

Article

Tourism destination sustainability: The systematic literature review

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CITATION

Papečkys S, Jasinskas E. Tourism destination sustainability: The systematic literature review. *Smart Tourism*. 2024; 5(1): 2484. <https://doi.org/10.54517/st.v5i1.2484>

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 10 January 2024

Accepted: 22 January 2024

Available online: 1 April 2024

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Abstract: The sustainable development of tourism destinations is a continual and evolving process crucial for long-term value and well-being. However, the existing literature reveals a gap in understanding how to effectively evaluate the sustainable development of tourism objects, with a predominant focus on developed countries. This raises concerns about the applicability of similar strategies in underdeveloped nations. This study employs an analysis of the scientific literature to address the identified research problem. We propose a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to sustainable tourism management, aiming to equalize the distribution of economic, social, and cultural dimensions. Our focus is on developing a theoretical evaluation model that goes beyond conventional frameworks and includes both broad and narrow dimensions. The research uncovers that sustainable development, as presented by various authors, encompasses economic benefits, environmental protection, and social dimension management. We introduce a sustainability management model that surpasses existing systems, offering a holistic perspective. Moreover, we emphasize the significance of voluntary publicity for environmental and socio-cultural activities in enhancing a tourism destination's image and societal value. Our study contributes a theoretical evaluation model based on global criteria for sustainable tourism. This model not only evaluates the dimensions of coherence broadly but also incorporates specific criteria for a nuanced analysis of the current situation and potential opportunities. The proposed framework aims to guide tourism destinations in achieving economic benefits without compromising the environment and prioritizing the well-being of local communities, thus fostering a more sustainable and equitable development process.

Keywords: tourism; tourism destination; sustainable development; performance evaluation

1. Introduction

Tourism stands as one of the most promising global industries, contributing to job creation, attracting substantial investments, and experiencing significant growth worldwide, including in Lithuania. The development of this sector necessitates a responsible and purposeful approach to ensure harmony among environmental, social, and economic goals. Sustainable tourism, rooted in the principles of sustainable development, becomes paramount in meeting the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

As tourism expands, the need for responsible development becomes crucial. Each individual involved in tourism, be it businesses or activities, must carefully evaluate the potential impact on the environment, communities, individuals, and culture. Improperly planned and executed tourism activities have the potential to harm the surrounding nature and communities. The absence of a unified model or theory for assessing the sustainability of tourist areas further complicates this challenge.

This study aims to address the identified problem by exploring ways to assess the

harmonious development of tourist destinations. In doing so, it emphasizes the importance of adopting the principles of sustainable development to mitigate potential harm and enhance the positive benefits of tourism.

To achieve the study’s purpose, we conducted a theoretical analysis to assess the harmonious development of tourist destinations. Our research delves into existing models and theories, seeking to synthesize a comprehensive approach for evaluating sustainability in tourism areas.

In the picture (**Figure 1**), a structured flow chart is presented to provide readers with a clear overview of the paper’s organization, guiding them through the research background and the specific steps taken in the study.

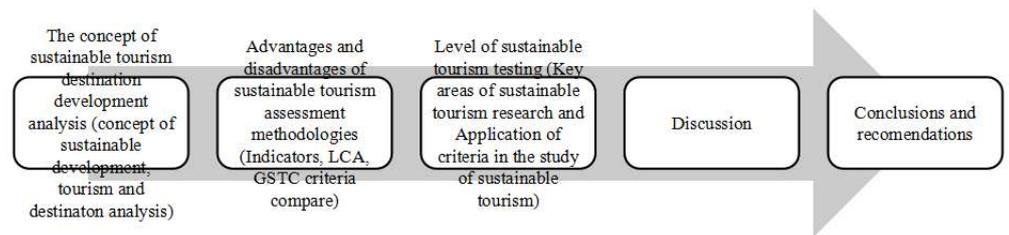


Figure 1. Structure of paper.

2. Literature review

2.1. The concept of sustainable tourism destination development

2.1.1. The concept of sustainable development

Over the past two decades, sustainability has become an important part of the tourism industry. Sustainable development is a never-ending process that includes environmental, social, and economic fields. In comparison, tourism has only recently begun to be assessed in terms of sustainable development. However, the activity of the tourism sector is very important in terms of sustainable development.

As stated by Roman et al. [1] sustainability in today’s life is a popular trend that includes development, operation, and also the tourism sector.

The foundations of the concept of sustainable development were formulated in 1980 in the document “World Conservation Strategy,” published on behalf of three international institutions—the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), which clearly declares that the rational management of nature and the use of resources are integral parts not only of society’s development but also of environmental protection [2].

In 1992, at the World Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, the world’s nations agreed on an unprecedented action plan to address the growing problems of environmental protection, poverty, and degradation. Sustainable development has been legitimized as a key long-term strategy for societal development [3].

As stated by Roman et al. [1], sustainable development, as a never-ending process, must be evaluated taking into account the country’s economic, social, and environmental status. For a long time, it was believed that the activity of the tourism

sector, as a service provision, should not be evaluated in terms of sustainable development, but in the long run, it became clear that this branch of the economy is important not only from the point of view of the general development of the country's economy but also from the point of view of sustainable development.

Sustainable development is the kind of development that meets the current needs of society without reducing the opportunities for future generations to meet their needs [4].

Roman et al. [1] claim that the most correct definition suitable for sustainable development is cited by Brundtland: sustainable development is meeting the needs of the current generation and includes opportunities for future generations to meet their needs in the future. According to the definition, the author distinguishes the main principles of sustainable development:

- takes a holistic approach to planning and strategy;
- protects the environment (biodiversity) and man-made heritage;
- preserves the main ecological processes;
- facilitates and engages in public engagement;
- guarantees that productivity can be ensured into the long-term future;
- provides a better level of fairness between different parties.

Čiegis et al. [5] also state that sustainable development is the kind of development that meets the current needs of society without reducing the opportunities of future generations to meet their needs. According to the authors, this definition of sustainable development is the most frequently cited and claims to be considered more comprehensive than many others. The core of his arguments (**Figure 2**) is the fair distribution of natural resources both among different generations and among the current generation of residents of the first, second, and third world countries. The authors are also supported by Palazzo et al. [4], which state that in order to achieve sustainable development, it is necessary to rely on three pillars—economic, social, and environmental. Management of natural resources, energy conservation, and population size with productive potential automatically result in sustainable development for tomorrow's generations living in developed countries.

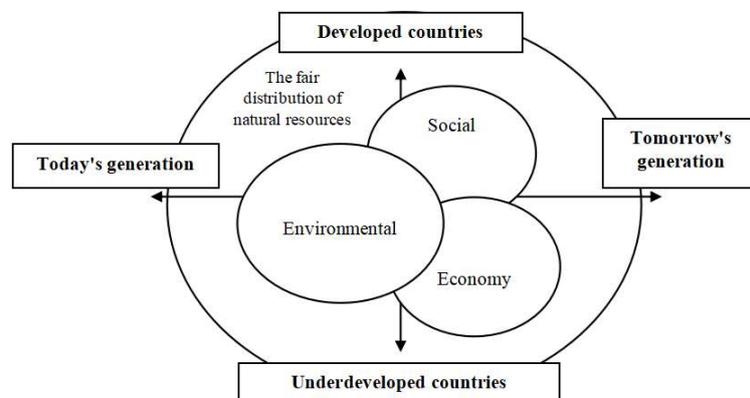


Figure 2. The essence of sustainable development [4,5].

The main goal of sustainable development is not to create greater economic benefits but to provide better living conditions for community members. Sustainable development is an opportunity to create a tourism infrastructure for the region where

natural resource bases are protected and suitable for market competition for future generations [6].

Sustainable development is harmoniously combined with tourism development; there is a relationship of correspondence and reciprocity between the two. According to the Commission of the European Communities [7], sustainable tourism is tourism that is economically and socially viable without deviating from the environment or local culture. This means business and economic success, environmental isolation, preservation and development, and responsibility for societal and cultural values in three aspects that are interrelated. Sustainable tourism, like sustainable development, is focused on three main issues: ecology, society, and the and the development of a systemic process [8].

Sustainable development must not be focused on raising added value but on defining the boundaries of the tourist area against a significant decrease in tourism resources. If the limits are exceeded, the consequences will be the decreasing attractiveness of interesting areas and the change of unique landscapes; thus, sustainability will be questionable. If the country's tourist area is used as a value-creating sector and no action is taken to limit the use, it is likely that sustainable development will not be developed [9].

In sustainable development itself, tourism is very important because the increase in the generated gross domestic product has a less negative impact on the environment than other farms in the country. Sustainable tourism also creates better places for people to live and visit. The benefits of sustainable tourism are obvious:

- promotes fair distribution of benefits and costs;
- promotes awareness of the impact of tourism on nature, culture, and the human environment;
- promotes employment directly in the tourism sector in various support and resource management sectors;
- stimulates profitable industries—hotels, catering, passenger transportation, crafts, and guide services;
- Sustainable tourism helps to achieve decision-making in all sectors of society, including the local population and other resource users who may coexist;
- Sustainable tourism demonstrates the importance of natural and cultural resources for the economic and social well-being of the community and can help them preserve them.
- Sustainable tourism monitors, manages, and evaluates the impact of tourism and develops reliable methods for environmental reporting [4].

Unlike other development options, tourism is a relatively green and renewable alternative. It also promotes smokeless industry, natural resources for its use (sun, sea, sand, wildlife), and historical, social, and cultural resources, which are usually abundant in less developed countries, especially among the lower strata of the population [10].

2.1.2. The concept of sustainable tourism

Sustainable tourism is defined as the management of all activities and forms of tourism development to preserve natural, economic, and social integrity and guarantee the care of natural and cultural resources. Sustainable tourism development guidelines

and management practices are applied in all forms of tourism, including mass tourism and various other tourism segments [1].

According to Jasinskas [11], sustainable tourism is promoted as an economic activity in many countries. The development of sustainable tourism requires higher investments than tourism, as a result of which economically weaker countries do not have the opportunity to implement the development of sustainable tourism. The principles of sustainable development are not implemented because many countries have accepted tourism as a value-added sector rather than restricting its development by applying the principles of sustainable development.

The main mission of sustainable tourism is to manage tourism resources in such a way that economic, social, and human development goals can be achieved by acting through common principles while preserving cultural and ecological integrity [1].

Sustainability for tourism, like other industries, has three aspects: environmental, sociocultural, and economic. Sustainability means permanence; thus, sustainable tourism involves the optimal use of resources, including biodiversity, minimizing ecological, cultural, and social impacts, and maximizing benefits for conservation and local communities [9].

Panasiuk [12] and Roman et al. [1] also agree that sustainability, like sustainable tourism, is possible in three aspects: environment, economy, and socio-culture. Both authors also believe that sustainable tourism must have goals in these three aspects (**Figure 3**). Each of the aspects has certain goals that achieve the result.

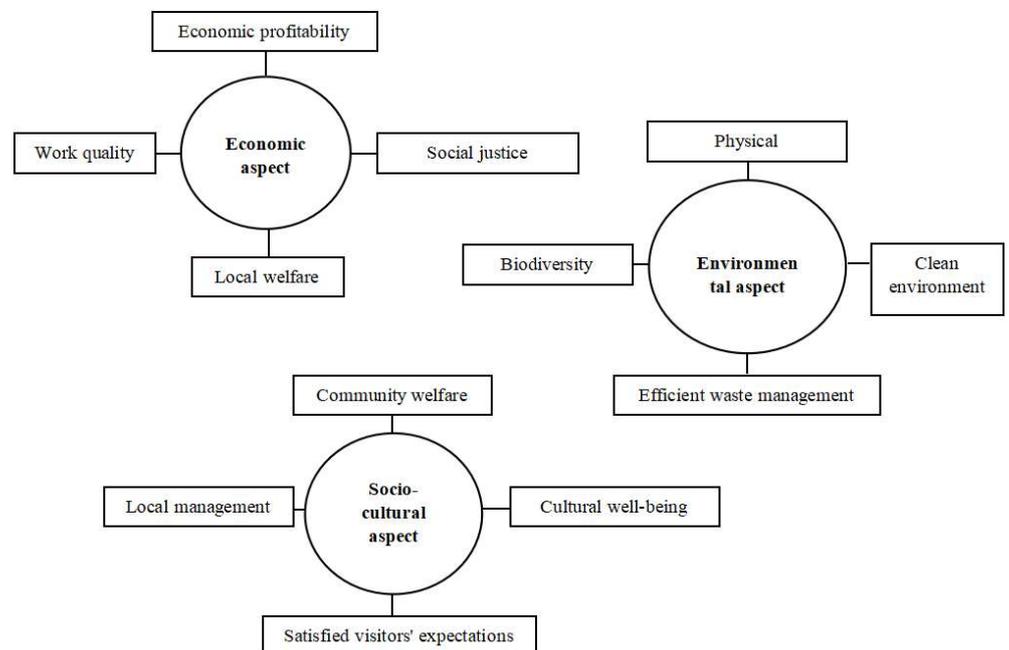


Figure 3. Objectives of sustainable tourism in economic, socio-cultural and environmental aspects.

Based on Roman et al. [1] and Panasiuk [12].

Economically, vitality and competitiveness between regions are achieved; companies ensure maximum economic benefits from tourism for the local community; the quantity and quality of jobs related to tourism increase; wages increase; the working environment and wages become non-discriminatory; and equal distribution

of social and economic benefits from tourism is ensured.

From an environmental aspect, the quality of the landscape is preserved and created; the environment, natural habitats, and wildlife are protected; environmental impact is minimized; and the use of rare and non-renewable resources for tourism is reduced.

In the socio-cultural aspect, the cultural heritage, local cultures, customs, and exceptional character of the host communities are supported and developed; a safe and pleasant tourism experience is ensured; the needs of tourists are met; and planning and decision-making in the management of tourism are delegated to local communities.

2.1.3. The concept of tourism destination

One of the parts of tourism is the tourism destination. Wullur and Samehe [13] describe tourism destinations very simply—they are tourism companies, tourism centers, and tourism organizations. According to the authors, these can be hotels, restaurants, camping sites, active leisure centers, and similar tourism companies. Tourist destinations are one of the main parts of the tourism system that attract visitors to tourist areas.

Cultural tourism destinations can also be considered as tourism destinations—historical, religious, or memorial destinations that emphasize the value, knowledge, and history of a certain area. The authors single out tourist destinations with artistic value as the most attractive tourist destinations [14].

As stated by Zemla [15], there are various types of destinations, but not all destinations can be used for tourism purposes, and therefore they should be distinguished as exactly a tourism destination. Those destinations that tourists and excursionists visit for tourism resources can be considered tourism destinations. They can be potential or actual. It can become a real tourist destination only when it becomes accessible to tourists. This means that there must be physical access, public access, some specific signs that this is a tourist destination, possible excursions if it is a place of interest, a museum, as well as information about the tourist destination and an explanation of the activity or the destination itself. A certain type of tourism destination corresponds to certain motives of tourists and allows certain activities that provide an opportunity to develop the chosen tourism. Thus, it can be said that in each of the tourism destinations, activities can be developed as sustainable tourism.

Zemla [15] presented a broader prevailing simplified division of tourism destinations into natural and artificial (**Figure 4**); the same classification of tourism destinations is presented by the Western Australian Tourism Government. Tourist destinations are presented by the scientist as natural and artificial; some of them are created by nature, others by man, taking into account the trends of the tourism industry and the wishes of tourists. Some other tourist destinations are divided into immaterials; these are historical events, but most often destinations of this type are found in museums or similar in the area's tourism destinations, so they cannot be considered completely immaterial.

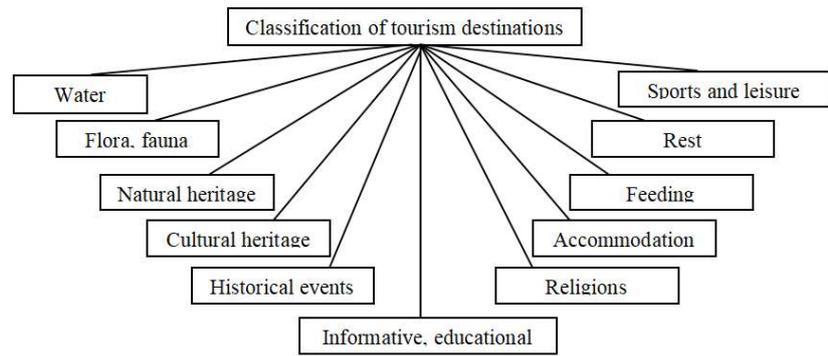


Figure 4. Classification of tourism destinations [15].

Sustainable development perspectives can also be applied to tourism destinations. Tourism destinations can play an important role in the development of sustainable tourism. To do this, it is important that they are managed harmoniously in order to maintain quality tourism products for future generations [16].

From a structural point of view, management of the impacts of tourism on environmental assets is essential to ensuring sustainability and continued use of these assets for tourism and recreation [17].

Tourist destinations are inseparable from their attractiveness and ability to attract customers. Amid ongoing debates on sustainability and travelers’ attitudes, a lot of research has been conducted in tourism destinations—hotels and restaurants. Some of the researched tourism destinations are associated with environmentally friendly characteristics, destinations, and products, while others are not. In short, some tourism destinations applied sustainable tourism, while others did not. Researchers have concluded that the application of sustainability to tourism destinations leads visitors to view those destinations as responsible and sustainable [17].

Hanafiah et al. [18] came to the conclusion that sustainable tourism destinations help attract tourists better by showing that not only economic benefits are sought but also the environment, local community, and culture are taken into account.

According to Juandi et al. [19], in order to reduce the impact of tourism on natural resources, tourism destinations need useful information on which decisions can be based. Despite the importance of decisions, many tourism destinations do not have a specific management guideline on how to reduce the negative impact of tourism on the environmental, social, and local economic dimensions. The sustainable management of tourism destinations has many advantages, including helping to maintain a competitive, clean, green image in line with social benefit strategies and helping the tourism industry to remain profitable and efficient.

The high number of visitors can have negative consequences, according to Santos-Roldán et al. [20] The problem with tourist attractions is that the more popular the attraction, the greater the chance of negative visitor impacts. The reality of such an impact raises serious questions about sustainability. Henderson [21] states that tourism destinations that host visitors must apply the principles of preserving nature, culture, and local well-being. Although visitors bring profit to tourism destinations, sustainability requires that potential threats be effectively addressed.

2.2. Advantages and disadvantages of sustainable tourism assessment methodologies

Policies and measures aimed at specific tourism objectives often contradict each other and can have a negative impact on other strategic priorities. Nevertheless, the harmonization of tourism policies in line with the Sustainable Development Goals can increase the efficiency of management and reduce the resources used. Therefore, it is very important to assess the impact of sustainability on tourism. The assessment of sustainability makes it possible to compare and classify the measures applied by the tourist destinations according to their social, economic, and environmental impacts.

Assessing sustainability in business, such as tourism, requires the integration of as many tools and methods as possible to achieve a comprehensive impact on the environment, social aspects, and economic aspects [22] (Table 1).

Table 1. Methods for evaluating sustainable development.

| | Indicators/indices | Evaluation of goods - technology | Project evaluation | Sectoral/country assessment |
|-------------------------|---|--|--|--|
| Environmental | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmental pressure indicators Ecological foot | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Life cycle assessment Material consumption per service unit Material flow analysis Energy process analysis Ex-energy analysis Emergy analysis | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmental impact assessment Environmental risk analysis | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmental advanced input-output analysis Input-output energy analysis Strategic environmental assessment Regional emergy analysis Regional analysis of ex-emergy |
| Economical | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gross national production product | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Life cycle costs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accounting for all life cycles | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysis of all economic flows Analysis of economic materials Economic input - output |
| Social | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social indicators | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social impact assessment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social input-output analysis |
| Integrated | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Human development indicator Environmental sustainability index Well-being index Sustainable national income True course indicator Real savings indicator | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost-benefit analysis Risk analysis | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multicriteria analysis |
| Sustainable development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainable development indicators Sustainable energy development indicators | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conceptual modeling System dynamics Assessment of impact on sustainability Integrated sustainability assessment |

Compiled on the basis of Mikalauskiene and Mikalauskas [23].

Indicators:

Indicators and indices are a tool for evaluating sustainability. Sustainability assessments are often based on a variety of indicators. Different indicators are measured and show the share of the related specific indicator. Given a common unit of measure, indicators are useful for comparison. Coherence scores can be obtained

by combining measurements across multiple indicators. Industry reports and national resources are often based on this highly aggregated data [24].

The main objective of sustainable development is to contribute to the protection of resources without going beyond the limits of land regeneration. Therefore, this measurement requires measurements in order to measure and evaluate the progress towards the goal, which is the basis of the significance of indicators as instruments of sustainable development. By combining environmental, social, and economic indicators into one indicator, an index is formed. Indicators are measures, usually quantities, presenting the state of economic, social, and environmental development in a certain region, often at the national level [24].

In order to evaluate or measure sustainable tourism, TBL (triple bottom line) is used, whose factors are people, planet, and profit. The main indices for determining sustainability are economic well-being, social justice, and environmental quality. According to Poundel et al. [25], these three elements travel in a single line.

Environmental indicators reflect the ecological awareness or knowledge of community members to prevent environmental damage, as well as actively promote ecological awareness and awareness of the efficient use of resources. Social indicators reflect social awareness or measure knowledge and actions aimed at valuing the importance of community, as well as negative practices that have a negative impact on human rights and property. Economic indicators reflect the knowledge of the community about the improvement of alternative means and progress, as well as the desire to improve this through work [22].

As stated by Oželienė and Drejeris [26], if you delve into the evaluation of each of the dimensions using the method of indicators or indices, you can find advantages and disadvantages (**Table 2**). Let's say the assessment of the environmental dimension by the aforementioned method evaluates progress, allows for quantitative comparison, shows how people are materially dependent on nature, but presents an incomplete assessment picture, reflecting only ecological harmony in the environmental dimension.

Table 2. Advantages and disadvantages of the methodology for evaluating indicators/indices.

| Advantages | Disadvantages |
|---|---|
| Indicators/indexes are useful for comparison. | Indicators/indices are a quantitative tool for determining overall measurements. It is not suitable for determining qualitative measurements. |
| Allows you to track longer-term sustainability trends. | Indicators/indices allow making only short-term predictions. |
| Long-term decisions can be made using the indicator/index method. | In order to obtain sustainability scores, it is necessary to measure all indicators. |
| Useful for comparing countries or regions. | It is difficult to apply when evaluating in a narrower aspect - companies, business, destinations. |

Compiled basis of Pollesch and Dale [24].

Indicators and indices that are continuously measurable are increasingly calculated, allowing us to follow longer-term sustainability trends from a retrospective

point of view. The realization of these trends allows you to make short-term forecasts and long-term decisions about the future [24].

Life cycle assessment as a methodology for evaluating sustainable tourism:

Life cycle assessment, otherwise known as LCA (life cycle assessment), is an important tool to help ensure sustainability through environmental impacts that can be applied in sustainable tourism development [27].

The life-cycle assessment also shows the costs necessary to create the service. It can also be called differently because the energy expended on it is shown to create sustainable development throughout the entire period of the harmonious development of a particular area, destination, service, or product [26].

The LCA focuses on flows more closely related to tourism products, services, and consumption. This method of assessment is similar to indicators or indices but is not intended to be measured for regions but for flows related to different tourism products or services. Using the LCA method, it is possible to study a single circuit when a service is being developed or the entire life cycle. The LCA method is more commonly used to analyze the environmental impact of a tourism product or service throughout its life cycle, but it can also be applied to the full assessment of sustainable development [28].

In the tourism sector, assessing the sustainability of tourism activities through the LCA method provides more detailed results and a more reliable evaluation system, which leads to better decision-making assistance. LCA is useful for the further development of sustainable development through decision-making [29].

With the LCA method, it is difficult to calculate the environmental performance of tourism. This deficiency has a significant impact on the step of determining the purpose and scale of the study [30].

Arzoumanidis et al. [31] attribute the shortcomings to the fact that the results obtained by the LCA are difficult to translate into something more easily understandable and suitable for use as indicators. As the authors say, the results obtained using the LCA method are complex and difficult to understand. The benefits of a life-cycle tool are that more and more are being created to help achieve sustainable development in the best possible way and maximize it (**Table 3**).

Table 3. Advantages and disadvantages of the LCA as a methodology for assessing sustainable development.

| Advantages | Disadvantages |
|---|---|
| Shows costs or wasted energy during the consumption period of a tourism product, service, for sustainable development. | Only environmental and economic dimensions of sustainable development are evaluated. |
| The evaluation system allows to make reliable decisions for the further development of sustainable development. | The obtained evaluation results are difficult to understand and translate into indicators |
| It is possible to analyze the impact of a tourism product, service or consumption on the environment during the entire period of its consumption. | It is appropriate to evaluate only the tourism product, service or consumption. |

Compiled on the basis of Herrero et al. [29], Soranta et al. [30], Arzoumanidis et al. [31].

The LCA cannot integrate nature-society systems as a tool, as it focuses on environmental aspects or dimensions. However, the life cycle assessment allows us to

review the environmental and economic dimensions of the sustainable development of tourism. The obtained assessments allow us to use them for both current and future decision-making [30].

GSTC criteria [32] as a methodology for evaluating sustainable tourism:

Another of the tools for assessing the sustainable development of tourism is the global criteria for sustainable development. The latest initiative to harmonise sustainable tourism standards and promote convergence emerged in 2008 with the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria. The GSTC [32] are universal sustainability criteria developed for the multi-stakeholder consultation process and global tourism sustainability. In 2010, these criteria began to be fulfilled by establishing minimum criteria so that any tourism company can strive to protect natural and cultural resources and when using tourism as a tool to reduce poverty [33].

The GSTC [32] provides an all-encompassing language and a common understanding of sustainable tourism; the implementation of the criteria can be adjusted to the local situation. The criteria are not aimed at approving sustainable tourist destinations but rather for use by existing tourist destinations; the destination is to check whether it meets certification standards [34].

The list of GSTC criteria [32] is used to define what constitutes a cohesive destination, tourist service provider, or locality. The criteria are designed to measure the sustainability of tourist destinations or tourist business destinations. However, there is no indication of how to measure and present the results, and there are no intended frames [34].

The criteria of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council are minimum sustainability standards in the field of travel and tourism. GSCT [32] standards are used as tools for measuring and evaluating education and awareness-raising policies on a certification basis. The GSCT criteria [32] are the result of an overall assessment of the sustainability of tourism. The assessment focuses on social and environmental responsibility as well as the positive and negative impacts of economic and cultural tourism. The following assessment thresholds are divided into four categories:

- sustainable management;
- socioeconomic impact;
- cultural impact;
- environmental impact.

Each of the above categories defines a certain general purpose for evaluating the criteria. Sustainable management aims to demonstrate the effectiveness of sustainable management. The main objective of socio-economic impacts is to assess how the socio-economic benefits to the local community are maximised and negative impacts are minimized. The main objective of cultural impact is to assess how the benefits of cultural heritage are increased and negative impacts are reduced. The main objective of the impact on the environment is to assess how environmental benefits are increased and negative impacts are reduced.

The criteria are minimal, not maximum. Companies, governments, and cities that apply them should achieve social, economic, and environmental sustainability. Each tourist destination has its own culture, environment, customs, and laws, so these criteria are designed specifically to adapt the tourist destinations to local conditions

and supplement them with additional criteria specifically for a specific place and activity [17].

The GSTC [32] assesses categories (**Table 4**), each of which is assigned criteria for assessing the sustainability of the tourism activities of tourism enterprises or operators. It has also been pointed out that the criteria may be amended or supplemented according to the destination being assessed, and, as mentioned above, there is no uniform evaluation system or scheme for the presentation of results as precisely as the conclusions to be drawn.

Table 4. Global criteria for sustainable tourism for the tourism business.

| Categories | Criteria |
|--|--|
| Sustainability management | Sustainability management system |
| | Legislation and regulations |
| | Periodic staff training |
| | Customer satisfaction |
| | Promotional material |
| | Respect for natural and cultural heritage |
| | Sustainable construction |
| | Explaining the importance of natural and cultural areas |
| | Sustainable management of opportunities for persons with disabilities |
| | Community development |
| Socio-economic impact | Local employment (job creation) |
| | Local purchase |
| | Supporting small local entrepreneurs |
| | The policy is used for commercial purposes |
| | The right approach to hiring |
| | Legal protection of employees |
| Cultural impact | Active company activity |
| | Preservation of historical or archaeological artifacts of the area |
| | Using local community art, culture, architecture in your company's activities |
| | The visitors' positive attitude towards the area is increased |
| | Preference for organic materials and products |
| Environmental impact | The organization/company aims to reduce disposable and disposable consumer goods |
| | Promoting the use of renewable energy |
| | Reducing water consumption |
| | Effluent, waste and hazardous substance reduction plan |
| | Conservation of local biodiversity |
| | Preservation of the local wild landscape |
| Interaction with wild animals. Conservation of species | |

Compiled on the basis of the GSTC [32].

The GSTC [32] is moving toward sustainable tourism on the world stage, emphasizing the complex type of development of these standards. When establishing

economic and environmental indicators, as well as socio-cultural criteria, justification must be observed. Sustainability can be measured at the national, local, and global levels [35].

According to the GSTC [32], every tourism company seeking sustainability according to the established criteria should take this into account in order to protect natural and cultural resources, and tourism is used as a means of reducing poverty.

Summing up the advantages and disadvantages of all the presented assessment methodologies (**Table 5**), it can be distinguished that the most favorable methodology for evaluating the methodology for tourism for business is the global criteria of sustainable tourism, which cover all dimensions: environmental protection, economy, and social dimension. The indicators and indices are more for broad evaluations—nationally, regionally, and not so focused on the tourism company. Life-cycle assessment as a method is more aimed at a tourist service or product and only covers the environmental dimension.

Table 5. Advantages and disadvantages of the criteria for sustainable tourism in the worlds.

| Advantages | Disadvantages |
|---|---|
| Minimum evaluation criteria that can be pursued by each tourism business enterprise | There is no unified assessment system provided |
| Evaluation criteria can be changed according to the tourism company, location or destination | Not defined as presenting results and conclusions |
| he evaluation criteria are not intended to approve sustainable sites, but rather to define what constitutes a sustainable destination, tourism service provider or locality | A more closely addressed to the tourism business |
| Evaluation criteria are used as awareness—raising and education—raising | |

Based on Saarinen et al. [36].

2.3. Level of sustainable tourism testing

Tourism and sustainable tourism research are increasingly recognised. Sustainable tourism research generates more progressive ideas and discussions related to ecology, policy, mobility, changing times, and changes in behavior and systems. In the field of research, the main entity is related to the ideas of the sustainable development sector in tourism programs. Sustainable tourism is constantly associated with the preservation of ecosystems, the promotion of human well-being, the equity capital of international and domestic generations, and public participation in decision-making [35].

2.3.1. Key areas of sustainable tourism research

Sustainable tourism developed on the basis of the ideology of sustainable development and became popular after the publication of “Our Common Future” by the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987. This quickly took root in the context of tourism, where sustainable tourism began to appear in governments, tourism-related industries, and among scientists studying tourism. Scientists studying tourism began to represent a more balanced approach to how to correct the cumulative negative impact on tourism activities that manifested over the

past decades [37].

Interest in the topic of sustainable development has grown undeniably over the past 30 years. Today, sustainability can be the main goal in the environment and activities of tourism of all types and scales [38].

Comparing tourism research with the system of sustainable tourism leads to large-scale conclusions. One quantitative tool for measuring sustainability in tourism is weak because it is difficult to define what to include, to calculate, to compare the different negative effects on proportional terms, and to analyze and monitor social mechanisms [39].

Scientists who study tourism are more likely to study the links between tourism and the environment. There is an urgent need to explore many more areas, especially when the situation with rapid climate change seems more serious than ever. The world and tourism as a socio-economic system face significant challenges [18].

Ruhanen et al. [16] argue that in order to ambitiously research and present conclusions, indicators, and insights, sustainable tourism research requires continuous development. However, we can achieve the already-mentioned goals at the level of sustainable tourism research through these research objects.

Discussions on sustainable tourism focus on integrated tourism development in the environment, but existing studies show that sustainability is a complex concept that requires more criticism and more detailed analysis. Scientists say that several very complex and intertwined questions about the quality of life, justice, and the environment revolve around sustainable tourism. It is argued that sustainable development must be understood in more detail in order to make a more meaningful and critical assessment of the links with natural, social, and economic elements or dimensions [39].

The highest and most common level of sustainable tourism research is assessment of the impact of tourism, sustainability, development, behavior and attitudes of visitors, and planning. The assessment of sustainability is related to sustainable tourism, but the four main areas most studied are aligned to study integrity with tourism as a whole. This leads to the conclusion that studies of sustainable tourism have mirrored trends that make it possible to study tourism as a whole [37]. But Spenceley [38] argues that the most frequently studied areas of sustainable tourism are ecotourism, responsible tourism, conservation tourism, and community tourism.

Ecotourism is defined as a small impact on natural tourism that contributes to the maintenance of species and habitats directly through conservation or indirectly through the provision of income to the local community, which is sufficiently appreciative and defends the area of the native heritage as a source of income [40].

Responsible tourism is a form of tourism that respects and protects long-term natural, cultural, and social resources, as well as contributes to positive and correct ways of development for those who live, work, and spend their holidays in a certain area [25].

Community tourism is a form of tourism that aims to involve and benefit local communities, in particular the rural population. For example, residents can accept tourists in their village, create a management scheme, and share profits [37].

The principles of responsible tourism are also used by other alternative forms of

tourism, such as, for example, ecological, community, fair, conservation, and rural tourism, although each form emphasizes precisely one aspect. Ecotourism, for example, focuses on preserving the environment or otherwise protecting the environment, but it does not forget about respect, honesty, and justice for the local community. The main elements are the same, but each form of tourism gives them a different meaning.

As stated in Nepal [39], sustainable tourism can be called an adaptive paradigm or adaptive management that examines unpredictable events and the unclear results of complex events.

Research in hard-developing countries is smaller and not very developed. Sustainable tourism research is carried out in more developed countries, and this means that most researchers rely only on the results and assessments of the developed world. Caution must be exercised when applying the principles of sustainable tourism research in underdeveloped countries, as cultural, economic, and social contexts are very different [41].

2.3.2. Application of criteria in the study of sustainable tourism

Sustainable tourism research is in the early stages of science. The sustainable tourism research methods used are mainly borrowed from other disciplines. Sustainable tourism research is still highly descriptive in content as well as analysis, which can greatly limit the chosen research method. More effort into experimental or semi-experimental research could make more progress in the development of sustainable tourism research [39].

One of the research innovation standards is application. The purpose of such a study is that it is possible to confirm that the destination of tourism and the company meet the default standards [42]. The application of standards has the opportunity to demonstrate the level of sustainable development and the potential to reduce the negative impact on the social, economic, and cultural environment. Also, the application of standards to the destination of sustainable tourism ensures the benefits of marketing.

Font and McCabe [43] talk extensively about criteria, standards, and certification in their study, arguing that the use of such methods in the study of sustainable tourism helps to achieve a reduction in the negative impact on the environment, increases social goodness and highlights the advantages, and also helps to increase the opportunities for economic benefits not only for companies but also for the communities around them. The researchers, studying the application of the criteria, also reveal the conclusion that the application of the criteria is a flexible and sufficiently easily applicable form of study of sustainability.

Currently, there are more than 100 similar programs that are not strongly defined and do not have a solid model [38].

Without proper planning and management, tourism can have a detrimental purpose, cause social or cultural conflicts, and reject the local community and its culture. In addition to the simplest form and planning model, the development of sustainable tourism for a tourist destination determines organizational activity and further actions in the future with a certain tactic or strategy to achieve a certain position [44].

According to the GSTC [32], the application of standards or other criteria does not provide for which method to apply them. Therefore, in order to learn how to evaluate, it is necessary, first of all, to develop a model for assessing the sustainable development of a sustainable tourist destination.

Sustainable tourism assessment models should be based on an analysis of the problems of the activity and the situation identified, which provides more opportunities for the development of sustainable tourism attractions [44].

Analysis of the literature on sustainable tourism showed that the most suitable of the assessment methodologies are the GSTC criteria [32], which cover all theories and are based on the treatment of the destination of research. GSTC [32] is universal and the most suitable for adaptation to the tourist destination. Weaver [17] explained that any tourism company or company providing tourism services can be a tourist destination. Therefore, the theoretical assumptions of sustainable tourism modeling are inseparable from the destination.

As stated in the literature analyzed earlier, it is necessary to evaluate sustainable development through three dimensions: economic, social, and environmental. Each of the dimensions plays a certain role of its own in sustainable development. For example, the economic dimension is important in assessing the sustainability of a tourist destination to ensure benefits not only for the tourist destination but also for the local well-being of the residents of the area. The social dimension must ensure the right attitude towards society; for example, when working employees, they must be subject to guarantees, to fair employment. The environmental dimension of assessing the sustainability of a tourist destination includes the applied possibilities for the preservation of natural monuments, various species, and how this is achieved.

One of the additional dimensions is distinguished by the GSTC [32] in the management of sustainable tourism, which includes criteria ranging from the importance of sustainable tourism to legislation and advertising measures. The advertised application of sustainable development to the tourist destination brings certain benefits.

According to the authors of the previously analyzed literature, the main benefit for tourism companies or, otherwise, for tourism destinations in the assessment of sustainable tourism is public relations or profit. Such a main goal is expected by most tourism companies.

The main point in assessing the harmonious development of tourism destinations is the coherence of tourism; further from that, it follows the dimensions of the assessment and the criteria according to which the assessment takes place. By choosing such an assessment methodology, it is possible to apply it to each tourist destination. The assessment methodology using the criteria, according to the GSTC [32], is universal and can be applied to any tourist destination, from tourism operators to a tourism company providing ski services, for example. Thus, the formation of an assessment methodology is influenced by the dimension and the criteria that follow from it in the assessment. By applying the criteria, it is possible to evaluate one or more destinations for tourism and compare them through each dimension. Taking into account the studied literary sources and evaluation methodologies, this model for assessing the sustainable development of tourism destinations using the criteria is

presented.

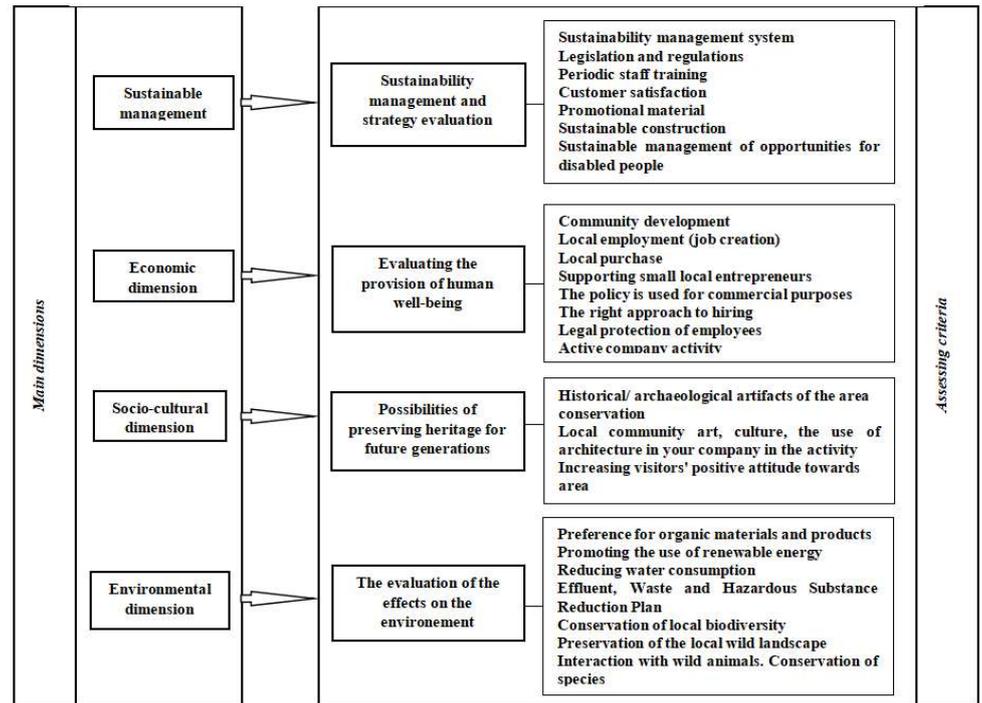


Figure 5. Theoretical model of sustainable development assessment of tourism destination.

Based on GSTC [32].

The **Figure 5** shows that this model looks primarily at the dimensions of sustainable management: economic, social, cultural, and environmental. Importantly, among the main dimensions influencing the sustainability of the tourist destination, the criteria for assessing them are: sustainability management and strategy assessment; assessment of ensuring human well-being; heritage preservation opportunities for future generations; and environmental impact assessment.

The assessment of sustainable tourism must become a priority for the tourist destination. In this way, it can be concluded that the assessment of tourism will demonstrate the possibilities of coherence to preserve values for future generations. Without a sustainable tourism assessment methodology, the possibilities for the level of threat and sustainable tourism are unknown. By applying the assessment methodology, it is possible to ensure that the known situation can affect the attitude of the tourist destination. When attitudes change, one can choose which dimension criteria to maintain, improve, or simply pay attention to.

3. Discussion

An analysis of sustainable development in the context of tourism, particularly focusing on the environmental dimension, aligns with the findings of various scholars [6,40,42]. The preservation of unique landscapes and the application of sustainable construction practices emerge as key elements in achieving sustainable development goals. Research reinforces the notion that sustainable development should encompass not only the preservation of the environment but also the expansion of fauna, acknowledging the need to safeguard ethnographic distinctiveness for future

generations [1,4,35,41].

During the study, the aim was to prepare a sustainable tourism assessment model based on theoretical analysis that would allow for the assessment of the sustainability of tourism destinations and to find out the possibilities of increasing sustainable development. This was accomplished by a comparative analysis of different evaluation systems for sustainable tourism areas, during which the indicator, life cycle assessment, and GSTC criteria as a methodology for evaluating sustainable tourism were identified. In the course of the study, a model for the evaluation of sustainable tourism objects based on GSTC criteria [32] was applied, which is universal and can be applied to any tourist destination, from tourism operators to a tourism company.

However, the study takes a step further by emphasizing that cohesion within sustainable development is not an automatic occurrence. It necessitates strategic planning and effective management to ensure its effectiveness. To foster sustainability in a specific tourism destination, our research highlights the importance of creating favorable sustainability conditions. Establishing criteria, defining boundaries, and implementing a robust sustainable management system for the tourism facility play a pivotal role in encouraging its ongoing development and improvement [18,28,36].

The research methodology involved a comprehensive literature review, drawing upon various sources to synthesize existing knowledge and identify gaps in the understanding of sustainable tourism development. By doing so, we aimed to contribute insights that extend beyond a mere description of previous works.

In terms of methodology, we utilized a qualitative approach, analyzing scholarly articles, case studies, and reports related to sustainable tourism. This allowed us to distill common themes, identify challenges, and propose practical strategies for promoting sustainability in tourism destinations.

Regarding the conclusion, the findings underscore the need for proactive measures to achieve sustainable development in tourism. We propose that a well-defined set of criteria, coupled with an effective management system, can significantly enhance the sustainability of tourism facilities. Furthermore, our emphasis on the unique contribution of our study lies in its practical applicability, providing a framework for sustainable development that can be tailored to various tourism destinations.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Sustainable development is presented differently by each of the scientists, but all of them convey the idea that it is a process that includes the economy, the environment, the social dimension, and their management. All of the dimensions include all categories that help achieve the common goal of sustainability. Sustainable development is a process that is continuously improved and has long-term value. By equally applying and distributing the economic, social, and cultural dimensions, it is possible to achieve well-being for the environment and local people not only now but also in the future.

The only way to verify compliance with the principles of sustainability is to assess sustainability. The advantages of indicators and indices are that they are useful for comparison, long-term decisions can be made, and they allow you to follow longer-

term sustainability trends. The disadvantages are that they allow you to make only short-term forecasts, are not suitable for determining qualitative measurements, and are difficult to apply in a narrower aspect, applying them to companies, organizations, and destinations. The advantages of the life cycle assessment methodology are that it allows making decisions for long-term development, shows the costs of a tourism product or service over the entire period, and is possible to analyze the impact of a tourism product or service on the environment. The disadvantages are that it evaluates only the economic and environmental dimensions; it is not suitable to evaluate only tourism products, services, or consumption. The advantages of global sustainable tourism criteria as a sustainability assessment methodology are that this assessment methodology is flexible and easy; it can be changed and applied to different tourism destinations, companies, and areas; assessment criteria are minimal; delays are such that no unified assessment system is defined; and results should be provided.

Publicizing the sustainability of a tourism destination increases the transparency of operations and public trust. Voluntary publicity of environmental and socio-cultural activities is an important factor that improves the image and increases value in society. Sustainability management is a more comprehensive, constructive, and holistic approach than the management systems offered so far. By applying the sustainability management system, it is easier to manage sustainable elements—economic, social-cultural, and environmental dimensions.

Author contributions: Conceptualization, EJ and SP; methodology, SP; software, SP; validation, EJ and SP; formal analysis, SP; investigation, SP; resources, SP; data curation, SP; writing—original draft preparation, SP; writing—review and editing, SP; visualization, SP; supervision, EJ; project administration, SP; funding acquisition, SP. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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