

TOURISTS' PERCEPTION OF THE BENEFITS OF PARKS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF GREEN SPACES MANAGEMENT

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Abstract: This paper aims to analyze the perception of visitors (tourists) about the benefits and importance of parks in Timisoara. To carry out this study, we applied an online questionnaire created in Google Forms, which included 12 questions about the opportunities offered by them. Parks are extremely important for both physical and mental health, being considered more than simple green spaces, they are extremely important for recreation, sports, biodiversity conservation and improving the quality of life. Park management is also extremely important, investing in the arrangement and creation of more parks offers tourists and residents long-term benefits, being essential for a balanced and sustainable lifestyle. In addition to their beauty, the plant species, trees and shrubs existing in parks in large cities play an essential role in absorbing carbon dioxide and cooling the air, which is why it is important to expand green spaces, being beneficial both for people's health and for combating climate change.

Key words: tourists, management of the parks, combating climate change

INTRODUCTION

Parks play a very important role both for the environment and for people's health.

From the specialized literature [7], it is noted that there are over 150 parks and heritage gardens, for example the Cișmigiu Garden in the capital of the country Bucharest, the Romanescu Park in Craiova, but also the Royal Palace Park in Mogoșoaia.

There is also a study that analyzed the parks in Timisoara and the city of Cluj Napoca, which shows that the parks were classified into three-star, two-star and one-star parks. The 3-star parks include the Rose Park in Timisoara, the Justice Park and the Children's Park. Parks with 2 stars : Queen Maria Park, Cathedral Park, Timișoara Botanical Park. Parks with one star: Civic Park (Citadel), C.D. Loga Park, Iancu Huniade Park, Andrei Mocioni Park [8]

In Romania there are 14 natural parks, 13 national parks and over 900 other categories of protected areas, which represent approximately 8% of the country's surface. [9]



Figure 1. Map Top of parks in Timisoara

Source: [8]

There are numerous studies on biodiversity [1,2], and at the conference entitled "The Role of Parks in Biodiversity Conservation" the importance of biodiversity in environmental conservation and nature protection was discussed. [10]



Figure 2. Alpinet Park - Japanese garden

Source: [12]

In the specialized literature, there are numerous studies about parks [3,4,5], that clarify certain aspects about the understanding of biological diversity, ecological management and the impact of tourism on them.

The literature describes the benefits of parks and the styles in which parks can be designed depending on the area where they are located. There are different styles of park design, for example: Japanese style, British country style or modern minimalist style. Parks significantly influence the tourist experience. [6]

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this study, we used a questionnaire created in Google Forms and distributed online. This is a useful tool because the results are recorded in an Excel spreadsheet and the authors can check them in real time. The questionnaire included 12 questions, from which we analyzed and described the respondents' perception of the characteristics of the parks, their preferred activities, the importance of protecting the environment in urban parks, and the respondents also answered questions regarding their age, gender, and locality.

RESEARCH RESULTS

In this study, we analyzed the perceptions and preferences of residents and tourists about Timișoara parks and the importance of green space management.

Analyzing the answers to the first question in the questionnaire, it is observed that 31% of the respondents are from Timișoara, and 69% are from another locality and have visited the parks in Timișoara.

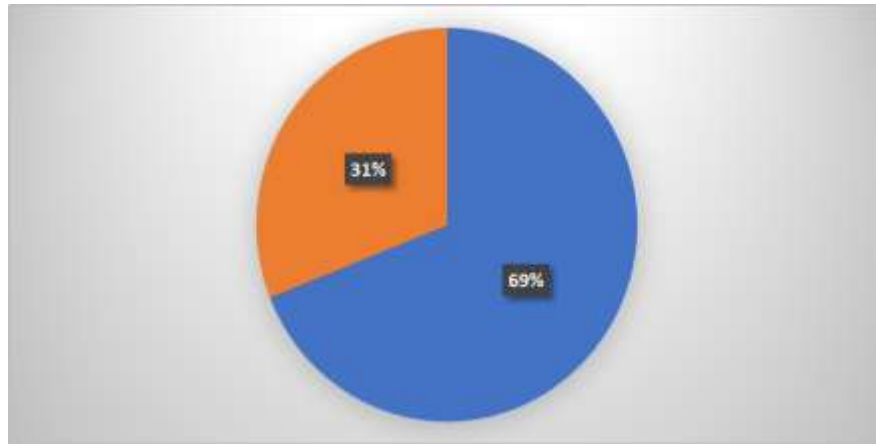


Figure 3. Distribution of responses by place of residence

When asked about the age of the respondents, we noticed that 20% were under 18 years old, the largest share was among respondents aged 18-30, respectively 44%. Between 31 and 40 years old, 8% answered, between 15 and 60 years old, 16% answered, and over 50 years old, 12%.

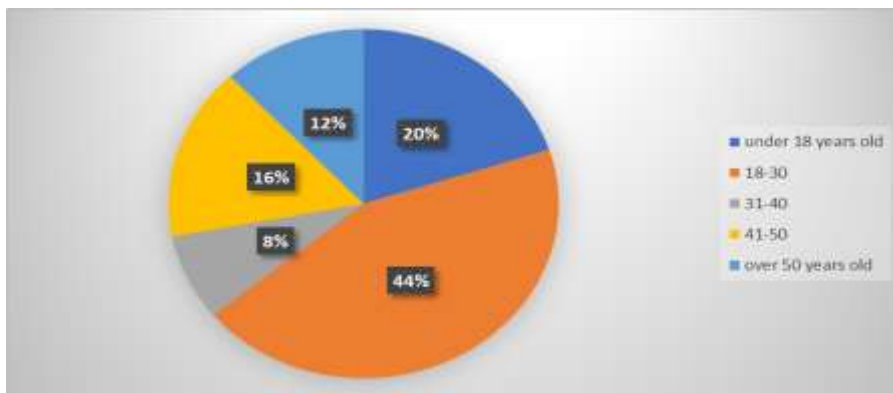


Figure 4. Distribution of responses by age

Regarding gender, we observed that the largest share was female at 69%, 28% were male and 3% answered other.

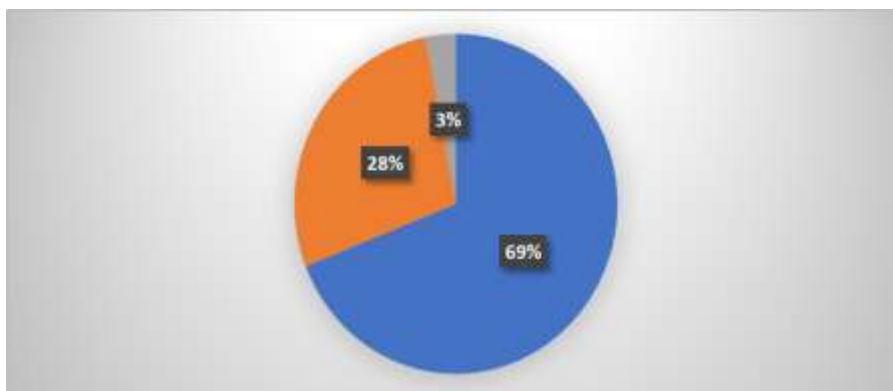


Figure 5. Distribution of responses by gender

From figure 6 it can be seen that over 97% visited parks in Timisoara, only 3% visited other parks.

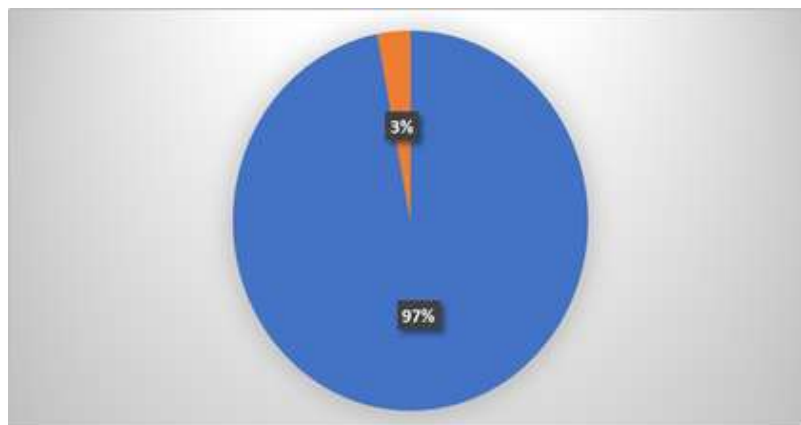


Figure 6. Distribution of answers regarding visiting parks in Timisoara

The most visited parks were the Roses Park, the Botanical Park and the Park in the Student Complex. Respondents also visited Civic Park, Alpinet Park, and other unspecified parks.

The importance of parks can be seen in the specialized literature [9,11,13,14].

When it comes to visiting parks, it is very important that they are properly designed and managed, so as to provide maximum comfort to the people who visit them and encourage them to return multiple times to relax. Green spaces are considered true oases of peace and relaxation [15].



Figure 7. Park in Timisoara

Source: [16]

When asked about the evaluation of the general appearance of the parks in Timisoara, it is observed that (figure 8) 21% of respondents consider it very good, 32% good, 39% consider it acceptable, 6% satisfactory and 2% unsatisfactory.

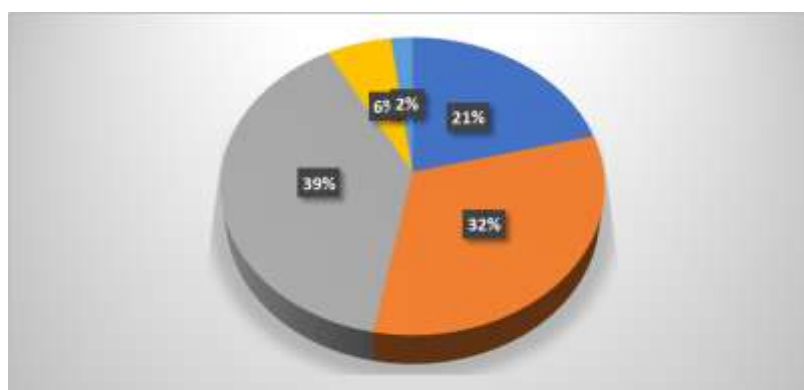


Figure 8. Share of responses regarding the general appearance of parks



Figure 9. Flora in a park in Timișoara

In figure 9 we observe the flora of a park in Timisoara, which attracts visitors to relax and breathe fresh air.

In figure 10, we analyzed the characteristics of parks in Timisoara, considered important for a tourist, and from the answers given, we observed that the most important are recreation spaces and relaxation areas 48%, activities for families and children 32%, sports and exercise areas 16%, but other characteristics are also important 4%, such as cultural and entertainment events.

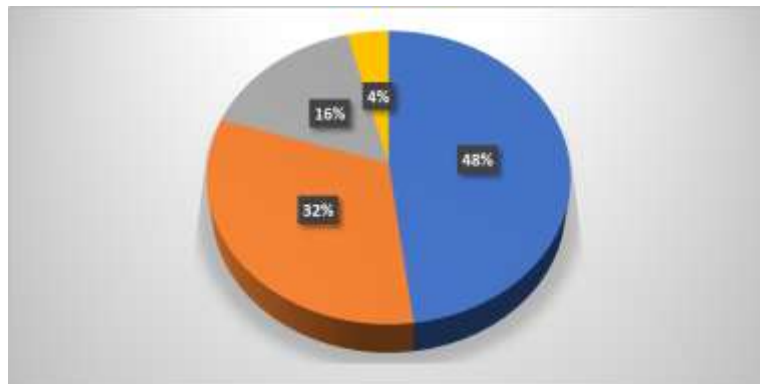


Figure 10. Characteristics of parks in Timișoara

In figure 11, we analyzed the answers given by respondents to the question of to what extent parks contribute to their tourist experience. 23% of respondents believe that parks contribute a lot to their tourist experience, 32% answered a lot, 34% believe it moderately, 9% answered a little and 1% answered that parks do not contribute at all to their tourist experience.

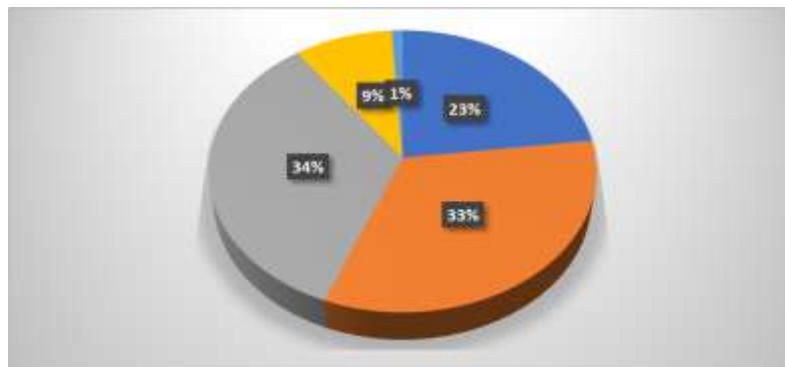


Figure 11. The contribution of parks to the tourist experience

When asked what types of activities they practiced in parks, it can be seen from figure 12 that 71% of respondents answered relaxing walks, 1% prefer parks for picnics, 4% practice sports in the park, 6% participate in cultural events in parks, 14% prefer parks to take photos and view the wonderful landscapes and 4% chose other activities.

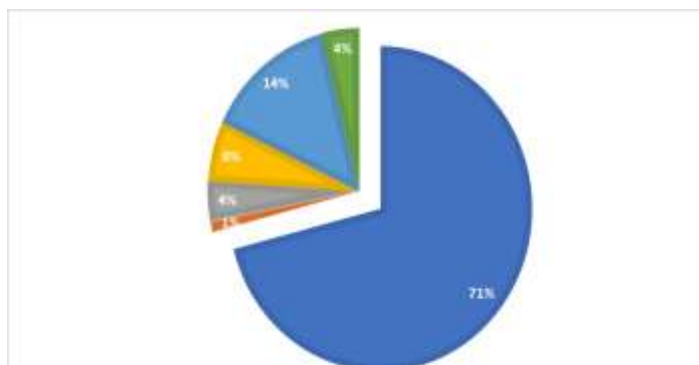


Figure 12. Activities practiced in parks

In figure 13 we observe the percentage weight to the question to what extent do you think that parks influence a tourist's perception of the city they visit? Thus, 46% believe that parks greatly influence the perception of the city, 37% answered a lot, 14% answered moderately and 3% believe that the perception of the city is little influenced.

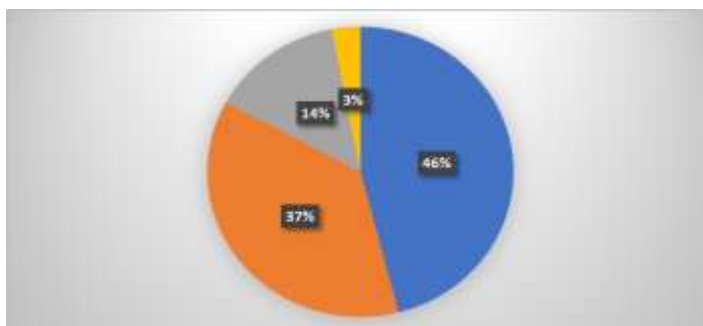


Figure 13. The influence of parks on tourists' perception

Both the flowers and the trees in the parks make people return to the parks by offering a special landscape. (figure 14, figure 15)



Figure 14. Blossoming trees in the parks of Timisoara

Source: [17]

Through this study, we also aimed to analyze how tourists and locals perceive the importance of environmental protection and sustainability in parks in the city of Timișoara.



Figure 15. The flowers - tourist attractions in the parks

When asked "How important do you consider the protection of the environment and nature in parks" the majority of respondents considered it very important. Analyzing the answers given by the respondents, we note that 81% consider it very important to protect the environment and nature in parks, 16% think it is important, only 2% responded moderately and 1% responded that it is less important.

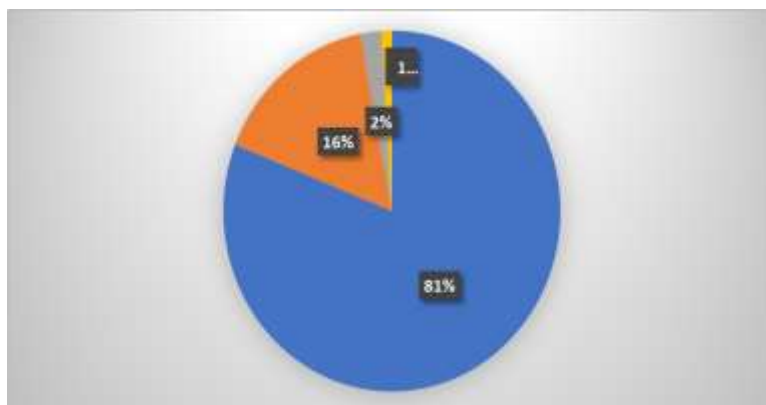


Figure 16. Tourists' perception of environmental protection in parks

From figure 16 we observe the percentage of responses to the question referring to observing environmental protection initiatives in parks. From the analysis of the responses we observe that 64% of respondents said that they had seen environmental protection actions, 18% believe that they had not seen them and 18% do not know if these nature protection actions take place in the parks of Timișoara.

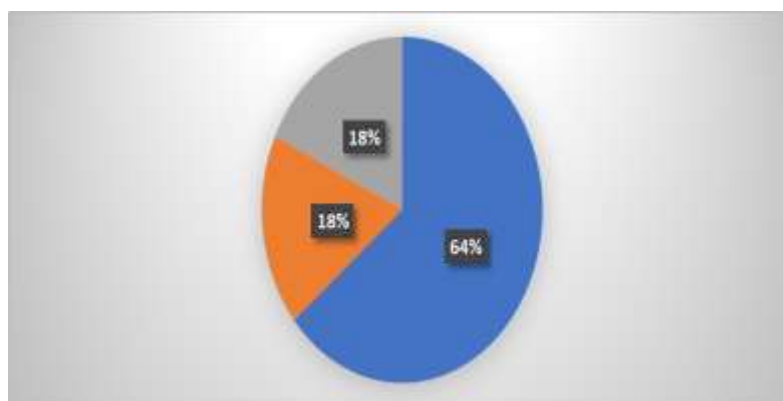


Figure 17. Distribution of responses regarding nature protection initiatives in parks

CONCLUSIONS

Parks are extremely important in both urban and rural areas because they contribute to people's health.

Most respondents (71%) prefer to walk in parks to relax.

From our study we observed that the most visited parks were the Roses Park, the Botanical Park and the Park in the Student Complex.

46% of respondents believe that the parks they visit greatly influence a tourist's perception of the city they visit, creating a positive image.

From our study, we observed that 81% of respondents consider it very important to protect the environment and the flora in the parks they visit.

64% of respondents observed initiatives to protect flora, fauna, and waste management, appreciating all these actions dedicated to protecting the environment in parks.

Park management is extremely important, creating more parks and improving existing ones offers tourists and locals long-term benefits, ensuring a balanced and healthy lifestyle.

The work is addressed to all locals, visitors, but also to the local authorities that manage these parks, to understand their benefits, but also the importance of keeping them clean.

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