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THE ROLE OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE REGIONAL ECONOMY

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ABSTRACT

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KEYWORDS Sustainable Tourism, Regional Economic, Environment, Regional Development. The subject of sustainable tourism is being increasingly discussed in recent years because there is a growing recognition of the intricate connection between the environment and the economy. It is crucial to integrate these two components in order to establish a foundation for long-term development that has a positive impact on society as a whole. The tourism industry is experiencing a paradigm shift and this presents challenges that need to be addressed by the relevant authorities and economic stakeholders. It is imperative to guide the industry towards sustainable development in order to tackle these challenges. Based on these findings, our research aims to emphasize the role of tourism in regional development, as well as to measure the impact of intensive and extensive tourism on environmental factors. This will be done through the use of qualitative and quantitative indicators, highlighting the fact that environmental damage ultimately hampers economic growth. The results of our research will enable us to propose several actions that should be taken by both developed and less developed regions to enhance tourism activity while respecting the environment. In conclusion, sustainable tourism is an important topic that requires attention due to the intertwined relationship between the environment and the economy. The tourism industry is undergoing changes that necessitate the implementation of sustainable practices. Our research will analyze the role of tourism in regional development and assess its impact on the environment. These findings will then be used to formulate actionable steps to promote tourism while protecting the environment.

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Introduction.

The quality of the environment is influenced by two main sets of factors: objective factors stemming from adverse natural occurrences and subjective factors resulting from human activities. This paper conducts an extensive systematic literature review to examine these factors and offers a critical perspective on the interface between tourism, sustainable development, and sustainable tourism. The analysis yields valuable findings presented in the conclusions.

The choice of this topic is motivated by a strong desire for comprehensive documentation due to its immense significance. The examination of the relationship between tourism and sustainable development has gained prominence among both tourism practitioners and researchers since the publication of the Bruntland Report in 1987. The principles highlighted in this report, especially the central concept of "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future

generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987), has provided the overarching framework for the evolution of tourism over the past few decades.

Among the various human activities that can contribute to environmental destruction, poorly managed and uncontrolled tourism activities within a region are included. On the flip side, tourism encompasses a wide array of economic activities and is often regarded as the world's largest industry.

Supporters of the idea that tourism is primarily a positive force in society present numerous arguments. The evolution of tourism in recent years has transformed this sector into a potent global economic force. Unlike some other industries that generate harmful environmental effects, which can at best be mitigated, tourism has the potential to not only mitigate its negative environmental impacts but also actively contribute to the protection and preservation of the environment through effective regulations.

This underscores the profound significance of the relationship between tourism and the environment, as safeguarding and conserving the environment are prerequisites for the continued operation and growth of tourism, and consequently, for regional economies. As the Swiss professor J. Krippendorf (Krippendorf, 1982) pointed out, "If we can lose and then rebuild our capital in other areas of the economy, the same thing does not apply in tourism, where the basic substance - the landscape and the land - once lost, is irretrievably lost." It is increasingly evident that the perpetuation of tourism practices that disregard the environment is unsustainable in the long run.

Overview of sustainable tourism development.

It's true that many countries with well-established tourism traditions prioritize national-level tourism planning to protect and sustainably develop their tourism resources. These countries often consider three main objectives when planning for sustainable tourism:

- **Economic Objective:** This objective focuses on identifying, enhancing, and effectively utilizing their tourist resources to generate economic benefits for the country. This can involve strategies like diversifying tourism offerings, investing in infrastructure, and marketing to attract tourists. The goal is to maximize the economic gains from tourism while minimizing negative economic impacts.
- **Social Objective:** The social objective of tourism planning involves improving the well-being of the local population. This can include measures to create permanent jobs, increase employment rates, and support traditional cultural practices such as cuisine. Sustainable tourism planning aims to ensure that local communities benefit from tourism and are not adversely affected by it. It often includes initiatives to involve local communities in the tourism industry and empower them economically and socially.
- **Ecological Objective:** The ecological objective is crucial for protecting the environment and ensuring that tourism development is sustainable in the long term. This involves implementing measures to prevent environmental degradation, minimize pollution, and promote responsible tourism practices. Sustainable tourism planning may include regulations to limit the number of tourists in ecologically sensitive areas, promote eco-friendly transportation options, and encourage the preservation of natural and cultural heritage.

In response to these requirements, there arose a necessity to formulate and adopt national tourism development plans. These plans were designed to facilitate the integration of insights and perspectives from key economic stakeholders, including public administration, employers' organizations, professionals, social associations, trade unions, and specialists engaged in specialized research.

At the Global Conference for Business and the Environment, known as GLOBE'92, held in Vancouver, Canada, in 1992, specialists from more than 60 countries presented the significant transformations that had occurred in the tourism industry sector over the past decade (Wight, 1992).

Subsequently, there were global shifts in policies, legislation, and regulations within the field (EU, 2021). These international regulations predominantly revolved around the following aspects:

- Establishment of institutions and frameworks necessary for the implementation of sustainable tourism.
- > Ensuring the preservation and protection of fundamental tourist resources.
- Mobilization of various tourism industry sectors to practice sustainable tourism in accordance with environmental requirements.

- In the economic and financial domain, the inclusion of environmental costs in the revenues collected from tourist activities. This involved the idea that polluters should bear specific taxes related to pollution, thereby indirectly contributing to environmental preservation.
- Preparation of reports assessing the degree of implementation of proposed projects at international, national, and regional levels, along with documenting actions taken and changes made to adapt to the environmental requirements of the tourism industry.
- Leveraging domestic and international markets to identify new tourist markets while adhering to environmental requirements and creating collaborative partnerships to promote the new concept of ecotourism, which supports sustainable tourism.
- Gaining advantages through environmental marketing by developing and selling tourist products that align with their inherent value.

In the social sphere, these regulations encompassed promoting active environmental education in sectors benefiting from natural and cultural resources within the tourism industry. This education emphasized an understanding of environmental issues.

Additionally, there were efforts to establish collaborative relationships with other sectors involved in environmental protection, such as forestry, agriculture, and regional planning.

Furthermore, initiatives were undertaken to create models and projects supporting the sustainable development of tourism. These efforts included presenting models and suggesting practical applications.

Lastly, positive outcomes from past experiences were evaluated to develop new proposals for sustainable development. Positive projects and experiences were shared and disseminated through national and international bodies.

Models of sustainability in tourism.

Building on the points discussed earlier, we now aim to explore the connection between tourism and sustainable regional development. Our analysis will be guided by the following considerations:

- 1. Tourism plays a significant role in the economy, with both positive and negative impacts. On the positive side, it contributes to environmental well-being and the community by creating more jobs, boosting GDP, enhancing service quality, increasing wages, spurring production, generating capital, bolstering local budgets through tax revenues, and attracting investors to the area. Conversely, tourism can also have negative consequences, such as heightened pollution levels and increased socioeconomic disparities (Saarinen, 2006; Cernat & Gourdon, 2012).
- 2. Many studies that assess the economic impact of tourism typically consider factors such as the number of tourists, income per visitor, average length of stay, and various other economic metrics. In contrast, (Miller, 2010) introduces a comprehensive set of indicators that encompass a wide range of sustainability-related aspects. These indicators cover environmental concerns, employment figures, financial leakages from the tourism system, and aspects related to tourists themselves, including their satisfaction levels, consumption patterns, and the degree of social responsibility exhibited by tourism companies.

According to (Ko, 2003) and (Choi & Sirakaya, 2006), a majority of research on sustainable tourism development is characterized by a descriptive approach that relies on qualitative data and tends to draw subjective conclusions. This suggests a lack of robust and rigorous methodologies in these studies.Simultaneously, the degree of advancement of a region, determined by its economic, social, and cultural attributes, as well as its natural resource abundance, is a factor that impacts the inclination of its residents to embark on journeys. This inclination, in turn, influences their conduct when they reach their destinations, subsequently affecting the overall impact on those destinations.

To promote sustainable regional development through tourism, it's essential to strike a balance between maximizing economic benefits and minimizing negative environmental and social impacts. This requires careful planning, effective policies, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation of tourism activities. Additionally, involving local communities, respecting their culture and traditions, and addressing the specific needs and challenges of each region are key factors in achieving sustainable tourism development.

The economic and environmental impacts of tourism are indeed subjects of significant interest and research within the academic and policy-making communities.

the economic and environmental impacts of tourism are multifaceted and complex. Research in this area spans various methods and approaches, from qualitative perception surveys to quantitative analyses. The goal is to strike a balance between the economic benefits of tourism and the need to protect and preserve the environment, ensuring that tourism can be sustained for the long term without causing significant harm to the places and communities it touches.

Indicators within the Environmental Sustainability pillar		
1.	The strictness of environmental regulations	
2.	Application of environmental protection regulations	
3.	Sustainability of the development of the tourism sector	
4.	Carbon dioxide emissions	
5.	Concentration of harmful particles	
6.	Endangered species	
7.	Ratification of environmental protection treatie	

Table 2. Indicators taken into account regarding the Regional sustainability of tourism.

Tourism serves as a way to broaden a nation's economic base. The tourism sector encompasses both positive aspects that contribute to a region's economic well-being and the necessity to prioritize environmental sustainability and social responsibility.

Hence, the evolving demands of tourists have led to the emergence of specialized activities within the tourism sector. To assess a country's overall competitiveness in travel and tourism, the World Economic Forum annually calculates an index based on various factors, including tourism policies, business aspects, environmental considerations, infrastructure, natural and cultural resources, and the general appeal for travel and tourism. Consequently, the environmental impact of tourism can be indirectly gauged through these indicators, regardless of their direct connection to tourism activities. This aspect is crucial in evaluating the alignment of development efforts with sustainability principles.

As a result, regions can be categorized as either efficient or less efficient in terms of tourism competitiveness. There is a discernible trend toward concentrating tourist activities in more developed regions, which can potentially endanger the environment. In the case of convergence regions, it is imperative to rethink tourism strategies, with a specific focus on harnessing natural assets, efficient resource management, and the implementation of principles related to social responsibility and sustainable development.

When we consider economic growth in the context of macroeconomic indicators and emphasize the effective utilization of environmental resources (emphasizing the qualitative aspect), we can categorize economic growth into five types based on its quality:

- ✓ *Negative Economic Growth:* This refers to a decline over time in the measurement indicator, indicating an economic recession.
- ✓ <u>Stationary Economic Growth:</u> In this scenario, the measurement indicator remains at a constant level, effectively reflecting zero growth. It is also known as replacement economic growth.
- ✓ <u>Balanced Economic Growth:</u> This type of growth involves a positive rate of the measurement indicator, and it additionally maintains constant ratios between growth rates in different sectors or branches of the economy.
- ✓ <u>Efficient Economic Growth:</u> Here, economic growth is positive, and the utilization of a specific factor of production is considered satisfactory.
- ✓ <u>Optimal Economic Growth:</u> In this case, economic growth is positive, and it satisfies an optimization criterion, such as maximization or minimization, under specific predefined conditions.

These distinctions help provide a nuanced understanding of economic growth and its relationship with the environment, considering both quantitative and qualitative aspects.

Over time, various models have been created to pursue balanced economic growth, resulting in several types of models.

In the last twenty years, the majority of tourism development strategies have, in some form, embraced the idea of sustainable development. One of the core principles of sustainability is the seamless integration of environmental, socio-cultural, and economic components. (Kişi, 2019) This approach not only holds the potential for benefits across different levels but also advocates for a comprehensive perspective on the phenomenon of tourism at a theoretical level. (Dezvoltare, 2022)

Tourism support opportunities.

The growth of environmental science, the expanding body of knowledge in economic and social sciences, and the deeper research conducted in these areas have culminated in the identification of the following categories of support capacity for the tourism sector. (Rodríguez, 2021), (WTTC, 2020).

Ecological capacity pertains to defining a level of development for tourism-related facilities and activities that doesn't significantly harm the environment or lead to the deterioration of its elements. This concept encompasses natural elements like air, water, soil, and vegetation, as well as production and economic recovery processes that don't require significant additional investments due to the degradation of specific tourist destinations.

Physical capacity plays a crucial role in determining the point at which tourist activities can reach a saturation level beyond which environmental issues start to emerge. The continuous growth of tourism in recent decades has raised concerns about various forms of pollution in areas like coastal and mountain regions. Safeguarding the physical aspects of a region can be achieved by investing in advanced technology and delivering top-notch tourist services.

The concept of social-receptive capacity underscores the significance of fostering positive relationships between hosts (the local population) and visitors (tourists). When local residents perceive that tourism activities are contributing to the degradation of their natural and cultural surroundings, it can lead to negative reactions and a reduced level of tolerance. To prevent such situations, the development of a tourist area or locality must consider the traditional lifestyles, habits, and customs of the local inhabitants.

The economic capacity underscores the efficient utilization of all available resources through tourism activities, ensuring the sustainable tourism function of a particular region. The effectiveness of resource utilization is gauged by the balance between costs and benefits, and leveraging high-performance technologies can enhance the weight of benefits. The cost level is also influenced by the qualitative and quantitative value of resources, including natural assets, cultural elements, labor force, and general infrastructure, among others.

Psychological capacity pertains to the perception of tourists toward a tourist destination, which can turn negative due to environmental degradation or unfavorable interactions with the local population. This concept is closely tied to encouraging tourists to choose a specific destination and ensuring their personal satisfaction. Its implementation is contingent on the quality of management activities, which can ultimately influence customer loyalty.

All these various support capacities, closely linked to tourism, establish tangible or intangible, measurable or immeasurable boundaries for a space that either has a tourist function or can be assigned one. Although there isn't a one-size-fits-all formula for these capacity indicators, given the challenges in quantifying certain aspects of the natural or cultural context using statistical or mathematical data, these support concepts offer a gauge of sustainable tourism development. Additionally, they help us understand the potential extent of tourism's impact on the environment, enabling the identification of ways to mitigate the environmental degradation caused by tourist activities and traffic.

Furthermore, it's important to recognize the significant role of tourism in fostering and diversifying international connections among nations, both in socio-economic and political terms. In fact, alongside international trade, international tourism is evolving into one of the primary means of connecting people across different continents.

Conclusiovn.

Many developed and developing countries have recognized the potential and opportunities in tourism, realizing that it can serve as an additional source of income, help balance foreign exchange, and enhance their global image.

In simple terms, sustainable tourism should strive to achieve a synergy between tourism objectives and the preservation of nature, landscapes, and cultural heritage. This involves promoting environmentally-friendly transportation for leisure activities. To achieve this, a coordinated governmental approach is crucial, one that encourages and supports increased competitiveness and sustainable tourism development.

Essentially, this effort involves researching and adopting the best practices of social responsibility for sustainable development. It also entails implementing ambitious policies that aim to accredit and strategically position a tourist destination while recognizing the positive impact of tourism on economic growth, including income generation, job creation, a skilled workforce, and economies of scale.

To promote more sustainable forms of tourism, it's essential to focus on economically disadvantaged regions that have environmental potential. This can be achieved by increasing the engagement of relevant authorities, diverse professional groups, and the local population in these tourist destinations. The goal is to identify weaknesses and convert them into potential advantages that can attract tourists.

For the practice of eco-friendly tourism, several decision-making entities, with the state at the forefront, must be actively involved. This involvement can take the form of economic development policies and the creation of sustainable development plans. These plans should prioritize the delivery of high-quality services while simultaneously reducing the excessive and inappropriate utilization of natural and cultural heritage.

Furthermore, there should be a continuous emphasis on ecological education for nature preservation and tourism potential. This educational effort should commence in childhood and become a fundamental part of the curriculum in educational institutions of all types and levels. This approach ensures a lasting commitment to environmental protection and sustainable tourism practices from an early age.

Competitiveness and the environmental and social aspects of sustainable tourism development can be effectively addressed in unison by implementing innovative practices and promoting sustainable consumption principles. This entails offering new tourism services that not only benefit tourists but also contribute to the welfare and needs of local communities. By aligning with the sustainable development priorities of tourism destinations, these efforts can provide a competitive advantage.

The tourism industry remains a distinct sector, with its growth contingent on the performance and development rates of other sectors within the national economy. Consequently, the degree of tourism's contribution to socio-economic progress can vary significantly from one country to another, depending on their level of development and the policies in place to support it.

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