



JOURNAL OF TOURISM, SUSTAINABILITY AND WELL-BEING

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Larry Dwyer

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AIMS & SCOPE

The **Journal of Tourism, Sustainability and Well-being (JTSW)** is an international open-access academic journal in the tourism field that publishes high-quality, refereed articles that advance science widely available so that tourism can serve the society, enhance a sustainable development of the destinations, and positively impact the well-being of stakeholders.

JTSW offers itself a multidisciplinary and all-inclusive bridge between theoretical and practical aspects of tourism and the emerging interdisciplinary aspects that can revolutionise the tourism and hospitality industries. While the JTSW maintains its traditional focus on original research, both conceptual and empirical, that clearly contributes to the theoretical development of the tourism field, it also has a far more inclusive and broadened scope to keep up with the new problems that challenge academics and practitioners working in private, public and non-profit organisations globally. JTSW encourages research based on a variety of methods, qualitative and/or quantitative, based on rigorous theoretical reasoning and supported by a strong methodology. Criteria for evaluation include significance in contributing new knowledge, conceptual quality, appropriate methodology, technical competence (of theoretical argument and/or data analysis), and clarity of exposition.

JTSW promotes research on a broad range of topics that explore major trends in the study of relationships between tourism, sustainable development of destinations and well-being of tourism-related stakeholders. Contributions can be from all disciplinary perspectives, with interdisciplinary approaches especially welcomed as far as they apply to the tourism research field. All policy, planning and management aspects of tourism are also encouraged.

The journal is published as a quarterly international review in open access, mainly composed of thematic special issues. The publishing schedule is the last working day of March, June, September and December. Any interested scholar can submit a proposal for the guest-edition of a special issue to the Editor-in-Chief. The proposal should follow the guidelines provided in the Guide for Guest Editors. Each article must follow the publication rules as in the Author Guidelines. The Guest-Editors and the Editor-in-Chief are responsible for the implementation of a double-blind review process. This method ensures that the author(s) and the reviewers remain anonymous to guarantee a fair and impartial review of the submitted manuscripts.

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The Editorial Board gathers world-renowned experts in different scientific areas, with a striving balance in geographic and gender diversity.

EDITORIAL

The third issue of JTSW in 2024 features five articles that critically examine various facets of sustainability in tourism, spanning social, environmental, and economic dimensions. The first article conceptualizes the well-being implications of tourism degrowth, evaluating both its positive and negative impacts on resident well-being through an established framework. The second article scrutinizes the legal framework for sustainable tourism in Mauritius, addressing emerging challenges by examining tourism laws within a sustainability context and conducting a comparative analysis with regulations in other destinations. The third article investigates the potential of tourism and ecotourism attractions at Annapurna Base Camp, highlighting the necessity of balancing social, economic, and environmental dimensions to ensure the sustainability of tourism destinations. The fourth study examines the influence of subjective and personal norms, environmental concerns, and perceptions of altruism on recreationists' environmentally friendly behaviors and environmental tourism practices. The fifth article explores the perception of luxury hotel offerings and the impact of sustainability labels and excellence awards on tourists' preferences. This article aims to enhance the understanding of consumer attitudes when selecting luxury hotel accommodations that emphasize sustainability values. Together, these articles provide comprehensive insights into the multifaceted nature of sustainable tourism and its implications for policy, practice, and theory.

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Tourism Degrowth and Resident Well-being

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ABSTRACT

An increasing number of tourism researchers now advance the notion of tourism degrowth as a serious and viable alternative to the mainstream, growth-oriented approach to managing tourism development. The paper seeks to clarify, at a conceptual level, the well-being implications of tourism degrowth, positive and negative. Following a discussion of the basic principles of the degrowth approach, and identification of some major degrowth strategies, the paper overviews the nature of well-being, its sources and indicators. The potential impacts of tourism degrowth on resident well-being, are explored through a lens based on an established well-being framework. Taking sources of both material and non-material well-being into account, it is concluded that the degrowth process, when considered alongside a range of complementary interventions, can potentially make several important contributions to resident well-being. Identification and measurement of resident well-being outcomes in turn provides guidance as to the preferred strategies and types of interventions in support of tourism degrowth. In conclusion, the paper identifies issues for future investigation by tourism researchers.

KEYWORDS

Tourism Degrowth, Sustainability, Resident Well-Being, Tourism Management and Policy.

ARTICLE HISTORY

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1. Introduction

Two approaches to tourism development are gaining prominence in the research literature. One approach emphasises the importance of estimating resident well-being outcomes in assessing alternative paths of tourism development. The importance of maintaining and enhancing the well-being of present and future generations in destinations globally, is clearly identified in the standard conception of sustainable development, based on the Brundtland Report (1987) and endorsed by the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO, 2018). Consistent with research in the wider social sciences (Stiglitz et al., 2018; Dalziel et al., 2018; Büchs & Koch, 2019) and recent publications of the IPCC (2023), tourism researchers now acknowledge resident well-being to be the primary aim of tourism destination development (Chassagne & Everingham, 2019; Dwyer, 2020; Berbekova et al., 2023). This has generated interest in the nature of well-being, its links with tourism development, the effects on different tourism stakeholders, and the implications for tourism policymaking (Dwyer, 2023c).

The second approach, degrowth, has emerged from dissatisfaction with the standard 'business as usual', growth-oriented approach to tourism development, pervasive in tourism destination strategy formulation and implementation (UNWTO, 2018). There is increasing concern that ongoing economic growth irreversibly depletes the Earth's resources and its ecosystems, significantly degrades the environment, generates emissions that exceed biophysical planetary boundaries, drives climate change, and creates inequalities in income and wealth, alongside other social injustices (Jackson, 2017; Trainer, 2023). Tourism is a major activity in this process, depleting and degrading the natural and socio-cultural environments that support industry growth (Dwyer, 2018). On what might be regarded as 'the standard view', the adverse effects of tourism growth, economic, social and environmental, can be eliminated through technological progress linked with more efficient management (Edgell, 2020; Butcher, 2023). This mainstream optimistic approach, however, has come under intense criticism in the 'heterodox', anti-growth tourism literature, with increasing calls for 'degrowth' of the tourism industry (and all related commercial and industrial activity) as the most appropriate response to the ongoing evident failures of growth-based tourism management (Hall, 2009; Andriotis, 2014; Fletcher et al., 2019; Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019; Sharpley, 2021; Dwyer, 2023e). Degrowth is not merely a reduction of growth but takes human well-being as a central element of a transformed, economic, social and political system (Andreoni & Galmarini, 2013).

To date, studies concerning the well-being outcomes of tourism development and studies of the impacts of tourism degrowth have developed independently, despite their obvious connection. If the primary aim of tourism development is resident well-being, then so also is enhanced well-being the primary aim of tourism degrowth. Despite some counter criticism that tourism degrowth will lead to all sorts of undesirable effects that erode social well-being (Butcher, 2023), this issue has been relatively neglected in the tourism literature. The degrowth counter-response is that its critics focus on the effects of degrowth on material well-being, neglecting other sources of well-being that may be activated in the process of degrowth (Hickel et al., 2022; Higgins-Desbiolles & Everingham, 2022).

This paper does not argue the case for tourism degrowth *per se*. Rather, it seeks to clarify, at a conceptual level, the well-being implications of tourism degrowth, positive and negative. In doing so, the paper identifies areas of essential overlap between well-being consequences and tourism degrowth, highlighting the implications for conceptual and empirical research, and issues for future investigation by researchers, destination managers and policy makers.

The structure of the paper is as follows. Section two provides the rationale for tourism degrowth emphasising the basic principles of the degrowth approach, together with a summary of some major degrowth strategies. Section three overviews the nature of well-being and its sources. In section four, the potential impacts of tourism degrowth on resident well-being, are explored with reference to indicators from an established well-being framework. Section five identifies important issues that will determine the direction of further research in this field of inquiry, both conceptually and by way of case studies of the potential well-being effects of degrowth in different destinations.

2. The Degrowth Approach

2.1 Failure of Growth Management

Critics have identified a major, as yet unresolved problem, for the standard growth management approach. A distinguishing feature of this approach is the underlying assumption ('faith') that technological progress can result in less intensive materials and energy use, accompanied by less carbon and greenhouse gas emissions (Fletcher & Rammelt, 2017). This assumption involves the potential 'decoupling' of resource depletion and associated emissions from economic growth. Two forms of decoupling may be distinguished: *absolute decoupling* implies that environmental efficiencies can be substantial enough to result in reduced resource use and lower overall environmental impacts, while *relative decoupling* relates to a situation where resource use and emissions still increase, but at a lower rate than economic growth (Parrique et al., 2019; Hickel & Kallis, 2020).

Only via absolute decoupling will growth management actually generate less material throughputs and less emissions overall. Essentially, absolute decoupling assumes that, new technologies will solve environmental problems, and destinations will become increasingly 'dematerialised' as consumption and production shifts towards the services sector (Monserand, 2022), making it possible to produce ever more, while extracting less resources and associated emissions from production. The potential for *decoupling* is central to the goal of 'green growth' (UNWTO, 2018).

There is increasing evidence, however, that technological progress cannot result in absolute decoupling, with or without associated managerial efficiencies (Healy et al., 2015; Hickel & Kallis, 2020). Whereas the quantity of greenhouse gases emitted per dollar of output has fallen consistently over time in developed economies ('relative decoupling'), the total volume of global emissions has increased alongside economic growth (Hickel & Kallis, 2020). Indeed, much of the perceived 'greening' in developed destinations is linked to their ability to shift resource-intensive and emissions-intensive sectors to lesser developed destinations (Parrique et al., 2019). Industry growth model simulations project that absolute decoupling is unachievable even under the most optimistic assumptions (Fletcher & Rammelt, 2017). A recent review of 179 articles published between 1990–2019 on decoupling mainly between CO₂ and GDP, found no evidence of economy-wide, national/international absolute resource decoupling, with no evidence of the kind of decoupling needed for ecological sustainability (Vadén et al., 2020). Increasingly, critics of growth management approaches to development now refer to the 'myth' of absolute decoupling (Fletcher & Rammelt, 2017; Parrique et al., 2019; Kallis et al., 2020). In the wider social science research literature, growing recognition that decoupling is unachievable has given rise to the degrowth approach, advocating an equitable downscaling of materials and energy throughput, while mindful of ecological boundaries, locally and globally (Kallis et al., 2020).

The infeasibility of decoupling has substantial implications for tourism development strategy. If absolute decoupling is unachievable, then any environmental efficiencies associated with tourism industry development will not reduce tourism's carbon footprint. While relative decoupling resulting from improved management and technological progress can reduce carbon emissions as a proportion of GDP, the level of emissions will continue to be positive. Thus, it is not possible for tourism GDP to grow indefinitely without generating further adverse environmental impacts. In other words, tourism growth will forever be inconsistent with achievement of tourism industry net zero emissions.

If producing more while polluting less is unachievable, by implication the tourism industry should produce less, in order to pollute less (Monserand, 2022). Tourism degrowth thus gains traction as a serious and viable policy option (Hall, 2009; Andriotis, 2014; Fletcher et al., 2019; Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019; Sharpley, 2022; Dwyer, 2023e). To understand the basic elements of tourism degrowth we must understand the nature of degrowth, and the major strategies associated with the process of degrowth.

2.2 Nature of Degrowth

The degrowth approach involves a planned, gradual and equitable 'downsizing' or 'rightsizing' of production and consumption in the global economy. Reduced energy and material throughput can achieve a

better balance between resource use and supply consistent with biophysical limits imposed by the Earth's regenerative and assimilative capacities. Beyond environmental considerations, the approach seeks also to redistribute wealth and income locally and globally to enhance social well-being (Schneider et al., 2010; Kallis et al., 2020; Hickel, 2021; Hickel et al., 2022). The degrowth remit is to address modes of production, values underlying consumption, gender relations, the organisation of work, civic engagement, modes of governance, enablers of social and environmental justice, to enhance the well-being of human and other life forms. The degrowth process thus involves deep transformations on four interrelated planes of social being: material transactions with nature, social interactions between persons, social structures, and human well-being (Buch-Hansen, 2023).

Three policy goals capture the broad thrust of the degrowth approach: reducing the environmental impact of human activities via reduced consumption, investment and government spending and reduced work time; redistributing income and wealth intra- and inter-generationally; and promoting the transition from a materialistic to a convivial, caring, sharing, participatory society (Cosme et al., 2017; Kallis et al., 2020). These goals are argued to be met through six major strategy types as listed in Table 1. These strategies comprise both voluntary and policy-induced reductions in both the supply and demand side of the economy.

Table 1. Key Elements of the Degrowth Approach

Key Elements	Action Agenda
Resizing	• Planned reduction of the physical scale of the energy and material throughputs of the economy, consistent with planetary boundaries; • Reduced consumption levels both in aggregate and specific items; • Emphasis on locally determined development paths rather than externally imposed ones; • Investigate proposals to stabilise population levels.
Value Change	• Need for a fundamental change in resident values and lifestyles away from consumerism towards values such as empathy, self-reflection, creativity, diversity, good citizenship, generosity, sharing, conviviality, concern, responsibility, sufficiency and cooperation; • Prioritising residents' the 'right to live' over the 'right to travel'; • Reduced dependence on economic activity to enhance material wellbeing; • Encouragement of community values such as empathy, self-reflection, creativity, diversity, good citizenship, generosity, sharing, conviviality, concern, responsibility, sufficiency and cooperation; • Need for more positive attitudes towards nature and its biodiversity.
Fairness	• Equitable distribution of income and wealth intra- and inter-generationally; • Public services accessible to all; • Fulfilment of basic human needs for all, including opportunities for decent employment; • Safe and healthy living and working conditions for people with economic security; • Increased work-sharing, leisure time, sense of community.
Participation	• Voluntary transition towards a just, participatory, and ecologically sustainable society; • Adherence to the principles of equity, participatory democracy, respect for social justice, human rights, and respect for cultural differences; • More collaborative relations, less bureaucracy, flatter governance hierarchies.
Environment and Culture	• Decommodification of heritage and cultural artifacts; • Regeneration of ecosystems and resources, with diminished biodiversity loss; • Healthy relationship between people and nature providing the foundation for people's physical and mental health; • Foster environmental justice.
Institutional and Political Change	• Institutional and political change to facilitate civic engagement, and social and environmental justice; • Independent judiciary, rule of law and access to justice for all; • Business models with social and environmental purpose prominent in mission statements; • Public participation in policy formulation and implementation.

Source: Latouche, 2009; Cosme et al., 2017; Santos & O'Neill, 2017; Kallis et al., 2018; Kallis et al., 2020; Hickel et al., 2022.

While many of the items comprising Table 1 are advocated by the critics of growth management approaches to tourism development, it is the downsizing or rightsizing of economic activity that distinguishes the degrowth approach. The degrowth agenda spans multiple scales (local, regional, national, international) and multiple stakeholders (households, communities, government, firms, employees, visitors), with a substantial range of interventions identified. Importantly, degrowth is not taken to be an end in

itself, but a process towards a sustainable steady state operating within planetary boundaries (Kallis et al., 2018, 2020). Degrowthers have no problem regarding the steady state economy as an 'unattainable goal' (Kerschner, 2010). In this respect the post-growth ideal it is no different from 'sustainable development', 'world peace', or even 'net zero carbon emissions' each of which can only be approximated at best. Their ultimate unattainability, however, does not imply that they are not worthy goals to aim for.

2.3 Major Strategies for Degrowth

On the degrowth approach, strategies aiming to increase *efficiency* in production must be complemented by the pursuit of *sufficiency* that is, 'the direct downscaling of economic production in many sectors alongside reduction of consumption' (Parrique et al., 2019). A range of initiatives for the transformation of society from growth to degrowth have been advanced (Jackson, 2017; Kallis et al., 2019; Hickel & Kallis, 2020; Hickel et al., 2022), with substantial debate regarding the required changes to economic, social and political institutions.

While differences in emphasis exist among researchers of degrowth, their shared strategic action agenda comprises the following features:

Beyond GDP. Recognising the inadequacy of standard economic measures, such as GDP, for capturing several critical dimensions of people's well-being, the Beyond GDP approach is developing measures of progress that capture broader aspects of people's living conditions and of the quality of their lives (Dwyer, 2020). Treating present and future well-being as essential to a sustainable development path, the *Beyond GDP* approach offers comprehensive and realistic ways to measure destination sustainability and well-being within a process of degrowth (Dwyer, 2023e).

Reduce production. Degrowth emphasises the need to reduce ('rightsize') the physical scale of the stock of built capital and of the energy and material throughput of the economy consistent with planetary boundaries. This implies a scaling down of fossil fuel dependent, carbon intensive economic sectors, such as aviation and automobiles and the need to end planned obsolescence of products (Hickel et al., 2022). Complementary strategies would include 'green job guarantees' involving training and mobilizing labour released from declining industries to areas consistent with social and ecological objectives such as installing renewables, insulating buildings, regenerating ecosystems and improving social care, (Hickel et al., 2022). A reduction in the large quantity of unnecessary productive effort occurring in a great many destinations would free up resources to be allocated to merit goods such as the arts, education, health care and socially desirable research and development (Trainer, 2023).

Reduce consumption. Given that overall consumption is the single most significant factor driving adverse global environmental impacts (Wiedmann et al., 2020), the degrowth approach emphasises reductions both in the overall level of consumption and consumption patterns, particularly in respect of high-emissions conspicuous consumption activity in the developed economies. Degrowthers argue the need for destinations, particularly developed destinations, to reduce their consumption levels of 'non-necessary' goods and services. This process would involve the transition to lifestyles, organisations and institutions that emphasise non-material sources of consumer satisfaction (IPCC, 2023).

Reduce inequalities in income and wealth. A major goal of the degrowth approach is to redistribute wealth and income globally to enhance the social well-being of the present and future generations. Income inequality is associated with higher production-based and consumption-based carbon emissions among both developed and developing nations, with 'demonstration effects' influencing the consumption levels and patterns of the less wealthy (Millward-Hopkins et al., 2022; Monserand, 2022).

Reduce work time. Working time is linked to wage income and hence to consumption. Reduced working hours restrict income and thus spending power, which in turn will limit consumption, the strongest determinant of environmental impacts globally (Wiedmann et al., 2020). Benefits of reduced working time spread among workers include greater opportunities for social, and recreational activities, including in-

tangible values such as supportive relationships and community involvement. Reduced working time can be achieved by encouraging part-time work, adopting a smaller working week or lowering the retirement age. Such measures, especially if accompanied by job guarantee schemes, can reduce carbon emissions and free up time to engage in care and other welfare-improving activities, stabilizing employment as non-essential production declines (Hickel, 2022).

Redefine business models. The transition to degrowth will require the development and application of innovative business models that direct firms' production strategies away from many 'frivolous' types of goods and services characterising consumption levels and patterns, to drive industry support for ecological regeneration and societal wellbeing. New business models are being developed for business operations based on values such as sharing and cooperation that create value for multiple stakeholders in the production process (Reinhold et al., 2019; Jonker & Faber, 2021). However, to date, there has been little effort to address appropriate models for degrowth generally, or for tourism specifically.

Relocalisation. The degrowth approach recommends production and consumption of goods and services should become more 'localised' in self-sufficient economies to promote community well-being (Latouche, 2009). Degrowthers favour labour intensive projects of smaller scale, devoting local resources to meeting local needs rather than the mass production methods of modern capital-intensive industry (Kallis et al., 2020). Given that domestic tourism typically has lower emissions due to shorter travel distances, and fosters improved social relations via community participation, a focus on domestic tourism is seen as an important development strategy, wherein the rights and needs of local residents are prioritized over those of tourists and industry stakeholders (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019). To date, proponents of localisation have yet to deal satisfactorily with the inevitable loss of economies of scale that reduce operation costs, enabling lower priced goods and services generally.

Institutional Reform. The degrowth approach offers a vision for the transition of society from a growth-oriented materialistic economy to a convivial, participatory 'post-growth economy' (Cassiers et al., 2017; Kallis et al., 2020). Degrowthers emphasise the need to investigate the social and institutional changes that will improve provisioning systems for energy distribution, as well as for sectors such as housing, health care, education, agriculture, transportation, and communication, to deliver more favourable social and environmental outcomes (Hickel et al., 2022). Improved provisioning systems can deliver decent living standards with lower energy use (Fletcher et al., 2019).

Substantial debate exists, however, regarding changes required to transition to degrowth.

Some see the post-degrowth process as a range of reforms compatible with existing social structures. (Trainer, 2023) recommends focus on the development of smaller communities with radically simpler lifestyles, systems, settlements and economies. Other researchers, arguing that capitalism in its pursuit of growth will inevitably continue to push industrial activity beyond planetary boundaries, emphasise the necessity for transformation in forms of production, consumption and exchange, the market system, work practices, financial systems, human relationships and livelihood practices. On this view, voluntary degrowth can be achieved only if capitalism is abandoned (Kallis et al., 2018; Hickel et al., 2022; Buch-Hansen et al., 2024). Whatever label is applied to the post-growth ideal, it seems clear that it will need to be organised according to fundamentally different cultural, social, economic, political and technological principles, reflecting different values from those supporting the pro-growth approach (Buchs & Koch, 2019). There is widespread agreement that the degrowth agenda is not possible without a deontological shift in human values away from current consumption patterns and lifestyles based on the quest for affluence through growth (Trainer, 2023; Buch-Hansen et al., 2024). This view is held also by several heterodox tourism researchers (Hall, 2009; Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019; Fletcher et al., 2019; Sharpley, 2022) who claim that successful degrowth of the tourism industry, both locally and globally, requires a redefinition/refocus of the nature of tourism as a human endeavour facilitating transformative experiences that foster human wellbeing.

Besides the formidable challenges in changing entrenched lifestyles, a common concern about degrowth is that rapid and significant changes to established economic, social and political institutions will lead to social and economic chaos and instability, resulting in decreased resident well-being (Butcher, 2023). If degrowth does inevitably adversely affect human well-being, it would cease to be a viable alternative path for the tourism industry. In response, degrowthers argue that the preferred, lower risk, strategy would be a type of 'stepwise (de)development' involving reform of current institutions to facilitate social transformation. In this way, degrowth can proceed at a slower, less disruptive, more acceptable pace, with policy measures put in place to cushion potentially adverse impacts on well-being. The process would involve both top-down and bottom-up contributions to policy (Buch-Hansen & Nesterova, 2023).

At the present time, there is little understanding of the various ways in which degrowth affects resident well-being. To investigate the well-being effects of degrowth, we need to apply indicators associated with a credible well-being framework.

3. Well-being: Nature and Sources

Human well-being is increasingly considered to be a combination of individual, social and material experiences involving physical and mental health, psychological state, freedoms, opportunities, capabilities, flourishings, sense of meaning and purpose in life, thrivings, functionings and self-acceptance (Dodge et al., 2012; Stiglitz et al., 2018; Tov, 2018; MacCagnan et al., 2019).

3.1 Criteria for Well-Being Measures

Several criteria apply to construction of a framework to identify and measure well-being outcomes associated with destination development paths (including degrowth).

3.1.1 Acknowledgement of both subjective and objective sources of well-being

Subjective well-being (SWB) comprises three elements: *Life evaluation*, *Experiential* (moment to moment emotions) and *Eudaimonia* (meaning and purpose in life). Each of these elements is itself complex, comprising interactive components (Diener et al., 2018). Tourism research has tended to emphasise SWB measures, with focus on the *perceptions and attitudes* of tourists and residents to tourism development. SWB measures, however, fail to address the structural causes of well-being. Individuals may also be poor judges of their own future well-being, tending to give greater weight to current satisfaction compared conditions that support thriving and flourishing in the future. A focus on SWB is thus likely to ignore conditions that affect the well-being outcomes of tourism development for future generations (Dwyer, 2023a).

A mix of objective and subjective measures is required to capture the full range of resident well-being outcomes associated with destination development including degrowth (Adler & Seligman, 2016; OECD, 2020). Objective sources of well-being include material living standards (income, wealth, consumption, quality of housing), alongside variables such as equity and fairness in the distribution of goods and services, mental and physical health, education, nutrition, workplace environment, work-life balance, social relationships, opportunities for civic engagement, personal and economic security, and environmental quality (Durand, 2015; MacCagnan et al., 2019; Eurostat, 2023). Whichever well-being framework is employed, a broad dashboard of well-being indicators, based on a mix of subjective and objective sources of well-being, provides a sounder basis for the design and appraisal of tourism development or degrowth policies than does a focus on SWB only (Dwyer, 2022a, b, c; Berbekova et al., 2023).

3.1.2 Distinction between current and future well-being outcomes

For a destination development path to be sustainable, the present generation must bequeath to the next generation a stock of capital capable of maintaining at least the same level of well-being *per capita* (Stiglitz et al., 2018; Durand, 2020). Issues of inter-generational well-being have been relatively neglected by tourism researchers with greater attention to conditions for promoting current resident and tourist well-being. However, it cannot be assumed that policies that promote the well-being objectives of the present generation will necessarily promote future resident well-being (Dwyer, 2022a, b, c; 2023a, b).

Distinguishing the sources of current and future well-being allows sustainability considerations to be embedded into study of the effects of tourism degrowth (Dwyer, 2023c).

3.1.3 Theory-based measures of key indicators

Well-being measures used to inform tourism analysis and policy must be credible with a sound basis in theory (Adler & Seligman, 2016). Tourism research, with only some exceptions (Dwyer, 2020) has tended to 'cherry pick' well-being indicators from varied data sources rather than base them upon established theoretical frameworks. Government agencies, destination managers and researchers are progressively moving towards the development of internationally comparable measures of well-being to better understand the effects of industry development on people's lives at the individual, household and community level (Exton & Shinwell, 2018; Durand & Exton, 2019; OECD, 2020; Eurostat, 2023). Theory-based indicator selection helps to promote consistency of analysis, intra- and inter-destination comparisons of findings, and implications for policy making to enhance resident well-being (Dwyer, 2022b). As indicators are developed by researchers and statistical agencies that better capture conditions in the various dimensions of well-being, the quality of data and the empirical robustness of well-being measures may be expected to progress over time (Durand & Exton, 2019).

3.1.4 Flexibility

The well-being framework must be flexible enough to embrace a variety of indicators of well-being that reflect the particular values of different cultures and communities. Establishing well-being indicators through an inclusive and transparent, public participatory process is crucial to identifying resident well-being priorities and to bolster resident support for degrowth strategies (Dwyer, 2023c). Ideally, the well-being framework will comprise both 'generic' indicators based on a credible framework and 'contextual' indicators relating to values of particular relevance to destination residents (Durand & Exton, 2019).

3.1.5 Policy relevance

Given that the primary goal of tourism development (and tourism degrowth) is resident well-being, well-being measures are essential to policy assessment (Durand & Exton, 2019; Dwyer, 2020, 2023b), including the effects of degrowth. To be relevant to public debate on appropriate resource allocation to enhance resident well-being, tourism research must assess the potential well-being contributions associated with alternative development paths. Unless tourism researchers adopt or develop the types of well-being measures employed by policymakers (OECD, 2020; Eurostat, 2023), their findings will have little relevance to the wider public debates on appropriate resource allocation to maintain or enhance social well-being within the degrowth context. An advantage of using well-being measures developed in consultation with international statistical agencies is their consistency with destination Systems of National Accounts (Durand, 2020), providing a credible basis for benchmarking and policy making to action degrowth.

3.2 Sources and Indicators of Well-being

A well-being framework meeting the abovementioned criteria for credibility is the *Better Life Initiative* (BLI), arguably the most widely accepted conceptual framework for understanding the sources and indicators of social well-being (Durand, 2015; OECD, 2020). As displayed in Table 2, the BLI framework classifies sources of well-being under three pillars: *material living conditions*; *quality of life*; and *sustainability*. Over 80 indicators of current and future well-being are identified (OECD, 2020; Durand, 2020; Eurostat, 2023). The BLI has been employed recently in a range of studies of tourism development and resident well-being (Dwyer, 2022a, b, c; 2023a, b).

Table 2. The BLI Well-being Framework

Sources	
Material Well-being	Income and wealth Employment Housing
Quality of Life	Health Education Work-life balance Social connections Civic engagement/governance Environmental quality Safety and security Subjective evaluation (+ context specific quality of life variables)
Future Well-being (Sustainability)	Economic capital Human capital Social capital Natural Capital

Source: Durand, 2015; Stiglitz et al., 2018; OECD, 2020; Eurostat, 2023.

A multidimensional indicator set, associated with a credible well-being framework such as the BLI, can act as a 'lens' to convert impacts associated with alternative development paths, into resident well-being outcomes. The lens can be used *ex ante* for policy formulation, or *ex post* for policy evaluation. The following section employs the BLI to identify well-being outcomes, positive and negative, potentially associated with tourism degrowth. The potential effects on resident well-being relate not just to the downsizing of tourism (and other industries), but also to the package of interventions that are recommended to accompany industry degrowth.

4. Effects of Degrowth on Resident Well-Being

4.1 Tourism Degrowth and Material Well-Being

4.1.1 Income and wealth

Tourism development is widely agreed to promote economic growth, and generate income, wealth and employment, increasing material standard of living at local, regional and national levels (Edgell, 2020, Butcher, 2023). Income allows people to satisfy their consumer needs, while wealth provides opportunity to sustain consumption choices over time (De Neve & Sachs, 2020). In contrast, tourism degrowth can be expected to adversely affect several indicators of material well-being including tourism contribution to household net adjusted disposable income *per capita*, net wealth per household, tourism contribution to GDP, hourly earnings by tourism sector; average earnings in tourism compared to national average, and tax revenues from tourism industry activity. While degrowth will place less pressure on land price rises and cost of living as compared to tourism growth, the likely net effect of reduced tourism activity with its foregone production and consumption opportunities, is a loss of resident material well-being.

Although degrowth is inevitably associated with lower GDP, the approach does not seek to achieve this *per se*, but rather to reduce material and energy throughput (Schneider et al., 2010). The effects of reduced GDP on social well-being depend on what goods and services are affected. Selective degrowth implies a scaling down in particular of ecologically destructive resource-intensive sectors such as fossil fuels, mass-produced meat and dairy, private cars, long-haul aviation and package holiday travel, while prioritising sectors with demonstrated social benefits such as education, health services, renewable energies and green hydrogen technologies. In parallel, degrowthers aim to reduce consumption levels of 'non-necessary' goods and services, or 'conspicuous consumption' that are either resource-intensive or contribute little to collective well-being (Fletcher et al., 2019). The effect of a decrease in consumption on

resident well-being depends on how strongly society emphasises material well-being, rather than the intangible elements of quality of life.

Degrowthers deny that reduced GDP inevitably results in reduced resident well-being. There is also growing evidence that individual material well-being depends not only on absolute levels of income and wealth but also on inequalities in its distribution (Lustig, 2018). Findings by Easterlin and others (Easterlin & O'Connor, 2020) reveal that, over the longer term, increased GDP does not improve social well-being beyond a certain threshold level of living standard. This finding contradicts arguments supporting continued economic growth of tourism. Within a destination, improved income equality has a greater effect on resident well-being- after basic needs are met, relative rather than absolute levels of income matter to well-being (Nikolova & Graham, 2020). While pro-growth advocates have focussed on the allegedly adverse effects of reduced *overall* GDP, this criticism overlooks the fact that income and wealth inequalities can entrench status-based consumption patterns (IPCC, 2023). Degrowthers emphasise the importance of interventions to redistribute income and wealth that tend to be relatively neglected in mainstream policy making (Hanacek et al., 2020). Neglected measures include relative income, at-risk-of-poverty rate, and material deprivation defined as the inability to afford the necessities of life (Laimer, 2017; OECD, 2020). There is increasing evidence that inequality can act as a driver of emissions resulting in unequal well-being outcomes for residents (Kelly et al., 2023). Addressing inequalities in income and wealth can increase overall resident well-being as well as improving the effectiveness of climate change mitigation policies (IPCC, 2023). Beyond environmental considerations, highly unequal societies also tend to perform poorly on a range of other criteria, including physical and mental health, crime, educational attainment and social trust (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2022).

4.1.2 Employment

The availability and quality of jobs is widely agreed to affect people's well-being, with income earned creating consumption opportunities. Standard employment indicators for the tourism industry include availability of 'decent' jobs, tourism contribution to employment; hourly earnings by tourism sector; annual gross earnings per full-time tourism employee compared to national average (Laimer, 2017). Since degrowth implies an overall loss in full-time employment in a destination, changes in each of these indicators would be expected to reduce material well-being and various aspects of resident quality of life associated with consumption. Forced unemployment also may lead to a loss of social status and self-esteem, social exclusion, poverty and deprivation (Krekel et al., 2019).

While conceding the benefits of 'decent work', degrowthers point out that employment opportunities *per se*, do not guarantee the fairness of different wages or the conditions of the workplace. The tourism industry globally has long been associated with low wages, persistent gender pay differences, poor working conditions, irregular hours, casualization, seasonal unemployment, and lack of unemployment benefits (Mahadevan & Suardi, 2019). Employment performance indicators include safe working conditions, number of workplace accidents, good workplace relationships, on the job training, career advancement opportunities, development of skills, work-related health problems, enhanced self-esteem, personal dignity and life satisfaction (Cazes et al., 2015). Attention to these issues can foster resident well-being within the degrowth process.

It should be emphasised that degrowth does not imply that jobs cease overnight. Complementary strategies attempt to ensure a just transition from employment in declining industries such as those with a high carbon footprint. The public and private sectors can each play an important role in promoting and funding socially useful and ecologically regenerative activities such as, environmental reclamation and management, ecosystem restoration, renewable energy production, improved education and social care. The direction of change for each of the well-being indicators will be influenced by the package of employment policies developed by both private and public sector stakeholders to complement degrowth.

4.1.3 Housing

Housing is part of a destination's key physical and social infrastructure. Indicators of adequate housing include adequate sanitation, good insulation and ventilation, access to electricity and internet, overcrowding rate, and satisfaction with housing quality. Housing quantity and quality can contribute to resident

basic needs, as an important determinant of health status, access to jobs and public services, opportunities for social connections and family cohesion, personal security and opportunities for individuals to live in safer and cleaner communities (Helliwell et al., 2020). The quality of tourism and hospitality worker accommodation can affect job satisfaction and labour productivity (Dwyer, 2022b).

Local residents compete with tourism developers for land and housing. Housing affordability relates to the share of household gross adjusted disposable income spent on housing rent and maintenance. Recent studies confirm the impact of tourism expansion on housing prices including a particularly strong tourism seasonality impact (Mikulić et al., 2021; Cró & Martins, 2023). Given that housing is the largest component of household expenditure (Stiglitz et al., 2018), the housing cost overburden, potentially affected by the size and pace of tourism development, restricts opportunities for resident consumption of other basic goods and services. A growing gap between housing prices and incomes has been found to generate inequalities in destinations affected, causing the displacement of local residents from tourism destinations, with an overall tourism-led decay of urban areas (Mikulić et al., 2021). Conversely, tourism degrowth is likely to put less pressure on housing prices generally making housing more affordable. To the extent that degrowth reduces or eliminates these effects, resident well-being may increase overall.

More affordable smaller scale housing can free up household resources to meet other consumption needs. A transition to reduced size housing and co-housing will likely lead to a lower overall ecological footprint for the housing industry. This is already happening across many destinations worldwide (Cró & Martins, 2023). The degrowth approach emphasises the need for improved spatial and urban planning, including alternative housing arrangements such as housing cooperatives and shared housing, and regulating the development of holiday homes. Public or cooperative housing should be prioritised in an economic system that regards housing as a basic need, rather than as an opportunity for making speculative profits.

The upshot of this discussion is that the loss of material well-being resulting from degrowth may not be as great as pro-growthers allege, particularly in view of the potential range of complementary interventions accompanying degrowth, expanding the opportunities for non-material sources of well-being to contribute to social well-being. While degrowth is likely to negatively impact upon *material* well-being, particularly in the early stages of the process, the wider consequences for overall *social* or immaterial well-being may well be positive. Contributions to quality of life, typically not captured in GDP, may result in well-being improvements to resident well-being as GDP falls. The net effect of overall social well-being for any degrowth situation can only be determined empirically.

4.2 Degrowth and Quality of Life

4.2.1 Health

Good physical and mental health allows performance of a range of personal and social activities that contribute to well-being (MacCagnan et al., 2019). These activities include gaining employment and earning income, participation in community life, becoming educated and creative, the fostering of a more productive workforce and achieving greater life satisfaction (Llena-Nozal et al., 2019; Helliwell et al., 2020).

The implications of tourism degrowth for health status of destination residents are mixed. Pro-growthers argue that the reduced taxation base will lead to an overall contraction in health care across the board, with consequent reduction in social well-being. In response, degrowthers deny that downsizing necessarily implies a reduction in health-related infrastructure or facilities specifically dedicated to health and welfare improvement. Treated as a 'merit good', expenditure on health care should be prioritised in the degrowth process. Degrowthers also identify some of the negative impacts that growth-oriented development can have on people's wellbeing caused by competition for status and recognition, that contribute to stress and the onset of mental and physical health conditions (Jackson, 2017).

4.2.2 Education

Education and skills acquisition benefit both the individuals concerned and society as a whole. Education supports other well-being outcomes such as better health status, reducing income inequalities,

fostering greater productivity, more active participation in civic and political engagement, volunteering, promoting tolerance of diversity between people, deeper personal fulfillment, lower physical crime rates and appreciation of global citizenship (MacCagnan et al., 2019; Helliwell et al., 2020). A better educated workforce is more innovative and productive, improving business profitability and employee remuneration (Helliwell et al., 2020), each of which contributes to worker well-being.

Since the absolute size of government receipts from taxation will be less in a degrowth situation, maintenance of a quality education sector will present challenges to policy makers, particularly if less work time induces increased demand for education services. Reduced business growth is also likely to negatively impact on business funding support for educational institutions and on in-house training programs. But degrowth *per se* does not imply cuts to education. Since education is an important sector affecting living standards and quality of life, degrowthers agree that every effort should be made to retain high funding for this sector at all levels including adult learning. An ideal focus should be on retention and enhancement of educational programs that are rewarding and life enhancing, directly enhancing their well-being (Helliwell et al., 2020). While numbers of students enrolled in tourism courses will decline due to tourism degrowth, tourism education, including in the form of adult education and training and lifelong learning, has significant potential to continue to promote values associated with individual and social well-being such as sustainability, pro-environmental behaviour, inclusiveness, a culture of sufficiency, tolerance, and analysis of eco-centric worldviews (Kaufmann et al., 2019).

4.2.3 Work-life balance

Work-life balance is important for individual and social well-being. There is evidence that economic growth is associated with a general imbalance between time devoted to work and time spent in other pursuits with long working hours, including long commuting times, restricting the time available for leisure and recreation, personal care, and family life (Krekel et al., 2019). Indicators of well-being associated with work-life balance include average hours at work, atypical working hours, proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, time devoted to leisure and personal care, flexibility of work schedule, gender differences in hours worked and satisfaction with time use (Eurostat, 2019). An appropriate balance between time devoted to work and that devoted to leisure promotes good mental and physical health, reduced stress, greater workplace productivity, with positive impacts on life fulfilling activity, including volunteering, civic engagement, and the forging of social connections (Durand, 2015; Helliwell et al., 2020).

The strategy of reduced working hours receives support in all major degrowth scenarios and is endorsed by heterodox tourism scholars (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019). The less time is spent on formal work, the more opportunities present themselves to pursue other activities that are fundamental to one's well-being. While average annual salaries will inevitably decline alongside reduced working hours, research suggests that the extent of the overall negative effect on well-being may well be exaggerated, particularly given greater awareness of the range negative effects associated with work-centred lifestyles (Kallis et al., 2018). Further research is needed as to the impact of shorter working hours on tourism stakeholder well-being, and the challenges associated with the transition to reduced working hours.

Reduced working hours may also be less environmentally harmful, with potential to lower carbon emissions via reduced need for energy and materials at the workplace and reduced demand for related transportation services. However, environmental gains may be limited if more leisure time activities involve material and energy-intensive goods and services, putting increased pressure on environmental resources (Demaria & Gómez-Baggethun, 2023). Additional policies may be necessary to create incentives for residents to favour convivial, environmentally friendly consumption over current volumes and patterns.

Degrowthers acknowledge that working less will not please every worker. Employment provides workers with opportunities to earn a decent living, acquire skills, form friendships, integrate into the community, forge an identity and achieve self-realization (Cazes et al., 2015). To embrace the positive aspects of working time, the degrowth approach seeks a reconceptualization of work involving deprioritising wage labour in society, in favour of a society emphasising activities such as community services and volunteer work caring and sharing, with less dependence on economic activity to enhance well-being (Jackson, 2017).

In sum, reduced employment hours, if planned and voluntary, may not have the significant negative net effect on worker/resident well-being as claimed by the critics of degrowth. While reduced wages result in less material well-being, increased leisure time can enhance opportunities for non-material forms of individual and social well-being.

4.2.4 Social connections

Societal well-being is enhanced through good social connections (Algan, 2018; Helliwell et al., 2020). Social connections can help individuals gain employment and to improve opportunities for increased incomes and career progression, to improve mental and physical health and to enjoy material and emotional support in times of need (De Neve & Sachs, 2020). Since good social connections are prioritised in the degrowth process, social connections they are likely to strengthen as a result of stakeholder participation in the degrowth process, with the required mutual support demanded to achieve common goals (Andreoni & Galmarini, 2013). Several indicators of well-being associated with social connections in tourism may potentially improve in the degrowth context. These include time spent by residents in social interactions with family and friends, social network support, participation in formal voluntary work, and expansion of the sharing economy (Jackson, 2017).

4.2.5 Civic engagement and governance

Civic engagement gives residents a political voice in society improving the accountability and the effectiveness of government institutions and public policy (Helliwell et al., 2020), with good governance required to translate people's voice into policies that support aspirations for the good life (Algan, 2018; Durand & Exton, 2019). Well-being indicators include the existence of formal and open consultation processes on rule making; trust in judicial and government institutions, participation in civil society groups/organisations, voter turnout, anti-discrimination legislation, access to and satisfaction with public services, perceived corruption in government and business, and community input into decision making including tourism policy and planning (Eurostat, 2023).

There is no evidence that the degrowth process will adversely affect the direction of these indicators. Indeed, degrowthers emphasize that initiatives to enhance good governance and civic engagement in the destination are essential to individual and social well-being (Hickel et al., 2022). Localisation, a preferred degrowth strategy, will help to achieve community-based tourism planning and development (Nunkoo, 2017), while resident engagement in tourism planning can foster place-protective behaviours (Chassagne & Everingham, 2019).

4.2.6 Environmental quality

The natural environment is interconnected with human physical and mental wellbeing (Krekel & MacKerron, 2020). This relationship reflects both exploitation of the material components of environment for sustenance (objective wellbeing), and to nature's role in generating enhanced SWB via a range of emotional cognitive, symbolic, educational, spiritual, aesthetic feelings (IPCC, 2023). The natural environment presents opportunities for people to undertake recreational and nature-based activities to improve physical and mental health, stress levels, the work-life balance, longevity, social connections and life satisfaction (Helliwell et al., 2020). There is substantial evidence that ongoing economic growth is associated with environmental degradation that adversely affects well-being (Roberts et al., 2020). To complement economic downsizing degrowthers support a range of strategies to reduce environmental pressures to improve environmental quality (Jackson, 2017). The transition to degrowth thus has the potential to reduce various adverse effects on environmental quality and reduced well-being resulting from economic growth.

4.2.7 Safety and security

Economic and physical security relates to those elements of well-being (perceived or real) associated with potential loss of life and property, stress, anxiety, feelings of vulnerability, lower productivity, absenteeism. Feelings of insecurity, discrimination and vulnerability limit people's daily activities and functionings (Krekel et al., 2019; De Neve et al., 2019). Despite degrowth commitments to inclusiveness, it is likely

that residents will experience increased financial insecurity and mental stress associated with tourism downsizing. A smaller government budget position may impact on funding of the police force and judiciary. While the degrowth process has the potential to affect economic security, there is widespread acknowledgment of the need to develop social security systems that support residents in time of need, including job loss, and which regard occupational health and safety regulations as an important determinant of well-being in the workplace (Kallis et al., 2018; Hickel et al., 2022).

4.2.8 Subjective evaluation

Tourism research generally has emphasised the effects of different types of tourism development on resident life evaluation, with less attention to feelings and emotions and eudaimonia (Dwyer, 2023b, c). The effects of tourism degrowth on SWB will vary according to the specific type of downsizing undertaken at any given time and the circumstances of the individuals and stakeholder groups affected. Degrowthers realise that a downsizing of the economy may well produce a loss in SWB, particularly of the hedonic type embracing feelings, emotions and states, but regard these as primarily short term effects of the degrowth process, rather than its post-growth phase (Buchs-Hansen, 2023; Buchs-Hansen et al., 2024). Recognition of the importance of eudaimonic well-being, alongside objective indicators is necessary for the creation of economic social institutions and political systems that can enable individuals to flourish during and following degrowth.

4.3 Degrowth and Intergenerational Well-being

Accounting for resident future as well as current well-being helps to put in place the longer-term focus essential to maintaining or improving well-being during the degrowth process. The BLI recognises that contribution to resident well-being over the longer term is influenced by changes in both quantity and quality of four different types of capital stocks- economic, human, social and natural.

4.3.1 Economic capital

Economic (manufactured) capital in the tourism industry includes facilities and services that are available to residents and visitors such as hotels, restaurants, airports, shipping terminals, shopping facilities, as well as the physical and financial capital supporting infrastructure such as roads, transportation networks, energy production, water storage and distribution, and telecommunications (Dwyer, 2023a). While reduced economic capital will impede growth in tourism GDP and tourism employment, thus impacting on material well-being, higher levels of public debt incurred to support tourism related infrastructure may lead to reduced public expenditure on essential community services reducing community well-being overall. An advantage of tourism degrowth would be a reduction in levels of public indebtedness and/or taxes to fund increased infrastructure and services.

4.3.2 Human capital

Human capital is the stock of knowledge, skills, competencies, creativity, physical, emotional and mental health of individuals that enables them to fully participate in work, study, recreation, and society, supporting individual and social well-being (Stiglitz et al., 2018). An increase in human capital and its equitable distribution, has positive effects on the economy and on the well-being of society. Good physical and mental health provides opportunity for individuals to participate in and enjoy a range of life-enhancing activities inside and outside the workplace. The education system, including tourism education, contributes to present and future well-being through development of knowledge, skills, productivity and ability to innovate (Helliwell et al., 2020). Degrowth can affect funding support for both, reducing the skills and learning opportunities available to people unless these sectors are prioritised in the degrowth process.

4.3.3 Social capital

Social capital comprises the public and private sector networks, connections, attitudes, norms and formal rules or institutions that contribute to societal well-being through coordination and collaboration between people and groups in society (Algan, 2018). Levels of trust generated by social networks influ-

ence a variety of well-being outcomes (De Neve & Sachs, 2020). Social capital is strongly influenced by the current degree of fairness in the distribution of resources (which is a major goal of the degrowth process). An ideal set of indicators of well-being outcomes associated with social capital would include quantity and quality of bonding, bridging, and linking capital, trust in civil institutions, good governance, resident sense of belonging and pro-social norms (Stiglitz et al., 2018; Eurostat, 2019). There seems little reason to believe that degrowth may cause these well-being indicators to downturn. To the contrary, the reduced economic activity, relocalisation, a cultural shift towards more inclusive values, and greater emphasis on non-market relationships between individuals, is likely to increase social capital and individual well-being as residents embrace their common purpose (Andreoni & Galmarini, 2013).

4.3.4 Natural Capital

Natural capital comprises the destination stock of renewable and non-renewable natural resources, including those that provide goods and services necessary for the economy, and broader ecosystems supplying provisioning, regulating, cultural and supporting services that support the biodiversity essential to physical and mental health, quality of life and survival of all species (UNWTO, 2018). Sufficient natural capital is essential to other types of capital (economic, human and social) that generate well-being into the future (De Neve & Sachs, 2020). Tourism degrowth may be expected to change indicators of changes in natural capital in a favourable direction. To complement the positive environmental effects of downsizing, degrowthers have developed a range of strategies to protect natural capital (Jackson, 2017; Fletcher et al., 2019). Well-designed climate mitigation policies emphasise wider community participation in climate action, building more effective governance for improved mitigation, and including social trust, greater equity, ecosystem restoration environmental justice and community wellbeing (Demaria & Gómez-Baggethun, 2023; IPCC, 2023).

For tourism degrowth to achieve favourable intergenerational well-being outcomes, important decisions must be made about the types of capital that can be used up in the present, and the types that must be preserved for the future (Dwyer, 2023a). The practicality of this position depends on the formulation of acceptable notions of 'criticalness' and the measures adopted to estimate threshold levels of capital stocks (Dwyer, 2023d). Ultimately, possible substitutions between the different types of capital stocks can only be determined by reference to the outcomes for current and future well-being.

5. Where to Now?

To date, the tourism degrowth movement has had little effect on mainstream thinking, but this situation is likely to change when the failure of absolute decoupling is fully realised by tourism stakeholders. The arguments presented above support the growing calls for governments and societies to reject their focus on economic growth and instead concentrate more directly on promoting well-being within environmental limits.

This paper first provided arguments to support degrowth as a serious alternative to the mainstream pro-management approaches that dominates tourism development research and policy. The rationale for degrowth comes from the demonstrated failure of improved management and technological progress to overcome biophysical realities to shift production towards less material and energy intensive types of goods and services.

The basic principles of the degrowth approach were identified, together with a summary of some major degrowth strategies. Since the promotion of well-being is the primary aim of tourism development, so also must this be the primary aim of tourism degrowth. If degrowth is to be taken seriously as a solution to reverse the accumulating economic, social and environmental effects of tourism industry development on planet Earth, it must demonstrate its potential to deliver well-being outcomes to destination residents, present and future. A range of strategies to downsize an economy in an equitable and participative way were identified, but there has been little detailed attempt to identify, let alone measure, potential well-being outcomes, negative or positive. The bulk of criticism of the degrowth concept has emphasised the various *material* benefits that may be lost if destination economic growth is abandoned, rather than the *immaterial* positive quality of life outcomes that can result.

In particular, little effort has been made to use an established well-being framework to identify and measure the well-being outcomes of degrowth experienced by different stakeholders. The arguments presented above suggests that individual and social well-being do not depend necessarily on high levels of production and consumption which themselves generate socio-economic and environmental costs. To assess the consequences of tourism degrowth for resident well-being, and to specify relevant sources and indicators, an established well-being framework, the *Better Life Initiative* was employed as a lens to filter the impacts of degrowth and complementary strategies to identify some important well-being outcomes of tourism degrowth. The well-being lens also enables the trade-offs implicit in policy interventions to be more open and transparent. This exercise revealed various well-being outcomes of degrowth that have escaped detailed investigation. It also revealed that the effects of degrowth on resident well-being are not clearcut. While degrowth affects levels of material well-being, the linkages between economic growth and resident well-being appear to have been overrated, as demonstrated by Easterlin and other researchers (Easterlin & O'Connor, 2020). Material well-being, beyond some threshold level is not closely associated with economic growth. Research findings confirm that an equitable income distribution rather than income level is an important determinant of individual well-being. Taking sources of non-material well-being into account, it emerges that the degrowth process, considered alongside a range of complementary interventions, can potentially make important contributions to resident well-being. By implication, the loss of material well-being, due to a downscaling of production and consumption, can potentially be compensated by improvements in other well-being variables. Resident well-being outcomes may decrease in the various stages of degrowth, but increase in a post degrowth state as values, norms, attitudes change. It is concluded that the net effect of overall social well-being for any degrowth situation can only be determined empirically, taking account of the timings of different interventions.

While the BLI framework formed the basis for identifying potential well-being outcomes of degrowth, the findings are not dependent on any particular well-being framework. Recently, a needs-based approach to identifying degrowth well-being outcomes has been proposed (Bucks & Koch, 2019). Any framework employed would, however, need to meet each of the criteria outlined in Section 3.1. Composition of the well-being lens can be refined over time as improved measures are developed. Ideally, destination managers need to develop indicators that can better capture resident well-being outcomes for different demographic and geographic segments of the resident population. An improved research effort can determine potential gainers and losers in the process of degrowth, with particular attention to individuals and communities already marginalised in terms of geography, gender, race, class and caste, with ameliorating actions taken where appropriate (Hanacek et al., 2020).

The degrowth process is unlikely to be successful unless driven by a transformative shift in values away from neo-liberal thinking. Detailed research is required to determine how the principles basic to degrowth can become institutionalised in public- and private-sector plans and policies. There is need also to identify those institutions, agencies and organisations that can support or impede degrowth (Buchs & Koch, 2019; Dwyer, 2023e). Researchers also need to determine the ideal characteristics of a post-degrowth tourism industry (Higgins-Desbiolles & Everingham, 2022), that incorporates wellbeing measures into private and public sector policymaking.

The task of identifying the effects of degrowth on resident well-being is magnified by a varied range of strategies, policies and institutional reforms enabling the degrowth process, each of which will affect well-being. Analysis of well-being outcomes, can, however, provide guidance as to the preferred strategies and types of interventions that best support the degrowth process. Particular attention should be devoted to the effects of degrowth on human, social and natural capital stocks that transmit well-being to future generations. This area of investigation will include analysis of the potential well-being outcomes for residents of the political-economic, socio-cultural, judicial and institutional changes required to enable the degrowth process (Roberts et al., 2020). Since changes in the quality and quantity of capital stocks affect the well-being outcomes of tourism activity for both present and future generations, the links between reduced capital stocks resulting from degrowth, and changes in resident well-being outcomes must also be identified (Dwyer, 2023a). While some recent ecological macroeconomic modelling shows degrowth can be environmentally, socially, and economically beneficial (Monserand, 2022), more studies are needed with specific attention to well-being outcomes under tourism degrowth. A key research issue thus

concerns the conditions required to maintain or improve human wellbeing in both the degrowth phase of tourism and postgrowth in the long term, and the types of institutions that can enable this (Büchs & Koch, 2019).

To date, little formal or empirical work has been undertaken by tourism researchers to estimate the likely outcomes of rejecting business as usual, and the advantages or disadvantages of alternative policy initiatives to 'resize' tourism. Empirical studies can reveal the relative weightings accorded to different well-being outcomes, which may be expected to differ according to the destinations studied, their economic, socio-cultural and environmental features and the types of degrowth initiatives undertaken. The discussion in this paper represents only a first step to determining well-being outcomes of tourism degrowth compared to tourism 'business as usual'. An intensive empirical research effort will be required to identify and measure resident well-being outcomes associated with degrowth and the role that different degrowth strategies may play in this process in different destinations. Undoubtedly, strategies to actualise tourism degrowth confront formidable challenges in their formulation and implementation. The discussion herein has attempted to demonstrate, however, that the degrowth process is capable of delivering a range of well-being outcomes to residents that hitherto have been ignored in the tourism research literature.

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The Legal Framework on Sustainable Tourism: A Comparative Analysis between Mauritius, Maldives and Seychelles

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ABSTRACT

The world is witnessing a rise in the number of international tourists travelling which is mainly caused by the fall in travelling costs and higher living standards. However, this has caused numerous negative impacts on the economy, the environment and the society. In the context of Mauritius, tourism has always been seen as among its key pillars that sustain its economy and helped it to flourish. Consequently, the purpose of this research is to assess the efficiency, robustness and accuracy of the legal framework on sustainable tourism in Mauritius in dealing with new emerging challenges. To achieve the research objective, the black letter research method was adopted to collect secondary data by analysing the related laws on tourism in the context of sustainability and a comparative analysis with some other countries' rules on the researched topic was conducted. The countries selected for the comparison are the Maldives and Seychelles. It is observed that although there is a legal framework for tourism that is currently in place, there are still gaps in the laws that make it challenging for tourism businesses to operate sustainably. Among other issues relating to the environment and the economy, the socio-economic aspect has been neglected.

KEYWORDS

Sustainable Tourism, Laws on Sustainable Tourism, Tourists and the Law, Human Rights and Tourism, Environment and Tourism.

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1. Introduction

Travel, which is the mother of all tourist interest has made several impacts on the aspects of the society over the years. One of the most used definitions for tourism is the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) which defines tourism as, “a social, cultural, and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or other purposes” (UNWTO, 2023). Moreover, the UNWTO notes that in the 1950s, there was a number of international tourists travelling and over the years this number has increased significantly and became 1.5 billion by 2019 (UNWTO, 2020). The rise in these number is mainly caused by the fall in travelling costs and more people are having higher standards of living (Zhang, 2020). However, this has also caused several negative impacts on the economy, the environment and the society. This had led to the emergence to a new form of tourism known as sustainable tourism which is the opposite of the mass tourism. According to the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), sustainable tourism refers to “the sustainable practices of tourism in the industry by acknowledging all the impacts of tourism, both positive and negative and aims to minimize the negative ones in the economy, environment and socio cultural” (GSTC, 2023).

In fact, rules, legislations and policies are important to drive sustainability practices with the view of respecting, protecting and progressively realizing human rights for all, future and the current human kind (Brown, 1995). To this effect, sustainable tourism laws take into account the element of sustainability when regulating touristic activities. This includes the establishment of proper mechanisms in the form of best practices as well as an appropriate monitoring system which is accompanied by sanctions and punishment. Unfortunately, there is no legislation which defines sustainable tourism in its contextual terms but some countries like South Africa has included “sustainable development” in Section 24 of its Constitution entitled “environmental right” (South African Constitution, 1996). Consequently, sustainable tourism is envisaged as two distinct independent spheres of rights being environment and human rights. As such, it is uncommon to find sustainable tourism laws in one single piece of legislation but rather, they are spread in various branches of law which are interlinked to environment and human rights protection such as travel law, administrative law, consumer protection among others.

In the context of Mauritius, an island destination, tourism has always been seen as among its key pillars that sustain its economy and helped it to flourish. For example, tourism contributed 8% GDP in year 2019 (Statistics Mauritius, 2019) and according to the Ministry of Tourism, tourist arrival increased at a rate of 9% each year and it has analysed that the tourism sector is expecting a rebound in tourist arrival after the covid pandemic and a revival growth of 6.7% has been seen in 2022 and a further growth of 4% is expected in 2023 (Export Enterprises, 2022). In fact, successive governments have successfully made the tourism industry meet international standards and in this way more tourists are attracted and to come in the island each year. Additionally, Mauritius has a well-structured tourism legal framework which englobes various aspects of the sector. Laws and policies set out in acts, regulations, guidelines are well drafted in order to ensure positive impact of tourism. Briefly it comprises the Tourism Authority Act 2006, Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority Act 1996, Tourism Employee Welfare Fund, amongst others. However, sustainable tourism which is a more complex type of tourism requires some specific amendments in existing laws to be able to cope with the new challenges specifically within the environmental and socio-economic aspect of tourism. In this context, sustainability encompasses triple bottom line that is it englobes the economy, society and environment also known as the 3 Ps that is Profit, People and Planet (Gbejewoh et al., 2021). In a nutshell, sustainable tourism has recently been observed to go beyond the environmental perspective and to take other factors into account as well (Neto, 2003).

Job creation prospects entailed by the tourism industry does definitely impact positively on the local population not only in terms of financial stability but also there may have good effect on the preservation of local cultures, conservation of heritage and hence leading to a better standard of living for the population. Nevertheless, despite all these positive impacts, sustainable tourism development does have some challenges which they face. The problem also concerns the economy and social aspect and goes beyond only the environmental problems. Concerning the economy, it has been noticed that there has been leakage of foreign currency of the investors outside the island (Chummun & Mathithibane, 2020) and this is a serious problem to address as it may result in closure of local businesses and impacting on the socio-eco-

conomic progress of the country. Additionally, Section 9 of the Mauritian Constitution which is considered as the supreme law of the country and deals with the protection of property have been breached as there has been restricted access to some beaches to civilians as a result of hotel construction and these two examples are only the tip of the iceberg and the problem is more serious. As such, the efficiency of the laws regulating sustainable tourism needs to be reviewed and reinforced in relation to socio-economic, and environmental aspect in order to better cope with the new challenges so as to prevent a bad image of Mauritius on an international level.

Consequently, the purpose of this research is to assess the efficiency, robustness and accuracy of the legal framework on sustainable tourism in Mauritius in dealing with new emerging challenges. To achieve this research objective, the black letter research method will be adopted to collect secondary data by analysing the related laws on sustainable tourism and a comparative analysis with some other countries' rules on the subject will be conducted. A desk-based approach and content analysis will be used to collect this information. The countries selected for the comparison are the Maldives and Seychelles since these are both Small Islands Developing States similar to Mauritius that focus on the tourism industry for survival to a great extent and also, they are considered to be direct competitors of Mauritius as per the Strategic Plan Report 2018-2021 published by the Ministry of Tourism (Government of Mauritius, 2018). The comparison is made on the basis of best approaches designed by each country to achieve sustainable development with a particular focus on the protection of environment and human rights. While the black letter method seeks to investigate how tourism laws in each country are protecting environmental and human rights, the functioning of the relevant laws is compared in terms of their establishment, monitoring modalities and sanctions. The aim behind this comparative analysis is to suggest recommendations for the Mauritian stakeholders to enhance and promote sustainable tourism practices in the country which may result in a competitive advantage at the global level.

At present, this study is amongst the first academic writings on sustainable tourism laws in the context of Mauritius and it is being carried out with the aim of combining a large amount of empirical, theoretical, and factual information that can be of use to various stakeholders and not only to academics. While the first section of the paper has introduced the background of the research, the objectives, the research methods to be adopted and the originality of this study, the other parts of the paper are structured as follows: Section 2 will discuss the various studies conducted by several distinct scholars that have considered sustainable tourism practices in line with the triple bottom line 3Ps' approaches in the context of Mauritius. Section 3 will assess the relevant Mauritian laws on tourism while Section 4 will compare the related laws on tourism relating to sustainability in Mauritius, Maldives and Seychelles. Section 5 will suggest recommendations for the Mauritian stakeholders and the final Section 6 will conclude the research.

2. Literature Review

This section of the research critically analyses the various research works conducted by scholars in the context of sustainable tourism in Mauritius, and then to showcase how this existing study differs from the already existing studies.

In particular, Ternel (2016) researched on the various sustainable tourism opportunities for Mauritius. The objectives were to identify sustainable practices in the country, and to analyse the priority sustainability areas which need to be addressed and a qualitative technique was applied in order to identify areas for improvement in the tourism sector. As a result, the researcher found that although the Mauritian government has already established some strategies in place in order to combat climate change, these were not sufficient to educate and raise awareness among the local population, other tourism stakeholders and visitors. Moreover, she mentioned the debate of La Cambuse hotel development project which faced numerous criticisms whereby the site where they wanted to construct the hotel was a natural area used for the reproduction of turtles. To this effect, members of "Platform Sov Nou Laplaz" which is a non-governmental organization stated that this kind of project represents a danger for the ecosystem (Business Mega, 2015). Therefore, Ternel (2016) firmly believes that environmental factors must be taken into consideration in order to better prepare an enhanced policy and law for sustainable tourism development.

Apart from environmental considerations, Beebeejaun (2017) emphasized on the effectiveness of the legal framework regulating sustainable tourism in Mauritius and the focus was also axed on human rights. The research objectives of the study were mainly to analyse the relation between tourism and these two aspects relating to sustainability. Also, the research aim was to analyse how policy makers can solve the problem of climate change through sustainable tourism. The second part was mainly about the human rights situation of the local population and suggestion of international recommendation has been put forward in order for Mauritius to adopt. The research comprised of socio legal analysis and also black letter approach was used whereby there has been the analysis of the main legislation governing human rights and environment. Concerning the environmental part, the researched found that measures have been taken by the Ministry of Tourism to help protect the environment such as the implementation of the Environment Impact Assessment to monitor the effect of the project on the environment. However, the researcher also found that there are still some negative impacts of tourism on the environment such as pollution, the depletion of natural resources, global warming which could later result in more alarming situations. In order to better tackle these problems, Beebeejaun (2017) advocated that the Tourism Authority Act of Mauritius must be amended by establishing a specific ecotourism committee which will cater only for better management of Mauritius as a sustainable tourism island. It can comprise mainly of tourism stakeholder's representatives, academics and NGOs and their main role will to promote eco-system tourism and can help establishing policy for the well management of the tourism sector. In order for this specific section to work, the local population will have to be aware of the problem affecting the environment and do their best on their behalf to avoid pollution and protect the nature.

Additionally, one early study conducted by Prayag et al. (2010) analysed hotel development in Mauritius and its impact on sustainable tourism. For the methodology, the researcher used questionnaire to measure hoteliers' attitudes in relation to tourism sustainability. The findings demonstrate that hoteliers were not aware that hotel development can have negative impact on the environment but they disagreed that hotel development has a negative impact on the society and according to them, the development only benefits the society in terms of job creation and infrastructure development. This gap is not uncommon as the policy makers generally view sustainable tourism as the protection of physical environment only. Moreover, the research found that only the beachcomber hotel at that time adopted the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR). At that time, CSR was purely voluntary although this concept is becoming more popular nowadays as each company must compulsorily contribute 2% of its chargeable income to a CSR fund (MRA, 2020). Also, Prayag et al. (2010) found that hoteliers on average agreed that hotel development should contribute to environmental sustainability, and have positive economic, social and cultural impacts. They were not entirely convinced that there were negative cultural and economic impacts, and they disagreed that there were negative social impacts.

Along similar lines, Seetanah (2019) explored the role of tourism in poverty alleviation in Mauritius by using time series analysis and empirical research as methodology. The aim of the research involved to supplement the literature in respect of the relationship between tourism and poverty reduction which will be useful to develop policy in this sector. There has been analysis and explanation on the concept of tourism and the positive economic impact it created. The recommendation and conclusion part demonstrated that employment and education level is the most important factor in poverty alleviation and concerning tourism development it has been found that the government must implement policies in order to align economic and budgetary incentives with social cost in order promote investment in this sector such as building of hotels, restaurants amongst others. As tourism is directly related to the informal economy whereby the poor are more likely engaged, this should more developed and in this way attracting international tourists. An aggressive approach of marketing destination must be adopted and in this way the country will get more foreign spending and lots of economic benefits such as poverty alleviation and a better standard of living of the local citizens.

Accordingly, the above-mentioned scholars' observations and analysis made it abundantly clear that there are gaps in the law governing sustainable tourism in Mauritius, particularly in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, which necessitated numerous amendments. Additionally, although many academics have written on the topic of sustainable tourism, very few have examined the legal framework that governs it in Mauritius which is spread in various pieces of legislation. In the following sections of this paper,

a critical analysis of the Mauritian Tourism Authority Act (2006) and other pertinent laws will be done in order to get a deeper examination of the research topic.

3. Legal Framework on Tourism in Mauritius

The legal system of Mauritius is a hybrid one consisting of the UK common law practices and the French civil code. Concerning tourism laws in the country, they are mainly inspired from international conventions but some of their provisions have been amended to adapt to the Mauritian context. These are elaborated hereunder.

3.1 Tourism Authority Act (2006)

In fact, the Tourism Authority Act (2006) is the main act responsible for the promotion of sustainable tourism in the country. Main duties involve control over licensees and make sure that all tourism organisations are abiding to the given standards. The Act contains a well-established plan covering aspects of the triple bottom line which are crucial to make Mauritius as a sustainable destination. Section 5 of the Act elaborates on its objectives and include the promotion sustainable development of tourism industry, encouraging activities in tourism industry to be done in a responsible manner, implementing tourism policies and develop coordination between private and public sector in the industry.

Section 6 and 7 of the Act respectively elaborates on the functions and powers of the Tourism Authority. It is mentioned that the authority has function to give and regulate license for tourist enterprises and pleasure crafts. However, if the organisations do not abide to the standards set by the regulatory bodies, the Tourism Authority has the power to revoke the license given. Other functions include the management and development of tourism sites, setting standards, policies and guidelines and lastly taking measures to protect the customers.

Additionally, great emphasis is put on complaints mechanisms under Section 24 of the Act. It is provided that any person who is unsatisfied with the services he/she got with, the licensees can make a complaint to the Tourism Authority and investigation must take place. This section is important for the promotion of sustainable tourism development as the licensees will set strategies in place in order to always abide by the policies and standards set in a way to get a good reputation and this will benefit the industry as a whole.

Another crucial legal component is Section 26 which deals with the licensing. This is related to Section 6 and it mentions that every enterprise must obtain authorisation before operating their tourism business and failure to abide to this will result to fines of more than MUR200,000 (USD4510) and accompanied by a 5 years imprisonment term. This can be seen in the case of *Police V Pedre Jean Steve Wasley (2013)*, whereby accused was found guilty as he embarked passengers outside of embarkation point and breached Section 26 of the Tourism Authority Act. Also, Section 33 stipulates that every licensee shall keep records of 5 years after the completion of the transaction and this is fundamental concerning the inspection and the transparency of the transactions.

For water sports such as pleasure crafts, Section 40 mentions that the authority must keep a proper register for pleasure crafts. And by virtue of Section 47, there can be refusal of registers if the pleasure craft does not abide by the laws and regulations of Mauritius and where the commissioner of police does not give proper authorisation.

3.2 Beach Authority Act (2002)

Moreover, the Beach Authority Act (2002) is used for the sound development of sustainable tourism in Mauritius. It was developed in 2002 and ensure the proper control of public beaches as one of the main features that attracts tourists in the island (Beach Authority, 2023). The mission of this Act is to make the locals and tourists to fully enjoy the amenities available to them on public beaches and it also takes into consideration the social and environmental aspect of sustainability. The functions are by virtue of Section 5 of the Act which concerns the implementation of projects associated with the conservation and protection of public beaches and also regulate the activities which takes place on the beaches. A board must also

be set up with representatives from different ministries in order to take important decisions concerning the policies and development of public beaches. Several projects have already been implemented by the authority in accordance with the Beach Authority Act 2002, such as the establishment of informative panels and the upgrading of several public beaches with the implementation of mini kiosk to avoid pollution. The authorities also work in accordance with the Use of Public Beach Operations Regulations (2004) and Beach Traders License Regulations (2004) for the proper development and use of public beaches. However even with these Acts, there are still some issues which need to be tackle. This will be analysed at the end of this chapter.

3.3 Environment Protection Act (2002)

Additionally, the Environment Protection Act (2002) is a fundamental legislation used to demonstrate that the local authorities are ensuring the protection of the environment with the development of the tourism sector in the island which again demonstrate the concept of sustainability. The main purpose of this Act is to set policies for the protection of the environment and sanctions are imposed when contravening these laws. Section 18(2) of the Environment Protection Act elaborates on the application of licence for the Environmental Impact Assessment which is a tool used to evaluate the impact of tourism development on the environment (OGL, 2022). In order to predict the environmental impact for the potential tourism development such as hotel construction, several governmental authorities' authorisations are needed such as approval from the Central Electricity Board, Central Water Authority, Road development authority, police department amongst others. Yet, an in-dept assessment is not needed when granting license for other tourism activities (Beebeejaun, 2017). Other strategies are adopted each year by the government in order to reduce negative environmental impact. This includes the 10-year policy and strategy developed by the Ministry of solid waste, environment and climate change. The Masterplan puts forward a new mindset and include several regulations and other programs such as the coastal rehabilitation of eroded sites (UNEP, 2023). In this way, all activities including tourism development will be more controlled and this will help reduce environmental problems.

3.4 Wildlife and National Parks Act (1994)

The Wildlife and National Parks Act (1994) must also be analysed as it also has direct impact on the environmental impact of tourism in the island. It has been established mainly for the protection of the flora and fauna in Mauritius. According to Section 3 of the Act, there shall be the setting up of an advisory council which is made up of a chairperson, representative several Ministries including representative of the Ministry of Tourism and other qualified members in order to advise the minister on any matter relating to the national parks and wildlife. In this way, those areas will be properly developed and sanctions will be taken if tourism activities cause a threat to the areas and thus sustainability will be maintained.

3.5 Tourism Employees Welfare Fund Act (2002)

Concerning the economic aspect of sustainable tourism, the Tourism Employees Welfare Fund Act (2002) can be taken into consideration. The establishment of the Tourism Employees Welfare Fund is by virtue of Section 3 of the Act and its main purpose is to provide social and economic welfare to employees of tourism organisations. Section 15 and 16 stipulates that funds are received in the form of grants from the government and also from the contribution of tourism enterprises. In this way, positive economic impacts of tourism can be achieved as locals will get jobs and a better standard of living as this Welfare fund can help them in the construction of their houses for example among other benefits.

3.6 Critical Analysis

Even though several tourism institutions are doing their best to be more sustainable in their activities, based on an early study carried out by Ritchie and Crouch (2003), it has been mentioned that Mauritius failed to implement some sustainable tourism in certain ways. This can be seen in cases where there has been violation of property rights of local people by some private companies in order to build hotels and

other tourism infrastructure which has been approved by the government (Beebeejaun, 2017). Moreover, locals have also protested because of the privatisation of public beaches and according to Dr Nunkoo, a lecturer at the University of Mauritius, this kind of tourism development targeting beaches can be a challenge of ensuring sustainability (Fakun, 2018). Furthermore, in a report issued by the European Commission (2023), it is stated that the procedures and granting of Environmental impact Assessment by the Tourism Authority to issue licences lack transparency and accountability. This shows a communication barrier between the government and the private sector which needs to ameliorate for the benefit of sustainable tourism development (Europa, 2021).

In the past few years, even the media has illustrated a rise concerning tourist aggression in the country. A more recent case is seen in an article published by Defi media whereby two tourists were attacked near the public beach of Bel-Ombre and they would be presented in court few days after (Defi Media, 2023). This insecurity impacts adversely on the social aspect of sustainability of tourism in the country especially given that there is a high positive relationship between the number of tourists arrivals and the number of theft and violence cases. It is therefore imperative for the Ministry of Tourism to take the necessary actions to prevent these incidents from happening. In another article published by Defi Media in 2017, it is seen that the cases of robbery and other forms of violence such as rape is increasing and proper measures should be taken in order to restore the reputation of Mauritius as an island destination and remove the image of Mauritius as a dangerous destination as portrayed in the case of Michaela Mc Areavey (Jad-doo, 2017). Consequently, it becomes relevant to assess the legal and regulatory measures undertaken by some other countries to suggest policy recommendations to the Mauritian stakeholders in order to ensure sustainable tourism, which the following section will elaborate on.

4. Sustainable Tourism Laws in Other Countries

According to the Strategic Plan Report 2018-2021 published by the Ministry of Tourism (Government of Mauritius, 2018), the main competing island destinations of Mauritius are Maldives, Seychelles and Sri Lanka. For the purpose of this research, the relevant tourism laws and regulations relating to sustainable tourism in Seychelles and Maldives will be used to conduct the comparison with that of Mauritius encompassing the various aspects of sustainable tourism and its legislation, the environment, human rights and tourism employee welfare. The main highlights of each countries' policies on the subject are summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Laws and Policies on Sustainable Tourism in Other Countries

	Mauritius	Maldives	Seychelles
Sustainable Tourism	- Mauritian Standard on Sustainable Tourism: MS 165:2019 - Tourism Authority Act (2007) Section 5	- Tourism Master Plan 2023 - 2027	- Sustainable Tourism Label - Seychelles Tourism Board Act (2012) Section 5
Legislation Governing Tourism	- Tourism Authority Act (2007)	- Maldives Tourism Act (1999)	- Seychelles Tourism Development Act (2019)
Human Rights	- Constitution (1968) - Human rights Act (1998) - Combating of Trafficking Acts 2009	- Human Rights Commission Act 2006	- Constitution of Seychelles - Independent National Human Rights Commission
Environment	- Environment Protection Act 2002 - Fisheries and Marine Resources Act 1998 - Coastal Zone Management Act 2015 - Solid waste Management Division - Hotel Classification Regulation - Tourism Authority Dolphin and Whale Watching Regulations 2012	- Maldives Protection and Preservation Act (1993) - Environmental Impact Assessment (2007) - Waste Management Act (2022)	- Seychelles Environment Protection Act (2012)
Employee Welfare for Tourism Employees	- Tourism Employee Welfare Fund Act 2002		

Source: Own Elaboration

As illustrated in Table 1 above, in Mauritius, the concept of sustainable tourism is mentioned in the Tourism Authority Act 2006 by virtue of its Section 5 and the objective is to promote sustainable tourism development of the island. Moreover, the Act is the main provision concerning the regulation and laws of tourism in the country and include section on licensing and sanctions among others. This part has already been analysed in the previous chapter and now the focus will be on the Mauritian standard on sustainable tourism: MS 165:2019. It covers important aspects such as sustainability issues in the country, socio-economic benefit of tourism, environmental impact of tourism and most importantly the different strategies used to improve Mauritius as a sustainable island destination. It highlights that there must be the continuous improvement and sanctions must be taken rapidly when breach the laws happen (Foondun, 2019). The standard is approved by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council as Mauritius met most of the criteria of a sustainable tourism island destination (Switch Africa, 2020). This can be a marketing tool to attract more tourist and also, the project has been created in order to help small and medium sized enterprises in the tourism sector to improve their sustainability (Switch Africa, 2020).

The main legislation governing tourism in the Maldives is the Maldives Tourism Act (1999) focusing on development zone for tourism as mentioned in its Section 4, licensing of tourism activities and sanctions if not abiding to the laws but here it can be noted that no aspect of sustainability is mentioned. However, In the Tourism Master Plan 2023 – 2027, the Maldives Ministry of Tourism mentioned implementation of strategies and he hopes that Maldives will finally be classified as a sustainable tourism island (Ministry of Tourism Maldives, 2023). The plan includes that for Maldives to be more sustainable, there should be the continuous improvement through a coordinated approach among the stakeholders. One strategy is the sustainable growth whereby the tax regimes shall be modified and discussed with the stakeholders. A green tax which is transparent must be included on all tourism products and make tourists aware of it. This tax requires all visitors staying in hotels and other tourist accommodations to pay USD6 per day as a compensation for any loss caused to the nature. In this way, the island can get a competitive advantage and stakeholders will be coordinated to attain the same objective.

For Seychelles island, the Seychelles Tourism Development Act (2019) is used to regulate tourism activities and it includes licencing requirements and sanctions same as the 2 other islands. Part III of the Act concerns the grading system of accommodations in the tourism industry. The concept of sustainable tourism is however not mentioned in this Act, but it is present by virtue of Section 5 of the Seychelles Tourism Board Act (2012) whereby the main function of the Tourism Board is to promote sustainable development of tourism and improving its contribution to the economy of the country. Also, there is the Sustainable Tourism Label which is used in order to encourage tourism enterprises to adopt more sustainable practices and those who meet all the criteria are certainly rewarded. In this way the tourism enterprises will have a competitive advantage and this will benefit the whole industry in terms of sustainability.

However, it is important to note that both the Sustainable Tourism Label in Seychelles and the Standard of Sustainable Tourism in Mauritius are voluntary programs and part of it can be mandatory in a way that all the tourism enterprises take it into consideration.

4.1 Analysis of Human Rights and Employee Welfare for Tourism Employees

The Constitution (1968) in Mauritius is the supreme law and has provisions concerning the rights of the citizens. According to Chapter 2, the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms are mentioned. This encompasses the rights of all individuals and avoid any form of discrimination according to race, place of origin, colour, sex, privacy among others. There is also the protection against forced labour according to Section 6 of the Mauritian Constitution. Section 11 elaborates on freedom of conscience and subsection (5)(b) put more emphasis on the right to observe and practise any religion belief as in a democratic society. This section was seen in the case of Soolekha, a lady who was forced to remove her 'tikka' at her workplace which is hotel 'The residence, Belle-Mare'. According to an article published by L'Express, the case breached Article 4 of the Employment Act and is also unconstitutional (Luckoo, 2018).

Section 7 of the Constitution of Mauritius elaborates on the protection of inhuman treatment. However, according to the recent trends seen in the media, there has been a rise in cases of abuse of tourists in the form of theft, aggression and other forms of violence like moral intimidation. Therefore, amendments may be made to reinforce the sanctions and punishment if laws have been breached and also there can

be educational programs to stop these activities. These can be done in coordination with the Protection of Human Rights Act (1998), whereby according to its Section 3, there is the establishment of a commission that deals with loopholes in law and sanctions.

In the case of Maldives, Although, it signed several international human rights treaties, the 2021 report on human rights stated that there are still many more instances of employer abuses and unsafe living conditions even though the island is covered by the Human Rights Commission act of 2006, which is used to protect citizens' rights in general (U.S. Dept of State, 2021).

Immigrant mistreatment cases are quite prevalent on the island. Although tourists may perceive Maldives as a beautiful place, immigrants who are taken advantage of on a regular basis do not have the same point-of-view. The Human-Rights Watch report (2023) indicates that migrants make up one-third of the population, with the tourism sector employing the majority of them. However, a member of the Maldives Parliament was accused of engaging in human trafficking, prompting protests from the workforce who had gone months without being paid. The bill to combat human trafficking in accordance with United Nations protocol is still pending, and there is still exploitation going on, which indicates that the Government is moving very slowly to address the issue (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

Similar to Mauritius, the Seychelles island has a constitution that protects individual rights. It also has an independent national Human Rights Commission that deals with defending residents' rights and enforcing the law. To protect its workers, the nation has ratified numerous conventions. For instance, the conventions on Occupational Safety and Health (2005) and Employment Discrimination (1999), among others. However, according to statistics, there are now more human rights breaches occurring in the country than ever before and the relevant authorities must find new strategies to deal with the problem (Association for Rights, Information and Democracy, 2019).

As a summary of the section on human rights protection in the tourism sector, it can be observed that Mauritius has an advantage over the other two destinations since it has signed various agreements pertaining to the protection of human rights and also has a thoroughly written constitution in force. We also have a significant edge over the Maldives because of Mauritius Combating of Trafficking in Persons Act (2009), which is used to prevent issues regarding human trafficking and protect the victims in compliance with United Nations norms. However, given the rise in violence against tourists, it is imperative that some other legislation tailored to the tourism sector are amended.

The Tourism Employee Welfare Fund Act (2002) which is mentioned earlier in this paper, gives Mauritius an advantage over both nations in terms of employee welfare for those working in the tourism industry in a way that more people are encouraged to work in the tourism industry and deliver a good service leading to positive economic impact of tourism. For the other islands, there are no explicit laws governing the wellbeing of tourism workers and this can lead to other negative socio-economic impact of tourism such as lower standard of living, poverty and theft. They have legislation for protection of workers in general and not specific to the tourism industry as Mauritius. As such, this aspect must be considered.

4.2 Analysis of the Environment Protection Legislations

In Mauritius there is the Environment Protection Act (2002), Fisheries and Marine Resources Act (1998), Coastal Zone Management Act (2015), Solid Waste Management Division, Hotel Classification Regulation, and Tourism Authority Dolphin and Whale Watching Regulations (2012) which are used to protect the environment regarding tourism activities and development. The Environment Protection Act has already been analysed in the previous part of this paper and the other legislations are quite useful to complement it. However, the challenge here is the fast changing of the climate due to global warming. The Environment Impact Assessment is used to monitor hotels and integrated resort construction and the concept of climate change has been mentioned in the 'Maurice Ile Durable' program. However, with the increasing number of tourists in the island like for instance, statistics are expecting 1.4 million tourists arriving by the end of 2023, the main legislation that is the Tourism Authority Act should cater for a part on climate change and measures to deal with the fast-changing problem (MauritiusNow, 2023). Thus, this would be specific to the tourism sector and stakeholders will know how to deal with the situation.

One notable case is that of MV Wakashio in 2020 which questioned the environmental laws of the country as to the extent to which it can protect the marine ecosystem from oil spills as it was one of the

biggest oil spills that the country experienced involving the destruction of biodiversity and ecological systems. Part 5 of the Environmental Protection Act (2002) concerns spills and environmental emergency and also include the liabilities that the owner of the pollutant have to pay. This part elaborates mainly about the compensation and liability of the damages caused. Section 31 of this Act provides more details about the clean-up procedures but there is not enough emphasis on how to prevent such incident from taking place avoiding ecological disasters. Despite the quick response to that emergency, the effect of the oil spill has gone beyond the ocean and this incident left its legacy for years as stated by UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2020). It is also important to note that this incident has negatively impacted the socio-economy of the country as many people depend on the sea to work and this could have increased poverty in the country. Therefore, as prevention is better than cure, the environmental laws can be amended in a way to prevent these incidents from happening.

Waste management for hotels has also recently been in the headlines. In a research published by the UK Essays (2018), it is stated that an unspecified number of illegal dumps exist in the island because lack of proper structure, supervision and regulatory framework. Legislation for general waste management is the Environment Protection Regulation (2001) and Solid Waste Management Division which forms part of the Environment Protection Act 2002, but it can be noted that there is no specific framework that caters for specific disposal of waste generated by the tourism industry. This need to be considered in order to promote Mauritius as a sustainable tourism destination.

Eco-tourism is another concept that allow a destination to be more sustainable. It is defined as a responsible way to travel to natural areas that protect the environment and improve socio-economic aspect of the destination according to the International Ecotourism Society (1991). In Mauritius, there is no law which explicitly regulates eco-tourism but there are standards provided in the Mauritian Standard on Sustainable Tourism: MS 165:2019, that are related to ecotourism such as the conservation of the biodiversity and ecosystems, improving socio-economic development among others and in such a way, all the stakeholders can adopt these principles. Nevertheless, these standards are not binding but are only voluntarily complied with when a tourist operator would like to be recognised for its contribution towards sustainable development. An example here can be the Veranda Hotels which has been awarded a Green Key Certification recognised internationally in 2023. The hotel carries an eco-label and makes all its effort to reduce water and energy consumption, use of renewable energy, waste prevention among others. Moreover, an audit is carried each year to analyse the progress made in this respect and find ways to ameliorate. To encourage eco-tourism, it is suggested that the Mauritian Standard on Sustainable Tourism: MS 165:2019 be made compulsory on all tourist operators by codifying these standards in a separate piece of legislation and more specifically focusing on the establishment policies coupled with a proper monitoring and compliance function.

Maldives islands has the Maldives Protection and Preservation Act (1993) which is used and also the Environmental Impact Assessment. The laws in this country should be reinforced concerning environment as due to rise in sea level, the island may be submerged in the coming years. Similarly, in the case of the airport expansion of Fainu Island, Maldives in 2018, the citizens protested on the streets and petition was sent to the Ministry of Tourism as such big projects involve the destruction of the environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Assessment was performed which led to the rejection of the project. This shows this assessment together with the Maldives Tourism Act (1999) are good mechanisms to make Maldives a sustainable destination.

Additionally, as per Section 2 of the Protection and Preservation Act in Maldives, all stakeholders must abide to the environmental policies set by the relevant ministries. In the case of Dhigufaru Island Resort in Maldives, it has been seen that the hotel dumped rubbish on a nearby inhabited island which caused pollution (Maldives Independent, 2018). Therefore, the Ministry of Tourism and Environment, reinforced their sanctions in cases where tourism activities caused negative impact to the environment. In this way, in order to get a positive image, some other tourism enterprises would act sustainably and abide to the tourism laws in the country.

However, careless tourism developments often cause negative effects on the environment and society as a whole. The government has focused more on attracting foreigners but forgets the negative impact on local citizens. In this respect, the Observer Research Foundation (2023) mentioned the fact that the

Minister of Environment pressured the Maldives Environmental Protection Agency to allow the expansion of the airport, even though an environmental impact assessment found that the project would remove natural resources such as mangroves where locals lived. Therefore, it can be seen that there is no transparency between the minister and other stakeholders.

For Seychelles island, there is the Seychelles Environment protection Act (2012) which is used its main function is the preservation of the environment and combatting environmental pollution. However, according to the National Report of Seychelles (2012), the country faced environment challenges because of the climate change and the laws must be reinforced to tackle this problem (Government of Seychelles, 2012).

Coral reefs destruction has always been a challenge to the small islands in the Indian ocean specially Seychelles and this is due to overfishing and lots of development concerning the tourism activities. Consequently, in 2021, a National Coral Reef Policy has been developed and implemented by the Seychelles Government for the conservation, protection of the coral reefs around the island. With these 13 policies strategic and transparent plan, all the stakeholders would find ways to protect the coral reefs as it would benefit the environment and local citizens (Seychelles News Agency, 2023). However, there are no specific sanctions if the stakeholders do not abide to those policies.

Solid waste management is another problem faced by the tourism industry in Seychelles same as Maldives island. With the growing the number of tourists in the island, there are less disposal facilities which often leads to several types of pollution. It has been a challenge because of lack of funding, high transport cost and shortage of land. In order to deal with the situation, a strategic plan 2018-2023 has been implemented and the goal is to manage wastes in a sustainable way to benefit the integrity of the environment and improve quality of life. Nevertheless, it can be noted that the plan is for the overall island but there is not a specific one for the tourism industry.

As a summary, it can be deduced that Mauritius' environmental rules in the tourism sector need to be revised to reflect how the environment is changing as a result of global warming in order to preserve the current environment for use by future generations. The issue of managing solid waste exists on each of the three islands and needs to be resolved. Moreover, Mauritius implementation of eco-tourism strategies, will significantly aid in achieving sustainable tourism, the island enjoys an edge, but there is still room for improvement such as implementation of more severe sanctions for breach of laws.

5. Recommendations

This part of the research seeks to suggest some recommendations based on the comparative study conducted to address issues related to human rights and the environment in the context of the tourism sector.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, the Maldives Tourism Master Plan 2023 – 2027 intends to establish a green tax to be payable by tourists and visitors at a fixed sum per day. This money will then be used to finance action plans to restore, reduce or eliminate any damage caused to the environment as a consequence of mass tourists' arrivals. It is suggested that the Mauritian government considers the adoption of a green tourism tax since this will boost governmental revenue while simultaneously provides a means for recovery from environmental damage.

Additionally, similar to the approaches undertaken by Seychelles and Maldives, the civil society and other stakeholders may be involved when taking decisions regarding tourism development in the country. This will create a sense of belonging to the local community and there will be the generation of more ideas on how to improve the existing laws of tourism in the country. Moreover, Social Impact Assessment can be introduced in tourism development projects like the Seychelles did in several instances. Furthermore, some sections of the Tourism Authority Act need to be amended to better cater for the protection of tourists and apply more severe sanctions for breaching these sections. This will help reduce the number of tourist aggression cases happening in the island. Therefore, tourists will feel more protected and spread positive word of mouth for the island.

Another notable recommendation that will bring an eco-friendlier tourism in the country is the inclusion of environmental protection in the constitution of Mauritius, which is the supreme law of the country.

Both Maldives and Seychelles have the protection of environment embedded in their constitutions and it is high time for Mauritius to follow same. Indeed, environment and human rights form part of the same womb and should be considered in parallel in projects that have an impact on both aspects.

Lastly, collaboration with other countries may also be effectuated to develop tourism in a sustainable way. Mauritius forms part of the vanilla island group with partnership with 6 other islands for the promotion and marketing of the island. The Ministry of Tourism can join other groups and conventions and adopt new ways to be more sustainable. Moreover, the Ministry officers can benchmark Mauritius sustainable tourism development strategies and laws with that of other island destination in order to adopt the best practices and implement it in the context of Mauritius.

6. Conclusion

To sum up, sustainability plays an important role for the development of tourism in Mauritius. In this paper, the laws surrounding the tourism sector in the context of sustainability in the island have been analysed. The importance of environmental and human rights protection in this paper was also examined and it is observed that although there is a legal framework for tourism that is currently in place, there are still gaps in the laws that make it challenging for tourism businesses to operate sustainably. Among other issues relating to the environment and the economy, the socio-economic aspect has been neglected.

The comparative study conducted in this paper reveals some of the action plans which Mauritius can inspire from both Seychelles and Maldives so as to promote sustainability in the tourism sector. Among these suggestions are the implementation of a green tax, the conduct of social impact assessments for all tourism projects, the inclusion of environmental protection in the constitution of Mauritius and international concerted efforts and collaboration for an eco-friendlier tourism sector. In this way, Mauritius will be able to gain a competitive advantage by building upon its existing strengths and educate all the relevant stakeholders in order to cement its position as the leading sustainable tourism destination and secure its place as a global tourism player.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest to be declared for the research conducted in this paper.

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Assessing Tourism Potential and Ecotourism Attractions of Annapurna Base Camp Nepal through an Appreciative Inquiry Approach

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ABSTRACT

Nature-based tourism such as trekking and mountaineering has gained popularity in recent years due to the demand for experience-based tourism. Adventure tourism is one of the mainstays of Nepali economy and a major source of revenue. Trekking has brought employment and income opportunities and contributed to the living standard of local people. However, the influx of visitors has led to the depletion of natural resources and the degradation of environmental conditions in many areas. Therefore, it is crucial to establish a proper balance between social, economic, and environmental dimensions to ensure the viability of these tourism destinations. This study aims to assess the tourism potential and ecotourism attractions of Annapurna Base Camp through appreciative inquiry analysis. Based on the concept of ecotourism and its principles, we carried out the study keeping ecotourism in the center for exploring other possible forms of tourism at the study site. Through our primary and secondary data sources, we have designed a strategic plan to bring the results of appreciative inquiry into practice. The study emphasizes the adoption of strength-based approaches like appreciative inquiry in tourism studies that will help communities and destinations address social, environmental, and economic problems while ensuring their sustainability.

KEYWORDS

Trekking, Stakeholders, Strategic Plan, Design, Discovery, Destiny.

ARTICLE HISTORY

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1. Introduction

Globally, the tourism sector has emerged as one of the most rapidly growing and significant economic industries (Akbulak & Cengiz, 2014; Zhao & Min Li, 2018). The tourism industry serves as a key driver for economic, social, and cultural development, particularly in developing nations (Rodriguez et al., 2018; Kharel et al., 2022). Nepal's tourism potential is considerable due to its geographical position, rich culture and traditions, iconic landmarks, and abundant natural beauty (Bhatta, 2019). Major tourist attractions in Nepal include mountaineering, trekking, rock climbing, bungee jumping, paragliding, mountain biking, jungle safari, rafting, and canyoning. Due to the growing influx of tourists, Nepal's tourism sector holds immense potential for expanding its scope in terms of generating higher revenue, creating more job opportunities, and offering additional advantages (Thapa, 2003; Khadka et al., 2021). On the other hand, tourism destinations have experienced various effects on society, culture, and the environment (Ramdas & Mohamed, 2014; Bhattarai & Karmacharya, 2022). The effects of climate change result in the alteration of tourist patterns, leading to an increased number of risks rather than opportunities (KC & Thapa Parajuli, 2015). The linkage between climate and tourism is obvious in different forms of tourism such as ecosystem tourism, coastal tourism, mountain tourism, and nature-based tourism. The majority of the adventure tourism activities in the Himalayas are heavily influenced by climatic conditions. Therefore, unpredictable weather such as heavy rainfall, and dense fog greatly diminishes the overall quality of the trekking experience in these regions (Anup & Fernandez, 2022).

To minimize the negative effects of mass tourism, the Government of Nepal and tourism stakeholders have initiated practices of nature-based tourism (Dahal et al., 2020). Ecotourism, a form of nature-based tourism includes cultural and environmental awareness, biodiversity conservation, and empowerment of local and host communities (Virijevic Jovanovic et al., 2021; Gautam et al., 2022). The concept of ecotourism has emerged as a promising prospect for developing countries as it encompasses responsible travel to natural areas, promotes environmental preservation, and enhances the well-being of local communities (Hosseini et al., 2021; Rahimian et al., 2022).

Furthermore, ecotourism centers around achieving objectives related to preserving the environment, alleviating poverty, and maintaining business profitability by utilizing sustainable practices (KC et al., 2015). Ecotourism not only considers environmental and cultural aspects but also emphasizes recycling, energy efficiency, water conservation, and the generation of economic opportunities for local communities (Isaacs, 2000; Dahal et al., 2020). Unlike mass tourism, ecotourism offers travelers the opportunity to not only observe and learn, but also contributes to the preservation of culture and the long-term sustainability of communities and natural resources. Therefore, the inclusion of multisector planning (Bin et al., 2008) and environmentally conscious features in ecotourism provide both ecological and economic advantages to the community and the entire nation.

Engaging in nature-based tourism activities (such as trekking) is a sustainable way to enjoy and appreciate the environment while preserving its natural wonders and wildlife (Brockelman & Dearden, 1990; Rojo-Ramos et al., 2020). These treks and tours can be conducted safely provided that proper planning, monitoring, and knowledge about the surroundings are ensured (Neupane et al., 2021). The employment opportunities generated by trekking have positively impacted communities living along the popular routes (KC et al., 2015). However, it is important to note that the perceptions of residents regarding these changes vary. Some embrace economic growth and improved social services brought by tourism, while others express concerns about potential impacts on their culture and climate (Nyaupane et al., 2014; Gautam et al., 2022). Overall, nature-based tourism offers a unique opportunity to experience the beauty of natural landscapes responsibly while supporting local economies.

Annapurna Base Camp (ABC) trek is one of the classical trekking trail (Baral et al., 2023) in the world. Annually, it receives thousands of trekkers across the globe because of its natural and cultural highlights. The journey of the trek takes you to the picturesque setting of the majestic snow-capped mountains, experiencing rich cultural heritage with a variety of natural scenery (Shrestha et al., 2023). Studies conducted in the past have focused on the perception of trekking and associated social and environmental changes (Nyaupane et al., 2014), rural energy consumption (Nepal, 2008), and ecotourist motivations (Holden & Sparrowhawk, 2002). However, there is a lack of sufficient literature and research that provides insights

into the tourism potential (Anup et al., 2023) and captivating attractions offered by the ABC trail. Therefore, this study aims to assess the possibilities for tourism and explore ecotourism opportunities along the ABC trail using a 4D (Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny) appreciative inquiry approach.

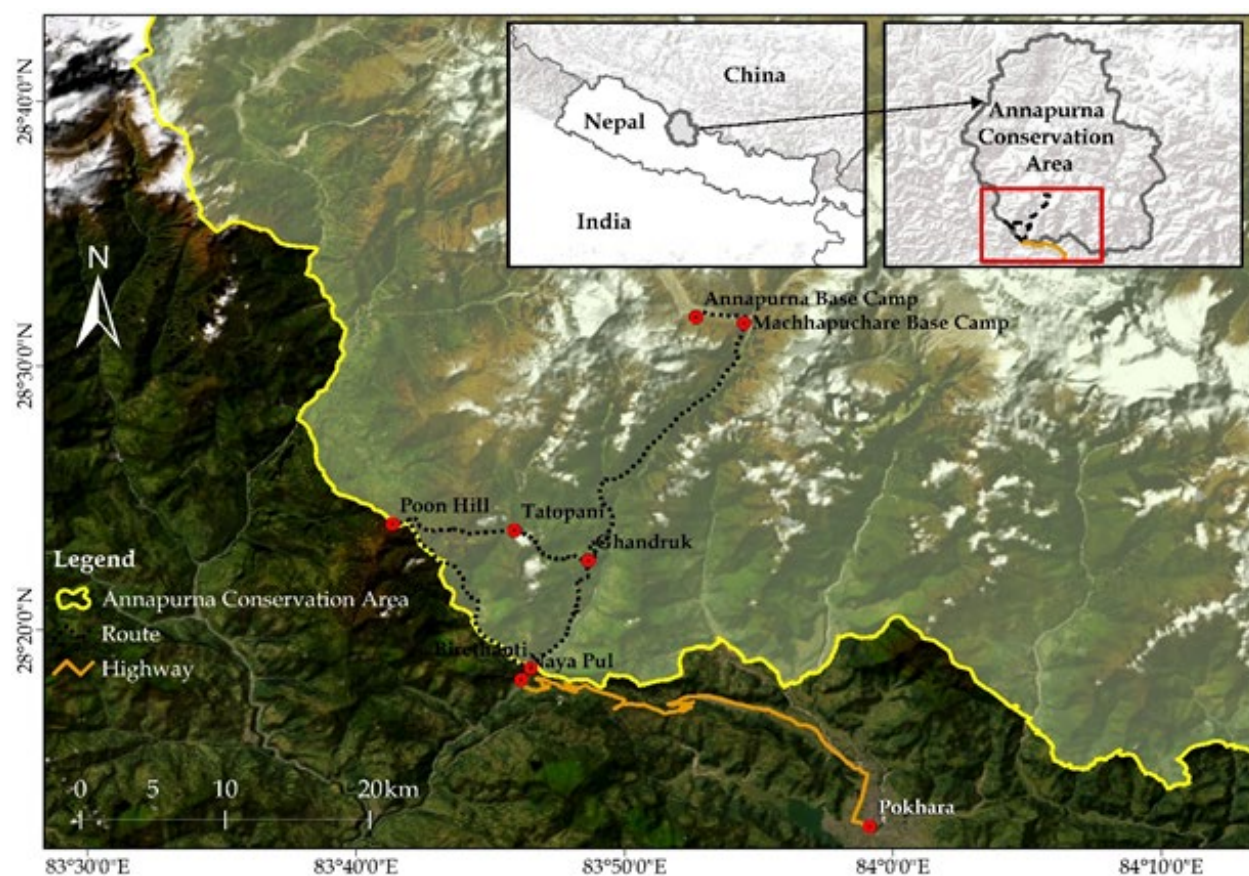
First proposed by David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva in 1987, appreciative inquiry has experienced exponential growth and has been widely applied in many social science and development sectors, including organizational development (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Ashley & Carney, 1999; Reason & Bradbury, 2001; Koster & Lemelin, 2009). Appreciative inquiry is a participatory research method that explores the strengths of individuals, organizations, and societies. It focuses on identifying the factors that contribute to the growth and success of human systems by promoting their liveliness, wellness, vigor, and performance (Watkins & Mohr, 2001; Whitney & Bloom, 2003; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Without isolating the rural population from research, this tool provides a straightforward and reliable way to comprehend their knowledge, requirements, and priorities (Nyaupane & Poudel, 2012).

2. Material and Methods

2.1 Study Area

The ABC trek is a high-altitude trekking route stretching through multiple environments in the Annapurna Conservation Area (ACA) (Figure 1) of Western Nepal. ACA is the largest protected area in Nepal covering an area of 7,629 km² with an abundance of flora and fauna (Shrestha et al., 2023).

Figure 1. Map of Nepal Showing ACA and the Trekking Route of ABC



Source: GIS and Google Earth

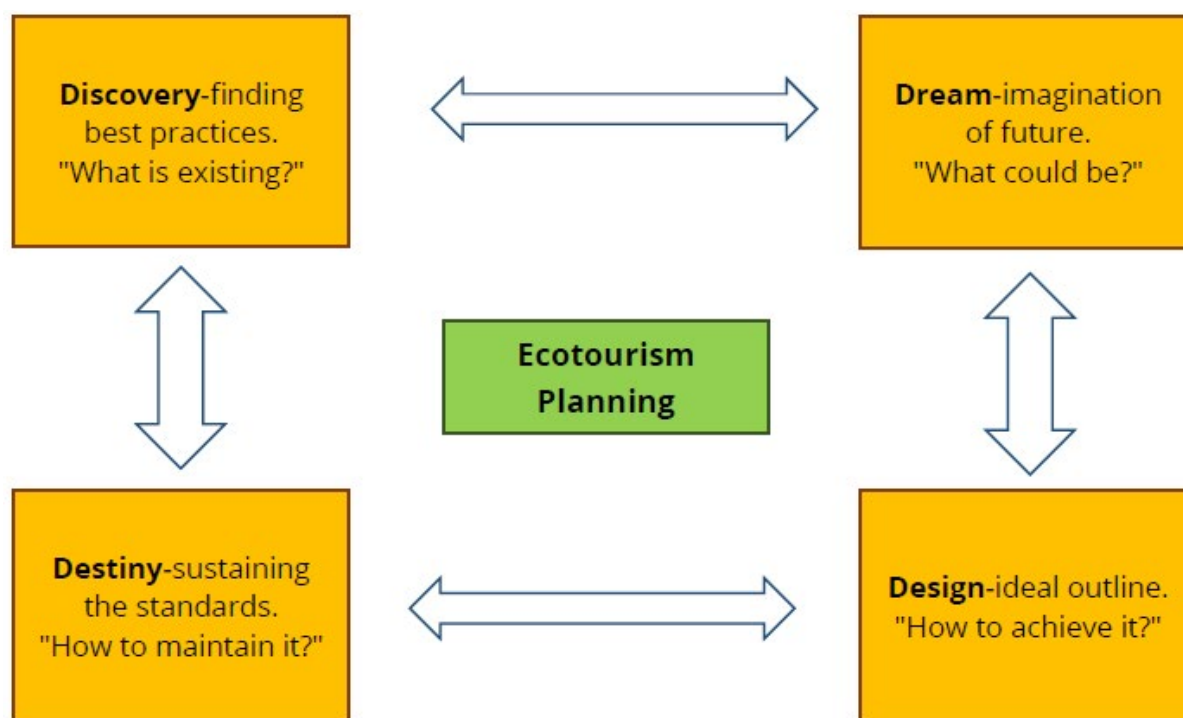
Beginning amidst lush forests and picturesque rice terraces, the trail gradually ascends to its pinnacle at ABC situated at an elevation of 4100m. The camp offers panoramic views of some of the world's highest

peaks, Annapurna I (8091 m), Annapurna South (7219 m), Machapuchhare also known as Fish-tail (6993 m), and Hiunchuli (6441 m). Due to its rich natural and cultural attributes, ACA has become the top choice for trekkers in the country. It is a tea house trek, meaning there are plenty of teahouses and hotels along the way. The rich biological diversity found within the Annapurna region is complemented by its vibrant cultural tapestry (KC et al., 2015). Gurung and Magar are the main inhabitants in the south, whereas Thakali and Manange are dominant in the north. The local people reside in five districts of 15 rural municipalities of the Conservation Area (Shrestha et al., 2023).

2.2 Research Methods

Appreciative inquiry was chosen as a research method against other research approaches based on its effectiveness in situations where multiple stakeholders with different interests collaborate, as indicated by previous studies (Reed et al., 2002; Carter, 2006). The success of this method relies on understanding the social dynamics, conflicts, and various socio-cultural, historical, political, and economic factors that shape a community (Messerschmidt, 2008). In the AI approach, individuals involved in the research process are prompted to share narratives that highlight positive aspects within their organization or community. This approach serves as a means to gain deeper insights while also facilitating the mobilization of transformative actions (Grant & Humphries, 2006). The adoption of strength-based approaches like appreciative inquiry in tourism studies helps communities and destinations to get rid of social, environmental, and economic problems and ensure sustainability (Nyaupane & Poudel, 2012). Based on the tourism attractions, ecotourism resources, and its potential for the future, we gathered our information to design a framework incorporating 4D (Discovery, Dream, Design, Destiny) approach (Figure 2). Drawing on the principles of community building, historical achievements, experience, opportunities, and aspirations for an ideal workplace, we designed an ecotourism framework incorporating a 4D approach. Our main objective was to establish sustainable connections between tourism, conservation, economic growth, and social development in the Annapurna region.

Figure 2. 4D Research Framework Centered on Ecotourism Planning

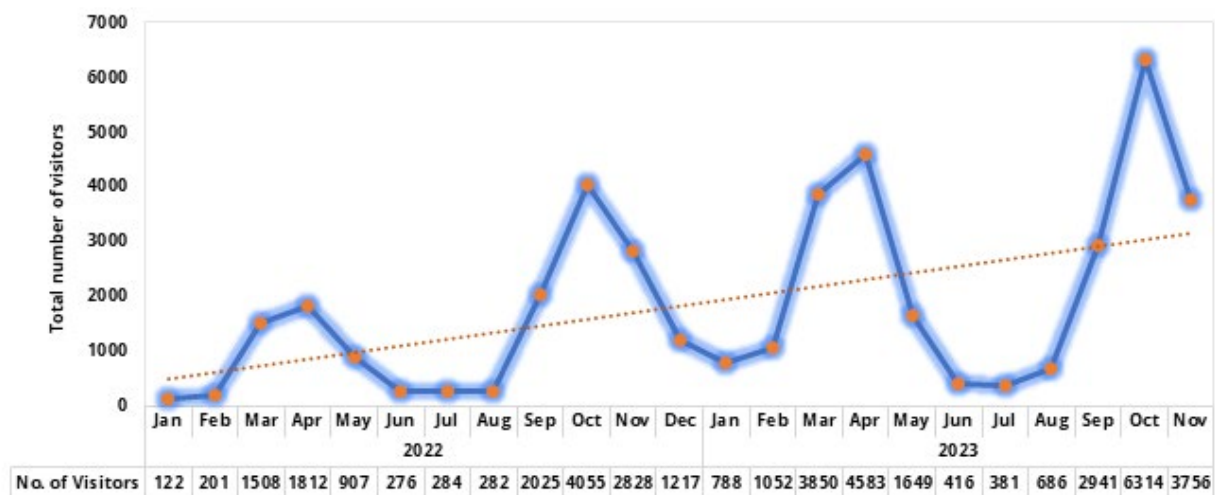


Source: 4D cycle modified from Stavros & Torres (2005) and Truschel (2007)

2.3 Data Collection

To understand trekker's experience and to explore the possibilities of tourism in the Annapurna region, we carried out in-person interviews using a questionnaire. The onsite questionnaire survey was conducted from 20 March to 27 March 2023. March to May (spring) are the best months to trek ABC. A convenience sampling method was adopted for primary data collection as it captures as much variation as possible with respect to demographic features of visitors such as gender, age, nationality, and education level. The interviewers remained at the designated locations to select individuals from the population and request participation in the interview. Convenience sampling was found to be the most practical and realistic sampling method considering the sample size, and the researcher's ability to reach individuals. We interviewed altogether 107 visitors who consented to take part in our study. In the month of March 2023, there were a total of 3850 tourists traveling around ABC. At first, a set of printed questionnaires was handed out to tourists who had consented to participate in the study. The questionnaire consisted of different sections like demographic information, travel features, and trekking experience. These questions consisted of objective type multiple choices, yes or no (dichotomous choice), a five-point Likert scale, and a few open-ended questions. Care was taken not to re-interview those who had already been interviewed.

Figure 3. Visitor's Arrival Trend at ABC in the Year 2022 and 2023



Source: Annapurna Conservation Area Project Office, Pokhara

After the COVID-19 pandemic, from the year 2022, the number of tourist arrivals gradually increased in the ABC region (Figure 3). September to November (autumn), and March to May (spring) are the best months to trek ABC. June to August (monsoon) are the rainy months and December, January, and February are the winter months of the year.

3. Results

3.1 Discovery

During the discovery phase, we engage in a process of rediscovering and recalling our achievements, capabilities, and moments of outstanding performance. This involves acknowledging the finest aspects of "what exists". We achieve this by directing our attention towards the most remarkable instances in the lives of individuals, communities, and institutions. We have identified and observed various potential ecotourism endeavors that can be pursued in the future. These activities have been categorized into three distinct groups.

3.1.1 Nature-based Tourism

Annapurna Base Camp is naturally one of the best destinations for ecotourism. The serene landscapes with diverse flora and fauna and the local ethnic groups with an authentic folkway of life make the Annapurna region unique from others. Its geography, high altitudinal range lands, rare and endemic biodiversity are tourist destinations for nature-based tourism. The rhododendron forest, birdwatching, waterfall, hot spring, bamboo forest, thick pine forest, rice terraces, and paddy farms are additional attractions for visitors. Similarly, tourists also come to the Annapurna region for photography, research, and educational purposes.

3.1.2 Adventure and Sports Tourism

Hiking, honey hunting, rock climbing, and seasonal skating are the major attractions for adventure tourism. The horses found along the trail to ABC are widely recognized throughout Nepal for their unique and indigenous characteristics. So, we have discovered sports such as horse riding, horse racing, horse polo, archery, and high-altitude sports as sports tourism activities.

3.1.3 Culture Tourism

Various cultures, like Magar, Gurung, and Thakali culture are the prime attractions for culture-based tourism in the Annapurna region. Their unique dresses, songs, languages, and handicrafts are major attractions for both domestic as well as international visitors. Also, the cultural and religious activities they follow are attracting tourists in that area.

3.2 Dream

Dream is the situation of imagination, 'What could be?' Besides several potential ecotourism activities that we have discovered, we dream of Annapurna Conservation Area as an ideal destination for other forms of tourism such as trekking tourism, agro-tourism, water-based tourism, and high-altitude adventure tourism.

3.2.1 Trekking Tourism

Annapurna Base Camp is famous for trekking as trekking routes such as Chomrong, Deurali, Bamboo, and Machhapuchre Base Camp, pass through it. So, we can promote this area as a trekking tourism hot-spot by connecting the trekking trail from Mardi Himal to the Annapurna trail.

3.2.2 Agrotourism

The production of agricultural products such as cheese, potato, and buckwheat are viable in the region. The village is adorned with empty paddy terraces. Upon conducting feasibility studies, it is recommended to encourage the residents to engage in agro-product farming. This initiative will not only support the consumption of locally sourced food but also contribute to the development of agro-tourism within the region.

3.2.3 Water-based Tourism

Following the construction of a dam, there is an opportunity to promote various water-based ecotourism activities like boating, fishing, and swimming. During our visit, we encountered numerous waterfalls that could also be utilized for other water-based tourist pursuits, like canyoning. Additionally, the hot springs in Jhinu could provide another attraction for visitors seeking relaxation and rejuvenation in warm waters.

3.2.4 Bungee Jumping and Rock Climbing

The long bridge near Jhinu village could be used for bungee jumping, which will help to increase tourist flow in the area. There are numerous Rocky Mountains along the Annapurna base camp trail, which can serve as ideal spots for rock climbing.

3.3 Design

The objective of the design phase is to establish and develop organizational frameworks, procedures, and connections that facilitate the achievement of our objective. During this stage, we thoroughly examine the situation and determine the necessary actions to transform our vision into tangible results. Initially, our primary concern was identifying stakeholders and organizing their respective roles and responsibilities while prioritizing the needs of tourists at all times. In Table 1, we identified the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder involved in tourism. For an instance, local people are responsible for providing lodging, food, and other hospitality services to the tourists. Non-governmental organizations should help in awareness, capacity building, marketing, and promotion of tourism in the area. Researchers should conduct studies on assessing feasibility of tourism and helps to identify demand and supply scenario. Governmental organizations should prepare policies and support in tourism infrastructural development in the area.

Table 1. Roles and Responsibilities of Stakeholders Involved

Stakeholders	Roles and Responsibilities Involved
Local People	Accommodation, Hospitality, Participation.
Tourism Development Committee	Capacity building, Awareness, Marketing, Promotion, Research.
Researchers/Academicians	Feasibility and effectiveness assessment.
Private sector/NGOs/ INGOs	Investment, Capacity building, Awareness.
Annapurna Conservation Area Project	Rules and regulations, Fund allocation, Mapping, Description, Signboard, and Fence on the trail.
Government of Nepal	Policy, Budget allocation, Safety and Security, Health Post and camps, Infrastructure development, Exploration, and Research.

Source: Own Elaboration

3.4 Destiny

Destiny pertains to the execution and implementation of the design, as well as clarifying responsibilities and roles. To ensure the success of this ecotourism plan, it is crucial for all stakeholders to actively fulfill their duties and obligations. Furthermore, visitors must also be mindful when enjoying the tourist destination by appreciating nature without causing harm and extending support to stakeholders in promoting and conserving the area.

3.5 Strategic Plan

From the 4D analysis, we have figured out some strategic vision and objectives to overcome the existing issues and challenges of promoting sustainable tourism practices in the ABC region (Table 2). According to the objectives, different stakeholders should perform their activities within a given time frame for tourism development of the area.

Table 2. Strategic Plan of ABC

Objectives	Strategic objectives	Concerned authorities and Stakeholders	Time frame When to do it?	Remarks/Priority
Biodiversity conservation around the ABC trail	Conservation of rare and endangered flora and fauna	TMC, HMC, ACAP, Travel and tour operators Local, Province, and State government	5 years plan	Establish a good trekking route
Increase Agro-farming	Vegetable farming Livestock farming	TMC, HMC Local people	5 years plan	Aid to the local economy and production of organic foods
Connect Mardi and Annapurna Base Camp trek	Construct a trekking trail from Mardi High Camp to Landruk Maintain Landruk to Jhinu trekking trail Construct a suspension bridge above the Mardi River	TMC, HMC, ACAP, Local and provincial government	5 years plan	Establish a short circular trek starting from Machhapuchhre to Annapurna Rural Municipality
Rescue operations	Establish health posts and check posts at different locations throughout the trail. Ensure tourist tracking system using GPS.	Health Department TMC, ACAP	1 year plan	Ensure the safety of tourists Rapid Response team
Alternative trails	Maintenance of damaged trails from rural road construction	Tourism Department Road Department Community stakeholders	2 years plan	Make sure the road network doesn't reduce the charm and quality of the trekking route
Recreational activities	Honey hunting Rock climbing Bungee jumping Bird watching High altitude sports	Forest Department TMC, ACAP	5 years plan	Increase the duration of stay of tourists Alternative income sources
Quality tourism	Insurance of tourist Different schemes for tourism activities Neat and clean environment	TMC, HMC, NTB, ACAP Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation	5 years plan	Reduce mass tourism and maintain the quality of tourism experience Increase foreign exchange and revenue

Abbreviations used: TMC for Tourism Management Committee, HMC for Homestay Management Committee, ACAP for Annapurna Conservation Area Project, and NTB for Nepal Tourism Board.

Source: Own Elaboration

Strategic planning helps to provide a forward-focused vision, draw attention to weaknesses, and align and track progress. However, it is important to note that strategic planning is a continuous, ongoing process, not a one-time consultation or meeting. It should be amended and updated as per the need. The strategic plan can be utilized to prioritize actions, effectively allocate resources to achieve the desired objectives, and ensure those objectives are backed by facts and valid reasoning.

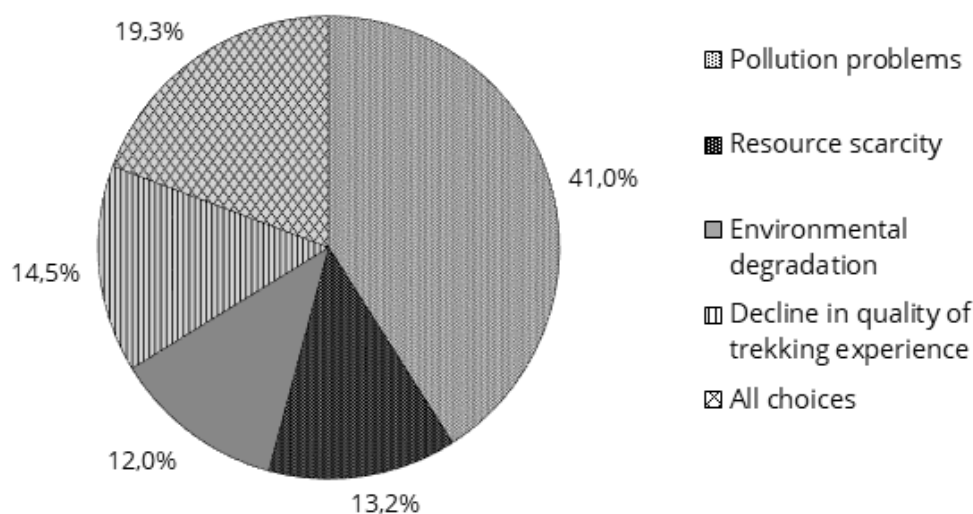
Table 3. Demographic and Travel Features of Tourists

Demographic Features			Travel Features		
Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender			Frequency of visit		
Female	46	43.0	First time	70	65.4
Male	61	57.0	Previously visited	37	34.6
Age in years			Preferences		
15-29	35	32.7	Primary	81	75.7
30-44	38	35.5	Secondary	26	24.3
45-60	34	31.8	Source of information		
Marital status			Friends/Family	60	56.1
Married	88	82.2	Social media/Internet	40	37.4
Unmarried	19	17.8	Travel agents/Tour guides	5	4.7
Nationality			Others	2	1.8
Nepali	43	40.2	Visitor's companion		
SAARC countries	39	36.4	Alone	23	21.5
Other	25	23.4	Group	84	78.5
Education level			Estimated length of stay		
Informal Education	20	18.7	Less than one week	98	91.6
School Level	23	21.5	7-10 days	9	8.4
Higher Secondary level	17	15.9	Main purpose of the trip		
Bachelors	26	24.3	Trekking	55	51.4
Masters/Postgraduate or higher	21	19.6	For holiday pleasure and fun	33	30.8
Occupation			Education and research	2	1.9
Student	20	18.7	Wildlife photography	11	10.3
Agriculture	17	15.9	Others	6	5.6
Travel and tourism	24	22.4	Use of trekking guide		
Business	23	21.5	Yes	28	26.2
Employed in service	22	20.6	No	79	73.8
Retired	1	0.9			

Number of visitors interviewed N=107.

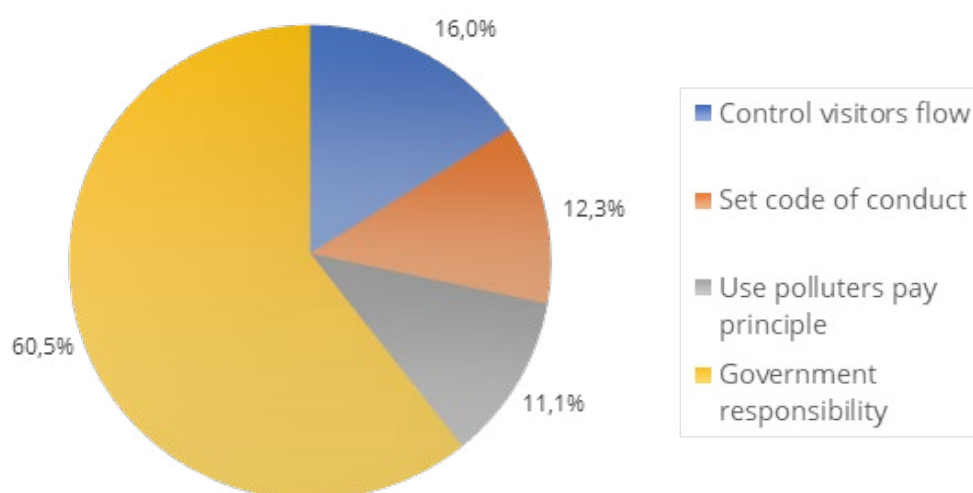
Source: Own Elaboration

The survey conducted had 107 participants, with a higher proportion of male than female. There were both domestic and international tourists. Approximately, two-thirds of the respondents were first-time visitors and the majority of them had ABC as a primary preference for their trip (Table 3). 78.5 percent of the respondents were in a group and the rest of them were solo trekkers. More than half of the tourists prioritize trekking as their primary reason for visiting, with holiday enjoyment, educational pursuits, photography, and other motivations following behind.

Figure 4. Strategies to Tackle Issues in the Study Area

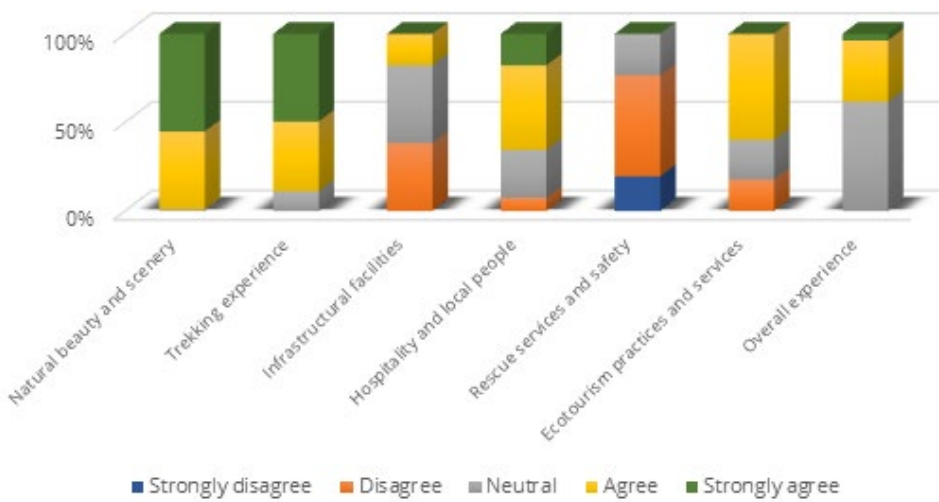
Source: Own Elaboration

Furthermore, visitors were asked if they noticed any problems related to tourism and trekking experience at the study site and, they replied with their responses and ways to tackle the existing issues. About 15 percent of the tourists shared the lack of adequate resources, rescue, and emergency health services in the region (Figure 4). Every year large number of visitors at ABC is creating a negative impact on the environment and leading to problems of pollution such as solid waste generation (paper, plastics, glasses), presence of smoke, noxious smell, and decline in air quality. These issues are not only affecting the local environment, flora, and faunal diversity but also contributing to the decline in the quality of trekking and tourism experience in the Annapurna region.

Figure 5. Satisfaction Level of Visitors for Various Experiences at ABC

Source: Own Elaboration

More than half of the respondents suggested it is the government responsibility to preserve and maintain the resources of the Annapurna region. About 16 percent of the respondents shared that the conservation area management committee should control visitor flow to save and maintain the beauty of the region (Figure 5). Over one-tenth of respondents suggested the adoption of polluter's pay practices and its effective implementation should be checked by the governing authority and the remaining respondents suggested setting a code of conduct and guidelines for visitors would help to overcome the existing issues like pollution problems at the study site.

Figure 6. Satisfaction Level of Visitors for Various Experiences at ABC

Source: Own Elaboration

We used a five-point Likert scale to check the satisfaction level of visitors for various amenities, services, and attractions at ABC. Most of the tourists were satisfied with the beauty of ABC trek such as the eye-catching view of the mountains as shown in figure 7(A), well guided information boards 7(B) and their trekking experience, but they expressed dissatisfaction with infrastructure facilities, rescue services, and safety measures (Figure 6). Mixed thoughts were observed regarding local people's hospitality and ecotourism practices and services. Overall, tourists seem to get some level of satisfaction from their visit.

Figure 7(A). View of the Majestic Snow-capped Mountains seen from the ABC Trail

Source: Own Elaboration

Figure 7(B). Signpost and Information Board in the Trail

Source: Own Elaboration

4. Discussion

Based on the appreciative inquiry analysis, our study revealed the Government of Nepal, Annapurna Conservation Area, local communities along with travel, and tour operators have not been able to utilize the resources and get the full economic advantages of tourism in the study site. There is an immense potential for various forms of tourism development and recreational activities such as adventure and sports tourism, including Bungee jumping, rock climbing, water-based tourism, agro-tourism, and cultural tourism, apart from trekking tourism (Kharel et al., 2022). We have envisioned and discovered these forms of tourism which could further aid the local and regional economy by providing more employment opportunities, capacity building, environmental awareness, and socio-economic development of the Annapurna region without affecting the quality of the tourism experience (Lamichhane et al., 2020). It is undeniable that tourism destinations have had several problems related to social, economic, and environmental spheres, like problems of pollution (Ramdas & Mohamed, 2014) (air, water, land), impact on natural resources, influence on cultures, loss of authenticity, and equitable share of benefits among the stakeholders (Anup & Fernandez, 2022). The Hindu Kush Himalayas are already at the forefront of climate change and vulnerable to natural calamities like earthquakes, landslides, and erosion. Various anthropogenic activities and overconsumption of natural resources are further exacerbating these risks. Mass tourism and the waste materials (plastics, paper, bottles) consumed and produced by the trekkers are inflicting severe threats to the biodiversity and pollution problems in the region (Bhattarai & Karmacharya, 2022). In the design phase, we have scrutinized the role of relevant stakeholders whose actions can transform our vision into tangible results.

Appreciative inquiry analysis is widely used in studies that are problematic where researchers try to explore the deficiencies and drawbacks (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011). We strongly encourage and recommend the use of appreciative inquiry analysis in social science and tourism research which helps to solve various issues prevalent in a social system that are complex, non-linear, and dynamic (Nyaupane & Poudel, 2012). Furthermore, appreciative inquiry is a strength-based participatory action research method that incorporates equality in the representation and expression of ideas and perspectives of the stakeholders in strategic planning, restructuring, redesigning (Morgan et al., 2022) key performance indicators, and

systems for quality assurance using an appreciative inquiry summit model. The study reveals the power of quality appreciation as an approach that elicits a shared vision for quality definitions and standards and serves as a historical marker in the higher education shift from data-driven faculty performance approaches to strengths-based, inclusive methods. Method: The retrospective business case outlines one university's 2018 Appreciative Inquiry Summit, 5D (define, discover, dream, design, destiny/deliver and in the effective implementation of action plans and policies in the study site.

The study has envisioned and designed a strategic plan to bring the results of appreciative inquiry analysis into practice. Strategic planning is positively related to ecotourism, which is a tourism and hospitality industry (Ugwu, 2021). Although it is argued that implementation of a strategic plan and stakeholder participation in ecotourism is hard to practice (Simpson, 2001) it still needs to be tested in the context of the ABC region, where most of the local livelihood, conservation initiatives, and development rely heavily on tourism. A strategic plan is guided by its objectives, which help to identify specific activities required for the implementation. Stakeholders have to implement those activities or support to implement those targeted activities within the specified time frame.

Our objectives revolve around ecotourism and its principles. The strategic plan includes a set of activities whose implementation creates synergy between conservation and livelihood (Neupane et al., 2021). For example, the conservation of rare species around trekking trails will enhance aesthetic and intrinsic value of the trekkers while at the same time meeting the goals of biodiversity conservation. Some objectives are aimed at improving existing issues, like better trails, delayed rescue operations, unsafe and unhygienic problems (Lamichhane et al., 2020). To achieve these objectives, the construction of alternative trekking routes, increase in recreational facilities, use of modern technology like tracking systems, insurance of tourists, sanitation activities, and well-managed resources for rescue operations are needed (Baral et al., 2023). Practices of improved farming and organic agriculture can ensure food security, and financial benefits that help to promote agrotourism in the region. During the interview survey, we found the majority of visitors; 51.4 percent visit ABC primarily for trekking. Also, 75.7 percent of the respondents shared ABC as the primary preference for their trip, which illustrates the immense tourism potential of the study site. Initiation of adventurous activities like bungee jumping, honey hunting, rock climbing, water-based sports, and recreational facilities could increase the duration of stay of visitors and boost their entertainment (KC & Thapa Parajuli, 2015). The primary stakeholders are local people who can collaborate with the tourism management committee, homestay operators, environment protection committee. They need to be supported by other relevant stakeholders, the ACA project, and government of Nepal (Anup et al., 2023). Proper implementation implies using a holistic approach, stakeholder participation and effective monitoring and evaluation that could help to achieve the best possible outcomes (Ruhanen, 2004). To implement these activities, social, cultural, and environmental aspects, organizational structure, available technology, economic effects, and tourism impacts need to be carefully considered (Chersulich et al., 2020). In order to address the existing issues and to ensure the sustainability of the ABC region, collaborative approach of multiple stakeholders, efficient planning and monitoring, and adoption of environment-friendly approaches is a vital necessity.

5. Conclusion

The study attempted to examine the tourism potential and ecotourism attractions of ABC using an appreciative inquiry approach. We use this method to understand the community needs, ensuring the representation of all stakeholders who are key to the success of tourism. Following the principles of ecotourism and steps of appreciative inquiry, we have framed a strategic plan. The active implementation of the strategic plan will help to maximize the benefits of tourism without losing the quality of the visitor's experience. The study found many opportunities for the development of adventure and sports-based tourism in the Annapurna region. Development of these forms of tourism could increase the duration of stay of trekkers, enhance their experience, and aid in the local and regional economy. Therefore, we strongly advocate the use of appreciative inquiry for understanding the tourism potential and promotion of tourist destinations in rural communities, especially in the case of developing countries.

STATEMENT OF INTEREST

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Prior to conducting an interview or questionnaire survey, we obtained the consent of all the participants. We informed them that the information collected would be solely used for this research. Additionally, respondents were given the assurance that their identity would remain confidential and undisclosed.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data will be made available after the request for the data.

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Effects of Norms, Place Attachment, Environmental Concerns, and Altruism on Environment-friendly Tourism Behavior

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of the subjective and personal norms, environmental concerns, and altruism perceptions of recreationists on environment-friendly behaviors and environmental tourism-behaviors. The population of the study consists of recreationists visiting the Ida Mountains in the western coast of Turkey. Visitors taking hiking trails as a recreational activity were included in the study and 221 complete responses were received. Partial Least Square Structural Equation Model (PLS-SEM) was applied to test research hypotheses. The findings show that (a) subjective norms, place attachment, environmental concern, and environmental altruism positively influence environment friendly behavior; (b) personal norms are non-significant antecedents of environment friendly behavior; and (c) environment friendly behavior is a significant antecedent of environmental tourism behavior. This shows that recreationists in Ida Mountains are more sensitive as they partake in tourism-related activities and pay attention to their attitudes and behaviors towards environmental problems when they interact with the environment. Revealing the effects of norms, place attachment, environmental concerns and altruism on environmentally friendly tourism behavior can support the development of sustainable tourism policies and programs. In this way, it can provide sustainability-related information to stakeholders in the tourism industry, policy makers and destination managers.

KEYWORDS

Norms, Place Attachment, Environment-Friendly Behavior, Environmental Concerns, Environmental Altruism.

ARTICLE HISTORY

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1. Introduction

Countries consume substantial natural resources to sustain their economies. From the extreme compulsive buying behaviors of some individuals (Wu, 2006; Chambers & Guo, 2009; Yüksel & Eroğlu, 2015), it can be inferred that resources are being excessively exploited. The waste resulting from it has started to pollute the environment. Various developments in the world from the 19th century to the present, combined with the desire for continuous economic growth of countries, have led to dramatic changes that have had substantial impact on the physical environment of many countries (Atay & Dilek, 2013). Industrialization and urbanization have resulted in the emergence of the metropolises, which has increased the speed of change in the physical environment. This has adversely affected organisms and ecologies (Vricella, 2017). Some individuals, however, have begun to question and revise their relationships with the natural environment after being exposed to environmental degradation (Rose, 2012). Many have felt the urge to revise their behaviors of protecting, preserving, and using the environment (Mansuroğlu, 2002).

Tourism destinations are a mix of products, services, and experiences, providing leisure opportunities to individuals (Buhalis, 2000). However, on many occasions individuals do not have the opportunity to take a long holiday away from home. For this reason, some travelers choose destinations that are close to their immediate locations while also preferring places where they can experience nature-based and natural resources. Outdoor recreational activities allow individuals to rest and relax physically and psychologically by letting them interact with nature. Forests, undeveloped natural sites, streams, parks, and naturally conserved places are examples of sites that attract recreationists (Bell et al., 2007; Arni & Kharil, 2013). Nature-based tourism is not only a leisure activity for tourists, but also a transforming activity that individuals adapt to find ways to achieve physical, mental and spiritual balance in nature (Pereira et al., 2020).

Destinations benefit from many natural features such as climate, flora, fauna, seas, beaches, fresh water resources, mountains and landscapes to attract visitors. However, these resources may be negatively affected as a result of touristic activities (Swarbrooke, 1995; Arica & Gök, 2019). Tourism with all its constituent elements can pollute nature as much as other sectors without careful management (Sunlu, 2003; Stefanica, 2017; Azarmi, 2019). Conserving nature and minimizing the effects of recreational activities on the environment is important to have sustainable tourism and to increase tourism-related revenues. Recreationists interacting with such natural resources can develop an awareness of environmental problems and react to these problems, and adopt a personal attitude to minimize their own effects on the environment (Kakoyannis & Stankey, 2002; Thapa & Graefe, 2003; Dolnicar et al., 2008; Tuntipisitkul, 2012; Lee & Han, 2015; McCullough et al., 2018). Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to describe the attitudes of individuals participating in tourism and recreational activities and their environmentalist behaviors in their everyday lives.

An understanding of nature-based recreationists' environmental concerns, attitudes toward mitigative efforts, and behavioral reactions will provide the tourism sector and public administrators with practicable data, so that they can create policies and plans concerning environmental challenges. Including increasing participants' awareness of environmental problems and how to contribute to the efforts to mitigate natural damages (McCullough et al., 2018). In addition, encouraging visitors to exhibit a common ecological behavior while attracting their attention to these issues may also lead to the purchase of environmentally friendly products more generally not just in tourism (Cornelissen et al., 2008).

Empirical studies on natural environments have shown that environmental concern (Bamberg, 2003), environmental awareness (Rodríguez-Oromendía et al., 2013; do Valle et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2016), place attachment (Vaske & Kobrin, 2001; Brownlee et al., 2014; Brownlee et al., 2015), place satisfaction (Halpenny, 2005; Ramkissoon et al., 2013), and conservation commitment (Lee, 2011) positively influence visitors' protective behaviors. Various disciplines adopt different statements to refer to people's connections to the places that they interact with (Williams & Vaske, 2003). Sociology emphasizes how the symbolic meanings of settings influence the social context of human interactions (Blumer, 1969). Anthropology seeks to understand the cultural significance of places in day-to-day life (Aucoin, 2017) and human geography has explored the notion of "place attachment" developed in environmental psychology as the concept of "sense of place" (Altman & Low, 1992). Human geography's reference to this interaction

as “sense” indicates that a positive bond can be formed between a human and a place. It is important to determine the effects of the parameters affecting the traditional environment-friendly behaviors on individuals’ consumption behaviors in everyday life. In previous research, studies have typically been undertaken to investigate the influence of one particular factor on environmentally friendly behaviors; however it is thought that a number of these variables are interrelated, and it would be useful to use them together. For example, while the concept of subjective norm exhibits a behavior and expresses the social pressure felt (Ajzen, 1991), personal norm is defined as a kind of internal pressure that affects human behavior (Schwartz, 1977). In addition, it would be difficult to observe altruism for others from the individual who does not have any concern or anxiety about the developments affecting others (including the environment) in their environment. The fact that they are in such a relationship with each other in terms of meaning integrity and at the same time they have characteristics of variables that affect environmentally friendly behavior, enabled all four variables to be used together in this research.

The concepts briefly mentioned above are concepts that have been used for many years in examining the behavior of individuals towards the environment. In recent years, the concept of place attachment, which reveals the emotional bond between people and places, has been added to studies on the research of environmentally friendly behaviors. This concept was first introduced by Altman and Low in 1992, where the place can sometimes be a home, a neighborhood or a destination visited (Manzo & Perkins, 2006).

Environmentally friendly behaviors of individuals in their daily lives are important. However, when the same people visit a destination, their behavior in that area is also important for the environment. Therefore, it is also necessary to understand how individuals exhibit environmentally friendly behaviors in the tourism activities. In this context, this study was conducted to contribute to the understanding of environmentally friendly behaviors of individuals participating in tourism activities at natural destinations, with the Ida Mountains in the western coast of Turkey being used as the context for this study. A contribution to the literature is expected through the identification of factors affecting the environment-friendly tourism behaviors of recreationists in this mountain range. This study will contribute to practice also because the findings will help organizers of nature based recreational activities and administrators of recreational sites to improve environment friendly tourism services and to minimize the damage to nature.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Environmentally friendly tourism behaviors are considered important to examine visitors’ behaviors at nature-based destinations. In addition, environmental tourism behaviors are shown to influence the purchasing of environmentally friendly tourism products and services (Song et al., 2012). Tourists who interact with nature-based destinations generally want to protect natural resources and make greater efforts to reduce the damage to these destinations (Crouch et al., 2005; Dolnicar, 2006; Lee et al., 2013). As a result, environmentally responsible behaviors of tourists help limit or avoid damage to the ecological environment (Chiu et al., 2014). People’s interaction with the natural environment will cause them to directly face the challenges associated with the natural environment and pursue strategies accordingly. Therefore, environmentally friendly behaviors serve as important clues to environmental tourism behaviors which will be investigated through the study of Ida Mountains’ visitors.

2.1 Subjective and Personal Norms

Behaviors of visitors while planning and visiting a tourism location can be affected by personal factors and their immediate environments (family, friends, colleague and such). Therefore, these aspects should be considered while investigating the behaviors of the visiting recreationists in relation to the environment. These concepts known as subjective and personal norms affect individuals’ decision making during their interactions with the environment. Subjective norms are perceived social pressures that cause behaviors to be performed or not performed (Ajzen, 1991). In other words, it denotes the effects of people that an individual lives with (family, relatives, close friends, colleagues, etc.) on their decision-making (Park, 2000). An individual decides to or not to perform a behavior in consideration of whether these people whose views are highly esteemed by them, do or do not approve of their behavior (Conner & Armitage, 1998; Park, 2000).

Sometimes an individual may even decide to act in a way that would not be noticed (Yuzhanin & Fisher, 2016). The subjective norm is one of the two dimensions in the theory of reasoned action, developed by Fisbein and Ajzen in 1967. According to this theory, the subjective norm constitutes the social dimension of behavioral intent which determines actual behavior (Martin et al., 2011). A great many studies report that individuals' attitudes toward subjective norms influence their behaviors and are among the determinants of behavioral intention (Kim & Han, 2010; Song et al., 2012; Askadilla & Krisjanti, 2017; Yadav & Pathak, 2017; Jain et al., 2020; Kumar & Pandey, 2023). Chan and Lau (2002); Research on hotel customers by Kim and Han (2010) reveals that the subjective norms of visitors can influence the likelihood of exhibiting environmentally friendly behaviors. Based on the responses of 620 participants, Yadav and Pathak (2017) showed that subjective norms are effective in purchasing an environmentally friendly product. These studies suggest that there is a relationship between subjective norms and individuals' behaviors. Accordingly, we propose the following hypotheses:

H1. Subjective norms of recreationists have a positive influence on environment-friendly behavior.

Another concept to be used for the purpose of the study is personal norms. According to Schwartz (1977), personal norms are an individual's self-expectations relying on internalized values (Zhang et al., 2014). Individuals having internalized these values remain committed to their values and these emotions allow them to assume various responsibilities while performing a behavior. Personal norms are effective in the performance of environmental activities and are activated by the belief that environmental conditions are threatened by individuals and individuals are mobilized to eliminate this threat (Stern, 2000). As stated above, firstly personal norms should be activated to affect individuals' behaviors. Activation occurs when (a) someone is aware of the consequences of one's behavior for the welfare of others, and (b) one ascribes at least some responsibility for these consequences to oneself. Only when these conditions are met can their environment-related behaviors be affected through personal norms (Harland et al., 1999). It is known that personal norms positively affect individuals' environmentalist attitudes and behaviors, not only in their everyday living areas but also during their holidays (Mehmetoğlu, 2010). Moreover, personal norms also influence individuals' choice of environmentally sensitive tourism activity over other travel options (Doran & Larsen, 2016). Briefly, personal norms are strong predictors of environment-friendly behaviors, yet first they must be activated.

H2. The personal norms of recreationists have a positive influence on environment-friendly behavior.

2.2 Place Attachment

The notion of place attachment was introduced by Altman and Low in 1992, in which place attachment is presented as an emotional tie between spaces and people (Manzo & Perkins, 2006). Devine-Wright and Howes (2010, p. 271) note that this bond can be formed between "individuals and/or groups and familiar locations they inhabit or visit i.e., home and neighborhood". Place attachment arises when settings are imbued with meanings that create and enhance one's emotional tie to a natural resource (Vaske & Kobrin, 2001). Place attachment is one of the key factors in the sustainability of ecotourism, including natural tourist attraction that visits to outdoor recreation areas help build emotional and cognitive bonds between individuals and the destination (Kim et al., 2023).

Place attachment to natural destinations significantly affects the pre-protective behaviors and attitudes of individuals referred to as "recreationists" (individuals participating in recreational activities) (Kyle et al., 2003; Budruk et al., 2009; Halpenny, 2010; Brownlee et al., 2014; Brownlee et al., 2015). Bricker and Kerstetter (2000) list South Fork of the American River as a popular whitewater recreation river in the US and state that its visitors are very sensitive to potential threats to the resource conditions in the area. In the study on visitors to the Point Pelee National Park in Canada, Halpenny (2010) explored the ability of place attachment to predict place-specific and general pro-environment behavioral intentions. Kyle et al. (2003) showed in their study on the MBSA situated in the Inyo National Forest, California that increased "place identity" as a component of place attachment positively effect of the spending attitudes of recreationists visiting these destinations. Lastly, Brownlee et al. (2014) found a relationship between the place

attachments of the lake by recreationists visiting Lake Hartwell - USA and climate change, drought concerns, and their attitudes toward water conservation.

Theoretical and experimental research studies have shown that place attachment is typically discussed in two aspects: "place dependence" and "place identity" (Williams et al., 1992; Williams & Vaske, 2003; Kyle et al., 2004; Kil et al., 2021). In their research on individuals' stability of favorite place selections and evaluations of place attachment over a ten-month period, Korpela et al. (2009) concluded that people mostly look for potentially "favorable" places and "place attachment" and "place identity" are important in doing so and forming an emotional bond with the place.

The concept of place identity has also appeared in environmental psychology research and constituted one of the dimensions of environment-focused studies. The concept was first introduced by Proshansky (1978) and "consists of those dimensions of the self that develop in relation to the physical environment by means of a pattern of beliefs, preferences, feelings, values, and goals" (Manzo & Perkins, 2006). Place identity is used to refer to the deep bond between a place and an individual's personal identity. Place identity is "a subculture of the self-identity of the person", which allows individuals to express and verify their own identities (Proshansky et al., 1983). Hence, in relation to visiting a specific place, individuals can become more compelled to protect, conserve, and improve the environmental protection associated with a place.

Few studies have observed a relationship between place identity and an environmentalist attitude and protective and conservative behaviors. Place identity of the residents near Cleveland Park in Ohio, USA, has been noted to have affected the intention to volunteer in the park (Moore & Scott, 2003). Bricker and Kerstetter (2000) report that recreationists with a higher level of place identity are more willing to protect the social setting and natural resources of the areas they visit.

The other component of place attachment is "place dependence". Place dependence refers to visitors' functional attachment to a specific area (physical characteristics of the resource) and their awareness of the setting that supports their visit-focused goals (Williams & Vaske, 2003; Ramkissoon et al., 2012). It is important that the area offers the opportunities required for their desired activities. These is, for instance, an accessible area for rock climbing, hiking trails, and/or a river with currents fast enough for rafting. For Vaske and Kobrin (2001), local natural destinations (e.g., community open spaces) are ideal for establishing this functional attachment. The same study remarks that the resource does not have to be the best, but even its closeness to an individual's home may lead to place dependence. In addition to these two traditional dimensions, "belongingness" too is considered to provide a more in-depth explanation than the functional aspect of place dependence and characteristic components of place identity (Hammitt et al., 2006). Place belongingness is an individual's attachment to an environment as if a "member". According to Brownlee et al. (2014), place belongingness refers to "being at home" and "belonging to something". They suggest that visitors not only appreciate the natural recreational site but also can feel that the place belongs to their personal and physical environments (Hammitt et al., 2006). Accordingly, we propose the following hypotheses:

H3. The place attachment of recreationists has a positive influence on environment-friendly behavior.

2.3 Environmental Concerns and Altruism

People who exhibit environmentally responsible behavior while performing outdoor activities tend to demonstrate environmentally friendly behaviors in their daily lives. Just as people can demonstrate their daily environmentally friendly behaviors in their holiday experiences, they can also reflect their environmental behaviors during their travels into their experiences at home (Bilynets & Cvelbar, 2022). Environmental concern refers to individuals' strong and positive attitudes toward environmental protection and it positively affects the individual's decisions regarding environmentally friendly consumption (Minton & Rose, 1997; Chen et al., 2022). Mostafa (2009) suggested that environmental concern may have a significant effect on individuals' motivation to try to alleviate the problem and to change behavioral practices. Moreover, because environmental concern reflects an individual's motivational and cognitive status, researching attitudes toward environmental protection enables us to understand environmental concern (Mostafa & Al-Hamdi, 2016). As a concept that shows environmental awareness, altruism is the act of

helping others selflessly (Kumar & Pandey, 2023). Environmental altruism is responsible environmental behavior that an individual exhibits to change the harmful consequences of another individual or environmental act by recognizing them (Schwartz, 1977). Altruism is also a tool to support the purchase of green products to support ecological sustainability (Guiao & Lacap, 2022). Sacrifice is conceptualized as the willingness of a person to sacrifice something to protect and maintain environmental, historical, and cultural resources or recreational opportunities (Knetsch & Var, 1976). In this process, individuals begin to think not only of their own interests, but also of the welfare of different stakeholders. This shows that individuals begin to have a kind of cognitive change (Davis et al., 2011). Self-sacrifice and willingness to act are extremely important to ensure permanent relationships in motivational transformation. Because such stakeholders and partners will share the future of the interdependence process as well as the past (Van Lange et al., 1997). The general idea here is to protect these resources for current and future generations.

It is likely that individuals participating in nature-based recreational activities take up these activities individually or in very small groups and these participants allocate more funds for such activities. Moreover, it is important that visitors performing such activities are willing to repeat and enjoy their visits and internalize the resources peculiar to that area (Ballantyne et al., 2008). Repetitive visits of nature-focused recreationists to a single area highlight that participants form an emotional and cognitive bond with that place (Hammit et al., 2009). Recreationists interacting with natural resources can develop an awareness of environmental problems and react to these problems and adopt a personal attitude to minimize their own impact on the environment.

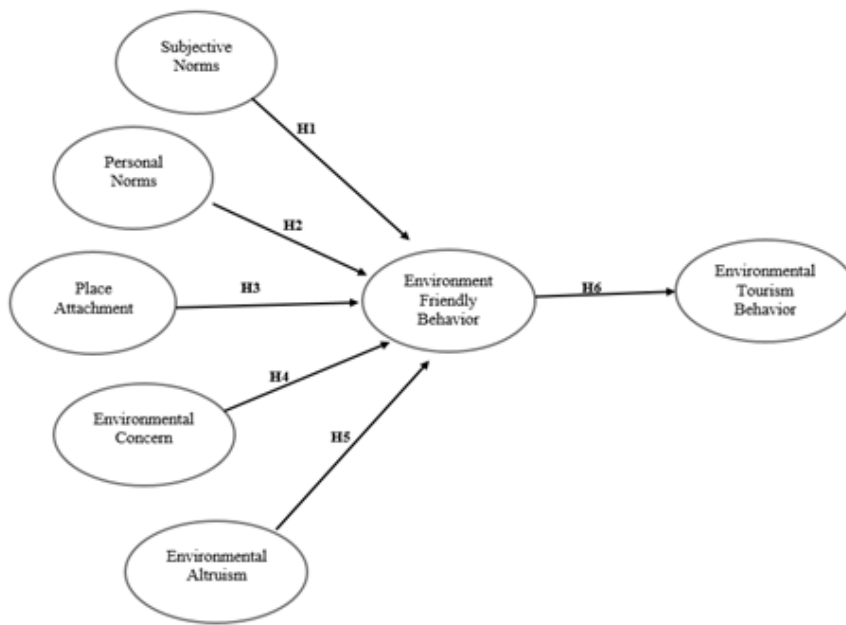
Brownlee (2012) has noted that one's own interaction with unique environments often influences individual and collective perceptions about the world and oneself. Implying that individuals participating in a recreational activity may undergo a change of attitude toward environmental problems encountered in everyday life. Accordingly, we add the following hypotheses:

H4. Environmental concerns of recreationists have a positive influence on environment-friendly behavior.

H5. Environmental altruism of recreationists has a positive influence on environment-friendly behavior.

The analysis of the related literature showed that the available studies mostly researched the effects of the parameters affecting environment-friendly behaviors on tourists' behaviors (Bamberg, 2003; Brownlee, 2015; Arisal & Atilar, 2016). In fact, in some studies, individuals' environmental behavior has been examined not only by their own perceptions but also by the perceptions of other individuals within the scope of social desirability (Geiger, 2022). However, the examination of the expressions in the environmentally friendly behavior scale revealed that these expressions focus only on the daily behavior of individuals (Paco & Raposo, 2009; Kim & Han, 2010). It has been observed that the same parameters (daily behavior) are not frequently used in the studies on individual behaviors within the direct tourism activity. However, individuals have been reported to begin demonstrating environment-friendly behaviors in such practices as eating, traveling, and leisure-time and cultural activities (Song et al., 2012). It is thought that studies should be conducted accordingly. Environmentally friendly tourism behaviors are important to examine visitors' behaviors at nature-based destinations. In other words, the characteristics of environmentally friendly behaviors that offer important clues to understand consumers' marketing behavior can explain the environmentally friendly tourism behaviors of recreationists visiting natural destinations. In a study on the participants of a festival at a natural site, individuals were found to be more likely to exhibit environmentally friendly tourism behavior (Song et al., 2012). Therefore, this hypothesis of the study was developed to determine whether environmentally friendly behavior has an impact on environmental tourism behavior.

H6. Environment-friendly behavior of recreationists has a positive influence on environmental tourism behavior.

Figure 1. Theoretical Model and Hypotheses

Source: Own Elaboration

3. Methods

This study was conducted in the Ida Mountains regarded as a tourism attraction due to its abundance of natural resources. It was carried out to investigate whether the environmental concerns, environmental altruism, norms, and place attachment perceptions of recreationists visiting the site affect their perceptions and concerns in regard to environmental problems and their attitudes, behaviors, and tendencies concerning environmental tourism-related behaviors.

3.1 Study Area and Research Instrument

The research site is the Ida Mountains in the province of Çanakkale, Turkey. The Ida Mountains, the highest elevation (1.774 meter) on the Biga Peninsula, is a preferred ecotourism site known for its highly diverse biological properties. The Ida Mountains produce the highest level of oxygen (22%) after the Alps (Uğuz, 2012). The oldest written source on the Ida Mountains and its environs is the one-thousand-spring Ida in Homer's *The Iliad*, incorporating numerous creeks and some 30 streams (Eceoğlu, 2011). Scientists have identified around 800 species of 101 families in the Ida Mountains. Seventy seven of these species are indigenous to Turkey and 29 are local species of the Ida Mountains National Park (Çanakkale Belediyesi, 2017). The Ida region has been populated by various civilizations for about five thousand years (Ari & Soykan, 2006). Among these are Trojans, Achaeans, Antandrosians, Romans, Greeks, and Ottomans. The Ida Mountains are also known as mythological and legendary mountains: Greek legend in the *Iliad*, and two Turkish legends, *Sarikiz* and *The Love Story of Hasan and Emine*. In addition, it is the site of the very first beauty contest, where Paris awarded the Golden Apple to Aphrodite (Öztura, 2010). Due to these characteristics, it was decided to carry out this study on recreationists visiting various destinations in The Ida Mountains.

The study is designed to measure the effects of place attachment, subjective norms, personal norms, environmental concerns, and environmental altruism on environment-friendly behaviors and environmental tourism behaviors. For this purpose, a quantitative method was adopted. A questionnaire was administered as the data collection tool. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. In the first part, participants were asked about their country of permanent residence, gender, age, marital status, income,

and education level. The second part incorporated the dimensions of place attachment, i.e., place identity, place dependence, and place belongingness. In the development of these scales, validity and reliability tests were used.

The scales utilized in this study were adapted from various studies including the personal norms scale from Zhang et al. (2014), the subjective norms scale from Kim and Han (2010), the environmental concerns and enthusiasm scale from Dunlap et al. (2000) and Davis et al. (2011), the environment-friendly behaviors scale from Miller et al. (2015), the environmental tourism behaviors scale from Song et al. (2012), and the place attachment scale was adapted from Brownlee et al. (2015). Thirty-three questions in all were asked. The researchers measured personal norms with four items, subjective norms with three items, place attachment with nine items, environmental concern with five items and environmental altruism with five items. The researchers also assessed environment-friendly behavior with eleven items and environmental tourism behavior with four items. The statements in the scales were reviewed by academics specialized in the field. Based on their views, the researchers improved the structure of the questionnaire by means of reselection of words, corrections, and clarity of items. A five-point Likert scale, with levels (1) I strongly disagree, (2) I disagree, (3) I neither agree nor disagree, (4) I agree, and (5) I strongly agree, was used to collect data.

3.2 Data Collection

The population of the study consists of recreationists visiting the Ida Mountains in the provincial borders of Çanakkale, Turkey, visitors using the hiking trails as a recreational activity were included in the sample. According to the obtained data from the authorities, approximately 300 thousand tourists visited the Ida Mountains (Ayazma, Yalama, and Kışladağ entrance gates) in 2016. A convenience sampling method was preferred as the sampling method given the nature of the study (Baker et al., 2013). Between August 2017 and October 2017, 380 questionnaires were given to visitors to the Ida Mountains and 221 questionnaires were returned and included in the data analysis, providing an acceptable response rate of 58% (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970; Crompton & Tian-Cole, 1999).

3.3 Analytical Methods

For this study, the hypotheses were tested with Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) using Partial Least Squares (PLS) analysis. SmartPLS (V.3.2.6) software was employed to build models and assess their validity (Ringle et al., 2015). PLS is a well-established technique for estimating path coefficients in structural models. Moreover, PLS has become increasingly popular in marketing research over the last decade due to its potential to model latent constructs under conditions of non-normality with small-to-medium sample sizes (Rezaei & Ghodsi, 2014). A structural equation model with latent constructs comprises two components. The first component is the structural model and it is called inner model in the context of PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2011). The inner model allows us to understand the relationships (paths) between unobserved or latent constructs (Henseler et al., 2009). The second component of the structural equation model is the outer models in the PLS-SEM context that also comprises the measurement models (Hair et al., 2014), the outer models are used to evaluate the relationships between the indicator variables and their corresponding construct.

Bootstrapping was applied to determine the significance levels of the loadings, weights, and path coefficients. The researchers performed the PLS algorithm procedures to determine the significance levels of the loadings, weights, and path coefficients, followed by a bootstrapping technique to determine the significance levels of the proposed hypothesis. As suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), the validity and goodness-of-fit of the measurement models were estimated before testing the structural relationships outlined in the structural model. Because PLS does not generally produce conformity indices, R^2 is the primary way to evaluate the explanatory power of the model (Ali et al., 2016). Tenenhaus et al. (2005) used R^2 values and AVE values in the GoF (Goodness-of-Fit). In the analysis, the GoF value is calculated by taking the square root of the average of the AVE values of all the structures and the R^2 means.

4. Results

The demographic statistics of the recreationists in this study are provided in Table 1. Accordingly, 60.3% of the recreational visitors to the Ida Mountains were male, while females represented 39.7% of the sample. The modal age range of the visitors was 26-35 years, accounting for 42.5% of the visitors. The majority of recreationists had an associate or a bachelor's degree as their highest level of education.

Table 1. Demographic Statistics of the Recreationists

Age	N	%
17-25	49	22.48
26-35	94	43.12
36-45	53	24.31
46 and over	22	10.09
Gender	N	%
Female	87	39.73
Male	132	60.27
Marital Status	N	%
Married	108	49.54
Single	110	50.46
Education	N	%
High School Education	20	9.05
Associate degree	45	20.36
Bachelor's Degree	138	62.44
Post-graduate	18	8.14
Income	N	%
Low	23	10.55
Middle	127	58.26
High	52	23.85
Very High	16	7.34

Source: Own Elaboration

4.1 Assessment of the Measurement Model

In this study, the researchers followed the guidelines of Jarvis, MacKenzie and Podsakoff (2003), suggesting the choice of reflective constructs. The PLS-SEM evaluation consisted of a two-step procedure: the measurement model assessment followed by the structural model assessment. Table 2 shows the indicators' outer loadings for the reflective constructs.

Table 2. Evaluation of Items, Constructs, and Measurement Model

Constructs/Indicators	Mean value	S. D.	Loading
Personal Norms: α : 0.770; CR : 0.848; AVE : 0.582			
I have the obligation to dissuade anyone from damaging the local environment.	4.62	0.53	0.750
I have the obligation to comply with local environmental regulations and laws.	4.64	0.61	0.745
I have the obligation to protect the local environment.	4.69	0.51	0.726
I have the obligation to alleviate local environmental problems caused by my daily life.	4.54	0.58	0.826
Place Attachment: α : 0.936; CR : 0.946; AVE : 0.664			
I identify strongly with Ida Mountains.	4.19	0.81	0.720
Ida Mountains means a great deal to me.	4.45	0.73	0.695
I feel highly attached to Ida Mountains.	4.00	0.90	0.892
I think Ida Mountains is better than other regions for walking.	4.04	0.82	0.720
I think Ida Mountains is indispensable for me as a walking route.	3.97	0.90	0.857
I think the walking route in the Ida Mountains is one of the most satisfying places.	3.95	0.94	0.825
I feel connected to Ida Mountains.	3.97	0.88	0.905
When I am at Ida Mountains, I feel part of it.	4.11	0.86	0.835
I feel like I belong at Ida Mountains.	4.07	0.95	0.853
Environnemental Concern: α : 0.633; CR : 0.800; AVE : 0.730			
I think, the balance of nature is delicate and easily upset.	4.54	0.75	0.659
I think, if things continue their present course, we will soon experience ecological catastrophe.	4.49	0.62	0.781
I think, the earth resources are limited.	4.53	0.66	0.822
Subjective Norms: α : 0.724; CR : 0.842; AVE : 0.642			
People who are important to me think I should behave environmentally friendly during recreational activity.	4.43	0.76	0.720
People who are important to me would want to be environmentally friendly during recreational activity.	4.35	0.77	0.807
People whose opinions I value prefer me to be environmentally friendly during recreational activities.	4.47	0.66	0.869
Environmental Altruism: α : 0.728; CR : 0.830; AVE : 0.549			
I am willing to take on responsibilities that will help conserve the natural environment.	4.51	0.60	0.718
I am willing to do things for the environment, even if I'm not thanked for my efforts.	4.62	0.56	0.744
Even when it is inconvenient to me, I am willing to do what I think is good for the environment.	4.34	0.67	0.709
I am willing to go out of my way to do what is good for the environment.	4.21	0.78	0.792
Environment-Friendly Behavior: α : 0.718; CR : 0.822; AVE : 0.536			
I buy less food to reduce waste.	3.76	0.76	0.806
I walk where possible.	4.14	0.92	0.712
I buy organic food products.	4.06	0.85	0.695
I use public transport where possible.	3.88	0.93	0.710
Environmental Tourism Behavior: α : 0.808; CR : 0.873; AVE : 0.632			
I try to purchase environmentally friendly tourism products in walking activity in Ida Mountains.	4.31	0.85	0.800
I have information about how my behavior affects the natural environment in Ida Mountains.	4.47	0.70	0.805
I try to minimize my tourism behaviors to influence natural environments in my walking activity.	4.50	0.70	0.722
I take care to participate in recreational activities in natural destinations.	4.45	0.74	0.802

Source: Own Elaboration

Except for the Cronbach Alpha value of the latent variable of environmental concern, internal consistency and reliability for all constructs was satisfactory, above the suggested threshold of 0.7 for both Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha. For personal norms, place attachment, subjective norms, and environmental tourism behavior, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) exceeds the threshold value of 0.5, suggesting adequate convergent validity. Relatedly, Bagozzi and Yi (1988) report that the AVE value should be 0.5 or higher for each latent variable. All the constructs included in this study exceeded the recommended level except for ten items, which were therefore excluded from the analysis.

The next step was to assess the discriminant validity, which refers to the extent to which the measures are not a reflection of some other variables. "Discriminant Validity" is another validity method indicated by low correlations between the measure of interest and the measures of other constructs (Ali et al., 2016). Therefore, the discriminant validity was tested in the study. Fornell and Larcker (1981) suggest that the square root of AVE in each latent variable can be used to establish discriminant validity if this value is higher than other correlation values among the latent variables. Discriminant validity is given when the diagonal elements (square root AVE) are greater than the off-diagonal elements in the corresponding rows and columns (Ali et al., 2015). Table 3 shows that the square root of each AVE (shown on the diagonal) is greater than the related inter-construct correlations in the construct correlation matrix, indicating an adequate discriminant validity for all the reflective constructs. As a conclusion, all the measures exhibit satisfactory reliability and validity.

Table 3. Fornell-Larcker Discriminant Validity Criteria

Constructs	EC	ETB	PN	PA	EFB	EA	SN
Environmental Concern	0.757						
Environmental Tourism Behavior	0.286	0.795					
Personal Norms	0.321	0.281	0.763				
Place Attachment	0.180	0.493	0.249	0.815			
Environment – Friendly Behavior	0.272	0.607	0.322	0.486	0.732		
Environmental Altruism	0.232	0.552	0.459	0.495	0.527	0.741	
Subjective Norms	0.177	0.473	0.270	0.399	0.375	0.398	0.801

Source: Own Elaboration

In addition, Table 4 presents the heterotrait - monotrait ratio of correlations (Henseler et al., 2015; Henseler et al., 2016), as a better means to assess the discriminant validity. Discriminant validity was tested using this method, and results are shown in Table 5. If the HTMT value is greater than the HTMT value of 0.90, this is a sign of a problem with the discriminant validity. As shown in Table 4, all the values passed the HTMT.90, indicating acceptable levels of discriminant validity.

Table 4. HTMT Discriminant Validity Criteria

Constructs	EC	ETB	PN	PA	EFB	EA
Environmental Concern						
Environmental Tourism Behavior	0.393					
Personal Norms	0.439	0.330				
Place Attachment	0.250	0.553	0.281			
Environment – Friendly Behavior	0.370	0.739	0.390	0.565		
Environmental Altruism	0.337	0.695	0.624	0.583	0.699	
Subjective Norms	0.238	0.601	0.339	0.488	0.346	0.520

Source: Own Elaboration

4.2 Assessment of the Structural Model

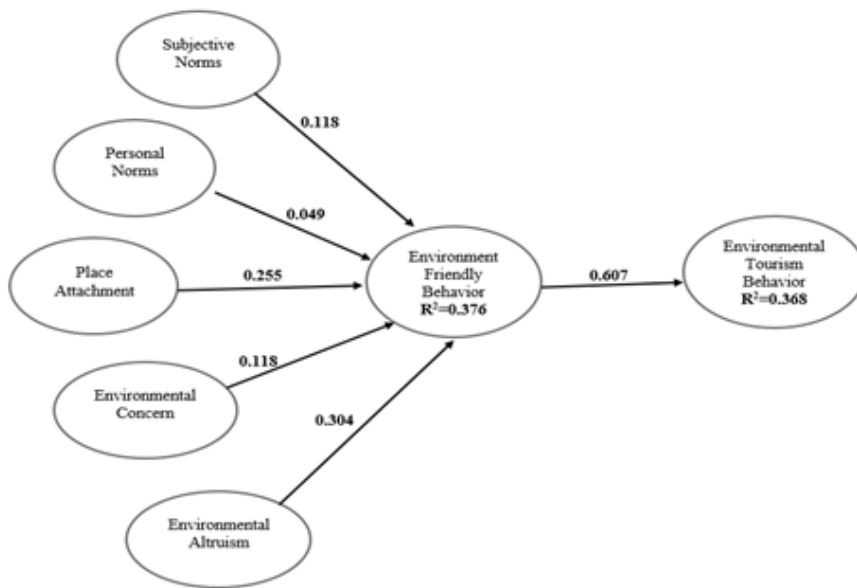
SmartPLS version 3.2.6 was used to test the structural model and the hypotheses. A bootstrapping procedure with 1000 iterations was performed to examine the statistical significance of the weights of the sub-constructs and the path coefficients (Chin et al., 2008). The SEM-PLS approach using SmartPLS software does not provide a traditional assessment of overall model fit as in CB-SEM (Ali et al., 2015). As PLS does not generate overall goodness-of-fit indices, R^2 is the primary process to evaluate the explanatory power of the model (Ali et al., 2016). Therefore, the corrected R-squared of all the constructs were calculated to employ a diagnostic tool to assess the model fit, known as the goodness-of-fit (GoF) index, presented by Tenenhaus et al. (2005). The GoF measure uses the geometric mean of the average communality and the average R-squared (for endogenous constructs). Hoffmann and Brinbrich (2012) report the following cut-off values for assessing the results of the GoF analysis: GoF small = 0.1; GoF medium = 0.25; GoF large = 0.36. For the model used in this study, a GoF value of 0.470 was calculated, indicating a good model fit. However, it is noteworthy that GoF cannot be used as a statistical tool for model validation. Rather, it is a diagnostic tool to indicate how well the collected data fits the proposed model (Henseler & Sarstedt, 2013).

Following the measurement model and goodness of fit (GoF), the hypothesized relationships in the structural model were tested. The results of the hypotheses testing are presented in Fig. 2. The values in the figure show the standardized coefficients and their respective t-values. The corrected R^2 values in Fig. 2 refer to the explanatory power of the predictor variable(s) on the respective construct. Personal norms, place attachment, environmental concern, subjective norms, and environmental altruism explain 37.6% of environment-friendly behavior. Moreover, environment-friendly behavior predicts 36.8% of environmental tourism behavior. Regarding the model validity, Chin et al. (2008) classify the endogenous latent variables as substantial, moderate, or weak, based on the R^2 values of 0.67, 0.33, or 0.19, respectively. Accordingly, environment-friendly behavior ($R^2=0.376$) and environmental tourism behavior ($R^2=0.368$) can be described as moderate.

The results of the structural model and hypotheses testing are presented in Table 5. The bootstrapping procedure indicates that four of the five path coefficients are significant with a confidence interval of 95%. Hypothesis 1 proposed that subjective norms were positively associated with environment-friendly behavior. Therefore, subjective norms had a positive and significant influence on environment-friendly behavior ($\beta_{SN \rightarrow EFB} = 0.118, p < 0.05$). Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported. For Hypothesis 2, the relationships between personal norms and environment-friendly behavior were not significant ($\beta_{PN \rightarrow EFB} = 0.049, p > 0.05$). Thus, Hypothesis 2 was not supported. Hypothesis 3 proposed that place attachment influenced environment-friendly behavior, thus Hypothesis 3 was supported ($\beta_{PA \rightarrow EFB} = 0.255, p < 0.01$). Hypotheses 4 and 5 proposed that environmental concerns and environmental altruism were positively associated with environment-friendly behavior. The findings indicated that both predictors exerted a positive and significant impact on environment-friendly behavior ($\beta_{EC \rightarrow EFB} = 0.118, p < 0.05$; $\beta_{EA \rightarrow EFB} = 0.304, p < 0.01$). Thus, Hypotheses 4 and 5 were supported. Finally, environment-friendly behavior had a positive and the most significant impact on environmental tourism behavior ($\beta_{EFB \rightarrow ETB} = 0.607, p < 0.01$).

5. Conclusion

The study proposed a PLS-SEM model to explore the impact of recreationists' environment friendly behaviors and environmental tourism behavior in the Ida Mountains, a nature-based destination. Based on previous research, the paper tested the relations between personal and subjective norms, environmental concern, place attachment, environmental altruism, environment friendly behavior, and environmental tourism behavior. The results provide both theoretical and practical implications for understanding the determinants of visitor's environment-friendly behavior in everyday life and environmental tourism behavior during tourism activities at nature-based destinations.

Figure 2. Model with β for Path Coefficients and R^2 for the Exogenous Constructs

Source: Own Elaboration

Five out of six hypotheses were supported in this study. One of the supported hypotheses is that subjective norms have a significant effect on individuals' environment-friendly behaviors in their everyday lives. It is of utmost importance to note that individuals are influenced by their families and their relatives and act accordingly to solve environmental problems. The findings herein are substantiated by the findings of previous studies having investigated a similar subject (Chan & Lau, 2002; Kim & Han, 2010; Song et al., 2012; Yadav & Pathak, 2017). The study conducted with hotel customers by Kim and Han (2010) has revealed that the levels of visitors' subjective norms could affect their likelihood to exhibit environment-friendly behaviors. Subjective norms were effective in individuals' purchase of an environment-friendly product (Yadav & Pathak, 2017). It is known that the intention of tourists to stay in a hotel with green practices and regulations at the stage of travel planning is influenced by subjective norms (Ting et al., 2019). The studies evidence that there is a relationship between subjective norms and individuals' behaviors. Personal norms can be strong predictors of environment-friendly behaviors but were not observed in this study. Personal norms guide individuals' moral responsibilities through internal values to change such perceptions of ours as good/bad and right/wrong (Schwartz, 1977). Besides, personal norms are influential not only in individuals' everyday behaviors but also in the behaviors they exhibit for the benefit of environment during their tourism-related activities (Mehmetoğlu, 2010). Personal norms affect individuals' behavioral intentions and are effective in determining environmentally friendly travel options (Doran & Larsen, 2016).

In contrast to previous studies (Chen & Chai, 2010; Mehmetoğlu, 2010), this study found that personal norms had no significant effects on environment-friendly behaviors. It can be understood from the responses of the recreationalists that the mean of the expressions was 4.54 or higher. These results showed that individuals take on responsibilities such as warning someone who is damaging the environment (= 4.62), compliance with the law (= 4.64). Moreover, it was revealed that recreationists were willing to protect and preserve the environment (= 4.69) and avoid behaviors damaging the environment in their everyday lives (= 4.54). But the proposed hypothesis was rejected. As indicated in the literature, personal norm attitudes should affect the environmentalist behaviors of individuals. Yet for such a perception to develop, people should come to understand that they threaten the environment (Stern, 2000). Therefore, the rejection of the hypothesis shows that the respondents do not feel the threat. Walking trails in the area are well-known and are constantly visited sites. This seems to have helped keep the sites clean and undamaged. Recreationists' attempts to use different trails and to see different landscapes may lead them to witness environmental pollution. However, it can be asserted that recreationists could not detect the threat and develop a response to it because they did not try different trails.

Place attachment is one of the independent variables most influential in visitors' environment-friendly behaviors. The results of the analyses indicated that place attachment affected environment-friendly behaviors (Hypothesis 3). The results are consistent with the findings of previous studies (Kyle et al., 2003; Budruk et al., 2009; Halpenny, 2010; Brownlee et al., 2014). In the study of visitors to the Point Pelee National Park in Canada, Halpenny (2010) has investigated the ability of place attachment to predict place-specific and general pro-environment behavioral intentions. People with the feeling of attachment originating from the interaction between individuals and spaces are more likely to develop more profound sensitivity toward the environment and tend to exhibit environment-friendly behaviors more frequently. In a study conducted at the Nanling National Forest Park and Dinghu Mountain National Nature Reserve in China, it is reported that place attachment indirectly affects the environmentally responsible behavior intention (Chow et al., 2019). It has been emphasized that different mediating factors such as conservation commitment (Lee et al., 2011), location identity (Vaske & Kobrin, 2001), or satisfaction (Tsai, 2015) should be explained in order to account for the effects on this behavior. Individuals establishing deeper connections with spaces assume some responsibilities pertaining to their environment-related everyday actions in order to prevent the destruction of these sites.

Table 5. Model Hypotheses Statistics (Bootstrapping) and Endogenous Constructs Assessment

Path Coefficients and Bootstrapping				
Hypothesis	Original Sample	T Statistics	P-Values	Decision
H1 Subjective Norms → Environment Friendly Behavior	0.118	1.857	0.032	Supported
H2 Personal Norms → Environment Friendly Behavior	0.049	0.692	0.245	Not Supported
H3 Place Attachment → Environment Friendly Behavior	0.225	3.495	0.000	Supported
H4 Environmental Concern → Environment Friendly Behavior	0.118	1.813	0.031	Supported
H5 Environmental Altruism → Environment Friendly Behavior	0.304	3.554	0.000	Supported
H6 Environment Friendly Behavior → Environmental Tourism Behavior	0.607	16.294	0.000	Supported
Endogenous Constructs Assessment			R²	Adjusted R²
Environment Friendly Behavior			0.376	0.362
Environmental Tourism Behavior			0.368	0.365

Source: Own Elaboration

The fourth hypothesis that visitor's environmental concern influences environmentally friendly behavior was supported. Even if the environmental concerns of the visitors to the Ida Mountains solely had no substantial effect, it was observed among the variables affecting environment-friendly behaviors. Regardless of the visitors' sources of information on environmental problems, their concerns about environmental damages were found to positively and significantly affect behaviors intended to prevent these problems. This finding is consistent with the findings of other studies on environmental concern regarding this construct as related to environment-friendly behavior (Bamberg, 2003; Mostafa, 2007; Mostafa, 2009; Lee et al., 2014; Dagher et al., 2015). In the study by Lee et al. (2014), environmental concerns are reported to have significant and positive effects on "good" citizenship and green purchase behaviors. Similarly, Dagher et al. (2015) have detected a significant relationship between environmental concern and environmentally friendly behavior.

The fifth hypothesis that visitor's environmental altruism influences environment friendly behavior was supported. Environmental altruism was found to make the greatest contribution to environmentally friendly behavior. Accordingly, it is important that visitors participating in this activity have values concerning and attitudes toward environmental destruction. The results are consistent with the findings of previous studies (Stern, 2000; Larocche et al., 2001; Groot & Steg, 2009). Groot and Steg (2009) emphasize that altruistic considerations and behaviors constitute the basis of environmentally friendly behaviors.

Environment-friendly behavior can explain 36.8% ($R^2=0.368$) of the changes in environmental tourism behaviors. People's perceptions of environment in their everyday lives, awareness of the practices detrimental to the environment, and concerns about it can be observed in their lifestyles and purchasing behaviors (Rodríguez-Oromendía et al., 2013; do Valle et al., 2015). Their everyday behaviors concerning environmental problems suggest that they are likely to exhibit these attitudes and behaviors during their tourism activities for several reasons and prefer environmentally friendly tourism products and practices. The results of Willuweit's (2009) study have revealed that visitors develop eco-friendly behaviors especially after they go to nature-based destinations with ecological resources. This can also be observed at the time of the visit or trip. The authors therefore emphasize that such interactions should increase the frequency of environmental behaviors and prevent damage to the environment. Thus, Hypothesis 6 was supported.

Environment and environmental resources are extremely important for the tourism sector and need to be a priority for state- and privately-run businesses. Individuals are also required to fulfill their responsibilities to eliminate these problems. This issue can only be solved by exhibiting a collective attitude and acting accordingly. If we can encourage people to visit such nature-based destinations in their travel plans and participate in activities at the destinations, they will have the opportunity to experience what is happening in the world they live in. This may increase visitors' sensitivity to the environmental issues. If visitors witness the existing problems, they may adopt an attitude to these problems and act to prevent them. The present study aimed to shed some light on the effects of environmental concerns, subjective norms, personal norms, environmental altruism, and place attachment visitors exhibit during their visits to natural destinations on their environment-friendly behaviors in their everyday lives.

One of the conclusions of the study is that personal norms do not affect environmentally friendly behavior. This result may be due to the fact that recreationists did not experience the trails without a controlled setting. In order to turn the personal norm attitudes into behaviors, individuals must face the threat. The fact that the destinations and the walking trails in this study are always used by the visitors to the site suggests that the environmental damage in these areas can be hidden. Researchers are recommended to consider this fact in their research. They can reveal more evident findings by conducting studies in untouched natural areas that have not undergone a controlled environmental set up. Studies investigating environment-friendly behaviors mainly feature expressions based on the behaviors of individuals in everyday life. But statements about environmentally friendly behaviors of individuals in direct tourism activity were included in view of environmental tourism behavior (Song et al., 2012). The results in this study showed that environmentally friendly behavior accounts for 36% of the variance in environmental tourism behaviors. This result is especially important to examine the environmentally friendly behavior of tourists visiting nature-based destinations.

Padel and Foster (2005) indicated that consumers' environmental concern and knowledge have a positive effect on their consumer behavior. The novel coronavirus pandemic, for example, has made people more sensitive to environmentally responsible behaviors and consumption, which will heighten their support for sustainable development. Results of this study assist in the understanding and identification of the environmental concerns during tourists' visits to natural destinations on their environment-friendly behaviors. This study is a step in the direction of learning more about recreationists who are interested in environmental sustainability. Therefore, findings could be considered as a basis for researchers to gain a greater understanding of reasons for people that emphasized environment friendly behavior and sustainability.

Such research studies can assist tourism managers with producing environment-friendly activities like including tourists in recycling waste applications or improving organic farming lands where tourists participate in farming process and consume products. Also, they may improve nature based sport recreational activity. Tourism managers' adopting sensitive attitudes allows them to make their businesses more environment friendly and more competitive. Researchers are recommended to use expressions concerning environmental tourism behavior and expand the scope of their research into different areas, such as food, travel, vacation, accommodation, and transportation. Understanding the environment-friendly behavior of tourists during their visits to nature-based destinations will assist in the conservation of natural resources. Tourists' taking responsibility to reduce consumption and break consumption habits can mitigate negative environmental impacts. Thus, the attractiveness of nature-based destinations may increase.

Environmental pollution, degradation of ecology, destruction of nature and resource scarcity have become important global problems. Therefore, it is important to increase consumers' environmental concerns. Therefore, developing environmental protection slogans, sharing videos, and publishing environmental protection laws may contribute to increasing consumers' environmental concerns. Topics opened on social media and internet environment to support nature conservation draw attention to protect the environment. Sharing positive experiences and nature-friendly practices in nature-based destinations by recreationists through social media and the internet can also support more people to connect with nature.

The effects of norms, place attachment, environmental concerns and altruism on environmentally friendly tourism behavior and the results obtained about the psychological, social and environmental factors underlying tourists' behavior can contribute theoretically to research in the field of environmental psychology and sustainability in tourism. It can help improve existing theories of human behavior in the context of sustainable tourism or enable the development of new theories.

Findings from this research, understanding how norms influence tourists' behavior, can inform destination management strategies aimed at promoting environmentally friendly practices. Similarly, recognition of the importance of place attachment can guide efforts to strengthen tourists' emotional ties to destinations and encourage a sense of responsibility for environmental protection. Effective communication campaigns or policies can be designed to encourage sustainable tourism behaviors among visitors. It can provide actionable information to stakeholders in the tourism industry, policy makers and destination managers to promote sustainable practices and reduce negative environmental impacts.

The study has some limitations, including the sample size and the selection of the Ida Mountains as the research area. Broadening the scope of the study to cover different sites would improve the generalizability of the findings. Testing the framework in different types of nature-based environments, such as forest areas, natural conservation areas, wildlife areas, lake visits, or bird watching tours could also improve the generalizability of the methodology and results. Moreover, the inclusion of other parameters (environment-related knowledge, environmental awareness, environmentalist consumer, etc.) could broaden the impact of future studies as well as increasing the sample size.

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The Importance of the Quality and Sustainability Labels in the Perception of the Luxury Hotel Industry

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ABSTRACT

The paper explores valorisation of hotel service quality elements and puts them in the context of guests' preferences related with luxury accommodation. The focus of the paper is perception of luxury hotel offer and influence of sustainability labels and excellence awards on tourists' preferences. The purpose of the paper is a better understanding of consumers' attitudes when choosing luxury hotel accommodation developed and awarded within the sustainability concept. The methodology includes qualitative and quantitative analysis of the defined quality elements, perception of luxury and impact of sustainable awards and certificates on consumers' preferences. The research was conducted using an online questionnaire in the last quarter of 2021, and it was carried out on a sample of 102 respondents, guests of upscale and luxury hotels. The research results were processed using quantitative statistical methodology, including mean values, percentages, STDEV, VAR and the Chi-square test of probability, while the open-ended question was processed using qualitative methodology, and the results are presented through the new model. Interpersonal communication followed by physical facilities and characteristics of luxury hotels are highlighted as important parameters, as is the valorisation of sustainable labels and certificates. However, by testing of the research questions and expected values, the authors have learnt that guests, consumers of luxury hotel products, predominantly do not valorise sustainable awards and certificates as key factors of perception of luxury. The findings suggest that sustainable initiatives in modern hospitality are entailed; however, the perception of luxury is not conditioned by awards and certificates. The research results, as well as the acquired knowledge, could encourage hoteliers to a more meaningful and effective promotion of certificates and awards in order to present a series of investments, activities and sustainable initiatives that have resulted in a certificate of excellence. The research bridges a scientific and professional gap in understanding of advantages of labels and awards and presents a platform for future research.

KEYWORDS

Hotel Awards, Certificates, Labels, Quality, Sustainability, Luxury Hotel Offer.

ARTICLE HISTORY

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1. Introduction

Tourism offer relies on natural and cultural resources, which are the key enablers of tourism destination development. Attractions, which make them destinations at a world level, are threatened by human actions. Sustainable practices highlight hotel organisations. Today's hotel offer users do not feel good if they know that a stay in a hotel, renowned for disregard of the local economy wellbeing, negatively affects the environment. Nor will they feel positive about booking a holiday connected with an organisation known for disregarding a local economy's wellbeing. The idea of enjoying oneself at the expense of others' fulfilling their own basic needs does not sit well with most people (UCF, 2023). Careful use of resources plays a key role in hospitality. Hotel organisation performance depends on preservation of natural and cultural attractions which draw tourists to tourism destinations, but also to hotel facilities. At the turn of the 21st century, Wight (1997) noted that the tourist demand trend was more directed towards luxury hotel accommodation, managed by big chains, but what are the current positions of the CSR and luxury sustainability? The theoretic platform is expanding and dynamic changes in the contemporary hotel industry change the patterns of value perception. Feng et al. (2018) discuss service experience in luxury hotels and whether being "cool" is important to luxury hotel brand management Khoi et al. (2022). What does "being cool" mean? Is sustainable luxury cool and are the eco labelling certificates proof of the hotel corporate social and ecological sensibility?

Eco labelling of tourism and hotel services has been studied in the past, but there is no agreement on two key points: whether or not eco certification increases tourist demand for a product among the general tourist population, and whether or not there is a specific market segment whose purchase decisions are influenced by eco labels. The research of Karlsson & Dolnicar (2015) indicates that eco labelling does not have a big impact on general tourist demand, but a niche market exists which is influenced by eco labelling when choosing among alternative tourist providers. The roots of environmental labelling programmes can be found in the growing global concern for environmental protection on the part of governments, businesses, and the public, elaborate Ren et al. (2022).

Luxury hospitality is becoming an increasingly important part of tourism (Kim et al., 2022). A hotel offer is created through a scope of development, through the ability of an offer to be diversified, but also of its specialisation in international tourism. Through offer, the luxury hotel competitiveness trends are based on loyalty to the brand and authenticity of experience, explain Wu et al. (2023) and they point out that, in luxury hotels, tourists are searching for not just special experience; they want to feel special. Directed towards sustainability, hotels can improve efficiency and attract an increased number of tourists who are looking for ecologically and socially responsible services. Acquisition of certificates leads hotel facilities to success through sustainability in hospitality. Hospitality certificates add a certain level of prestige to a hotel's "identity card". Sustainable initiatives, eco labelling and certificates of excellence contribute to the perception of new luxury evolved from traditional valorisation.

Waida (2023) notes that the implementation of certificates serves as a symbol of achievement, and continues that, by being awarded, hotel companies are better profiled in the market. They can also maintain long-term loyal relationships with clients; namely, retain existing, and acquire new, clients. Certification classification by subject is divided into products, persons and/or systems, and management systems (Waida, 2023). Furthermore, according to Preziosi et al. (2021), environmental sustainability practices and implemented eco-labels of a hotel are positively recognised by the guests, and are therefore positive differentiation factors. It should be noted that the adoption of green practices, such as hotel efforts to avoid single-use or single-dose products, communication about green practices carried out, environmental and cultural activities available in the area and public transport are perceived as factors of excitement related to contribution to a higher goal for a better world.

A large number hotel accommodation offer consumers nowadays recognize the importance of environmentally responsible initiatives and are looking for sustainable accommodation facilities. Operation of hotel facilities can have a harmful effect on the environment. Therefore, it is important that the providers of the luxury hotel offer adopt ecologically sustainable practices in order to protect the resources on which the attractiveness of the offer depends. Socially responsible business activities conducted by hotel industry companies could be awarded with various environmental certificates and quality marks. They

are a significant factor in the competitiveness of the offer on the tourist market. Based on these marks, users of the hotel's accommodation offer know that the hotel runs its business respecting all three pillars sustainability and it means that it cares about both, the environment and local community and culture. In continuance, technological solutions and innovation that are introduced in order to reduce resource consumption contribute to business efficiency and results.

The aim of this paper is to research in what measure affirmed sustainable initiatives and realised awards contribute to the perception of luxury in modern hospitality. Its purpose is a better understanding of consumers' attitudes when choosing luxury hotel accommodation developed and awarded within the sustainability concept. The paper explores valorisation of elements of hotel service quality and puts them into the concept of experience of luxury and guest satisfaction. Apart from the quality elements, organisational aspects of the competitiveness factors are also investigated for the needs of an integral excellence research.

Research questions are posed, which affirm new knowledge and affect the defining of the determinants of luxury hotel operations:

Q1 - Do consumers value the responsible and sustainable hotel initiatives marked by special eco labels as an integral part of the luxury hotel offer?

Q2 - Do consumers value certificates of quality and luxury in the perception of luxury hotels?

In consideration of the problem area, the authors started from the premise that, in the context of luxury, consumers imply implementation of sustainable initiatives. As a platform for statistical methodology and testing of the problem question using Chi-square test, they set the probability of respondents' agreement at 80%. For the second problem question, predictions are somewhat lower; the agreement level is expected to be 60%.

The paper is divided into three main sections. In the first section, a theoretical platform is presented and review knowledge, which affects the shaping of the luxury hotel offer, is considered. In the second section, research methodology, materials and design are presented, followed by the research results. The third section contains discussion and concluding considerations.

2. Theory and Literature Review – Linkage of Luxury, Quality and Sustainability in the Hotel Industry

Luxury tourism offers represent a functional, hedonistic and a symbolic, expressive value. From the stated, an extended concept is developed, which defines five fundamental elements of a luxury tourist accommodation product: exceptional quality, visual distinction and conspicuousness, hedonistic value, uniqueness, rarity and exclusivity, as well as social value, considered within the context of sustainability (Vigneron & Johnson, 2005). For the purposes of comprehension of the conjunction of determinants and the research problem area, fundamental determinants within the context of a synergic value affirmation are presented.

2.1 Aspects of Luxury Hotel Offer - Quality as a Fundamental Prerequisite

It is difficult to precisely define luxury hospitality because of the problem of clearly defining the concept itself of "luxury" and what it exactly implies. The starting point of luxury experience would imply guests' high expectations, a desire and need for a perfect atmosphere and environment, as well as impeccable services (Walls et al., 2011). Although luxury can be understood and interpreted differently, mostly because of specificities in cultures, financial possibilities, degree of education and similar characteristics, we thus arrive at a different understanding and conception of the term "luxury", i.e. what, for some, means commodity, for others will be a primary necessity of life, and vice versa (Mohsin & Lockyer, 2010).

Bakker (2005) examines how luxury tourism is characterised by personalised top offers which, with their particularities of service provision, will attract users. They are differentiated, unique and exclusive, and represent a product, a service that is not offered to just anyone, but which is, at the same time,

not available to everyone. The main elements of luxury hotel offer which evoke special experiences are uniqueness, prestige and social status, price and the time (Chu et al., 2016).

In the age of growing international tourism, providing excellent quality service at hotels is increasingly more important (Yang, 2014). Therefore, hotel service provision must also be continuously improved by quality standards. Additionally, as international travellers expect standardised quality, hotels need to provide a professional, efficient and international offer. Moreover, Lu et al. (2015) evaluated services offered by luxury hotels and the way customers actually experienced them.

According to Iloranta & Komppula (2022), luxury tourist product aims to add wellbeing and joy to customers' lives by offering an experience that makes them feel special. The concept of luxury hotel offer adds value to service users by providing authenticity and by active participation, through unique hedonist experiences. Popescu & Olteanu (2014) see luxury hotel offer as: excellence, which interprets price levels with the perceived value, uniqueness, hedonism, quality and belonging to a certain social circle. Accordingly, luxury accommodation is linked to the exclusivity and tourists' high purchasing power Bakker (2005), Berry (1994).

Luxury accommodation offers certain characteristics and it is pointed out that it is differentiated, unique and exclusive, and that it is difficult to define what tourists see as superior, convenient and engaging (Cerović et al., 2020; Geerts & Masset, 2022). Today's tourists are looking for: personalised service, quality equipped accommodation units, exclusivity and positive and professional interaction with the staff. For designing of a luxury tourism offer, all offer stakeholders should be focused on providing personalised experiences and unforgettable moments through an offer that is authentic, impressive, unique and exclusive, point out Jiang et al. (2022) and Cerović et al. (2019). It is emphasised that "the sun and luxury are excellent, but travellers demand more enriching experiences". Furthermore, Purohit et al. (2023) reveal human interaction-based hotel attentiveness/caring and emotion-based indulgence as necessary conditions for brand evangelism. Further, Floričić (2022) asserts that luxury as such is defined as a state of great comfort and elegance; however, as people's tastes differ, individual concepts of luxury equally differ. Hotel chains which wish to promote their brand as luxury are frequently dependant on co-creation in order to make personalised experiences that are more related to a psychological element than to traditional luxury products. In that case, co-creation integrates personal feelings, i.e., guests' preferences, so that a unique luxury experience can be realised. Furthermore, authors identify physical environment-based tangible sensorial experience and differentiate important elements in the luxury hotel design (Ahn & Pearce, 2013; Purohit et al., 2023).

Table 1. Design Characteristics for the Luxury Hotels

Design Direction	Design Characteristics for Luxury Hotels
Lobby design	• Social interaction areas, not only for hotel guests, but also for outside guests • The presented design theatrically introduces one into luxury appointment of other areas in the hotel and its environment
Guest room design	• Safety, comfort, privacy and quiet and spacious rooms • Unique design, emphasis on details, technology and managed lighting • Comfortable interior surroundings in the room • Comfortable workspace – facilities inside the hotel room • Stylish design furniture, luxury fabrics and top high-tech entertainment appliances
Bathroom design	• Spacious bathrooms • Deep bathtubs, walk-in showers, use of precious materials, marble and chrome • Separate ladies' and gents' toilets • Quality appearance of the bathroom content and equipment • Technology, such as small plasma television sets, flexible lighting
Art in the hotel interior and exterior	• High quality artefacts in guest bedrooms, corridors, stairways and elevators • Areas – gallery zones in hotels
Spa and Wellness services in hotels	• Attention directed towards interior design, influencing guest rest and relaxation • Spacious changing rooms and public surfaces • Multiple indoor and outdoor relaxation zones • Care of guests' ecological responsibility and comfort • Offer of Spa bites and foods in the form of healthy, organic options

Food and Beverages Department (F&B) in the hotel	• Organic food and unusual offer of food • Offer of top-quality food and drinks
Arrangement of landscape and hotel exterior	• Nurtured horticulture in parks and gardens, with planted trees and plants • Open-air spaces with trees and gardens • Different colours and textures (combinations of materials) in the hotel exterior arrangement

Source: Ahn, Y. H., & Pearce A. R. (2013)

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the perception of luxury in modern hospitality is going through a process of transformation. Ghattas (2020) points out that, although luxuriously designed and equipped hotels, top gastronomy, personalised service and exclusivity continue to be a key to competitiveness, new luxury includes the formation of some new, innovative services and conceptual revalorisation of the existing facilities:

- *Wellness and Wellbeing* - wellness, wellbeing and health through mental, sensory and physical well-being, organised in the hotel;
- *Workspitality* - high technological equipment and professional services, designated workspaces in hotel rooms;
- *Biophilic Design and Sustainability* - biophilic design and a complete sustainability concept in "green" hotels.

Quality is very important for tourism destinations and the hotel industry to enhance long-term innovation, competitiveness and sustainability. Garrigos-Simon et al. (2019) and González, Sasidharan, Álvarez Hernández and Azpeitia Herrera (2018) show that improvement of the quality of tourism, and thus hotel, offer, needs the commitment of tourism operators in terms of innovation, continuous improvement and renewal, aimed at enhancing the tourism industry. Al-Gasawneh & Dalain (2023) discuss that quality in tourism is a result of the process which presumes consumers' satisfaction with all products, services, requests and expectations at a reasonable price, and in line with the key quality determinants, such as: safety, hygiene, accessibility, transparency and authenticity of the product and harmony of tourist activities with the natural and social environment. Pohland & Kesgin (2018) explore pricing determinants of quality and differentiate aspects of various categories of hotels, with the emphasis on luxury hotels. Tari et al. (2017) explore the problem area of the relationship between quality and realisation of business results and highlight the component of excellence in hotel services with business performance. Furthermore, Kimes & Ho (2018) elaborate the importance of revenue management in the luxury hotel industry. Elshaer & Augustyn (2016), on the other hand, determine the direct effects of quality management on competitive advantage.

Dedeoglu & Demirer (2015) research the global context and point out that the perception of guests about the service quality in the international context is very wide, and that guest satisfaction by the provided services considerably and subjectively varies. Two different variables affect their perception: guest expectations and service standards. The concept of expectation is very important as it, to a great extent, affects the level of guest satisfaction. As the end result, a perceived service quality, which reflects the difference between guest expectations and received services, is obtained (Fernando, 2019). The degree to which an expected and a received service are similar or different directly affects the degree of guest satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Moreover, service standards are emphasised, through which it should comply with the set norms. Luo & Qu (2016) claim that exceeding the expected service levels and physical standards affects the excellence perception which is still the best market positioning promoter and affirmer, and which also encourages loyalty.

Quality management is one of the most important tasks of modern management which no longer refers only to product quality management, but also to service quality management and the management of the entire organisation. For those reasons, an increased number of hoteliers and other stakeholders of tourism offer are undertaking steps towards the introduction of the TQM system (*Total quality management*), stress Khan et al. (2020). Moreover, the two levels of quality are identified; firstly, the general quality which could be described as a measure or an indicator of the sum of the use/value of the product or service for meeting of specific needs at the right time and in the right place. Secondly, they define the

term “new quality”, which could be described as a modern perception of quality affected by a series of factors, such as standards, added value, experience, and similar. Further conclusions of experiences in luxury hospitality facilities are presented by Manfreda et al. (2023) in their study, in which they offer important practical implications for luxury accommodation operators on designing, staging and managing quality experiences. They lean on the findings of Awan et al. (2023), where they point out significant and positive effects of functional, natural, and cultural experiencescape on customer satisfaction, while sensory and social experiencescape had a non-significant impact on customer satisfaction.

2.2 Sustainable Ecolabels and Luxury Hospitality Certificates

Green building principles are increasingly respected in modern hospitality and efforts have been made to meet the certification criteria. This indirectly impacts the external and the internal appearance of the hotel, and an increasing number of hotels are using “green roofs and living walls”, so-called biophilic design. Certified hotels distinguish themselves as leaders in application of green business practice and this provides them with a better position in the tourism market and competitive advantages, but also has a positive impact on business results (Jalilvand et al., 2018). Green hospitality is becoming a synonym for and imperative of modern hospitality good business practice (Mustapić & Vlahov, 2015). It is possible to implement initiatives through activities which do not generate additional costs, including different regulation and rationalisation measures, as well as through activities which generate small to medium costs, and which result in higher levels of savings of a financial and practical nature (Radić et al., 2009). Each investment in green business is the result of a hotel's strategic defining and its developmental programme by which the level of investment is defined, as well as the models of realisation in the hotel business, stresses Črnjar, (2002).

Similar to consumer goods producers, luxury manufacturers are also under continuous pressure to remain competitive and cope with the changing and increasing customer demands. Several scholars consider sustainable luxury to be one way to cope with this pressure. Furthermore, Kunz et al. (2020) explain that sustainable luxury affects whole supply chains and goes beyond the production of luxury products, making the incorporation of the exploitation of raw materials like gold necessary to fully understand its idiosyncrasy compared to sustainable commodity goods. Wu et al. (2023) and Feng et al. (2018) express the quality of hotel luxury offer through three key aspects: 1) it is associated with emotions and sensory experiences; 2) it surpasses what is needed; 3) the high price of luxury offer is usually not related to the costs of service preparation and provision (Pohland & Kesgin, 2018). Scholars have defined the luxury sector's important role in the process of changing production processes and motivating consumers to change their consumption patterns towards a more sustainable way of living, which will be needed to overcome the challenges identified herein (Joy et al., 2012).

Implementation of energy efficiency measures in construction (for example by means of conversion of abandoned spaces, buildings in the local community), business (for example lighting which reacts to touch, reduction in drinking water consumption), and establishment of an overall system of waste management towards the “zero waste” concept, are activities which are based on a sustainable hotel operation concept (Cunha & Oliveira, 2021). Besides sustainable management of energy sources, water, food and waste, the importance is emphasised of socially responsible business and practices in the local community. This also refers to appreciation of diversity, respect of other cultures, both from the social aspect and the aspect of economic and financial allocation of a part of the profits for realisation of socially responsible initiatives in the destination. By inclusion of local autochthonous products in the gastronomic offer, the production of small, medium and micro primary and secondary economy sector entrepreneurship is affirmed, and local products are placed through the tertiary sector – tourism and hospitality.

Dang-Van et al. (2023) present the findings of their study that indicate that green hotel practices are positively related to consumer brand identification, and this relationship is positively mediated by perceived green service innovation, perceived utilitarian value, and perceived hedonic value. Moreover, Sharma et al. (2023) explore green purchase behaviour; namely, they identify factors influencing consumers' green purchase intention and provide strategic insights to marketers to create better marketing opportunities for green offers. A recent paper by Moise & Gil-Saura (2020) explores guests' satisfaction and points out the impact of “green” practices on perceived value, satisfaction, intention to revisit and WOM.

With the aim to achieve new competitiveness and recognisability of ecologically and socially aware hotel companies, systems of special labels have been created which, using standards, set requirements in accommodation facility design, equipment and operations. Eco-labels and certifications are given to products and services that are deemed to have fewer impacts on the environment than similar products and are therefore more environmentally preferable. The goal of eco-labelling initiatives is to promote products and services that are less damaging to the environment. Eco-labelling in the hospitality industry helps customers understand which sustainability-focused practices hotels have implemented in their daily operations (Cloudbeds, 2023). According to Booking.com's Sustainable Travel Report (2019), 70% of global travellers say they would be more likely to book accommodation knowing it is environmentally friendly, whether they are looking for a more sustainable stay or not, claims Bøcker (2021).

The advantages of holding ecolabels are numerous but, primarily, by having them, hotels demonstrate and prove high quality and care for the environment, reduced consumption of water, electricity and the amount of waste which, in turn, reduces the business costs. By certificates, hotels opt for preservation of the environment, promote healthy accommodation, healthy nutrition and a healthy environment for both guests and employees, and directly affect their satisfaction.

Finally, certification by green hospitality certificates contributes to a better service quality, strengthens the market position and differentiates the facilities which hold them apart from others (Eco hoteli OMH, 2018). Green certificates and green awards positively affect the guests' perceived value in hotel facilities. Lee et al. (2019) confirm the positive impact of perceived value and satisfaction, intention to revisit, and intention to pay a green premium. A hotel that has obtained green certificate(s) promises green services, products, and operations, and possesses thereby (potentially) important strategic assets, when it comes to attracting customers and employees.

In the Republic of Croatia, projects have also been initiated which aim to accept modern ECO standards in hospitality. The Association of Employers in Croatian Hospitality designed the project "Green business in hospitality" within which the *Sustainable* hotel certificate is awarded, followed by the National Association of Family and Small Hotels of Croatia, which developed the programme of eco labelling of hotel facilities with the label Eco Hotel (Golja & Globov, 2020). The stated certificates envisage the criteria in the field related to architecture and design, so the following are regularly assessed:

- 1) Environmental protection policy by application of ecologically acceptable materials;
- 2) Application of renewable energy sources;
- 3) Noise levels and harmful gas emissions control;
- 4) Expressed care of the landscape and the environment;
- 5) Materials used in hotel construction;
- 6) Unique hotel design.

"Certificate or confirmation is a document which is issued in accordance with previously determined and defined certification system regulations by which it is ensured that either a production process or any other type of service, which comply with certain norms, has been established. Any type of certificate consists of a corresponding label, which a company can display on its documents or products." (Bačun et al., 2012).

By being awarded a certificate, a hotel company is better profiled in the market; it develops and maintains long-term loyal relationships with clients, retains existing and acquires new clients. It is important to point out that a certificate in itself is not a key to success (Sutherland et al., 2021). They elaborate that the company which holds a certificate and carries out its operations in line with recommended norms is not fully protected from the competition or business failure, but a certificate can help a lot with a better business process management, a higher market position, a better relationship between the quality and the product price, as well as with satisfaction of clients, employees, management and macro and micro environments (Waida, 2023). Certificate classification by subject is divided into products, persons and/or systems, and management systems. What they have in common is the fact that a certificate, i.e. confirmation of certification, represents a proof of compliance with all the stated and established norms on the basis of an examined and graded sample which, de-

pending on the situation, can be larger or smaller, i.e. it depends on the subject class which is passing through the certification process.

However, in consideration of the advantages of certifications, potential dangers, related to a flawed, unethical conduct in implementation of green standards also needs to be looked at (Zhang et al., 2022). So-called "sustainable greenwashing" represents a kind of emphasising and application of only those standards which are suited to the company, while the others are dismissed. Promotional activities highlight only what is positive and project an incorrect, incomplete, picture of the activities and initiatives, elaborate Majeed & Kim (2023), while Rahman et al. (2015) pursue the consequences of unethical promotion of green initiatives from the aspects of consumers' perception.

According to Sutherland et al. (2021), certification of quality is an important strategic concern for hotel industry practitioners, since it entails explicit and implicit investments in time, personnel training and finances. By certification, documentation, as well as the practical work of the whole organisation which wishes to be certified, is assessed, and it can only be done if it meets the criteria and determined norms. Certification refers to various areas of hotel offer organisation: energy, waste and recycling, building, products and packaging, supply chain, water, food, transportation, community, and employees (Green Business Bureau, 2023).

Hotel companies decide on certification also when they wish, in a timely manner, to acquire competitive advantage. With the intention to ensure an always safe and reliable product for their clients, and to continuously increase quality, producers include and certify various management concepts, the main goal being provision of reliability and effectiveness of the process or service product, claim Jia & Wahnschafft (2015). They continue that the majority of national and international product certification requirements aim to ensure that the product is intended for sale or export to a specific market, compliant with quality regulations, health validity and safety, and environmental protection. By certification, the quality which is recognisable in the market is guaranteed, and the certificate gives the hotel company a certain status, which is respected by both the clients and the competition (Jia & Wahnschafft, 2015).

Ecologically acceptable options are welcome within the hospitality industry, where hotels, and especially luxury hotels, opt for green solutions. Floričić (2020) states that it is possible to affirm ecological and social responsibility strategies upon implementation of technological solutions and innovations in hotels, while including all the components which have green technology status, i.e. the choice of such a technology which would enable them to, by their business activities, protect the environment and the social community in which they operate. Furthermore, she points out the importance of planning of hotel accommodation structures in accordance with the sustainability strategies but, at the same time, focuses on competitiveness, evaluated by attitudes and perceptions of the consumer segment.

Hotels can ask for green certificates for several reasons, such as cost savings and an efficient environment management system. There is a big potential for the hotel industry to rethink business models and services aiming to reduce consumption and waste, and to increase the sustainability-oriented experiences of the hotel guests (Eskerod & Đurić, 2018). Kasim (2009) stresses that the leading hotel chains in Western Europe and North America consider green marketing as a tool for positioning of their hotels, distinction of hotel offer from the competition and creation of a relationship of trust by their ecological awareness. Bernard & Nicolau (2022) claim that environmental certification has a positive effect on hotels' market value (reducing the effects of the alluded negative publicity). The most important eco-green certificates of those present in the hospitality business are noted: LEED, Green Leaders, Green Key Global, Green Tourism Active, Audubon Green Lodging Program, Green Seal, Earth Check, Green Globe, Friend of Environment, EU Ecolabel, Travelife and Sustainable Hotel.

Today, it is increasingly difficult to win hotel awards given the demanding criteria. This is why, given the complexity of human labour and interpersonal communication, which are evaluated through the award system, the realised awards are appreciated and presented. An excellence and luxury award in the hospitality industry represents an independent and public acknowledgment of a hospitality company's effort to produce consistent and high-quality service across the board, from the processes of checking in and out to the services offered to guests (Jobs, 2022). Awards in hospitality

implement the important mission of affirmation of quality through valorisation of the best hotels in accordance with specific evaluation categories. The evaluation results are directed towards promotion, placement and new competitiveness. Ricca (2024) emphasizes the importance of strategic marketing linking of hoteliers who possess certificates of excellence, sustainability and quality developed through classic hotel brands with consortia brands of luxury tourism. The latest successful example of connecting Hyatt and Hilton hotels with the SLH-Small Luxury Hotel consortium brand is highlighted, where benefits for guests are realized through a developed loyalty program with a number of benefits for guests, an additional developed distribution network for hoteliers and recognition, strengthening the perception of luxury in the hotel industry.

The purpose of presentation of awards is manifested in striving for improvements through innovations, development and cultural education of the society, with an increase in tourism attractiveness and guest care. Competitiveness is an important factor and, with implementation of activities, different innovations and investment, a step forward in the quality is achieved, as well as an advantage in relation to the competitors from the industry (Bernard & Nicolau, 2022). By award winning, the hotel, as the best representative in the proposed nomination, obtains international or national recognition which affirms it as a leader in a certain market segment or in tourism, generally.

The Certificate of Quality represents a powerful promotional tool, and hotels which obtain it as an award for excellence should use it in every form of promotion and marketing placement. Consumers' psychology always prefers a product with an award and, provided the hotel product is strategically adequately priced, this will, in most cases, prevail in attracting guests.

All hotels are treated completely the same when it comes to the assessment for award winning and, in this way, a platform is set up for a reliable award system. At the international level, 18 different luxury hospitality certificates can be distinguished, namely: Andrew Harper grand awards, Boutique hotel awards, British travel awards, Conde Nast traveller, Expedia Insider's select list, Hoscar awards, International hotels awards, International restaurant and hotel awards, International star diamond awards, Jet Setter, Mr & Mrs Smith hotel awards, Travel + Leisure awards, Travel weekly Magellan awards, TripAdvisor traveller's choice awards, Wellness travel awards, World luxury hotel awards, World luxury spa awards and World travel awards (Floričić, 2021).

3. Materials and Methods

In order to fully consider the topic, the research design is presented. Following the review of literature and theoretical determinants, which included scientific methods of analysis, synthesis, generalisation and systematisation, desktop research of awards and certificates was carried out. Further, consumer perception of the importance of awards and certificates for the hotel competitive advantage and market positioning, is explored. The research was conducted using an online questionnaire in July 2021, and it was carried out on a sample of 102 respondents who were guests of an international branded hotel in Croatia. The questionnaire was open for three days. As the trends in luxury hotel industry perception are changing, the attitudes of consumers of all ages, but similar profiles, are important. The gender of the sample was not profiled. The sample is reliable and the statements are relevant for the study, as the respondents, as a sample group, are the consumers of an upscale and luxury hotel product.

The questionnaire was formed in three main parts: 1) the general part with demographic questions and questions on respondents' preferences, 2) research of respondents' preferences and perceptions by means of the scale of level of agreement and 3) an open-ended question, through which the respondents presented their perception of luxury in modern hospitality. The variables were identified and chosen as relevant to the research according to the modified SERVQUAL methodology. The modification was based upon the classification of Avelini Holjevac (2002), developed after (Pohland & Kesgin, 2018; Feng et al., 2021) and adjusted for the research problem. The research results were processed using quantitative statistical methodology, including mean values, percentages, STDEV, VAR and the Chi-square test of probability, while the open-ended question was processed using qualitative methodology, and the results are presented through the new model created by the authors. The results represent new knowl-

edge which contributes to the development of the science and practice and represent a platform for new considerations.

4. Findings and Discussion – Sustainability Labels and Awards in Positioning of Luxury Hotels

The basic goal of the research was to examine the influence of service quality and satisfaction, as well as of the award system and introduction of luxury hotel certificates.

In the research participated 102 persons of whom 72 were female (70.6%) and 30 male (29.4%). The majority of respondents were between 30 and 39 years old (44.1%), then between 18 and 29 years (28.4%), between 40 and 49 years (12.7%), and over 50 years of age, 14.7% of respondents. The majority of respondents had a higher level of educational degree (51%), a university degree (29.4%), other degrees of higher education (21.6%), followed by those with secondary school education (46%), and with three years of secondary education and less, 3.9% of respondents. The highest number of respondents declared not having children, 64 of them, i.e., 62.7%, which means that they mostly travel individually, with a partner or with friends. Considering the purpose of the respondents' travel, the primary respondents' satisfaction motive was evidenced in 89.2% of respondents, followed by visits paid to friends and relatives (28.4%), recreation (19.6%), visits to museums and historical heritage sites (15.7%), and other differentiated motives. Given the complexity of the questions, multiple responses were evidenced.

With regard to the frequency of travel, it is evident that the respondents travel once (35.3%) or twice (36.3%) a year. A share of 27.5% of those who travel three or more times a year points to the importance of the sample, and the data that 41.2% of respondents have an average expenditure of over €200, points to a higher purchasing power and inclination towards high quality accommodation in 4 or 5-star hotels, where they spend between 4 and 7 nights (54.9%). A high share of shorter stays, between 1 and 3 nights (25.5%) follows, and stays of more than 7 nights (17.6%).

To the question: In your opinion, what does service quality mean to you? (Table 2), the majority of respondents replied: Accessibility (accessibility of services, location and waiting time), 63.7% of them, followed by Communication (45.1%), professionalism and responsibility (preparedness of employees to provide the requested service), 40.2% of them. The identical number of guests considered Reliability in service provision and Safety as equally important (39.2%), followed by Understanding (personalised service), 28.4% of them, Competence (competence of contact staff), 27.5% of them, Credibility (behaviour, professionalism, 26.5% of them) and, at the very bottom is the importance of Tangible elements, such as exterior, interior, employees' appearance, equipment, and promotional materials (20.6%).

Table 2. Ranking of the Perception of Hotel Service Quality Elements

Service quality	n	Share %
1. Accessibility (accessibility of services, locations, waiting time)	65	63.7
2. Communication	46	45.1
3. Professionalism and responsibility (preparedness of employees to provide the requested service)	41	40.2
4. Reliability in service provision	40	39.0
5. Safety	40	39.2
6. Understanding (personalised service)	29	28.4
7. Contact staff competence	28	27.5
8. Credibility (fairness and professionalism)	27	26.5
9. Tangible elements (exterior and interior, employees' appearance, equipment, promotional materials)	21	20.6

Source: Own Elaboration

These statistical indicators stand out: Median: 40, Mod: 40, Min: 21, Max: 65, arithmetic mean: 3.3, and STDEV: 2.73. The average service quality level in luxury hotels is 3.3, with average deviation STEV of the arithmetic mean of 2.73, with VAR. of 7.45. During the survey, the respondents were expressing the service quality level on the basis of the given answers. The largest number of respondents were of the opinion that the service quality is based on accessibility, i.e., accessibility of services, location and waiting time. The lowest service quality level was determined in tangible elements, i.e., exterior, interior, employees' appearance, equipment and promotional materials. In grading the service quality, it was established that this part was the least important among respondents.

The next question referred to the importance of the quality physical environment of the luxury accommodation. Namely, physical environment affects the perception and achieves positioning in the service user's mind. The majority considered quality physical environment as important (59.8%), but not as a primary, i.e., a very important factor (14.7%) when choosing their destination, i.e. their stay in luxury accommodation. It is indicative that over a quarter of the respondents (25.5%) believed that a high-quality luxurious environment is not of key importance. On the other hand, the data is significant that 61.8% of respondents stated that it was important for them, and 25.5% that it was very important to experience a high-quality interaction with hotel employees; a mere 12.7% of them claimed that it was not important. The following question concerned the quality of the rooms in the luxury accommodation facilities, where almost a half of the respondents considered it as an important factor that the room where they were staying was of good quality (47.1%) while, for the other predominant group of respondents, the quality of the room was not important at all (39.2%). It can be concluded that one part of the respondents expects full service quality in a luxury hotel, while the other part of the respondents believes that interaction with the employees, as well as the quality of the services which are on offer during their stay in the destination, are more important.

The next question referred to the needs of the luxury hotel guests for the purposes of their satisfaction. The largest number of respondents, 81.4% of them, considered the overall quality, i.e., room cleanliness, comfort, feeling of security and spatial experience, as most important. The quality of food and drinks follows. 56.9% of the respondents believe that luxury hotels have a versatile offer of food and drinks, a pleasant atmosphere and an overall staff service so, for that reason, 50% of the respondents considered the staff quality as important, which includes a timely service, politeness, professionalism, and tidiness. 49% of the respondents stressed the importance of value for money in luxury hotels, while the smallest number of respondents (44.1%) considered booking services, accuracy of booking, speedy check-in, speedy check-out, availability of information and wake-up call service as important. The results lean on research by Mohsen and Lockyer (2010), who dealt with the topic of guest satisfaction in luxury hotels.

Table 3. Elements of Influence on Satisfaction with Stays in Luxury Hotels

Elements of influence on satisfaction with stays in luxury hotels	n	Share %
Overall quality (room cleanliness, comfort, feeling of security, spatial experience)	83	81.4
Food and drinks quality (menu versatility, atmosphere, overall staff service)	58	56.9
Staff quality (timely service, politeness, professionalism, tidiness)	51	50.0
Service (simplicity of booking, accuracy of booking, speedy check-in, speedy check-out, availability of information, wake-up call service)	45	44.1
Value for money	50	49.0

Source: Own Elaboration

In the statistical analytics of the data from Table 3, the following indicators stand out: median: 54.5, Mod: non-existing = 0 element "overall quality", Min: 45, Max: 83, STDEV: 2, range 38 and arithmetic mean: 2.81. The average level of guest satisfaction during their stay in luxury hotels is 57.4, with an average deviation from the arithmetic mean of 15.04. In the course of the survey, the respondents were expressing the satisfaction level on the basis of the given sub-questions. The largest number of respondents were of the

opinion that the overall quality, which includes room cleanliness, comfort, feeling of security and spatial experience created the highest level of satisfaction during a stay in a luxury hotel.

In the analytics, the conclusions of the Table 2 and Table 3 results are presented. The application of the arithmetic mean in the case of service quality can help in the comprehension of how far or how close service quality is from the ideal value and how different service aspects are mutually compared. This can help companies to identify the areas in which service quality needs improvement and to compare their services with rival companies. Mod is a value which appears most frequently. In this case, there is no clearly defined Mod, as no value surpasses 50% of the total number of respondents. All these measures give us valuable information about how the respondents grade different aspects of services and how their opinions differ. This information is crucial for the development of strategies which could improve the service quality and user's satisfaction.

After the exploration of quality, the importance of the award system and acknowledgement of quality and sustainability in luxury hospitality was examined by the next set of questions. 45.1% of respondents considered the question of the importance of the eco certificate in the operations of the hotel where they were staying as important, while for 43.1% of them it was not important. Only 11.8% of the respondents believed that it was very important to possess eco certificates in one's business. From this, it can be concluded that, nowadays, a low level of public awareness is still present about green business, given that consumers themselves are not familiar with the eco certificate programmes. By introducing them, hotels reduce their adjustment to a minimum due to a decreased external pressure to invest their efforts and money in order to fully dedicate themselves to eco certification.

Table 4. Evaluation of Importance of Quality Elements, Award System and Luxury Hotel Certificates

Quality elements	Not important	%	Important	%	Very important	%	n	AVR	STDEV
High quality environment	26	25.5	61	59.8	15	14.7	102	34	24.02
Staff interaction	13	12.7	63	61.8	26	25.5	102	34	25.94
High quality rooms	40	39.2	48	47.1	14	13.7	102	34	17.78
Award system	61	59.8	32	31.4	9	8.8	102	34	26.06
Eco certificates	44	43.1	46	45.1	12	11.8	102	34	19.08

Source: Own Elaboration

From the users' point of view, quality refers to the level up to which a certain product or service satisfies their needs. In exploration of the importance of quality, award system and certification of luxury hotels, we arrive at illogicality of thought. Namely, in evaluation of the quality elements, 61.8% of the respondents were of the opinion that interaction between the staff and the service users was important, and 25.5% believed that it was very important, while, for 12.7%, it was an unimportant quality element. Evaluation follows of quality elements of the hotel facility through the perception of a quality environment and high-quality rooms. The perception of environment is important in the assessment of hotel quality and acquisition of certificates and awards for the facility itself and where the integral arrangement, design, ambience and other intangible quality factors are evaluated. In the evaluation of the environment, more than half of the respondents, 59.8% of them, stated that this quality element was important. In contrast, the awards system was not considered to be an important element, as 59.8% of respondents stated, contrary to the respondents' claims, agreement of more than a half of respondents concerning the importance of interaction and interpersonal communication.

Although the respondents recognised eco certificates as relatively important, a significant number, 43.1% of them, stated that they were not important, which is a basis for further research regarding the expected values. This can be considered within the context of the assertions by Majeed & Kim (2023) and Zhang et al. (2022), who address the questions of sustainable "greenwashing", a selective promotion of selected positive initiatives which introduce guest distrust into fair, sustainable practices.

Within the context of the above stated, deviations, realised regarding the expected values, have been explored using Chi-square test.

Q1 - Do consumers value the responsible and sustainable hotel initiatives marked by special eco labels as an integral part of the luxury hotel offer?

The prediction of importance is 80% of agreement. The research is shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Importance of Eco Certificates in the Perception of Luxury Hotels

	Not important - %	Important - %	Marginal Row Totals
Obtained frequency	43.1	56.9	100
Expected frequency	20.0	80.0	100
<i>Marginal Column Totals</i>	63.1	136.9	200 (Grand Total)
<i>Chi-squared test: 33.351</i>	Degrees of freedom:1		p-value: 1e-8

Source: Own Elaboration

Should we look at the level of significance in the question of *the importance of Eco certificates in the perception of luxury hotels*, it can be noted that the value of the Chi-square test equals $p < 0.05$, which means that a statistically significant difference was noted regarding the *observed groups*. However, the answer to the problem question Q1 is positive.

Q2 - Do consumers value a certificate of excellence and luxury in the perception of luxury hotels?

The prediction of agreement is 60%, and the research is shown in Table 6 below.

Table 6. Importance of Luxury and Quality Awards in the Perception of Luxury Hotels

	Not important - %	Important - %	Marginal Row Totals
Obtained frequency	59.8	40.2	100
Expected frequency	40.0	60.0	100
<i>Marginal Column Totals</i>	99.8	100.2	200 (Grand Total)
<i>Chi-squared test: 16.335</i>	Degrees of freedom:1		p-value: 0.00005307

Source: Own Elaboration

Should we look at the level of significance in the question of *the importance of luxury awards and acknowledgements*, it can be noted that the value of the Chi-square test equals $p < 0.05$, which means that a statistically significant difference was noted regarding the *observed groups*, where it can be seen that the frequency of expressing unimportance is more significant than expected. The answer to the problem question Q2 is, therefore, negative.

Furthermore, to the next question which referred to the importance of eco certification in the hotel of choice and stay: "Do you think that hotels should invest more in the business quality by introduction of certificates of sustainability, food safety, quality management, travel safety, and similar?" the majority of the respondents (92.2%) believed that they should, while a small share (7.8%) were of the opinion that they should not.

Finally, the perception of luxury in hotel offer was explored.

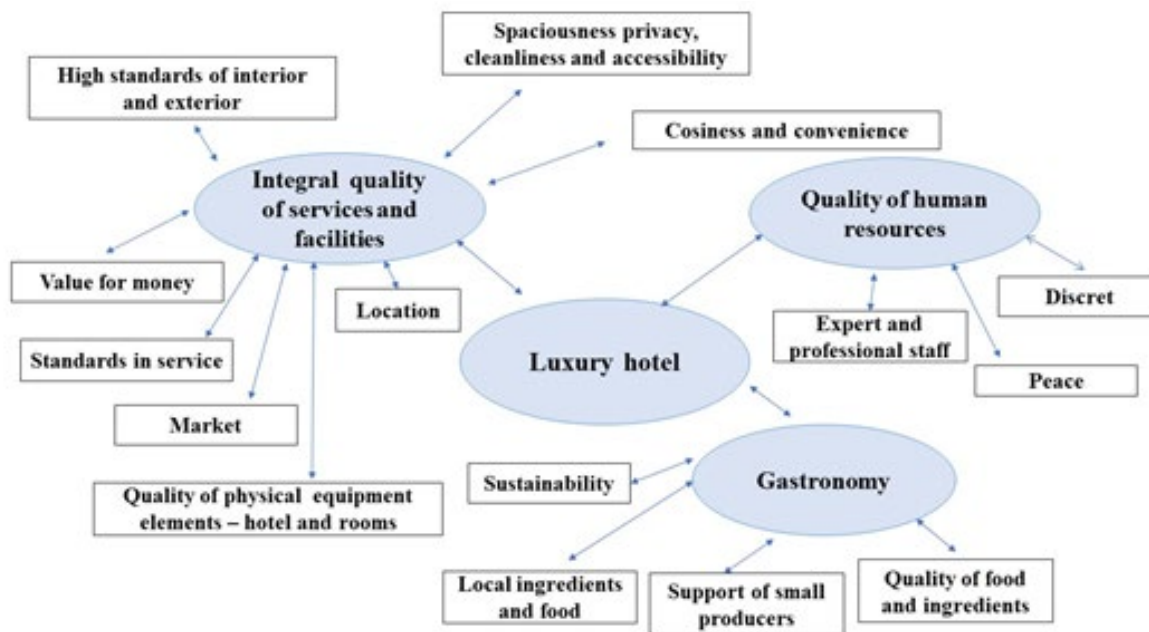
Table 7. Ranking of Perception of the Concept of Luxury

Rank	What is your perception of hotel luxury?	N	Share %
1	Quality	52	51
2	Business excellence	22	21.6
3	Market positioning and recognition	18	17.6
4	Loyal guests	6	5.9
5	Name, term, symbol, logo	3	2.9
6	Standardisation	1	1
Total		102	100

Source: Own Elaboration

In Table 7, the perception is explored of luxury in hotel offer. The respondents were asked to, out of the offered answers, choose what is associated with luxury. The results show that 51% of the respondents associated the concept of luxury with quality, 21.6% of the respondents believed that business excellence was the basis for luxury hotel operations, while 17.6% of them were of the opinion that market recognition was the characteristic of luxury hotels. 5.9% of the respondents believed that loyal guests were the basis of luxury hotel business performance, and 2.9% of the respondents opted for the name, term, symbol or logo. The smallest number of respondents opted for service standardisation (1%). It can be concluded that the respondents did not perceive sufficiently the importance of standardisation and brand as a label of luxury hotel as an important element of luxury hotels.

The last question of the research, which was of an open-ended type, asked the respondents to highlight what the concept of luxury hotels meant for them. The processing of the answers was based on the identified values, expressed in Table 4, and the frequency of elements and new knowledge in the perception of luxury hospitality were also explored in the research. Of 102 questionnaires, 53 (51.9% of the respondents) persons answered the stated open-ended question. There were 48 valid answers, of which none referred to the award system and eco certificates. A possible interpretation of the afore stated is noted in the implication of advantages, activities and initiatives which are recognised by awards and certificates but which, at the same time, are not recognised as competitive advantage. This is contradictory to the authors' research; on the other hand, it represents information and stimulus for a better marketing valorisation of the realised awards and certifications, coupled with education of stakeholders at all levels. A review of the respondents' answers follows, presented in a link table model, which describes the identified elements of the cycles of integral quality and business excellence. This is complementary to the writing of Tari et al. (2017) and claims by Elshaer & Augustyn (2016).

Figure 1. Concept of Luxury Hotel – Perception of Respondents

Source: Own Elaboration

By the testing in Tables 5 and 6, and subsequent evaluation of eco certificates in relation to the respondents' answers, the need is emphasised to further invest in them, with the aim to present an overall integral hotel offer quality, which leans on the theoretical determinants, presented by Lee et al. (2019) and Bernard & Nicolau (2022). Furthermore, through the open-ended question, the expression of elements of perception of luxury was explored and, here, the respondents did not indicate eco certificates as a tool to a hotel's competitive advantage in perception of luxury. This weighs in favour of the claim that, ecology, social responsibility and cultural authenticity imply sustainability, but also, on other hand, not the luxury in hotel offer. It leans to the knowledge presented by Ahn & Pierce (2013). Further, the results show that tourists identify ecological practices as a specific dimension of eco-labelled hotels and they correspond to the theory of Preziosi et al. (2021).

5. Conclusion

The hotel service quality is extremely important from many aspects. Hotels base their business on quality improvement, which they confirm by quality certificates. A multitude of certificates can confuse hotel guests. Therefore, in order for the certificates to be reliable, they have to be awarded by independent certifying companies whose experts control all business aspects. The criteria should be public and available to hotel guests, to provide them with the necessary transparency. In ideal circumstances of the hotel business, apart from the quality certification, certificates should also consider all the aspects of sustainability. Alongside environmental protection, this also includes social standards such as working conditions in hotels and cultural and economic aspects, but also includes business excellence. The research results are correspondent with the theoretical platform (Jia & Wahnschaft, 2015; Khalil et al., 2022). Quality certificates are awarded to products and services which are deemed to be ecologically acceptable, irrespectively of the proscribed requirements for sustainability strategies. However, with their synergy, a step forward has been made in the striving for excellence and competitive advantages (Sutherland, 2021; Waida, 2023).

Luxury tourism rests on a presumption that the standards of responsible and sustainable tourism and supervised intensity of visits to the destination and luxury hotel facilities form an integral part of luxury tourism offer which, even after the current crisis on the international tourist market, may have development potential and perspective. In these new conditions, management of the destination tourist development becomes a more challenging and responsible task, especially if luxury tourism is a strategic

orientation. Such a tourism strategy includes continuous monitoring and exploration of the global tourism trends in order to, by means of constant adjustment, stimulate and maintain the trust of tourism destination guests. Luxury tourism development is based on flexibility, innovativeness and possibility of adjustment to clients by means of a high service standard.

In today's modern hospitality, with the increasingly powerful progress of technological innovations, it is becoming increasingly difficult to fulfil the guests' expectations and wishes, let alone surpass them. Luxury hotels must be guided by the fact that they can achieve success in the market solely by quality; their brand must be unique and different in relation to their competitor's brands. Today's users of luxury hotel offer with a higher purchasing power are not looking only for luxury hotel facilities and top accommodation; they are looking for additional services and contents such as entertainment, cultural events, gastronomy, and similar. The initiatives of the future in luxury tourism include the establishment of individualised services, creation of authentic experiences, use of modern and contemporary technology, social engagement on the Internet, in order to show their "status" in front of their families, friends and acquaintances.

The purpose of this paper is to explore to what extent awards and certificates contribute to the perception of luxury in modern hospitality. The research encompassed preferences and perception of luxury in modern hospitality. Following the research in this paper, based on a survey questionnaire, it can be concluded that the price and quality continue to be the most important determinants when deciding on a purchase, and only after these follow comfort and design of specific luxury destinations. We can also come to the conclusion that loyal consumers are less sensitive to changes in the price of certain products as, for them, quality plays the main role and is more important than the price. The findings lean on the knowledge presented by Popescu & Oltenau (2014) and Sharma (2022).

In the segment of guests who are looking for the highest level of luxury, i.e. "experience in a package", constant accessibility, efficiency and speed are essential, as well as a highly individualised approach to the client. With an inevitable presentation of an authentic local story, good and quality guidance and professional staff "in time" accessibility to clients, they could feel the ratio between the price and the quality. The findings are correspondent with the theoretical platform of Purohit et al. (2023) & Manfreda et al. (2023).

Under the concept of luxury hotels, the respondents understand advantages, activities and the initiative which are confirmed by certificates, but they do not recognise them as being competitive advantages. On the other hand, this represents information and stimulus for a better marketing valorisation of realised awards and certificates, coupled with education of stakeholders at all levels. From this the limitation of the study also arises, given the problem area of education in the field of measurements and values, which certificates and awards represent. The results are presented through the concept of elements of luxury hotel values, and represent new knowledge which contributes to the development of the science and practice, thus constituting a platform for new considerations.

Both scientific and practical implications contribute to the knowledge for hotel industry managers with recommendations for activities targeting quality and business excellence. They are based upon the theoretical platform and lean on the results of the research.

- Education of staff, innovation of business processes;
- Implementation of sustainable protocols and initiatives intensifying hotel promotion and image perception;
- Educational initiatives oriented on consumers, tourists that present benefits of sustainable initiatives, responsible behaviour and the needs of local community;
- Establishing cooperation with the local community and identifying authentic domestic goods that could be included in integral hotel service;
- Organisation of charity initiatives where, various stakeholders; tourists, luxury goods suppliers and hotel companies support local associations and people in need through joined initiatives;
- Development of the strategic marketing that include strategic contracting of sustainability labelled and awarded hotels with luxury hospitality consortia brands.

For the development of luxury tourism, luxury hotel offers and certificates which show evidence of hoteliers' investment and initiatives, it is necessary to ensure a high level of quality in the facility, in the tourism destination as a whole and to establish a system of responsible and reliable promotion with-

out doubting corporative sustainability greenwashing. Certificates and awards, based on exact indicators which record values and initiatives, are important for it; however, for them to be presented, education of stakeholders and efficient communication are needed. Future research could be focused on monitoring improvements and efficient benefits resulting in hotel awards and certificates, as well as on the exploration of luxury hotel industry certificates and labels.

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