



The Need for Sustainable Tourism

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Abstract: Sustainable tourism has gained significant attention in recent years due to environmental pressures. Climate change and environmental degradation have made people more aware of the environmental and social impacts of their travel and tourism activities. The tourism industry has the potential to contribute to the three pillars of sustainable development by preserving the environment, promoting social inclusivity, and fostering local economic development. Balancing tourism development with environmental conservation and socio-economic sustainability is crucial for the long-term viability of this industry. Albania has great potential to become one of the Balkans region countries suitable for implementing and developing sustainable tourism practices due to its natural beauty, cultural heritage, landscapes, etc.

As tourism affects the overall dimensions of our lives, implementing sustainable tourism practices requires undertaking some strategies such as policy and regulations, community engagements, and awareness. People must choose greener transport forms, eat local foods, and seek authentic and small-group tourism experiences. The private sector needs to invest in sustainable practices to minimize the negative impacts of their activities on the environment. Through prioritizing responsible development, community engagement and awareness, and environmental conservation, Albania can turn tourism into a significant contributor to the economy and people's well-being.

Through a descriptive overview of some global and Albanian sustainable tourism practices and their impact on the economy, environment, and society, this paper aims to analyse the importance of implementing more sustainable tourism practices in our country's accommodation and services sectors.

1. INTRODUCTION

The tourism sector is a major global industry with significant effects on economies, cultures, and environments worldwide. It has the potential to drive sustainable economic growth, benefiting both people and places (UNWTO, 2020). However, despite its economic contributions, tourism poses serious environmental challenges. Its unsustainable features, such as waste generation, greenhouse gas emissions, and natural resource depletion, cause severe threats to the environment. According to Pang et al. (2023), tourism contributes significantly to environmental degradation and greenhouse gas emissions. A 2018 study revealed that global tourism accounted for 8% of global greenhouse gas emissions from 2009 to 2013, a figure four times higher than earlier estimates (Lenzen et al., 2018).

Climate change and environmental degradation have made people more aware of the environmental and social impacts of their travel and tourism activities. Sustainable tourism has gained significant attention in recent years due to environmental pressures. Increased awareness of climate change and environmental degradation has heightened concern about the impacts of travel and tourism (Gössling, 2021).

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Even though, its negative impacts on the environment, the tourism industry has the potential to contribute to the three pillars of sustainable development by preserving the environment, promoting social inclusivity, and fostering local economic development (Sachs, 2015). Balancing tourism development with environmental conservation and socio-economic sustainability is crucial for the long-term viability of this industry (Hall, 2020). Tourism is one of the most important global economic sectors, contributing widely to economic growth and sustainable development (Garau-Vadell et al., 2018).

As tourism affects the overall dimensions of our lives, implementing sustainable tourism practices requires undertaking some strategies such as policy and regulations, community engagements, and awareness (Buckley, 2020). People must choose greener transport forms, eat local foods, and seek authentic and small-group tourism experiences (Weaver, 2020). The private sector also plays a crucial role by investing in practices that mitigate environmental harm (UNWTO, 2022).

Albania, with its natural beauty, cultural heritage, and diverse landscapes, has significant potential to implement and develop sustainable tourism practices (Tourism Review, 2023). By focusing on responsible development, community involvement, and environmental conservation, Albania can transform tourism into a major contributor to its economy and overall well-being (Gori & Cici, 2022).

Through a descriptive overview of some global and Albanian sustainable tourism practices and their impact on the economy, environment, and society, this paper aims to analyze the importance of implementing more sustainable tourism practices in our country's accommodation and services sectors.

2. WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE TOURISM?

According to Britannica, tourism is the act of spending time away from home pursuing recreation, relaxation, and pleasure, while making use of the commercial provision of services. Tourism is considered a social, cultural and economic phenomenon, which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes. Despite the direct activities, tourism practices include also indirect activities, such as the transport company, which delivers the food to the restaurant, or the laundry company that has a contract with the hotel for cleaning bed sheets.

Tourism is the sector that can significantly contribute to a region's GDP, create jobs, and foster business opportunities. It can drive demand for local goods and services, increasing revenues for small and medium-sized enterprises, which are particularly crucial in rural and less-developed regions.

In 2022, the Travel & Tourism sector contributed 7.6% to the global GDP, while in 2023, this sector contributed 9.1% to the global GDP; an increase of 23.2% from 2022 and only 4.1% below the 2019 level. In 2022, this sector contributed 9 % of global employment, while in 2023 there were 27 million new jobs, representing a 9.1% increase compared to 2022, and only 1.4% below the 2019 level. The forecasted figures for 2033, are shown in the figure below, where we can conclude that it is a significant increase in the percentage of the contribution of the travel and tourism sector to global GDP and employment.

Tourism also promotes cultural exchange and helps preserve local heritage and traditions. Cultural tourism, for instance, draws attention to historical sites, crafts, music, and festivals.

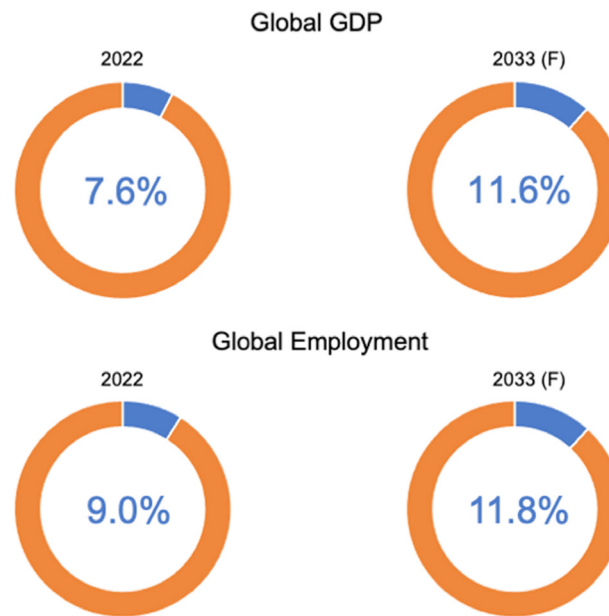


Figure 1. Travel and Tourism sector's total economic contribution

Source: World Travel & Tourism Council (2023)

Tourism has been included as a targets in Sustainable Development Goals:

8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth: *“Improve progressively, through 2030, global resource efficiency in consumption and production and endeavor to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation.”*

12 – Responsible consumption and production: *“As the targets rely on recirculating what was previously seen as waste back into the economic space, via closed-loop processes which reduce negative externalities”.*

While tourism provides substantial economic and social benefits, it has a significant environmental footprint. According to Pang et al. (2023), tourism contributes significantly to environmental degradation and greenhouse gas emissions, because the tourism sector overuses natural resources for its purpose without minding the negative impact to the environment. The tourism industry can be a heavy consumer of natural resources. Hotels, resorts, and recreational facilities often overuse water and energy, which can strain local resources. Infrastructure development such as airports, roads, and resorts can lead to deforestation, loss of biodiversity, and pollution. Transportation, particularly air travel and cruise tourism, is a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions.

To address these issues, sustainable tourism aims to ensure that tourism benefits local economies and cultures without degrading the environment. The concept of sustainability has its origin in the environmentalism that evolved in the 1960s and was formally defined in the 1987 Brundtland Report. This report defined it as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable tourism is generally defined as tourism that *“fulfills the needs of tourists, host communities, tourism enterprises, and local and central decision-makers”* by managing tourism resources in a way that preserves continuous economic, social, cultural, and environmental values. This ensures that these resources remain as attractive as before and continue to create opportunities for future tourism development. Sustainable tourism operates on three primary principles.

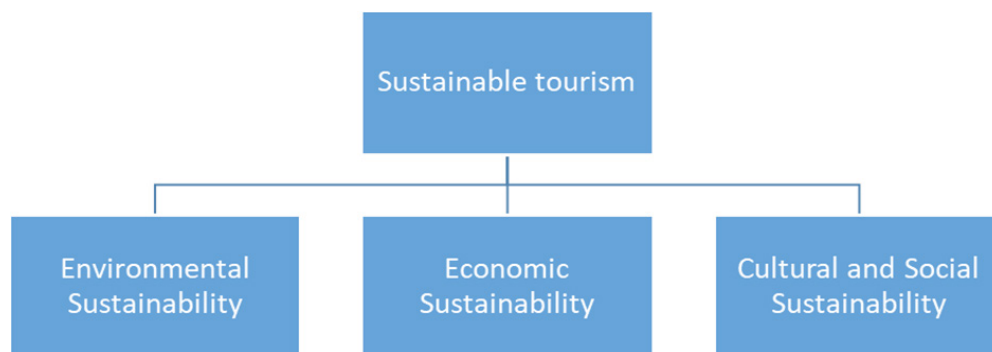


Figure 2. Three primary principles of sustainable tourism

Source: Authors own illustration

Environmental Sustainability: Minimizing energy and water use, reducing waste, and protecting biodiversity, to reduce the ecological footprint of tourism activities. Sustainable tourism encourages public transportation, cycling, and walking, considered low-carbon travel options. It also encourages travelers to reduce their environmental impact through responsible behaviours, such as reducing energy use and supporting eco-friendly accommodations. Sustainable tourism businesses tend to adopt green practices like waste reduction and renewable energy to minimize their carbon emissions.

Economic Sustainability: Ensuring that tourism generates income and jobs for local communities without undermining their long-term prosperity. Sustainable tourism and economic development are closely linked, with sustainable tourism practices aiming to balance the economic benefits of tourism with environmental preservation and social equity. Sustainable tourism can create employment opportunities and generate income for local communities.

For instance, studies by [Ashley \(2000\)](#) highlight how eco-tourism in Namibia has provided jobs and income for residents while promoting wildlife conservation. [Mitchell and Ashley \(2009\)](#) found that tourism in developing countries often leads to significant economic linkages with local businesses, enhancing their sustainability and growth. The development of sustainable tourism often leads to improvements in infrastructure, such as roads, airports, and sanitation facilities, which benefit both tourists and residents.

Sustainable tourism encourages tourists to spend money on local goods and services, benefiting small and medium-sized enterprises. [Blanco \(2011\)](#) found that eco-tourism initiatives contributed significantly to the national GDP and created thousands of jobs, particularly in rural areas in Costa Rica.

[UNWTO \(2019\)](#) reported that sustainable tourism contributes significantly to GDP in many developing countries, fostering economic growth and poverty alleviation.

Cultural and Social Sustainability: Sustainable tourism also plays a vital role in preserving cultural heritage and fostering cultural exchange. By encouraging tourists to engage with and respect local traditions, sustainable tourism helps protect cultural assets that might otherwise be at risk of erosion due to globalization.

For instance, sustainable tourism initiatives often involve the promotion of traditional arts, crafts, and cultural practices, providing local artisans and performers with economic opportunities while

also educating tourists about the rich cultural heritage of the destination. This exchange creates a deeper understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity, enhancing the overall travel experience and contributing to the preservation of cultural identity.

3. SOME SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PRACTICES

Sustainable tourism practices aim to minimize the negative impacts of tourism on the environment, culture, and local communities while maximizing the benefits for all stakeholders. Some of the recently used practices are:

Community-based tourism consists of the involvement of residents in profiting from tourism activities, ensuring that a significant percentage of tourism revenue remains in the community. In this way, it empowers local people economically and socially. The local community is involved in touristic services such as accommodation, guiding services, handicraft sales, and local food preparation. Indirectly, this practice reduces the migration phenomenon. This practice also encourages and promotes the preservation of traditional customs, practices, arts, and crafts, helping communities to take pride in their cultural heritage and identity, reinforcing social cohesion and cultural pride.

Statistics from the International Labour Organization indicate that community-based tourism can increase local incomes by up to 30% in some regions (ILO, 2018). Examples of successful community-based tourism can be found in regions like Thailand and Costa Rica, where indigenous communities offer cultural tours, eco-lodging, and wildlife experiences that highlight local traditions and biodiversity conservation. The Sustainable Tourism Development Project implemented in Thailand generated a 20% increase in local incomes from tourism-related activities (UNWTO, 2020). According to the Costa Rican Tourism Board (2019), indigenous tourism ventures have seen a 25% rise in community revenue and a 15% boost in local employment due to cultural and eco-tourism initiatives.

Carbon offsetting practices consist of encouraging carbon offsetting or providing low-impact transportation options. Traveling via low-carbon methods, such as public transportation, biking, or walking, tends to be cheaper than driving private vehicles or flying, leading to cost savings for travelers. Moreover, the use of bicycles, electric vehicles, and public transportation reduces the environmental impact of traveling to popular destinations. Studies by the European Cyclists' Federation show that using bicycles can reduce carbon emissions by up to 50% compared to cars (European Cyclists' Federation, 2021). Electric vehicles, on average, cut emissions by 30% compared to conventional vehicles (International Energy Agency, 2022). Amsterdam is a global leader in low-impact transportation with its comprehensive cycling infrastructure. The city continues to invest in making cycling safer and more accessible. Additionally, Amsterdam encourages residents and tourists to offset their travel-related carbon emissions through local reforestation projects.

Promoting sustainable travel methods can have many benefits. It leads to job creation in industries such as eco-tourism, renewable energy, and green transportation technologies; improves physical health by encouraging active lifestyles; provides more affordable and accessible alternatives to private vehicles or air travel, promoting social equity; a longer stay in a destination; reduces the environmental degradation caused by mass tourism, ensuring that they remain attractive to future generations of travelers, ensuring long-term economic stability and environmental health.

Eco-friendly practices aim to minimize air, water, and soil pollution by reducing waste, limiting the use of harmful chemicals, and promoting cleaner technologies. These practices promote the responsible use of resources such as water, energy, and raw materials lowering the amount of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere. Many eco-friendly practices, such as energy efficiency, water conservation, and waste reduction, lead to significant cost savings for businesses and households over time. Eco-friendly practices promote long-term economic stability by reducing dependence on finite resources like fossil fuels, encouraging investment in sustainable technologies, and ensuring resources remain available for future generations. The zero-waste movement in tourism encourages both travelers and operators to minimize waste by avoiding single-use plastics, encouraging recycling, and promoting the use of biodegradable materials. Some eco-lodges, like those in the Maldives, have adopted a zero-waste philosophy by managing their waste streams, composting, and reducing reliance on disposable goods. Eco-lodges have implemented zero-waste practices, reducing waste generation by up to 60%. Many have achieved a 100% recycling rate and significantly reduced reliance on single-use plastics (Maldives Ministry of Environment, 2022). Many Marriott properties have implemented comprehensive energy management systems, utilizing LED lighting, energy-efficient appliances, and smart thermostats to reduce energy consumption. Mrizi i Zanave Agroturizëm in Albania uses solar panels to generate electricity and heat water, emphasizing the use of locally sourced and organic ingredients in their restaurant, supporting local farmers and reducing the carbon footprint associated with food transportation. They also implement waste segregation, composting organic waste, and use biodegradable products to minimize environmental impact. Llogora Tourist Village, located in Llogara National Park in Albania, utilizes solar panels for energy needs, reducing reliance on non-renewable energy sources. The construction of the village incorporates eco-friendly materials and methods, ensuring minimal disruption to the surrounding natural environment. The resort supports local conservation efforts and educates guests about the importance of protecting the natural environment. Green Cabs, New Zealand is a taxi service that uses hybrid and electric vehicles to reduce carbon emissions.

Promotion of local and organic production. Many eco-friendly hotels and restaurants prioritize sourcing ingredients from local farmers, supporting the local economy while reducing the carbon footprint associated with food transportation. Some destinations, like New Zealand, are promoting “farm-to-table” experiences, where tourists can dine on locally grown, seasonal produce. The Farm-to-Table initiative has increased the consumption of local produce by 25% among tourists, and 80% of eco-friendly hotels source their ingredients locally (New Zealand Tourism Board, 2023). Noma, Copenhagen, Denmark is known for its commitment to sustainability, using locally sourced, organic ingredients, and reducing food waste through creative menu planning and composting.

Cultural/societal sustainability practices. In many parts of the world, tourism is helping to preserve local cultures and traditions by promoting cultural tourism. This type of tourism encourages visitors to engage with and appreciate local heritage through events such as traditional music performances, craft workshops, and cultural festivals. In Bhutan, for example, cultural preservation is central to their tourism policy, with restrictions in place to prevent cultural dilution. Their tourism policy includes a high-value, low-impact approach, which restricts visitor numbers to preserve cultural integrity. This has led to a 10% increase in cultural preservation funding and a 20% increase in local cultural tourism jobs (Bhutan Tourism Council, 2022). Inkaterra Hotel in Peru engages with local communities by employing local staff, sourcing food

and products locally, and supporting community development projects such as education and healthcare initiatives. In tourist areas like Gjirokaštër and Krujë in Albania, shops selling souvenirs made from recycled materials have become popular. These shops focus on sustainability by using waste materials to create unique, eco-friendly products. By promoting recycled crafts, these shops support local artisans and contribute to the local economy. Outdoor Albania offers eco-friendly tours and adventure travel experiences that emphasize minimal environmental impact and cultural sensitivity. Activities include hiking, cycling, and rafting, with a focus on conserving natural landscapes and wildlife.

Some tourist practices such as responsible travel, education and awareness, voluntourism and respectful behaviour can encourage tourists to minimize their environmental impacts, such as reducing waste, conserving water, and using eco-friendly products and respecting local customs, traditions, and regulations.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMANDATIONS

Tourism plays a vital role in economic development and cultural exchange, but its environmental footprint cannot be ignored. The tourism industry consumes vast amounts of natural resources and contributes to pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, particularly through transportation and infrastructure development. However, the rise of sustainable tourism offers a way to balance the economic, social, and environmental impacts of tourism.

The linkage between sustainable tourism and economic development is complex and multifaceted, with significant potential benefits and challenges. Sustainable tourism can drive economic growth, create jobs, and support local businesses while promoting environmental conservation and cultural preservation. However, achieving sustainable tourism requires careful planning, robust regulatory frameworks, and active community involvement to balance economic, environmental, and social objectives. Future research should continue to explore innovative models and practices that enhance the sustainability and economic benefits of tourism.

By promoting eco-friendly practices, supporting local businesses, and preserving cultural heritage, sustainable tourism ensures that tourism can continue to provide benefits to local communities while minimizing its negative impact on the environment. Sustainable tourism is essential for the long-term viability of the tourism industry and the protection of natural and cultural resources for future generations.

The principles of sustainable tourism emphasize the importance of stakeholder collaboration and partnerships. Effective sustainable tourism development requires the involvement of various stakeholders, including government agencies, local communities, private sector businesses, and non-governmental organizations. By working together, these stakeholders can develop and implement strategies that address environmental, social, and economic concerns holistically. Collaborative efforts help to align tourism activities with local development goals, create synergies between different sectors, and leverage resources and expertise from multiple sources. This collective approach not only enhances the effectiveness of sustainable tourism initiatives but also ensures that the benefits are distributed equitably among all stakeholders. In Albania, there is a great need for an awareness increase for all stakeholders, regarding the environmental degradation caused by the tourism sector and the importance of implementing and investing more in sustainable tourism practices in both accommodation and service sectors.

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