region remains relatively limited. Previous research conducted in Kotor has documented predominantly critical perceptions of cruise tourism impacts, emphasizing pressures on everyday life and the urban environment, as well as limited differentiation across spatial and demographic groups (Božović & Avdić, 2025). These findings have contributed to understanding the general tone of local attitudes and the extent of perceived socio-economic and environmental challenges. However, they leave open important questions regarding how residents' perceptions are internally structured, whether distinct perceptual profiles can be identified within the local population and which factors ultimately shape residents' broader evaluations of cruise tourism. Building on this foundation, the present study moves beyond general, average judgments of cruise tourism impacts and looks more closely at how residents' views are structured within the community. It shows that support is not simply a mirror of "positive vs. negative" attitudes, but can persist even when people report substantial pressures. The analysis also indicates that these differences are not well explained only by proximity to the cruise zone or basic socio-demographic characteristics.

The aim of this study is to assess how residents in Kotor evaluate cruise tourism across selected perception domains such as quality-of-life pressures, environmental and heritage impacts, perceived economic benefits and governance/participation and how these evaluations relate to support for further cruise tourism growth. Methodologically, the study combines standardized composite indices with cluster analysis, MANOVA and hierarchical regression in order to identify perceptual profiles and assess the relative importance of different perception domains. By focusing on the configuration of perceptions within the community, the paper contributes to debates on the social sustainability of cruise tourism in small UNESCO destinations, where acceptance often depends on the perceived balance between benefits, pressures and governance quality.

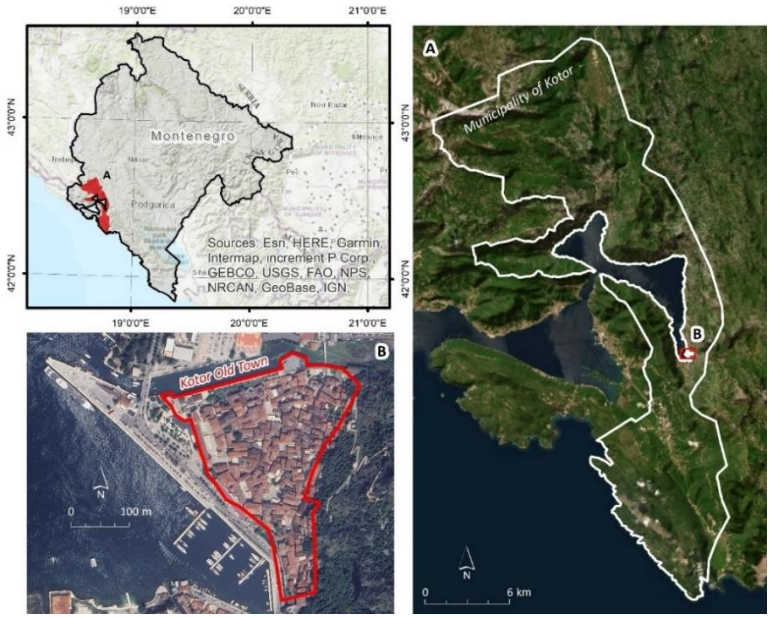


Figure 1. *Study area: Municipality of Kotor and the UNESCO-protected historic core*

Source: Prepared by the authors in GIS using administrative boundary data and Esri basemaps/World Imagery. Basemap and imagery credits: Esri, HERE, Garmin, Intermap, increment P Corp., GEBCO, USGS, FAO, NPS, NRCAN, GeoBase, IGN and other contributors.

2. Literature review

Residents' perceptions are widely recognised as a very significant indicator of tourism sustainability, as they reflect how local populations evaluate tourism-related changes in their community (Del Chiappa *et al.*, 2016; Tovar *et al.*, 2020). In the context of cruise tourism, existing research has predominantly focused on identifying negative impacts, such as crowding, environmental degradation, congestion and pressure on heritage sites (Thyne *et al.*, 2025). These studies have contributed valuable insights into the challenges faced by cruise destinations, particularly those characterised by limited carrying capacity and sensitive cultural landscapes (Johnson, 2002; Asero & Skonieczny, 2018; Kulkov *et al.*, 2023). Beyond perception-based surveys, empirical research has also examined measurable community-level outcomes of cruise development. For example, MacNeill and Wozniak (2018), using a quasi-experimental design, found limited evidence of sustained economic improvement following the establishment of cruise infrastructure, alongside observable environmental degradation and governance-related concerns. Such findings challenge assumptions of automatic multiplier effects and highlight the need for critical, context-sensitive evaluations of cruise tourism impacts.

However, much of this literature relies on aggregated measures of residents' attitudes, often treating local communities as relatively homogeneous groups and emphasising average levels of dissatisfaction or opposition. Building on perception-based frameworks, social sustainability in cruise destinations is commonly operationalised through residents' evaluations of perceived benefits, quality-of-life impacts, environmental/heritage pressures and governance performance (Sharpley, 2013; Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Hoarau-Heemstra *et al.*, 2023). Accordingly, this study treats these domains as distinct but interrelated dimensions and examines how they jointly define support for further cruise tourism development.

Although such multidimensional approaches are important for diagnosing general impact patterns, existing empirical research often remains at the level of aggregated assessments and average attitudes, providing limited insight into the internal structure of residents' perceptions and the mechanisms through which attitudes towards cruise tourism are formed. Residents may simultaneously recognise environmental or quality-of-life pressures while still expressing acceptance of tourism development, particularly when economic benefits or effective governance are perceived. This suggests that perceptions of cruise tourism are not necessarily uniform, but rather multidimensional and internally differentiated (Papathanassis *et al.*, 2012). Understanding how these perceptual dimensions interact and how different configurations of perceptions relate to broader evaluations of tourism development remains an underexplored area.

Contemporary debates therefore emphasise the need for conceptual and empirical frameworks that go beyond fragmented assessments of individual impacts and enable the modelling of interdependencies among perceptual dimensions in explaining attitudes towards tourism. In particular, perceptions of local governance and participatory processes have been identified as crucial mediating factors that could influence how residents interpret tourism-related pressures and benefits (Badurina & Frleta, 2021; Wattanacharoensil & Stettler, 2025). At the industry level, concerns about governance and responsibility extend to the corporate practices of cruise operators. Li *et al.* (2022) demonstrate that while major cruise companies increasingly report on corporate social responsibility, performance remains uneven across social and environmental dimensions, suggesting a gap between formal disclosure and substantive accountability. This perspective complements destination-based research by situating local perceptions within broader structural dynamics of the global cruise industry.

While corporate-level responsibility shapes the broader structural context of cruise tourism, residents ultimately interpret tourism impacts through everyday experiences of urban life. Quality of life in this sense is not a monolithic construct, experiences of crowding and congestion may be perceived differently from longer-term processes of urban change and spatial transformation (Wen *et al.*, 2020;

Shafaati & Saffarzadeh, 2024). These distinctions underline the need for analytical approaches capable of capturing the complexity and heterogeneity of residents' perceptions, rather than reducing them to binary pro- or anti-tourism positions (Eggli & Wattanacharoensil, 2025). However, many empirical studies still rely on average attitude measures and rarely connect segmentation of resident profiles with explanatory modelling of support as an outcome. Božović and Avdić (2025) provided a first quantitative evidence base for Kotor by documenting predominantly critical aggregate perceptions of cruise tourism impacts and highlighting socio-economic challenges in a highly constrained UNESCO destination. Building on that baseline, the present study uses the same resident survey dataset but advances the analytical framework: it restructures survey items into standardized composite indices, identifies distinct perceptual profiles through cluster analysis and models support for further cruise tourism growth using hierarchical regression. This allows the analysis to move beyond average impact assessments toward explaining how different perception domains combine within the community and which evaluations most strongly predict support. Importantly, this represents a complementary analytical extension, shifting the focus from overall attitude patterns to the internal configuration of perceptions and their explanatory pathways to support.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative, perception-based research design grounded in survey data and inferential statistical analysis. Using a structured questionnaire, the research examines how residents evaluate multiple dimensions of cruise tourism, including quality-of-life pressures, environmental and heritage impacts, economic benefits, governance and everyday exposure. A combination of composite index construction and multivariate statistical techniques was employed to identify underlying perceptual patterns, distinguish distinct resident profiles and assess the relative importance of different perceptions in shaping overall evaluations of cruise tourism. All analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics (version 31). The methodological approach was selected to move beyond average attitudes and capture the internal structure and heterogeneity of residents' perceptions within a spatially constrained cruise destination. The overview of the methodological procedure is shown in Figure 2.

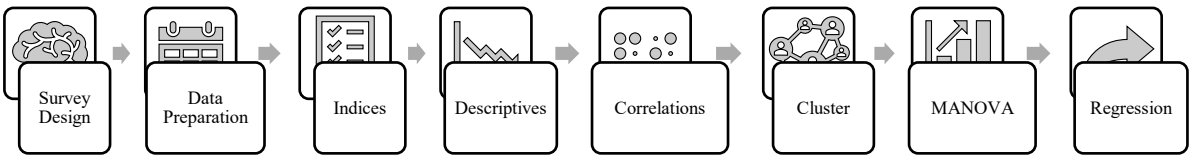


Figure 2. *Overview of the methodological workflow*

3.1 Survey design and data preparation

The study is based on a structured questionnaire survey conducted in April 2024 among adult residents of *Kotor, Montenegro* (N = 214). The dataset is identical to that analysed in Božović and Avdić (2025), but the present study applies a substantially different analytical framework focused on perceptual configuration and explanatory modelling rather than aggregate impact assessment. The questionnaire was developed through adaptation of survey instruments previously used in resident-perception studies of cruise tourism destinations, particularly Naples, Venice and Dubrovnik (Del Chiappa *et al*., 2019; Del Chiappa *et al*., 2021; Peručić & Puh, 2012). Items were contextually adjusted to reflect the spatial, heritage and governance characteristics of Kotor.

The questionnaire captured residents' perceptions of cruise tourism across multiple domains: quality-of-life pressures (crowding and urban transformation), environmental and heritage impacts, perceived

economic benefits, governance and participation, exposure to cruise-related activity and overall support for further cruise tourism development. Most attitudinal items were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), supplemented by selected nominal background variables.

The attitudinal statements included in the questionnaire were adapted from established tourism impact perception studies, particularly those examining residents' attitudes toward cruise tourism in Mediterranean destinations (e.g., Brida *et al*., 2012; Del Chiappa & Abbate, 2013). Items were contextualised to reflect the specific spatial, economic and governance characteristics of Kotor as a UNESCO-protected coastal city. The wording of individual statements was adjusted to ensure local relevance while preserving the conceptual structure of previously validated perception frameworks. A full list of questionnaire items and their allocation to composite indices is provided in Appendices B and C.

Data were collected via online distribution targeting neighbourhoods in Kotor and areas exposed to cruise tourism flows. Given a municipal population of 22,857 residents (MONSTAT, 2023), the estimated margin of sampling error at the 95% confidence level is approximately ±6.5%, assuming maximum variance ($p = .50$). The sample should therefore be interpreted as indicative rather than statistically representative. All variables used in index construction were standardised using Z-scores ($M = 0$, $SD = 1$). Reverse coding was applied where necessary to ensure consistent conceptual direction.

3.2 Construction of composite indices

For conceptual and methodological clarity, this section specifies the analytical meaning and function of the composite indices used in the study. Given that the indices encompass multiple domains (quality of life, environment/heritage, governance, economic benefits, exposure and overall support), their combined structure could be interpreted as representing a single overarching evaluative construct of cruise tourism. This is not the intention here and the study does not construct an aggregated sustainability index. Instead, the indices are used as a set of complementary dimensions that capture different aspects of how residents experience and evaluate cruise tourism. Similar approaches have been used in tourism-impact and sustainability research, where several related indicators are combined to describe broader perception or sustainability dimensions. In cruise tourism research, Tovar *et al*. (2020) used factor-based analysis to identify key dimensions of residents' perceptions of cruise impacts. Fernández and Rivero (2009) also proposed a composite-index approach for measuring tourism sustainability as a multidimensional concept.

Conceptually, the indices are organised around three broad domains. First, perceived pressures and costs, captured through the two *Quality of Life Pressure indices*, crowds and urbanization (Section 3.2.1), as well as the *Environmental and Heritage Impact Index* (Section 3.2.3). Second, perceived benefits and institutional performance, captured through the *Economic Benefit Index* (Section 3.2.5) *and the Governance and Participation Index* (Section 3.2.4). Third, everyday exposure, captured through the *Exposure to Cruise Tourism Index* (Section 3.2.2), which reflects the intensity of residents' day-to-day contact with cruise-related activity (e.g., contact with cruise tourists, visits to the Old Town during the cruise season and residential proximity). EXPOSURE is included not as a "pillar" of sustainability, but as a contextual factor that can influence how impacts and benefits are noticed and interpreted.

Finally, *Support for Cruise Tourism Growth* (Section 3.2.6) is treated as the overall evaluative outcome. It reflects whether residents consider further cruise development desirable, given their combined perceptions of pressures, benefits and governance. This structure allows the analysis to examine how different perception dimensions relate to one another and how they jointly translate into support or opposition, rather than reducing attitudes to a single aggregated score. The full list of questionnaire

items and their allocation to composite indices, together with reliability statistics, is presented in Appendix C.

3.2.1. Quality of Life Pressure Indices

Perceived pressure of cruise tourism on residents' quality of life was initially conceptualised as a multidimensional construct encompassing spatial overcrowding, urban transformation, traffic congestion, noise, rising prices and the saturation of public spaces during the cruise season. Eight survey items addressing these aspects were included in the initial pool. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA), using principal axis factoring with Oblimin rotation, revealed the presence of two distinct latent dimensions. Factors were retained based on the Kaiser criterion (eigenvalue > 1) and item salience was evaluated using a minimum loading threshold (λ) of 0.40. The analysis was conducted on eight items (N = 214) and resulted in a two-factor solution explaining 59.25% of the total variance. The first factor (eigenvalue = 3.22) accounted for 40.28% of the variance, while the second factor (eigenvalue = 1.52) explained an additional 18.97%. The rotated pattern matrix indicated a clear and interpretable structure:

- QoL Pressure (factor 1) – Crowds (QoL_CROWD): This dimension captured crowding-related pressures and included items referring to congestion in the Old Town (λ = 0.981), overcrowding of public spaces during cruise arrivals (λ = 0.846) and the perception that further growth of cruise tourism threatens quality of life (λ = 0.731).

- QoL Pressure (factor 2) – Urbanization (QoL_URBAN): This dimension reflected broader urban and infrastructural pressures, including perceptions of overdevelopment (λ = 0.832), negative impacts of urban transformation (λ = 0.867), traffic and parking congestion (λ = 0.378) and noise during cruise arrivals (λ = 0.423).

The two factors were moderately correlated (r = -0.437), supporting the appropriateness of oblique rotation. Internal consistency analysis indicated high reliability for QoL_CROWD (Cronbach's α = 0.895) and acceptable reliability for QoL_URBAN (α = 0.717). Composite sub-indices were subsequently calculated as the mean of standardized (Z-score) items loading on each respective factor.

Given the clear factorial separation and the distinct experiential logics underlying crowd-related and urban-structural pressures, the two dimensions were retained as analytically separate indices rather than aggregated into a single quality-of-life score.

3.2.2. Exposure to Cruise Tourism Index

An Exposure to Cruise Tourism Index (EXPOSURE) was constructed to capture residents' everyday contact with cruise-related activity, combining spatial and social dimensions of exposure. The index consists of three indicators: frequency of visits to the Old Town during the cruise season, frequency of direct contact with cruise tourists and residential distance from the port/Old Town. All components were standardised using Z-scores and the composite index was calculated as their arithmetic mean. Because this index is formative in nature, its indicators represent complementary rather than interchangeable dimensions, internal consistency measures such as Cronbach's alpha are not considered appropriate. The index was therefore treated as a summary measure of exposure rather than a reflective scale.

3.2.3. Environmental and Heritage Impact Index

Perceived environmental and heritage-related impacts of cruise tourism were measured using five items addressing air and sea pollution, waste generation, visual impacts of large cruise ships and perceived threats to Kotor's image and heritage value. One item referring to cruise tourism's contribution to environmental protection was reverse coded to ensure directional consistency. All items were

standardised and aggregated as an arithmetic mean to form the Environmental/Heritage Impact Index (ENVIRON_HERIT). The scale demonstrated good internal consistency (Cronbach's α = 0.808), supporting its use as a single composite indicator of perceived environmental and landscape-related impacts.

3.2.4. Governance and Participation Index

The Governance/Participation Index (GOV_PART) captures residents' perceptions of local governance related to cruise tourism and was constructed from three items measuring perceived levels of information provision, public consultation in decision-making and efforts by local authorities to manage cruise tourism impacts. Due to differences in response scales, all items were standardised prior to aggregation. The composite index was calculated as the arithmetic mean of the Z-score values and internal consistency was satisfactory (Cronbach's α = 0.713).

3.2.5. Economic Benefit Index

Perceived economic benefits of cruise tourism were measured through six items addressing employment opportunities, income generation, public and private investment, destination promotion and improvements in public services. The Economic Benefit Index (ECON_BEN) was constructed as the arithmetic mean of standardised item scores. The scale exhibited high internal consistency (Cronbach's α = 0.892), indicating a coherent underlying perception of economic benefits among respondents.

3.2.6. Support for Cruise Tourism Growth Index

Residents' overall acceptance of further cruise tourism development was operationalised through the Support for Cruise Growth Index (SUPPORT). The index consists of four items capturing support for continued cruise development, perceptions of benefit-cost balance, evaluations of cruise tourism management and the view that the city is less vibrant without cruise ships. The scale demonstrated acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's α = 0.708), indicating that the items jointly measure a latent construct of support for cruise tourism growth.

3.3 Descriptive properties of the indices

All constructed indices are based on standardised scores, resulting in mean values close to zero across the sample. Ranges and standard deviations reflect the degree of perceptual variability among respondents. Higher values indicate stronger perceived pressure or negative impacts in the case of QoL, exposure and environmental indices and more positive evaluations for economic benefits, governance and support for cruise tourism growth.

3.4. Correlation analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the bivariate relationships among the composite indices and to explore the internal structure of residents' perceptions of cruise tourism. This step aimed to identify dominant patterns of association between perceived economic benefits, governance and participation, quality-of-life pressures, environmental and heritage impacts, exposure to cruise activity and overall evaluations of cruise tourism. Only statistically significant correlations ($p < .05$) were considered in the interpretation of results, in order to enhance clarity and avoid overinterpretation of weak or spurious associations. Correlation analysis served as an exploratory step that informed subsequent multivariate analyses by revealing how different perceptual dimensions are interconnected prior to segmentation and regression modelling.

3.5. Perceptual segmentation and multivariate analysis

To identify distinct perceptual profiles among residents, a *k-means cluster analysis* (SPSS Quick Cluster) was performed using the seven *Z-standardized composite indices* (QoL_CROWD, QoL_URBAN, EXPOSURE, ENVIRON_HERIT, GOV_PART, ECON_BEN and SUPPORT). A *three-cluster solution (k =*

3) was specified based on interpretability and statistical coherence of alternative solutions explored during preliminary modelling. The algorithm was run with a maximum of *10 iterations* and convergence was achieved after *eight iterations* due to negligible change in cluster centers. The resulting clusters were labelled *Environmental Skeptics, Pro-economic Enthusiasts* and *Ambivalent Pragmatists* based on their centroid profiles across the seven indices.

Differences between clusters were examined using *multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA)*, with the seven indices entered as dependent variables and cluster membership as the fixed factor. Prior to interpretation, the assumption of homogeneity of variances was tested using *Levene's test*. Although this assumption was violated for three indices (QoL_CROWD, QoL_URBAN and ECON_BEN), MANOVA is considered appropriate to moderate violations, particularly when supported by post-hoc corrections. *Bonferroni-adjusted post-hoc tests* were therefore used to interpret univariate differences. The multivariate tests indicated statistically significant differences between clusters across the combined set of indices, confirming the validity of the perceptual segmentation. Follow-up *univariate ANOVA tests and post-hoc comparisons* were used to identify the specific dimensions driving between-cluster differentiation.

3.6. Regression analysis

To assess the relative importance of different perceptual dimensions in shaping residents' evaluations of cruise tourism, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was performed with the Support for Cruise Growth Index (SUPPORT), a four-item composite scale, as the dependent variable. The index was computed as the mean of four Likert-scale items and demonstrated acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.708$). For regression analysis, the standardized (Z-score) version of the index was used. In the first step, perceptual indices were entered simultaneously to estimate their direct contribution to residents' evaluations, independent of socio-demographic characteristics.

In the second step, socio-demographic and structural control variables, including education, income, place of birth, length of residence in Kotor, employment in the cruise sector, were added to the model. This hierarchical approach allowed for an assessment of whether perceptual factors retain explanatory power once individual background characteristics are taken into account. Standard diagnostic procedures were applied to assess the suitability of the regression model, including inspection of multicollinearity among predictors and evaluation of model fit. Standardised regression coefficients (β) are reported to facilitate comparison of effect sizes across predictors. This stepwise analytical strategy ensured consistency between descriptive, relational and explanatory levels of analysis.

4. Results

4.1. Composite indices of residents' perceptions

As a first step, the analysis is based on seven standardized composite indices capturing distinct but interrelated dimensions of residents' perceptions of cruise tourism in Kotor: perceived economic benefits (ECON_BEN), governance and participation (GOV_PART), environmental and heritage impacts (ENVIRON_HERIT), exposure to cruise activity (EXPOSURE), two dimensions of quality-of-life pressure, crowding (QoL_CROWD) and urbanization-related pressure (QoL_URBAN) and overall support for cruise tourism growth (SUPPORT) (Table 1). Together, these indices represent a central empirical output of the study, as they condense multiple survey items into coherent, reliable and mutually comparable measures of the most important socio-economic and environmental tensions associated with cruise tourism in a small historic port city.

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics of composite indices (Z-standardized)*

Index	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Support for Cruise Growth	214	–1.18	1.88	0.00	0.73
Economic Benefits	214	–1.51	1.81	0.00	0.81
Governance/Participation	214	–1.19	2.12	0.00	0.80
Environmental/Heritage Impact	214	–1.60	1.25	0.00	0.75
Exposure to Cruise Activity	214	–1.69	1.04	0.00	0.69
QoL Pressure – Crowds	214	–1.83	1.02	0.00	0.91
QoL Pressure – Urbanization	214	–0.78	2.56	0.00	0.74

Table 1 summarises the descriptive statistics of the composite indices following Z-standardization. Because all indices were transformed into Z-scores before analysis, their means are centred at zero by definition. The variation across respondents is therefore reflected in the standard deviation and range values rather than in the mean. Minimum and maximum ranges, as well as standard deviations indicate varying levels of perceptual heterogeneity among residents. The greatest variability is observed for QoL Pressure – Crowds (SD = 0.91), Economic Benefits (SD = 0.81) and Governance/ Participation (SD = 0.80), indicating pronounced heterogeneity in how residents evaluate the economic gains from cruise tourism and the quality of local governance. Substantial dispersion is also evident for Environmental/Heritage Impacts (SD = 0.75; min = -1.60) and QoL Pressure – Urbanization (SD = 0.74; max = 2.56), suggesting that perceptions of environmental degradation and urban change vary widely across the local population. Support for Cruise Tourism Growth displays a moderate level of dispersion (SD = 0.73), pointing to a broad spectrum of attitudes ranging from strong support to marked opposition.

Exposure to Cruise Activity also exhibits moderate dispersion (SD = 0.69), reflecting differences in residents' daily interaction with cruise-related flows rather than a shared spatial experience.

Importantly, the identical number of observations for all indices (N = 214) confirms that no cases were lost due to missing values at this stage. Overall, the descriptive patterns already indicate that residents' perceptions of cruise tourism in Kotor are far from homogeneous, particularly with respect to economic benefits, governance and environmental impacts, thereby providing a clear rationale for the subsequent multivariate and segmentation analyses.

4.2. Correlational structure of residents' perceptions

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the internal structure of relationships among the composite perception indices and to identify dominant perceptual linkages prior to multivariate modelling in Table 2. Rather than assessing isolated pairwise associations, this analysis reveals broader relational patterns through which residents connect economic benefits, governance quality, environmental impacts and quality-of-life pressures associated with cruise tourism.

Table 2. *Pearson correlation matrix of composite indices of residents' perceptions of cruise tourism*

Index	SUPPORT	ECON_BEN	GOV_PART	ENVIRON_HERIT	EXPOSURE	CROWD	URBAN
SUPPORT	1						
ECON_BEN	0.634**	1					
GOV_PART	0.486**	0.426**	1				
ENVIRON_HERIT	-0.349**	-0.076	-0.354**	1			
EXPOSURE	0.221**	0.051	0.079	-0.161*	1		
QoL_CROWD	-0.127	0.186**	-0.285**	0.795**	-0.133	1	
QoL_URBAN	0.524**	0.442**	0.504**	-0.454**	0.149*	-0.359**	1

*Notes: Pearson correlation coefficients (two-tailed). * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.*

Overall support for cruise tourism growth is most strongly associated with perceived economic benefits (r = 0.634), followed by urbanization-related change (r = 0.524) and governance evaluations (r = 0.486). In contrast, support is negatively related to perceived environmental and heritage impacts, indicating that acceptance of cruise tourism is primarily grounded in assessments of its economic contribution and institutional management, while concerns over environmental degradation undermine social support.

The quality-of-life dimensions reveal a differentiated internal logic. Perceived crowding is very strongly linked to environmental and heritage impacts (r = 0.795), suggesting that congestion and ecological stress are experienced as a single, intertwined problem affecting everyday life in the destination. However, crowding itself shows no direct association with support for cruise tourism growth, implying that congestion alone does not automatically translate into opposition to further development.

Urbanization-related quality-of-life pressure follows a different pattern. It is positively associated with perceived economic benefits (r = 0.442), governance quality (r = 0.504) and support for cruise tourism growth (r = 0.524), while being negatively related to environmental and heritage impacts. This configuration points to a developmental paradox in which urban change and spatial transformation linked to cruise-related activities are interpreted by part of the population as acceptable, or even necessary, trade-offs for economic development, despite their potential pressures on the urban environment.

Exposure to cruise activity displays weaker but meaningful associations within the perceptual structure. Residents with higher everyday exposure tend to express slightly higher levels of support (r = 0.221) and less pronounced environmental concerns (r = -0.161), suggesting that direct contact with cruise-related flows may normalize perceived impacts or mitigate their salience rather than intensify opposition.

Taken together, the correlational structure reveals two partially competing perceptual logics. One connects environmental and heritage impacts with crowding perceptions and forms the basis of critical or resistant attitudes. The other links economic benefits, governance evaluations and acceptance of urban change, underpinning support for cruise tourism growth. These internally differentiated patterns indicate that residents do not constitute a homogeneous group, providing a clear rationale for the subsequent perceptual segmentation and multivariate analyses.

4.3. Perceptual segmentation of residents (Cluster analysis)

To move beyond average tendencies and capture heterogeneity in residents' perceptions of cruise tourism, a cluster analysis was conducted on the seven standardized composite indices. The results reveal a clearly differentiated perceptual structure within the local population, indicating that residents do not respond to cruise tourism as a homogeneous group but rather cluster into distinct profiles characterized by specific combinations of perceived benefits, pressures and attitudes. These labels were

assigned to reflect the dominant perceptual orientation within each profile and should be understood as analytical descriptors.

The final solution identifies three internally coherent resident profiles, which differ substantially across all core dimensions of perception, including quality of life, environmental and heritage impacts, governance, economic benefits, exposure and support for further cruise tourism development. Figure 3 visually illustrates these differentiated perceptual configurations, highlighting qualitatively distinct patterns. Based on the dominant perceptual emphases within each configuration, the clusters were accordingly labelled Environmental Skeptics, Pro-economic Enthusiasts and Ambivalent Pragmatists, reflecting their prevailing interpretative orientations toward cruise tourism.

The three-cluster solution resulted in groups of unequal but analytically meaningful size (Cluster 1: n = 50; 23.4%; Cluster 2: n = 57; 26.6%; Cluster 3: n = 107; 50.0%). Table 3 presents the final standardized cluster centers across the seven composite indices, which form the empirical basis for profile interpretation. The clusters exhibit clearly differentiated centroid patterns across all perceptual dimensions, particularly with respect to quality-of-life pressures, environmental and heritage impacts, economic benefits and support for further cruise development (Figure 3). These centroid configurations substantiate the interpretative labels assigned to each profile.

Table 3. *Final cluster centers (Z-scores) for perceptual indices*

Index	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3
QoL_CROWD	-1.14	-0.34	0.71
QoL_URBAN	-0.13	0.77	-0.35
EXPOSURE	0.06	0.18	-0.12
ENVIRON_HERIT	-0.67	-0.49	0.57
SUPPORT	-0.38	0.80	-0.25
ECON_BEN	-0.78	0.73	-0.03
GOV_PART	-0.11	0.75	-0.35

Note: Values represent standardized (Z-score) cluster centroids. Positive values indicate above-sample average perceptions.

Environmental Skeptics (Cluster 1; 23.4%) are characterized by the lowest levels of perceived economic benefits and support for cruise tourism growth. This group places strong emphasis on environmental and heritage-related pressures, as well as on crowding in everyday life, while expressing relatively low trust in governance and participatory processes. Their perceptual profile suggests a predominantly cost-oriented evaluation of cruise tourism, in which environmental degradation and pressure on daily routines outweigh perceived economic or developmental gains.

Pro-economic Enthusiasts (Cluster 2; 26.6%) display the most positive overall orientation toward cruise tourism. They report the highest scores on perceived economic benefits, governance and participation and support for further cruise growth. At the same time, this group also acknowledges elevated levels of urban pressure and exposure to cruise activity, indicating an acceptance of certain spatial and social costs as a trade-off for economic opportunities. This profile reflects a development-oriented perspective in which cruise tourism is viewed as a legitimate and manageable driver of local prosperity.

Ambivalent Pragmatists (Cluster 3; 50.0%), the largest group in the sample, occupy an intermediate yet distinct position. While their evaluation of economic benefits remains moderate and their support for further cruise growth is relatively low, they report the strongest perceptions of crowding and

environmental and heritage-related impacts. This combination points to a pragmatic stance: cruise tourism is recognized as an established reality, but its negative externalities, particularly those affecting everyday life and the local environment, dominate residents' overall assessment.

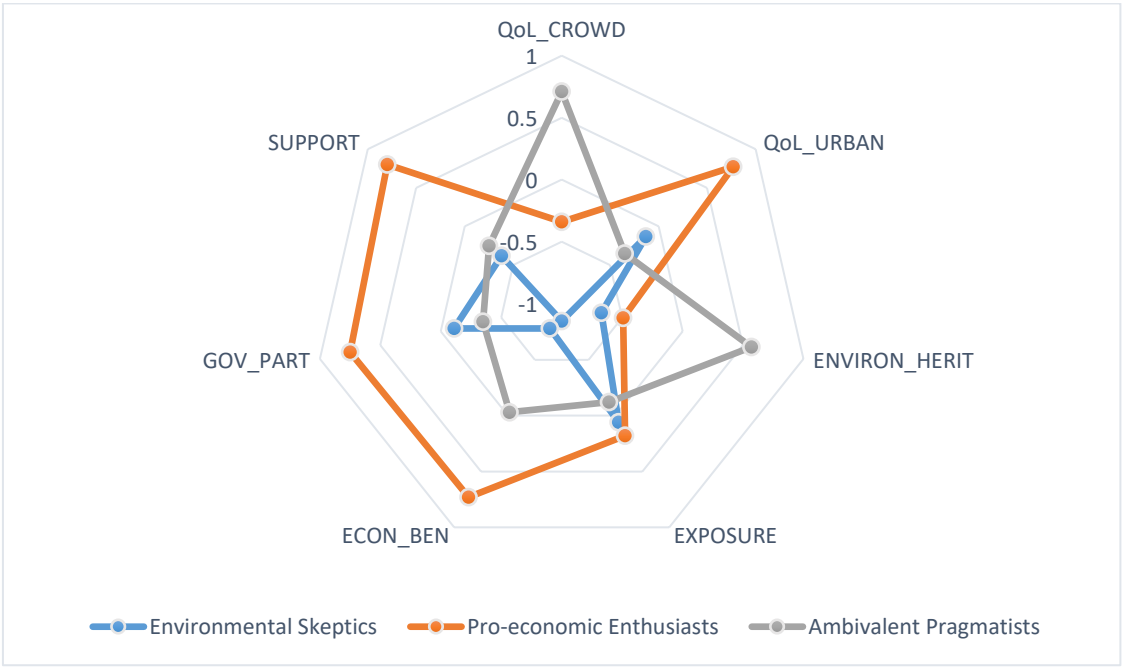


Figure 3. *Perceptual profiles of resident clusters based on composite indices*
Note: Values represent mean Z-scores of composite indices. Positive values indicate above-average perceptions relative to the full sample.

Between-cluster differences were statistically confirmed through one-way ANOVA tests for all seven indices (Table 4). The largest effect sizes were observed for crowding-related quality of life ($\eta^2 = 0.717$) and environmental/heritage impacts ($\eta^2 = 0.591$), underscoring that perceived pressures on daily life and the environment constitute the primary axes of differentiation among residents. Substantial differences were also found for support for cruise tourism growth ($\eta^2 = 0.443$), perceived economic benefits ($\eta^2 = 0.435$) and governance and participation ($\eta^2 = 0.339$), indicating that attitudes toward development and institutional performance further structure resident segmentation.

Table 4. *ANOVA results for differences between clusters on perceptual indices*

Index	F	p
QoL Pressure – Crowds (QoL_CROWD)	267.49	< 0.001
QoL Pressure – Urbanization (QoL_URBAN)	73.18	< 0.001
Exposure to Cruise Activity (EXPOSURE)	3.98	0.020
Environmental/Heritage Impacts (ENVIRON_HERIT)	152.66	< 0.001
Governance/Participation (GOV_PART)	54.01	< 0.001
Economic Benefits (ECON_BEN)	81.28	< 0.001
Support for Cruise Tourism Growth (SUPPORT)	83.98	< 0.001

Note: One-way ANOVA tests were conducted using standardized (Z-score) composite indices. All indices show statistically significant between-cluster differences.

Post-hoc comparisons (*Bonferroni/Games-Howell*) clarify these patterns. All three clusters differ significantly in their perception of crowding, with Ambivalent Pragmatists reporting the highest levels and Environmental Skeptics the lowest. Pro-economic Enthusiasts score significantly higher than the other two clusters on economic benefits, governance and support for cruise tourism growth, while Ambivalent Pragmatists consistently report the strongest environmental and heritage-related concerns. Differences in exposure to cruise activity are more modest but remain significant, with Pro-economic Enthusiasts reporting higher exposure than Ambivalent Pragmatists.

Taken together, the cluster analysis demonstrates that residents' responses to cruise tourism in Kotor are structured around distinct perceptual logics, rather than along a simple pro-anti continuum. While one segment strongly endorses cruise tourism as an economic opportunity, another emphasizes environmental and quality-of-life costs and a third occupies a cautious middle ground. This segmentation provides a nuanced empirical foundation for understanding social acceptance of cruise tourism and highlights the need for differentiated governance strategies that address the concerns and expectations of specific resident groups rather than assuming uniform community responses.

4.4. Multivariate group differences in residents' perceptions

Extending the perceptual segmentation identified in Section 4.3, multivariate analyses were conducted to examine whether residents' perceptions of cruise tourism differ across selected socio-economic and spatial characteristics (Table 5). The grouping variables were derived directly from the survey questionnaire and reflect respondents' socio-economic position, spatial proximity and level of economic integration into cruise tourism. As summarized in Table 5, the results consistently indicate that economic engagement with cruise tourism and perceived employment security represent the primary sources of differentiation, while spatial factors play a limited role in structuring residents' attitudes.

Table 5. *Multivariate effects across MANOVA models using selected survey-based grouping variables (listed in Appendix D).*

Survey grouping variable	Multivariate test	F	p	Partial η^2
Cluster membership	Wilks' Λ	61.51	< 0.001	0.677
Tourism work experience	Pillai's Trace	1.79	0.039	0.057
Cruise-sector employment	Pillai's Trace	7.26	< 0.001	0.198
Residential distance	Pillai's Trace	1.30	0.184	0.109
Months per year in Kotor	Pillai's Trace	1.59	0.078	0.103
Intention to move	Pillai's Trace	1.21	0.268	0.079
Perceived job security	Pillai's Trace	5.97	< 0.001	0.169

Note: Each grouping variable was entered as the fixed factor in a separate MANOVA model with the seven composite indices as dependent variables

Cluster membership shows a strong and robust multivariate effect across all perceptual indices, confirming that the three resident profiles identified in the cluster analysis differ substantially in their evaluations of cruise tourism impacts. This finding reinforces the analytical validity of the perceptual segmentation and demonstrates that residents' attitudes are structured around coherent combinations of perceived benefits, pressures and governance evaluations rather than isolated or issue-specific opinions.

Beyond clustering, direct involvement in the cruise economy emerges as a significant differentiating factor. In particular, formal employment in the cruise sector shows a pronounced multivariate effect, indicating that economically engaged residents systematically differ from non-engaged residents in their overall perceptual profiles. These residents report higher exposure to cruise activity, express

stronger support for further development and hold more positive views of economic benefits and governance quality. In contrast, broader tourism work experience exhibits only modest multivariate effects, suggesting that direct and stable economic integration into the cruise sector is more influential than occasional or indirect involvement.

Spatial variables display limited explanatory power. Neither residential distance from the port nor the duration of residence in Kotor produces significant multivariate effects, indicating that proximity to cruise-related activity and long-term residence alone do not fundamentally shape residents' overall perception structures. This finding suggests that attitudes toward cruise tourism are influenced less by where people live and more by their socio-economic positioning within the local tourism system.

Perceived job security related to cruise tourism also shows a strong multivariate effect. Residents who perceive their employment situation as secure report higher levels of support for cruise tourism growth and more favorable evaluations of governance and participation, highlighting the central role of economic stability in shaping attitudes toward development. By contrast, relocation intentions do not yield a significant multivariate effect and are associated only with selective univariate differences, primarily related to environmental and heritage perceptions.

Univariate follow-up analyses (Table 6) further clarify these patterns. Employment in the cruise sector is associated with significantly higher support for cruise tourism growth, stronger perceptions of economic benefits and more positive governance evaluations. Similarly, higher perceived job security corresponds to increased support and greater trust in governance structures. Differences related to tourism work experience are more limited in magnitude and primarily affect exposure and support levels.

Table 6. *Selected significant univariate effects (follow-up tests) by survey grouping variables.*

Survey grouping variable	Index	Higher mean	Partial η^2
Tourism work experience	EXPOSURE	Current > others	0.080
	SUPPORT	Current > never	0.038
Cruise-sector employment	SUPPORT	Workers > non-workers	0.095
	ECON_BEN	Workers > non-workers	0.051
	GOV_PART	Workers > non-workers	0.035
Perceived job security	SUPPORT	Secure > insecure	0.072
	GOV_PART	Secure > insecure	0.104

Note: Table 6 reports selected univariate follow-up results for indices that showed statistically significant differences within each grouping variable. Higher mean indicates the group with the higher mean value on the standardized index. Effect sizes are reported as partial η^2

Taken together, the multivariate results demonstrate that residents' perceptions of cruise tourism in Kotor are structured primarily by economic and institutional factors rather than by spatial proximity or length of residence. While cluster membership captures internally coherent perceptual logics, socio-economic engagement, particularly stable employment and perceived job security, emerges as a significant mechanism through which residents interpret the costs and benefits of cruise tourism. These findings highlight the importance of differentiated governance strategies that recognize residents' heterogeneous economic positions and address distributional concerns, rather than assuming uniform community responses to cruise tourism development.

4.5. Drivers of residents' support for cruise tourism (Regression analysis)

To synthesize the preceding analyses and assess the relative importance of different perceptual dimensions, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted with the Support for Cruise Growth Index (SUPPORT) as the dependent variable. In the first step, only perceptual indices were entered into the model, allowing for an assessment of their direct contribution to residents' support independent of socio-demographic and structural characteristics.

Model 1 explains a substantial proportion of variance in support (R^2 = 0.546), indicating strong explanatory power. The model was statistically significant, $F(6, 207) = 41.50$, $p < 0.001$. Perceived economic benefits emerge as the dominant positive predictor of support, followed by perceptions of governance and participation. In contrast, environmental and heritage impacts exert a significant negative effect, confirming that perceived environmental degradation directly undermines residents' willingness to support further cruise tourism development. Acceptance of urban change and higher exposure to cruise activity are also positively associated with support, suggesting that for part of the population, urban pressure and everyday exposure are interpreted as acceptable components of a broader development trade-off. Perceived crowding, however, does not exert a significant independent effect once other perceptual dimensions are taken into account.

In Model 2, socio-demographic and structural control variables (education, income, place of birth, length of residence and employment in the cruise sector) were added to the regression equation. Their inclusion results in only a negligible increase in explained variance (ΔR^2 = 0.008, n.s.), while the magnitude and significance of the perceptual predictors remain largely unchanged. None of the control variables reach statistical significance, indicating that residents' support for cruise tourism in Kotor is shaped primarily by evaluative perceptions of its impacts rather than by socio-demographic background or structural position.

Table 7. *Hierarchical regression models predicting support for cruise tourism (listed in Appendix D).*

Predictor	Model 1 β	p	Model 2 β	p
QoL – Crowding	0.102	0.249	0.089	0.326
QoL – Urban pressure	0.148	0.019	0.140	0.029
Exposure to cruise activity	0.136	0.005	0.114	0.027
Environmental/heritage impacts	-0.255	0.003	-0.243	0.005
Governance/participation	0.142	0.015	0.152	0.011
Economic benefits	0.463	< 0.001	0.445	< 0.001
Education	–	–	0.001	0.990
Income	–	–	0.071	0.149
Place of birth (local vs. in-migrant)	–	–	-0.035	0.546
Employment in cruise sector	–	–	-0.057	0.274
Years living in Kotor	–	–	-0.020	0.720
R^2	0.546		0.554	
Adjusted R^2	0.533		0.530	

Note: Standardized regression coefficients (β) are reported.

Taken together, the regression results support the findings of the cluster analysis and multivariate group comparisons (Table 7). Across analytical levels, support for cruise tourism is consistently driven by perceived economic benefits, governance quality and assessments of environmental consequences, whereas spatial, demographic and structural characteristics play a secondary role. These results

highlight that residents' acceptance of cruise tourism is fundamentally perception-based and contingent upon how development outcomes are evaluated, rather than on fixed social or spatial attributes.

5. Discussion and concluding remarks

The findings of this study provide important insights into how residents of Kotor perceive cruise tourism-related pressures, benefits and governance and how these perceptions combine to shape broader evaluations of cruise tourism. Rather than reflecting a simple continuum from support to opposition, residents' perceptions in Kotor are structured through interrelated and internally differentiated perceptual dimensions. This confirms the need to move beyond aggregated impact assessments toward more nuanced, perception-based approaches to understanding the social sustainability of cruise tourism (Sharpley, 2013; McLeod, 2014; Božović & Avdić, 2025).

Although cruise tourism is highly visible and concentrated in the Old Town area (Figure 1), direct exposure alone does not explain residents' attitudes. Residents differentiate their views mainly through how they judge economic benefits, governance performance and the capacity to manage pressures. Exposure thus reflects everyday context, but it is not the main dividing line between resident evaluations. This interpretation is consistent with recent mobility-based perspectives that view destinations as places shared by residents, visitors and other users, instead of a simple host-guest relationship (Donaire & Zerva, 2025). It also challenges spatially deterministic assumptions that equate proximity with opposition (Butler, 1980; Del Chiappa *et al*., 2019) and supports arguments that residents' attitudes are socially and institutionally mediated rather than mechanically produced by physical closeness to tourism activity (Nunkoo & Ramkisson, 2010).

Perceived economic benefits emerge as the most consistent and powerful anchor of residents' evaluations across all analytical stages. Economic benefits are strongly associated with more favourable overall assessments of cruise tourism and play a central role in sustaining acceptance even under conditions of perceived pressure. However, the results also indicate that economic considerations do not operate in isolation. Their positive influence is closely intertwined with governance-related perceptions, suggesting that economic gains are more readily accepted when residents believe that tourism development is managed responsibly and transparently. This reinforces the argument that economic compensation alone is insufficient to secure long-term social sustainability and that institutional trust constitutes a critical mediating dimension in residents' evaluations (Ly & Cope, 2023; Wang & Ke, 2024; Jiang *et al*., 2023; Sandven *et al*., 2024).

Governance and participation represent one of the most analytically significant dimensions identified in this study. It is important to note that the study measures perceived governance performance rather than objective institutional effectiveness. What matters for social acceptance is not whether residents possess detailed knowledge of governance procedures, but whether they perceive decision-making processes as transparent, inclusive and responsive. Positive perceptions of governance are associated not only with higher acceptance of cruise tourism, but also with lower perceived quality-of-life and environmental pressures. This dual role suggests that conflicts surrounding cruise tourism are often less about tourism per se and more about how its impacts are governed. Respondents appear more willing to tolerate urban change and spatial pressure when they perceive decision-making processes as legitimate and responsive. This finding could support broader claims that governance quality can mitigate social tensions in tourism destinations more effectively than restrictive measures focused solely on limiting visitor numbers (Hall, 2011; Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Koens *et al*., 2018), as well as conditioning a better quality of life through economic benefits (Almeida-García *et al*., 2015).

The study also highlights the importance of differentiating between distinct dimensions of quality-of-life pressure. Perceived crowding and environmental or heritage degradation form one coherent perceptual cluster, reflecting everyday discomfort and concerns related to congestion and ecological stress. In contrast, perceptions of urban change and spatial transformation follow a different logic, one that is more closely aligned with development-oriented evaluations. While crowding and environmental pressure are associated with critical attitudes, urbanisation-related pressure can coexist with acceptance of tourism development. This distinction helps explain why residents may simultaneously acknowledge negative impacts while refraining from outright opposition, interpreting certain urban transformations as necessary or inevitable trade-offs associated with economic development (Ap, 1992; Andereck *et al.*, 2005; García-Hernández *et al.*, 2017).

A particularly relevant and somewhat counterintuitive finding concerns the limited role of perceived crowding in shaping overall evaluations of cruise tourism. Although crowding is strongly linked to environmental and heritage concerns, it does not independently predict broader acceptance or rejection once other perceptual dimensions are taken into account. This suggests that crowding functions more as a symptom of tourism intensity than as a direct driver of opposition. Residents appear to differentiate between temporary inconvenience and structural threats to quality of life and urban identity, indicating that crowding becomes politically salient primarily when it is perceived as unmanaged or irreversible (Koens *et al.*, 2018; Milano *et al.*, 2019).

The weak explanatory power of spatial and sociodemographic variables further underscores the perception-based nature of residents' attitudes. Contrary to the findings of numerous authors (Gatewood & Cameron, 2009; Belisle & Hoy, 1980; Del Chiappa *et al.*, 2019), neither residential distance from the port, length of residence nor basic demographic characteristics substantially differentiate perceptual profiles once evaluative dimensions are considered. Instead, socio-economic positioning within the tourism system, particularly employment in the cruise sector and perceived job security, plays a more meaningful role. These findings challenge simplified centre-periphery narratives and highlight the importance of considering residents' functional and economic relationships to tourism when assessing social acceptance (Ap, 1992; Sharpley, 2013).

By identifying distinct perceptual profiles within the local population, the study demonstrates that residents do not constitute a homogeneous community with uniform interests or concerns. This segmentation has important implications for governance and policy-making. Measures aimed exclusively at mitigating pressures or exclusively at promoting economic benefits are unlikely to resonate equally across different resident groups. Instead, differentiated governance strategies that recognise diverse perceptual logics and address both distributional and procedural concerns are more likely to foster long-term social sustainability (Fredline & Faulkner, 2000; Bramwell & Lane, 2011).

Although this research is grounded in the specific context of Kotor, its implications extend beyond the local case. Many historic cruise destinations face similar combinations of spatial constraints, economic dependence on tourism and governance challenges (Papathanassis, 2017; Fernández-Gámez *et al.*, 2022; Božović & Avdić, 2025; Da Cruz Vareiro *et al.*, 2012). The perceptual structures identified in this study therefore offer broader conceptual insights into how social acceptance of cruise tourism is formed in such contexts. Rather than framing acceptance as a binary outcome, the findings suggest that it is a complex and internally differentiated process shaped by residents' evaluations of benefits, pressures and governance quality.

From a practical perspective, the findings have several implications for relevant stakeholder groups involved in cruise tourism management. For local authorities and destination managers, the results underline the importance of transparent decision-making and more visible communication about how

cruise-related pressures are managed. For the Port of Kotor, the findings point to the need for closer coordination of cruise calls and arrival schedules in order to reduce peak-time congestion in the historic core. Cruise companies can contribute by supporting more responsible visitor management practices, including better coordination with local institutions and greater attention to environmental and heritage-related pressures. Tour operators also have an important role in dispersing visitor flows beyond the Old Town and developing itineraries that reduce spatial concentration while supporting a wider range of local businesses.

Strengthening the perceived transparency and inclusiveness of governance processes may be more effective in sustaining social acceptance than relying solely on visitor caps or infrastructural expansion. Policies aimed at improving the distribution of economic benefits, particularly beyond directly employed cruise-sector workers, may reduce perceptual polarisation within the community. Differentiated communication strategies should be developed for distinct resident segments, recognising that Environmental Skeptics, Pro-economic Enthusiasts and Ambivalent Pragmatists respond to different policy priorities. Finally, managing crowding alone may not substantially increase support unless residents perceive broader institutional capacity to regulate long-term environmental and urban pressures. Together, these implications suggest that governance credibility and benefit distribution constitute central levers for enhancing the social sustainability of cruise tourism in Kotor.

Overall, the results show that residents' support for cruise tourism in Kotor is driven primarily by perceived economic benefits and governance credibility, while environmental/heritage pressures and everyday crowding remain the main sources of concern. The findings therefore confirm that social sustainability in cruise destinations depends less on spatial proximity alone and more on how residents evaluate benefits, pressures and institutional capacity to manage them.

5.1. Methodological limitations

Several methodological limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings of this study. The sample was collected exclusively within the municipality of Kotor, which limits the generalisability of the results to other cruise destinations with different spatial, institutional or socio-economic contexts. Although the sample size (N = 214) is adequate for multivariate analyses, the geographically and contextually specific nature of the case study constrains broader inference.

The study relies on self-reported survey data, which may be affected by subjective biases such as social desirability or season-specific perceptions, particularly given the highly visible and temporally concentrated nature of cruise tourism. While the constructed indices demonstrate satisfactory internal reliability, they necessarily reduce complex and multidimensional attitudes to numerical representations.

The cross-sectional research design precludes causal inference, allowing the identification of associations rather than dynamic or directional relationships; longitudinal or multi-seasonal designs would provide a stronger basis for assessing changes in residents' perceptions over time. The applied statistical techniques are based on assumptions of normality and variance homogeneity. Although alternative estimation procedures were employed where these assumptions were violated, the risk of Type I error inflation in multiple testing cannot be fully excluded. Similarly, the cluster analysis depends on the researcher-defined number of groups and the resulting typologies should therefore be interpreted as descriptive analytical constructs rather than fixed population categories.

Taken together, this study contributes to the literature on cruise tourism and social sustainability by demonstrating the value of a perception-based and multidimensional analytical approach. It shows that

understanding residents' attitudes requires attention not only to what impacts are experienced, but to how these impacts are interpreted, prioritised and mediated through institutional contexts.

5.2. Future research directions

Future research could extend this study in several important directions. Longitudinal and multi-season designs would allow for an examination of whether perceptual profiles and predictors of support shift across peak and shoulder periods, as well as under different cruise management regimes. Comparative analyses across Adriatic UNESCO port-of-call destinations could test the external validity of the identified perceptual configurations and assess how variations in governance capacity influence social acceptance. Mixed-method approaches, including follow-up interviews or focus groups within the identified clusters, would provide deeper insight into how residents interpret governance processes and economic benefits in everyday terms and why certain pressures translate into opposition while others do not. Further research could also integrate perception-based indices with objective indicators, such as visitor density, air-quality measurements or port call scheduling patterns, thereby strengthening both explanatory power and policy relevance.

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The authors used AI-assisted language editing tools to improve grammar and stylistic consistency of the manuscript. All analyses, interpretations and conclusions remain the sole responsibility of the authors.

APPENDICES

Appendix A. Port of Kotor: Vessel calls and passengers by type (2000-2025)

Year	Passenger vessels (calls)	Yachts (calls)	Passenger vessels (passengers)	Yachts (passengers)
2000	5	75	2,680	329
2001	10	267	4,918	1,032
2002	81	282	18,537	1,233
2003	57	605	34,120	2,359
2004	70	651	19,027	2,294
2005	150	767	36,595	3,081
2006	155	1,005	36,360	4,536
2007	176	1,205	48,161	5,751
2008	227	1,109	52,739	5,910
2009	260	1,109	75,128	5,101
2010	309	1,118	145,185	5,007
2011	316	1,224	189,426	5,739
2012	343	1,454	245,400	5,642
2013	387	1,493	317,746	6,485
2014	353	1,637	309,322	7,559
2015	411	1,567	442,029	7,096
2016	487	1,674	535,232	8,292
2017	430	1,838	532,387	8,630
2018	411	1,831	492,475	8,054
2019	464	1,604	613,747	8,811
2020	9	265	3,009	766

Year	Passenger vessels (calls)	Yachts (calls)	Passenger vessels (passengers)	Yachts (passengers)
2021	64	723	9,139	2,791
2022	432	798	418,174	3,259
2023	432	1,086	505,076	3,535
2024	476	1,010	586,403	3,469
2025	483	1,075	580,411	3,668
Total	**6,998**	**27,472**	**6,253,426**	**120,429**

Source: Port of Kotor (2025)

Appendix B. Questionnaire extract: Attitudes toward cruise tourism in Kotor, Montenegro
This appendix provides an English translation of Part B of the resident questionnaire used in the present study. The survey was administered online in April 2024 and was originally conducted in the Montenegrin language. The items presented below capture residents' attitudes toward cruise tourism and form the empirical basis for constructing the composite indices analysed in this paper (e.g., perceived economic benefits, environmental/heritage impacts, quality-of-life pressures, governance/participation and support for further cruise tourism growth) in the context of Kotor, Montenegro. The same survey dataset was also used in the earlier study by Božović and Avdić (2025); however, the current paper applies an expanded analytical framework focused on perceptual segmentation and explanatory modelling of support.

For the following statements, please indicate your level of agreement using a scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree)

Response scale (Likert-type):
1 = Strongly disagree | 2 = Disagree | 3 = Neither agree nor disagree / No opinion | 4 = Agree | 5 = Strongly agree

Note: The questionnaire items presented below were adapted from previous cruise-tourism resident perception studies, primarily Del Chiappa et al. (2019), Del Chiappa et al. (2021) and Peručić and Puh (2012), with modifications for the local context of Kotor.

Statement	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Improves the physical and socio-cultural environment.	□	□	□	□	□
Encourages environmental protection.	□	□	□	□	□
Enhances safety and security in the city.	□	□	□	□	□
Enables the preservation and utilization of local cultural heritage.	□	□	□	□	□
Improves the quality of public services.	□	□	□	□	□
Encourages the development of better infrastructure (e.g., roads, water supply).	□	□	□	□	□
Utilizes the identity and authenticity of the location in the best possible way.	□	□	□	□	□
Expands the local offer of cultural and entertainment activities and attractions.	□	□	□	□	□
Enables interaction with new people and cultures.	□	□	□	□	□
Improves the quality of restaurants, hotels and retail establishments.	□	□	□	□	□
Increases the income of the local population.	□	□	□	□	□
Increases public investment in infrastructure.	□	□	□	□	□
Increases private investment in infrastructure.	□	□	□	□	□
Increases employment opportunities.	□	□	□	□	□
Promotes Kotor as a desirable tourist destination.	□	□	□	□	□
Increases air and sea pollution.	□	□	□	□	□
Generates significant amounts of waste.	□	□	□	□	□

Revenues from cruise tourism do not go to the local community and residents but to business entities outside the Municipality of Kotor.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Increases the number of minor criminal offenses.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Increases the cost of living.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Crowds in the Old Town of Kotor caused by cruise ships force me to change my usual daily activities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
During cruise ship visits, local entertainment venues and public areas (squares, parks, etc.) are overcrowded.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Large cruise ships spoil the beauty of the city.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Large cruise ships undermine Kotor's status as a high-quality holiday destination.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cruise tourists are not good spenders.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Brings more benefits than harm.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The development of cruise tourism is being managed effectively.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Local institutions should become more active in attracting even more cruise ships.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Expanding the tourist offer attractive to cruise tourists beyond the city center would be very beneficial.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The city feels empty without cruise ships.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Kotor's current tourist offer meets the needs of cruise tourists.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
No measures have been taken to reduce traffic congestion caused by the large number of cruise ships arriving on the same day.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Activities for cruise tourists need to be better organized in order to reduce congestion in the Old Town.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sustainable and compatible with the long-term development of the destination.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Beneficial for the local economy and tourism sector.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Helps the tourism sector recover and stabilize after crisis periods.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Has a positive effect on stationary (conventional/overnight) tourism in the destination.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Provides a significant share of income for the tourism economy and the local community.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Positively affects the image and recognisability of Kotor as a tourist destination.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Creates new business and investment opportunities in the destination.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Increases employment opportunities in the tourism economy.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Improves public infrastructure and public services in the destination.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Improves recreational amenities (parks, promenades, sports facilities).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Helps preserve local culture and tradition.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Contributes to the restoration of historic buildings and monuments.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Contributes to the conservation of the destination's natural resources.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Encourages environmental awareness among all stakeholders.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Encourages environmental education and campaigns in the destination.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Improves cooperation between local authorities, tourism companies and the local community.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Extends the length of visitors' stay in Kotor.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Reduces seasonality and the off-season period.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Crowding in the Old Town makes it difficult for both tourists and local residents to move around.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Traffic congestion negatively affects visit quality and mobility.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Municipal infrastructure (water, sewage, electricity) is adequate for the number of tourists.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The destination's carrying capacity (accommodation, restaurants, parking) is sufficient for visitors.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Deficiencies in infrastructural capacity negatively affect tourists' experience.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Effective management of crowding and traffic contributes to the sustainable development of the destination.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Appendix C. Structure of composite indices

Index	Items (short description)	No. of items	Cronbach α
QoL_CROWD	Old Town congestion; Public-space overcrowding during cruise arrivals; Cruise-growth threat to quality of life	3	0.895
QoL_URBAN	Urban transformation; Traffic; Noise; Overconstruction	4	0.717
ENVIRON_HERIT	Air/sea pollution; Waste; Visual degradation; UNESCO threat; Environmental protection (R)	5	0.808
ECON_BEN	Local income; Employment; Public investment; Private investment; Destination image; Public services" to the item description to reflect all six items	6	0.892
GOV_PART	Local information; Consultation; Problem-solving efforts	3	0.713
EXPOSURE	Frequency of Old Town visits; Contact with cruise tourists; Residential distance (R)	3	n/a
SUPPORT	Support for growth; Benefits > costs; Good management; City without cruises	4	0.708

*(R) – reversed items

* N/A = Cronbach's α is not applicable to EXPOSURE because it was constructed as a formative composite index (see Section 3.2.2).

Appendix D. Additional survey variables used in statistical analyses (controls and grouping variables)
This appendix lists the socio-demographic, socio-economic and spatial/experiential variables used in the analyses alongside the composite indices. These variables were included either as control predictors in the hierarchical regression model (Section 3.6) or as grouping variables in the multivariate comparisons (Section 3.5).

Variable (label)	Question wording / measurement and coding	Analytical role
Income (*Q5: What is your average monthly income?*)	Original coding: 1 = Up to EUR 450; 2 = EUR 451–1000; 3 = EUR 1001–1500; 4 = EUR 1501–2000; 5 = Over EUR 2000. For regression, categories were recoded as 1 = Up to EUR 1000 (original codes 1–2); 2 = EUR 1001–2000 (original codes 3–4); 3 = Over EUR 2000 (original code 5).	Control variable in hierarchical regression (Model 2)
Education (*Q3: What is your highest completed educational qualification?*)	Original coding: 1 = Primary education; 2 = Secondary education; 3 = Higher school; 4 = Bachelor's degree; 5 = Specialist degree; 6 = Master's degree; 7 = Doctorate. For regression, categories were recoded as 1 = Primary education; 2 = Secondary education; 3 = Higher education (original codes 3–7).	Control variable in hierarchical regression (Model 2)
Place of birth (local vs. in-migrant) *(Q6: Were you born and raised in Kotor or did you move to Kotor later?)*	1 = Born and raised in Kotor; 2 = Moved to Kotor later.	Control variable in hierarchical regression (Model 2)
Years living in Kotor *(Q7: How many years have you lived in Kotor?)*	Ordinal categories: 1 = 0–5 years; 2 = 6–10 years; 3 = 11–20 years; 4 = 21–30 years; 5 = More than 30 years.	Control variable in hierarchical regression (Model 2)
Employment in cruise sector *(Q11: Is your regular job related to cruise tourism [port, shipping agency, tourist*	1 = Yes; 2 = No.	Control variable in hierarchical regression (Model 2); grouping variable in

agency/guide, taxi boats, hospitality, retail]?)		MANOVA (Section 3.5)
Tourism work experience (*Q10: Do you have work experience in tourism [hotel, restaurant, tourist agency]*)	1 = Currently working in tourism; 2 = Previously worked in tourism but not currently; 3 = Never worked in tourism.	Grouping variable in MANOVA (Section 3.5)
Perceived job security (*Q25: Does cruise tourism in Kotor create secure jobs [permanent employment]?*)	1 = Yes; 2 = No.	Grouping variable in MANOVA (Section 3.5)
Residential distance (*Q8: Distance of your place of residence from the Port of Kotor and the Old Town [km]*)	1 = Up to 2 km; 2 = 2–5 km; 3 = 5–10 km; 4 = More than 10 km.	Grouping variable in MANOVA (Section 3.5)
Period of the year spent in Kotor (*Q9: How long during the year do you stay in Kotor?*)	1 = Throughout the year; 2 = During summer; 3 = During winter.	Grouping variable in MANOVA (Section 3.5)
Intention to move (*Q20: Do you plan to move away from the Municipality of Kotor?)*	Original coding: 1 = Yes, to another part of Montenegro; 2 = Yes, to a neighbouring country; 3 = Yes, abroad; 4 = No intention to move; 5 = Unsure. For MANOVA, responses were recoded as 1 = No intention to move (original code 4); 2 = Unsure (original code 5); 3 = Intends to move (original codes 1–3).	Grouping variable in MANOVA (Section 3.5)

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