

Sustainable Tourism Development and Innovation: Recent Advances and Challenges

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1. Introduction

Traveling and tourism are now an essential part of people's life and have a big influence on society. Communities can gain a lot from tourism, but it can also bring about issues such as climate change, excessive energy use, and natural degradation. The large volume of visitors may also put a strain on the region's resources and degrade the standard of living for locals.

Sustainability is an essential consideration in tourism planning and development, and while it is often included in strategic plans, its implementation remains poor. Sustainable tourism development is a multifaceted and ever-evolving process that must continually address emerging challenges. However, it presents an optimistic avenue for generating economic, social, and environmental advantages.

The purpose of this Special Issue is to offer a platform for discussion and exploration of developments and new tools that impact sustainable tourism within the domains of economy, society, and environment. The eight manuscripts published in this Special Issue address several areas of interest as trends in climate change [1], agritourism [2], marketing [3–6], tourist journey [6], sports activities [3,5], technologies [7], innovation [3,7], economy [8] and blue economy [7].

2. Articles

The paper written by Song [1] is primarily motivated by the need to tackle climate change and promote sustainable tourism in developing countries, using Jeju Island as an example. In reaction to climate change, the tourism industry has recently changed. A key aspect of this transformation is the adoption of a low-carbon approach that involves policy and institutional reforms, changes in behavior, and climate change action. Sustainable tourism on islands is particularly vulnerable to the devastating impacts of climate change. Long-distance island travel frequently necessitates air travel, which contributes significantly to greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming. This exacerbates the problems with island tourism and adds to the wider effects of climate change, such as rising sea levels and an increase in the frequency of severe weather events. Global warming and other adverse effects of climate change are mostly caused by carbon emissions. As a result, reducing carbon pollution is crucial to halting climate change. In the study, Jeju Island in the Republic of Korea is used as a case study to demonstrate how an organic link between halting climate change and promoting sustainable travel might be achieved. The article outlines concrete ways in which climate action can be integrated with sustainable tourism and evaluates the likelihood of the success of various climate change response programs. The author claims that to effectively implement a climate action initiative, a comprehensive four-step process should be established. Firstly, climate action projects need to be developed. Secondly, there must be an efficient monitoring and administration system in place to ensure the smooth execution of the projects. Thirdly, adequate support needs to be provided for climate action projects. Finally, the impact of the climate action projects must be evaluated to assess their effectiveness. Thus, the study provides insights into how other destinations can also adopt



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sustainable practices to address climate change and shows how low-carbon tourism can be linked with initiatives to mitigate climate change.

Today's environmental issues in many nations make tourism a possibility for the preservation of natural resources. Agritourism is considered one of the main mechanisms for sustainable growth of rural areas, as it creates diverse cultural, social, and economic prospects for farmers. Due to its quick global development, it has emerged as one of the most significant supplemental income sources for farmers and can aid rural development by offering an alternative activity to boost farm earnings. In Uzbekistan, the primary means of subsistence for the rural population is agriculture, hence it is important to focus on developing potential ties with other economic sectors.

One of the most pressing issues confronting Uzbekistan today is the high percentage of rural unemployment, and many are undergoing structural changes as a result of low economic income. In the Samarkand region, heritage and pilgrimage tourism are the two primary types of tourism, with a minor number of tourists interested in nature-related tourism such as ecotourism, sports tourism, and agritourism. These three types of tourism are new and emerging activities in Uzbekistan's tourism industry. The paper of Togaymurodov, Roman &, and Prus [2] investigates factors influencing the participation of medium-sized farms (farmers) in agritourism in the Samarkand region of Uzbekistan. A questionnaire survey of 110 farmers in 14 districts of the Samarkand region was used to gather data. One-hundred farmers did not participate in agritourism and ten farmers did participate in the survey. The study's findings demonstrated that factors such as each farmer's income, education, employment, location, and proximity to Samarkand City have a major impact on their engagement in agritourism activities in the Samarkand region. The findings have the potential to significantly boost the local economy by offering insightful information that can boost the number of farmers and foster the expansion of agritourism. The research sheds light on the crucial role of a farmer's income, education, and location in determining the feasibility and success of agritourism ventures. By understanding these factors, farmers can make informed decisions to support their agritourism businesses.

Sustainable tourism development and entrepreneurship through sports events were investigated by Tsekouropoulos et al. [3]. Sporting events generate interest among athletes, residents, and tourists, making them a valuable catalyst for tourism development at a local level. By hosting sporting events, communities can attract visitors and create opportunities for individuals and businesses to benefit from increased economic activity. Sustainable development can be achieved through sporting events that prioritize the needs of the local community and the conservation of available resources. By taking a holistic approach that balances economic, environmental, and social considerations, sporting events can generate positive outcomes that go beyond the immediate economic benefits, such as social cohesion and civic pride, the enhancement of a destination's image, and the emphasis on the importance of environmental protection. A quantitative study was conducted on a sample of 448 residents of Pieria Prefecture, Greece to investigate their attitudes and behavior regarding sports events and sustainable tourism development. The study's conclusions suggest that a number of factors, including economic impact, locals' attitudes toward sporting events, and citizens' propensity for entrepreneurship, can predict whether sustainable tourist development through sports will be welcomed. Sports events have a broad range of effects on tourist destinations, and these effects are correlated with locals' propensity for starting businesses in the sports industry. Locals commonly link the growth of sustainable tourism to concrete advantages for their neighborhoods and the area as a whole.

Cycle tourism represents a tangible example of sustainable tourism, as it promotes low consumption of natural resources and fosters a connection with the landscape through vacation activities. It is a thriving industry and a type of tourism that attracts an increasing number of people each year. Ciascai, Dezsi, and Rus [4] examined the effects of cycle tourism on the social environment, taking into account the benefits and potential drawbacks for local communities as well as the health benefits for practitioners, in their review article.

This analysis included both direct and indirect effects on the economy. Additionally, they evaluated the degree of sensitivity to travel restriction-related economic problems. According to the literature, cycling tourism is becoming more and more popular as a way to support social and economic development at all levels of geography, from local to regional and national. The authors discovered that due to the increased difficulties presented by growing accessibility requirements and behavioral shifts brought on by travel restrictions imposed by the pandemic circumstances, researchers are paying particular attention to cycle tourism. Researchers are also becoming more interested in finding new ecologically friendly travel patterns as a result of the desire to reduce air pollution emissions from highly polluting modes of transportation. This paper provides valuable information that can be applied to promote cycling for recreational purposes and develop sustainable cycling/cycle-tourism infrastructure in small towns and rural areas with tourism potential.

Sustainable tourism has become a crucial element in strategic plans for tourism development, as it aims to achieve sociocultural development and environmental preservation. The paper written by Fragidis et al. [5] explores ways to promote sustainable tourism by encouraging tourists to consider sustainable options in their practices. The paper adopts a practice-based approach and views tourist behavior as a series of practices that are supported by tourism organizations and service providers to create valuable experiences. The authors suggest that sustainability should be integrated into these practices and designed to motivate and enable tourists to adopt sustainable tourism practices. To achieve this, they propose the ‘sustainable tourist journey,’ a holistic approach to designing sustainable practices. The sustainable tourist journey is based on the customer journey design approach. It is a holistic approach that goes beyond individual organizations that interact with and support tourists in their practices and describes how people/tourists pursue their life/travel goals. Tourists have the option to choose between sustainable and unsustainable practices, which can vary in the degree to which they prioritize sustainability. Sustainability is a quality that characterizes tourist practices and can be learned, developed, and inspired as a behavior that tourists adopt in their practices.

Another paper on the topic of marketing is the paper by Kilipiri et al. [6] which aims to contribute to the understanding of sustainable tourism destinations by examining the role of Instagram travel influencers and the importance of geo-location data in shaping users’ opinions and selection of such destinations. Specifically, the authors investigated (a) how Instagram travel influencers influence users’ perceptions of sustainable destinations and (b) the impact of geo-location data used by these influencers on users’ destination choices. To achieve the research objectives, the authors selected 30 sustainable tourism destinations that were posted on Instagram between 2017 and 2019. To assess the influence of Instagram travel macro-influencers, they analyzed their power, which was derived from the interactions of their followers with the posts, and selected 10 such Instagram influencers for the analysis. To evaluate the hypotheses, the study used a mixed-methods strategy that incorporated cross-sectional and quantitative data analysis. The data were analyzed using panel data and multiple hierarchical analysis with SPSS Statistics software. To determine the connection between geo-location information and the choice of sustainable tourism locations, a regression model was used. The results show that Instagram travel influencers have a big impact on how people perceive sustainable vacation destinations. In particular, a favorable link between the choice of sustainable tourism locations and the use of Instagram travel influencers as social media communicators were discovered. Macro-influencers have the power to persuade their followers to support environmentally friendly causes and travel to sustainable locations. Influencers can motivate their followers to develop more ecologically responsible travel practices by showcasing eco-friendly vacation destinations, emphasizing eco-friendly activities, and talking about the value of responsible tourism. They can also spread knowledge of the negative effects of unsuitable travel habits, such as trash and environmental destruction. However, contrary to the hypothesis, the use of geo-location data by Instagram travel influencers did not enhance travelers’ intention to choose a sustainable destination.

The successful development of smart destinations relies on an efficient management system that leverages digital technology to deliver value to visitors. While research on smart island destinations is limited, even less is known about those utilizing blockchain technology to enhance their smartness. To address this gap, the study of Pranita et al. [7] investigated the perceptions of stakeholders in the blue economy regarding the use of blockchain technology to create smart islands, particularly in disconnected islands such as the Seribu Islands in Jakarta, Indonesia. Using mixed methods, the authors collected qualitative data from scientific publications and conducted a VOS viewer analysis, and quantitative data from 150 blue economy industry players using a questionnaire survey. According to structural equation modeling analysis, smart islands and blockchain technologies are highly influenced by competent blue economy management and digital literacy. Active engagement in the advancement of digital literacy and the inclusion of each firm in the blue economy can promote the creation of significant added value, which will help the Seribu Islands make the best use of blockchain technology. The generation of attractiveness and originality, which might stimulate tourists' curiosity to enjoy it, depends on the creation of added value. The development of digital literacy and the blue economy has the potential to greatly contribute to the formation of smart islands, which are renowned for their individuality on a worldwide scale. The results also show how blockchain and smart technology may help islands with poor connections integrate resources from different stakeholders, increasing the efficiency and efficacy of the blue economy while fostering sustainability.

Nowadays, the importance of tourism in a country's economic and financial development is stronger than ever. Thus, public and private investments should be focused on regions where tourist development is a top priority in order to promote sustainable economic and financial growth and well-planned development. In Albania and Kosovo, where comparable research has not previously been carried out, Tase and Lulaj's study [8] explores the effects of tourism perceptions on the impacts and opportunities of economic and financial development. Data for the study were submitted by respondents from several cities in both countries. A total of 1002 questionnaires were analyzed using factor analysis, data reliability analysis, and multiple regression analysis. The study revealed several key factors that require special attention to promote tourism in Albania and Kosovo. Firstly, there is a need to improve tourists' awareness of the facilities available in the destinations they wish to visit. Secondly, residents of both countries should have a better understanding of foreign languages to facilitate communication with tourists during transactions or other requests. Thirdly, it is essential to draw in new investors and establish a safe environment for both investors and tourists. Fourthly, it may be advantageous to encourage the marketing and sale of regional goods to tourists. Fifthly, infrastructure support from government bodies is necessary to enhance economic and financial well-being through tourism. Sixthly, both countries must implement sustainable development strategies to enhance tourism, and finally, focus on regional competitiveness and follow development trends in the region. The findings of the paper have broad implications beyond just the states of Kosovo and Albania. They shed light on the impact of tourists' perceptions on economic development and can inform tourism policies in countries worldwide. As tourism plays a vital role in the economic development of many countries, the insights gained from the study can be beneficial for investors, policymakers, and other stakeholders interested in promoting tourism as a means of driving sustainable economic growth.

3. Conclusions

The Special Issue generated new insights, perspectives, and ideas that advance sustainable tourism practices and contribute to its long-term viability. The latest research findings on recent advances and challenges will be disseminated. The Special Issue is an essential tool for academics, decision-makers, and industry professionals who want to better understand sustainable tourism and how it may advance social, economic, and environmental sustainability. Through this collective effort, we hope to encourage sustainable tourism practices that create a positive impact on the global community while preserving

the world's natural beauty for generations to come. It is crucial to be aware of the potential drawbacks of tourism and take action to lessen them. This entails putting into practice sustainable tourism principles, encouraging tourists to behave responsibly, and assisting local people to reap the benefits of tourism while reducing its negative effects. By doing this, we can make sure that tourism keeps improving communities' social and economic well-being while simultaneously preserving the environment and fostering sustainable development.

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