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Novi Sad as a creative city: An exploratory study of local residents

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ABSTRACT

Cities are centers of culture, economy, and politics. They are exciting because they are dynamic and creative, but they can also be centers of unemployment, poverty, and crime. With the globalization of urban environments, progress has occurred and, in many cities, standardized development patterns have become the norm. These changes have created opportunities for investment and economic growth, but they have also intensified competition among cities in attracting residents, visitors, and capital. If a city aspires to become a competitive tourist destination, it must first be attractive and functional for its local population. The aim of this study is to examine the perception of the local population of Novi Sad regarding its cultural, social, tourism, and economic characteristics, and to assess whether Novi Sad is perceived as a creative city. The research was conducted among residents of Novi Sad using a structured questionnaire. The results indicate that residents predominantly perceive Novi Sad as a city of culture and festivals, a recognizable tourist destination, and a city of social tolerance and economic potential. Factor analysis identified four key dimensions of Novi Sad as a creative city: culture, tourism, social activity, and urban development and quality of life. The findings confirm that Novi Sad possesses the essential attributes of a creative city and highlight the importance of integrating cultural resources, tourism development, social cohesion, and economic sustainability in urban development strategies.

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INTRODUCTION

Large numbers of people today live in densely populated urban areas that often lack adequate housing, infrastructure, and access to essential services. Such conditions increase exposure to public health risks, social inequality, crime, and spatial segregation, contributing to growing urban polarization (UN-Habitat, 2022; OECD, 2020). Many urban residents experience social exclusion and marginalization, which can foster the formation of closed subcultures characterized by mistrust toward mainstream institutions and social norms (Khanna, 2011; Wacquant, 2016). These challenges have intensified in the context of rapid urbanization and post-pandemic socio-economic pressures, further

exposing structural inequalities within cities (UN-Habitat, 2022). In this context, contemporary urban development paradigms, such as the creative city, are increasingly promoted as responses to economic restructuring and social fragmentation, positioning culture, creativity, and innovation as tools for urban regeneration and competitiveness.

However, the creative city is not only a policy framework or branding strategy, but also a lived urban reality. Creative city initiatives reshape everyday urban environments, cultural provision, tourism development, and public spaces, directly affecting residents' quality of life, social inclusion, and sense of belonging. As cities pursue creative city strategies to enhance their global visibility and attractiveness, it becomes crucial to understand how these strategies are

perceived and experienced by local residents, who are the primary users of urban space and the long-term bearers of both benefits and costs of urban transformation. From this perspective, residents' perceptions represent a key indicator of whether creative city development contributes to inclusive urban well-being or reinforces existing socio-spatial inequalities.

Because of these complex and interrelated challenges, cities have become a central focus of interdisciplinary research and policy-making. Scholars and practitioners from architecture, economics, ecology, sociology, demography, geography, anthropology, tourism studies, political science, urban planning, and design increasingly examine cities as critical arenas of social, economic, and cultural transformation (Pušić, 1995; Florida, 2017; Glaeser & Cutler, 2021). As Lewis Mumford famously argued, the city functions as a stage for social life encompassing art, politics, education, and commerce—where social processes are intensified and made visible through the spatial and symbolic organization of urban space (Mumford, 1968). Contemporary urban theory further emphasizes that cities are not merely physical settings, but dynamic socio-spatial systems in which inequalities, creativity, and innovation are simultaneously produced and contested (Harvey, 2012; UN-Habitat, 2022). These dynamics are central to understanding how creative city policies are translated into everyday urban experiences.

If a city wishes to become a tourist destination and remain competitive in the global urban hierarchy, globalization intensifies competition: cities strive for higher rankings on “best cities in the world” lists and seek international recognition. Despite globalization, however, the most sustainable and successful creative city models are those rooted in local contexts, as regional heritage and cultural capital remain key sources of urban distinctiveness and long-term competitiveness (Page & Hall, 2003). This reinforces the importance of aligning creative city branding and tourism strategies with residents' identities, everyday practices, and expectations. In this regard, Novi Sad represents an illustrative case. As a creative city, Novi Sad was named in 2019 by the well-known travel magazine and guide *Lonely Planet* as one of the best city tourism destinations in the world, ranking third and being described as an “elegant and relaxed city”. Novi Sad has also been designated European Capital of Culture 2022 and European Youth Capital 2019, reflecting its strategic orientation toward culture,

creativity, and youth. While such international recognitions enhance the city's global visibility and branding, their long-term relevance depends on how residents perceive and experience these creative city transformations in their everyday urban lives.

Some previous studies have explored residents' perceptions of Novi Sad and indicated some interesting findings. Kovačić et al. (2021) research on Novi Sad has shown that residents' cognitive and affective perceptions of the city play a significant role in shaping its image and development trajectories. Blešić et al. (2022) explored cultural involvement and resident support demonstrating their effect on attitudes toward tourism and urban development, reinforcing the bottom-up dimension of creative city strategies. Šagovnović et al. (2022) examined the key factors that shape residents' support for the European Capital of Culture project, focusing on the roles of perceived event sustainability, emotional solidarity with visitors, community attachment, and trust in the city brand. Moreover, study by Vujičić et al. (2023) focused on Novi Sad as European Capital of culture and developed comprehensive methodological frameworks to assess the multidimensional impact of ECoC on host cities, incorporating cultural, economic, and community-level indicators, emphasizing residents as important target group to be included in the research.

The main aim of this study is to examine how residents perceive Novi Sad in terms of its cultural, tourism, social, and economic characteristics, and to assess whether Novi Sad is perceived as a creative city. Specifically, the study seeks to identify the key dimensions shaping residents' perceptions of the city's creative profile and to evaluate the role of tourism development, cultural assets, social cohesion, and economic potential in forming the city's creative city image. By focusing on residents' perceptions, the study aims to provide empirical evidence on how the creative city concept is experienced and evaluated at the local level, thereby informing more inclusive and resident-oriented urban development and tourism strategies.

The novelty of this study lies in its empirical focus on residents' perceptions of Novi Sad as a creative city, a perspective that has been relatively underexplored in the existing literature, which often prioritizes policy documents, expert assessments, or external branding narratives (Evans, 2009; Pratt & Hutton, 2013; Richards & Palmer, 2010). While previous studies have primarily examined creative city strategies from

the standpoint of urban governance, cultural policy, or the creative industries, this research contributes a bottom-up perspective by capturing how the creative city concept is perceived by those who live in the city daily (Colomb & Novy, 2016; UNESCO, 2019).

Despite a growing body of research on residents' perceptions and tourism development in Novi Sad that were previously mentioned, the important gaps remain. Existing studies have predominantly focused on specific aspects such as tourism attitudes, cultural participation, or the impacts of the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) initiative, often treating these concepts separately. Moreover, most research has examined these issues either during the event period or from the perspective of tourism development, without explicitly situating them within the broader creative city framework or assessing their integration into residents' everyday urban experience.

This study addresses these gaps by offering a comprehensive and integrative analysis of residents' perceptions of Novi Sad as a creative city in the post-cultural-event context. First, it advances the literature theoretically by explicitly linking residents' perceptions to the creative city concept, moving beyond fragmented approaches that treat culture, tourism, and urban development as isolated domains. Second, it provides an empirical contribution by examining how multiple dimensions cultural, tourism, social, and economic jointly shape the perceived creative profile of the city after its designation as European Capital of Culture 2022. In doing so, the study captures the longer-term impacts of creative city policies rather than short-term event-related effects.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Creative cities, urban development and local residents

Cities are engaged in a global race to survive, develop, and remain sustainable. Consequently, they seek to retain and attract capital, investors, creative and educated people, and tourists. In this competitive context, distinctive local characteristics and place-based identities become increasingly important, and cities actively position themselves as centers of socio-economic development through digital platforms and global networks supporting trade and urban tourism (Thornely & Rydin, 2017). As people live, work, and consume in cities, urban spaces function as concentrated arenas of economic, cultural, and social

activity, with tourism, leisure, and entertainment playing an increasingly prominent role in urban economies (Page, 1997). These dynamics directly shape how residents experience their city and evaluate its development trajectories, making local perceptions a crucial dimension of contemporary urban competitiveness. For cities to maintain healthy populations and resilient economies, urban growth must be carefully managed and guided. Urban planning integrates research and analysis, strategic thinking, urban design, public participation, policy formulation, implementation, and governance (Riddell, 2008). The effectiveness of these processes is ultimately reflected in residents' everyday experiences of urban quality of life, infrastructure, cultural provision, and social cohesion. As such, residents' perceptions provide an important lens through which the success and legitimacy of urban development strategies can be assessed.

Tourism-led regeneration, widely adopted since the 1970s and 1980s, has reshaped many urban landscapes through the rehabilitation of historic buildings, waterfronts, and former industrial areas, as well as the revitalization of central and deprived neighborhoods (Hall, 2002; Law, 2002; Richards & Palmer, 2010; Colomb & Novy, 2016). Contemporary urban regeneration increasingly links the adaptive reuse of cultural heritage with place branding, cultural programming, and creative city strategies (Evans, 2009; OECD, 2020). However, while such interventions may enhance the city's external image and tourism appeal, their long-term success depends on whether they improve residents' everyday urban experiences and quality of life.

Cities have increasingly become spaces of intensive consumption of goods and services, where the quality of urban ambience including physical and cultural aesthetics and the overall urban landscape plays a central role in shaping both visitor and resident experiences (Thorp, 2012; Richards, 2014). Consumption-driven urban development has become a core component of local and national development strategies within the global experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 2011; OECD, 2020). Yet, when urban development relies on standardized place-marketing models and the uncritical imitation of "successful" city brands, large investments do not always yield sustainable benefits for local communities (Pappalepore, 2008; Colomb & Novy, 2016). Such formulaic approaches often described as McDonaldization (Ritzer, 1996) risk eroding local

distinctiveness and undermining the authenticity of urban experiences valued by residents and visitors alike (Richards, 2014).

Within this context, the creative city has emerged as a prominent paradigm in contemporary urban development. Creative city strategies position culture, creativity, and knowledge as key drivers of urban transformation, shifting the focus from traditional manufacturing toward innovation, symbolic production, and human capital (Chatterton, 2000; Landry & Bianchini, 1995; Landry, 2008; OECD, 2020). Creative cities function as relational spaces that foster connections not only among people, but also between people and places, linking cultural heritage with contemporary forms of creativity and innovation (Hawkins, 2002; Evans, 2009; UNESCO, 2019). However, the creative city is not merely a policy label or branding strategy; it is a lived urban reality whose legitimacy and effectiveness depend on how it is experienced by residents in everyday life.

Although creative city strategies often aim to attract visitors and members of the creative class, sustainable creative city development requires environments that enhance quality of life for permanent residents, not only transient consumers (Florida, 2002; Florida, 2017). Critiques of the creative class approach highlight that narrowly targeted strategies risk reinforcing social inequalities and excluding broader segments of the population (Peck, 2005; Landry, 2006; Pratt & Hutton, 2013). Contemporary perspectives therefore emphasize inclusive creative city models that embed creativity in everyday urban practices and extend benefits across social groups (OECD, 2020; UNESCO, 2019). Large-scale cultural projects and flagship events such as the EXIT Festival in Novi Sad may strengthen international visibility, but their long-term contribution to creative city development depends on integration with local communities and residents' support (Richards & Palmer, 2010; Colomb & Novy, 2016).

Long-term urban development further depends on economic sustainability and resilient urban economies. A city's economic capacity is shaped by firms' adaptability, labor market diversity, and housing and real-estate dynamics, while effective governance and adaptive policy responses are essential for maintaining resilience in changing global conditions (Krugman, 1996; Glaeser, 2011; OECD, 2020). These structural conditions directly influence residents' opportunities, well-being, and perceptions of whether

their city offers inclusive and sustainable development pathways.

In the era of digitalization, cities remain crucial sites for face-to-face interaction and the strengthening of social ties, even as online connectivity expands (Eriksson, 2010; Klinenberg, 2018). Rapid urban diversification and migration challenge social cohesion, particularly where governance and social infrastructure fail to keep pace. Inclusive urban policies and community-building strategies are therefore central to creative and sustainable city development (Lewandowski & Streich, 2012; OECD, 2020; UN-Habitat, 2022). The extent to which residents feel included, safe, and valued in everyday urban life shapes their support for creative city initiatives and tourism development.

Cultural heritage, cultural sustainability, and environmental responsibility form further pillars of contemporary creative city agendas. Cultural heritage represents accumulated creativity that can be mobilized as an urban resource, while creativity enables the renewal and reinterpretation of heritage in contemporary contexts (Landry, 2000; UNESCO, 2019). Cities that integrate cultural vitality, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability are better positioned to achieve long-term urban well-being (Yencken & Wilkinson, 2000; OECD, 2020). Intercultural city approaches that emphasize everyday interaction and shared spaces further contribute to social cohesion in diverse urban contexts (Wood & Landry, 2007; Council of Europe, 2018; UN-Habitat, 2022).

Finally, cities combine urban heritage, cultural heritage, and natural landscapes, yet these dimensions are often addressed separately in development practice. Tourism is increasingly framed not only as an economic instrument, but as a tool for reinforcing local identity and community values (Shilling, 2007; Richards, 2014). The contemporary rediscovery of "forgotten" urban experiences and nostalgic imaginaries shapes regeneration strategies and urban branding but may not always reflect residents' lived realities (Page & Hall, 2003; Colomb & Novy, 2016). As cities continue to position themselves within global consumption and experience economies, residents' perceptions of urban ambience, cultural authenticity, and quality of life become critical indicators of whether creative city strategies are socially sustainable and locally legitimate (Thorp, 2012; OECD, 2020).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Instrument

For the purposes of the research, a questionnaire was developed, consisting primarily of closed-ended questions. To examine the perception of the local population, a five-point Likert scale was used, with values from 1 to 5, where 1 indicated absolute disagreement or the lowest values, and 5 indicated absolute agreement or the highest values. The questionnaire was designed in line with the needs of this study. It examined citizens' perceptions of the cultural, social, and economic characteristics of the city. Depending on the topics, different statistical methods were applied. Statistical processing of the collected data was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 23.0). The questionnaire comprised two sections: (1) socio-demographic characteristics of respondents; (2) perception of Novi Sad as creative city. All interested residents of Novi Sad responded anonymously. The measurement scale (for perception of Novi Sad as creative city) was constructed by combining established instruments from the literature and context-specific adaptations. Items related to destination image were adopted from Echtner and Ritchie (1993), while items measuring residents' attitudes toward tourism were based on Gursoy et al. (2002). In addition, several items were developed by the authors to capture characteristics specific to Novi Sad, including its cultural identity, symbolic representations, and local urban context (such as: Novi

Sad is the "Gibraltar on the Danube" or "Serbian Athens").

Procedure

The research was conducted in Novi Sad from October to December 2024. The study included the local population of Novi Sad. The respondents were informed that research is anonymous, and that their participation is voluntarily. The survey was distributed online via social media platforms but also using paper-and-pen survey.

Data analysis

The applied methods included descriptive statistics, reliability analysis of the measurement instrument, and factor analysis. Descriptive statistics included the collection, organization, and presentation of data; data grouping was performed according to the values or modalities of the observed characteristics. Reliability of the measurement instrument was examined using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. To reduce a large set of items, factor analysis was applied by identifying clusters of closely related items. The adequacy of factor analysis was assessed using Bartlett's test of sphericity (Bartlett, 1954) and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure (Pallant, 2020). The retained factors explained 52.5% of total variance (Stevens, 2002). After determining the number of factors, a rotation method was applied.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample (local population)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (%)
Gender	Male	91 (37.1)
	Female	154 (62.9)
Age	Under 25	9 (3.7)
	26-35	64 (26.3)
	36-45	54 (22)
	46-55	77 (31.6)
	56-65	23 (9.4)
	Over 66	18 (6.9)
Occupation	Employed	124 (50.6)
	Private company	85 (34.7)
	Public enterprise	13 (5.3)
	Student	22 (9.0)
	Pupil	1 (0.4)

Source: Based on data analysis in SPSS 23.0

Participants

In this study, respondents were residents of Novi Sad. A total of 245 respondents completed the questionnaire. Table 1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the sample.

In the overall sample, men accounted for 37.1% and women for 62.9% of respondents. The most represented age groups were 46–55 (31.6%) and 26–35 (26.3%). In terms of occupation, the largest share was employed respondents (50.6%). Of these, 34.7% worked in private enterprises and 5.3% in public enterprises. Students accounted for 9% and pupils for 0.4%.

RESULTS

Perceptions of the local population

The main aim of the research was to explore residents' perceptions of Novi Sad and to determine whether Novi Sad is perceived as a creative city. The results presented in Table 2 indicate that the local population predominantly perceives Novi Sad as a city of culture, museums, theatres, galleries, and cultural landmarks, which is reflected in a relatively high mean value ($M = 3.83$). Respondents also perceive Novi Sad as a multinational environment that represents a cultural attraction ($M = 3.33$), although this perception is moderately strong and characterized by greater variability in responses. In addition, the local population supports the statement that Novi Sad is a city of festivals and cultural events ($M = 3.78$), confirming the strong cultural and event-based identity of the city.

In contrast, respondents expressed a more reserved evaluation regarding the extent to which Novi Sad fully utilizes its cultural potential, as indicated by a lower mean value ($M = 2.83$), suggesting that a considerable proportion of residents believe that existing cultural resources remain underutilized. Tourism-related perceptions received the highest mean scores. In particular, respondents strongly agreed that Novi Sad has become visible at the global level through tourism development ($M = 4.34$). High levels of agreement were also recorded for the statements that tourism development preserves the city's tradition and history ($M = 4.32$), that tourism in Novi Sad creates new employment opportunities ($M = 4.24$), and that tourism stimulates the work of cultural institutions ($M = 4.22$). These findings indicate that

tourism is perceived as a key driver of cultural preservation, employment generation, and international visibility.

With regard to urban quality of life and social characteristics, respondents evaluated Novi Sad as a city of good food and restaurants ($M = 3.64$), high-quality education ($M = 3.75$), greenery, parks and gardens ($M = 3.33$), and tolerance in which differences are respected ($M = 3.44$). Perceptions of residents' manners ($M = 3.41$) and safety ($M = 3.16$) were moderately positive. Assessments of urban infrastructure and transport were less favorable ($M = 2.93$), indicating room for improvement in functional urban systems. Evaluations of well-maintained streets and public areas ($M = 3.29$) and new business opportunities ($M = 3.28$) were moderate, suggesting that while Novi Sad is perceived as developing, further investments in infrastructure and economic opportunities are needed to strengthen its position as a creative and competitive city.

Attitudes of the local population on Novi Sad as a creative city

In order to determine the factor structure of the scale measuring perception of Novi Sad as creative city, principal component analysis has been performed. The KMO measure of sampling adequacy was 0.89, exceeding the threshold value (it should be greater than 0.6). Bartlett's test of sphericity reached the required statistical significance ($\text{Sig.} = 0.000$), which is below the threshold 0.05, thus confirming the justification for applying factor analysis.

The analysis suggested that four factors should be extracted, explaining 52.5% of the data, i.e., the variance. The communality values of individual items were all above 0.3, so all items were retained for further analysis (Hair et al., 2019). Based on the eigenvalues and the scree plot, it is meaningful to retain four dimensions describing the perception of Novi Sad as a creative city.

Table 2. Attitudes of the local population regarding characteristics of Novi Sad

Item	1	2	3	4	5	Mean (M)	Std. dev.
Novi Sad is a city of culture, museums, theatres, galleries and cultural landmarks.	0.4	9.0	28.2	31.8	30.6	3.83	0.980
Novi Sad as a multinational environment is a cultural attraction.	5.7	18.8	30.2	26.9	18.4	3.33	1.146
Novi Sad is a city of festivals and cultural events.	1.2	10.6	25.7	33.5	29.0	3.78	1.019
Novi Sad is the “Gibraltar on the Danube” that uses its cultural potential.	18.0	21.2	31.8	18.0	11.0	2.83	1.236
Through tourism development, Novi Sad has become visible at the global level.	1.6	4.1	12.7	31.6	50.0	4.34	1.532
Novi Sad is a city of good food and restaurants.	2.4	10.6	29.8	34.7	22.4	3.64	1.021
Tourism development preserves the city’s tradition and history.	1.6	3.7	11.8	26.5	56.3	4.32	0.935
Tourism in Novi Sad creates new employment opportunities.	1.6	4.1	12.7	31.6	50.0	4.24	0.940
Tourism stimulates the work of cultural institutions.	0.8	3.7	17.1	29.8	48.6	4.22	0.913
Novi Sad is a city of decent people with good manners.	6.1	12.7	33.9	28.6	18.8	3.41	1.115
Novi Sad is a safe city.	8.6	22.4	30.2	22.4	16.3	3.16	1.194
Novi Sad is a city of tolerance in which differences are respected.	6.1	15.9	28.6	26.1	23.3	3.44	1.185
Novi Sad, the “Serbian Athens”, is a city of high-quality education.	4.5	8.6	23.3	35.1	28.6	3.75	1.098
Novi Sad is a city of greenery, parks and gardens.	8.6	13.5	33.5	25.7	18.8	3.33	1.177
Novi Sad is a city of good infrastructure and transport.	15.5	24.1	26.1	20.4	13.9	2.93	1.274
Novi Sad is a city with well-maintained streets and public areas.	5.7	22.9	27.8	26.1	17.1	3.29	1.235
Novi Sad is a city of new business opportunities.	7.8	15.5	32.2	29.8	14.7	3.28	1.130

Source: Based on data analysis in SPSS 23.0

Cronbach’s alpha values for all factors exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, while the alpha coefficient for the full scale was 0.89, indicating good internal consistency and overall reliability of the measurement instrument (Hair et al., 2019; Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Promax rotation has been applied, since the factors were correlated.

The first factor comprises five items with factor loadings ranging from 0.323 (the statement “Novi Sad is the ‘Gibraltar on the Danube’ that uses its cultural potential”) to 0.422 (“Novi Sad is a city of culture, museums, theatres, galleries and cultural landmarks”). This factor is labeled F1 – *Novi Sad as a city of culture*. The second factor comprises five items with loadings from 0.301 (“Through tourism development, Novi Sad has become visible at the global level”) to 0.783 (“Tourism stimulates the work of cultural institutions”). This factor is labeled F2 – *Novi Sad as a city of tourism*.

The third factor comprises three items with loadings from 0.346 (“Novi Sad is a city of decent people with good manners”) to 0.810 (“Novi Sad is a city of tolerance in which differences are respected”). This factor is labeled F3 – *Novi Sad as a city of social activity*. The fourth factor comprises five items with loadings from 0.326 (“Novi Sad, the ‘Serbian Athens’, is a city of high-quality education”) to 0.584 (“Novi Sad is a city of new business opportunities”). This factor is labeled F4 – *Novi Sad as a city of urban development and quality of life*.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Based on the perceptions of the local population, Novi Sad can be characterized as a city with a strong cultural identity, growing tourism significance, and notable social potential, high urban development and quality of life. The findings indicate that residents

predominantly perceive Novi Sad as a city of culture and festivals, and as an increasingly visible tourist destination at the international level. Tourism is recognized as an important driver of cultural preservation, institutional development, and employment opportunities. The factor analysis revealed four key dimensions that shape the perception of Novi Sad as a creative city: culture, tourism, social activity, and urban development and quality of life. Together, these dimensions confirm

that Novi Sad possesses the essential attributes of a creative city, as perceived by its residents.

Recent research highlights the role of local and distinctive retail and services in generating emotional responses and strengthening place identity among users of urban spaces (Petrucci et al., 2018, Henche et al., 2022). Moreover, these studies highlight collaborative networks among cultural institutions, creative actors, and local businesses in revitalizing cities into experiential tourism destinations. This

Table 3. Results of factor analysis

Factor	Item / Attribute	Loading	Variance explained (Cumulative %)	Cronbach's α
F1 - Novi Sad as a city of culture			31.156	0.799
	Novi Sad is a city of culture, museums, theatres, galleries and cultural landmarks.	0.422		
	Novi Sad as a multinational environment is a cultural attraction.	0.403		
	Novi Sad is a city of carnival.	0.376		
	Novi Sad is a city of festivals and cultural events.	0.346		
	Novi Sad is the "Gibraltar on the Danube" that uses its cultural potential.	0.323		
F2 - Novi Sad as a city of tourism			41.588	0.778
	Through tourism development, Novi Sad has become visible at the global level.	0.301		
	Novi Sad is a city of good food and restaurants.	0.502		
	Tourism development preserves the city's tradition and history.	0.763		
	Tourism in Novi Sad creates new employment opportunities.	0.758		
	Tourism stimulates the work of cultural institutions.	0.783		
F3 - Novi Sad as a city of social activity			47.746	0.745
	Novi Sad is a city of decent people with good manners.	0.346		
	Novi Sad is a safe city.	0.620		
	Novi Sad is a city of tolerance in which differences are respected.	0.810		
F4 - Novi Sad as a city of urban development and quality of life			52.575	0.783
	Novi Sad, the "Serbian Athens", is a city of high-quality education.	0.326		
	Novi Sad is a city of greenery, parks and gardens.	0.341		
	Novi Sad is a city of good infrastructure and transport.	0.379		
	Novi Sad is a city with well-maintained streets and public areas.	0.380		
	Novi Sad is a city of new business opportunities.	0.584		

Source: Based on data analysis in SPSS 23.0

aligns with the present study, which show that residents associate Novi Sad's creative character not only with large-scale cultural events and institutions, but also with everyday urban experiences such as gastronomy, local venues, and the atmosphere of public spaces that shape emotional attachment to the city.

However, the results also indicate that residents are sceptic regarding the extent to which the city fully utilizes its cultural potential, as well as regarding the quality of infrastructure and transport systems. These findings suggest that, although Novi Sad demonstrates strong creative city characteristics, further strategic investments are needed to better integrate cultural resources with urban infrastructure, mobility, and inclusive development policies. Strengthening functional urban systems and ensuring balanced development across cultural, social, and economic domains may further enhance Novi Sad's position as a sustainable creative city.

The predominantly positive perception of tourism among residents may be explained by several contextual and structural factors. First, tourism development in Novi Sad has largely been associated with cultural events, such as the European Capital of Culture 2022, which tend to generate visible benefits while producing relatively limited negative externalities compared to mass tourism destinations. As a result, residents are more likely to associate tourism with cultural vibrancy, international recognition, and economic opportunities rather than congestion or environmental pressure. Second, the scale and intensity of tourism in Novi Sad remain moderate, meaning that potential negative impacts—such as overcrowding, rising living costs, or social disruption—are not yet strongly perceived by the local population. This aligns with previous research suggesting that residents' attitudes toward tourism tend to be more positive in destinations where perceived benefits outweigh perceived costs and where tourism development is still in a growth phase rather than saturation (Šegota et al., 2024; Alsaloum, 2024).

In contrast, the relatively lower evaluation of infrastructure and transport can be interpreted as a reflection of everyday lived experiences, which are often more sensitive to practical urban issues than to symbolic or cultural attributes. While cultural identity and tourism visibility are episodic and highly visible, infrastructure-related challenges—such as traffic congestion, public transport efficiency, or maintenance of public spaces—are encountered on a daily basis and therefore more critically assessed. This

discrepancy suggests that, although Novi Sad performs strongly in terms of symbolic and experiential dimensions of a creative city, functional aspects of urban development may lag behind residents' expectations. Similar patterns have been identified in urban studies literature (Shen et al., 2023), where residents tend to evaluate tangible, service-related aspects of city life more critically than cultural or identity-based dimensions.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted using a convenience sample of residents in Novi Sad, which limits the generalizability of the findings to the entire population of the city. Second, the study relies on self-reported perceptions, which may be influenced by respondents' subjective attitudes, temporary moods, or recent experiences. Finally, the study focuses exclusively on residents and does not include the perspectives of other relevant stakeholder groups, such as tourists, policymakers, cultural workers, or business representatives.

Future research could build on these findings in several ways. Longitudinal studies could be conducted to examine how residents' perceptions of Novi Sad as a creative city evolve over time, particularly in response to major cultural events, tourism development strategies, or infrastructure investments. Comparative studies involving other cities in Serbia, or the broader Central and Southeast European region would provide valuable insights into how Novi Sad's creative city profile compares with similar urban contexts. Future research could also incorporate mixed methods approaches, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews or focus groups, in order to gain deeper insights into the meanings, residents attach to creativity, culture, and urban development. Additionally, expanding the sample to include other stakeholder groups such as tourists, cultural sector professionals, urban planners, and local entrepreneurs would provide a more comprehensive understanding of Novi Sad's creative city dynamics and inform more inclusive and evidence-based urban development policies.

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