



Sustainable tourism policies: From crisis-related awareness to agendas towards measures

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ABSTRACT

The relevance of sustainable tourism policies that aim to balance the positive and negative impacts of tourism has become particularly evident during the COVID-19 crisis, which has shown the need for more research on the impact of crises on tourism policy. The findings of this study are based on twenty-four in-depth interviews with tourism organisations responsible for tourism policy development across the globe, showing that policymakers are (1) aware of the relevance of the development of sustainable tourism during the crisis, (2) agendas such as strategies for sustainable tourism are being developed and policies do translate into (3) measures related to environmental, economic, socio-cultural and community instruments. This study carries value for the development of sustainable tourism research following the theory on the penetration of environmental awareness and also informs about the variation in sustainable tourism policies in different countries and across continents.

1. Introduction

The balance between economic growth and sustainability contributes to the fact that sustainability and competitiveness represent the two major concepts in tourism policy from a modern perspective (Vanhove, 2002). The importance of sustainable tourism policies became obvious during the prolonged COVID-19 crisis. Kuščer et al. (2022) showed that active tourism policies are required for crisis recovery and Sigala (2020) indicated that even though 'economic growth' determined policies in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, sustainable tourism policies are necessary for the post-crisis period. Thus, tourism needs to transform to be more sustainable (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2021), which requires tourism organisations to address these challenges. Transformation demands sustainable policies to be adopted in response to the crisis (Gössling et al., 2021; Hall et al., 2020).

According to Øian et al. (2018), sustainability represents a major policy framework tool, with sustainable tourism being recognised in tourism policies (Guo et al., 2019). However, Xu and Sofield (2016) argue that while sustainability is represented in tourism development strategies, policies offer little guidance on how to adhere to sustainability principles. Although, the political environment is regarded as an sustainable tourism enabler (Mihalic, 2020). Ruhanen (2008) criticises tourism policies for tending to misinterpret sustainable tourism.

Although they incorporate sustainability as a guiding principle within tourism plans, they prioritise short-term objectives (i.e. increasing arrivals) as well as measures that promote further growth. In an attempt to respond to the changes initiated by the COVID-19 crisis, proper sustainable tourism policies are essential (Ioannides & Gyimóthy, 2020). According to Mihalic (2020), the implementation of sustainability is based on (i) awareness of sustainability, (ii) the inclusion of sustainability on the agenda at the strategic level, and (iii) the implementation of sustainable measures.

The socio-political environment in the context of sustainable tourism calls for an examination of the effectiveness of sustainability management (Mihalic, 2020). Dodds and Butler (2010) described what is required from tourism policies, while stating that studies of existing policies and their underlying rationale are lacking and studies that address the implementation of sustainable tourism policies are scarce (Dodds, 2007). In light of the COVID-19 crisis in particular, research needs to concentrate on sustainable tourism policies, practice and strategies in the post-crisis era (Sigala, 2020). According to Kuščer et al. (2022), research is required to explore tourism policies that lead towards a more sustainable post-pandemic future. Although tourism crisis management literature illustrates that crises follows divergent reactions (Ritchie, 2004), little is known about tourism policy makers' reactions relating to sustainable tourism development. Dodds and Butler (2010)

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illustrate the need to study the implementation of tourism policies in terms of achieving sustainable tourism. Therefore, this study focuses on exploring the relevance of sustainable tourism triggered by the COVID-19 crisis and the incorporation of sustainable tourism into policies across different countries. In this regard, the following research questions are posed: (i) Are tourism policy-makers aware of sustainable tourism in the wake of a crisis? (ii) How are sustainable tourism strategies as agendas approached and (iii) How are sustainable tourism measures implemented following a crisis?

In an attempt to understand tourism organisations' awareness of sustainable tourism and its implementation following the crisis, a qualitative research study is developed involving tourism policy makers across the world.

2. Literature review

2.1. Tourism policies contributing to sustainable tourism

According to [Vanhove \(2002\)](#), the aim of tourism policies is to maximise the benefits derived from tourism while attempting to minimise the negative impacts. Policy-making is regarded as complex due to the diverse number of issues and organisations involved ([Xu & Sofield, 2016](#)). [Bécherel \(2001\)](#) argues that, in an initial phase of tourism development, tourism policies are focused on promoting attractiveness through advertising, while investments in services and infrastructure are also made. As a result of increased competition, tourism policies are evolving to create frameworks to control, monitor and improve the industry while protecting resources ([Bécherel, 2001](#)). Past research has focused on the concept of governance to explore and establish mechanisms and rules for policies by involving all individuals and institutions ([Beritelli et al., 2007](#)). Governance emphasises networks, collaborations, alliances and cooperation between stakeholders and interest groups to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes ([Zeppel, 2012](#)). According to [Volgger and Pechlaner \(2014\)](#), destination management organisations¹ (DMOs) are asked with managing these networks, wherein collaborations can lead to an innovative regional system ([Pechlaner et al., 2012](#)).

Various studies have identified the need for sustainable tourism, assuming that policies need to address this demand ([Dodds, 2007](#)). [Bécherel \(2001\)](#) defines the two key parameters of tourism policies – sustainability and competitiveness – which are mutually supportive and constitute the main tasks of destination management. Sustainability in this regard refers to the preservation of environmental, social, cultural, and physical resources, while effective and profitable competition is the focus of competitiveness ([Bécherel, 2001](#)). The socio-political environment serves as an enabler of sustainable tourism. To this end, (i) sustainability awareness, (ii) agendas, and (iii) measures are discussed, highlighting governance, tourism leadership and civil initiatives, as well as political agendas ([Mihalic, 2020](#)). These stages are based on [Frey's \(1985\)](#) model of environmental awareness penetration, which emphasises – after a stage in which society is unaware of environmental damage – an awareness stage, followed by discussions of environmental policy and finally implementation of environmental policies. The implementation involves the development of proper measures and the adoption of appropriate outcomes ([Frey, 1985](#)).

The application of sustainability policies attempts to deliver economic and environmental benefits, while balancing the negative physical and human environmental impacts ([Dodds, 2007](#)). Although the usefulness of the concept of sustainable tourism has been questioned in past research, in particular criticising its focus on temporal and spatial scales ([Øian et al., 2018](#)), according to [Dodds \(2007\)](#), sustainable tourism represents a solution for the development of mass tourism, with policy-making seen as the means to achieve this goal. However, [Xu and Sofield \(2016\)](#) argue that the incorporation of sustainability into tourism

policies is often confusing due to the ever-prevailing dominance of the development of pro-business tourism.

In terms of the implementation of a sustainable tourism policy, [Dodds \(2007\)](#) defines (1) environmental, (2) economic, (3) voluntary (4) socio-cultural as well as (5) planning and regeneration instruments. In this context, the introduction of an eco-tax as part of economic policy, measures to prevent environmental degradation through protective measures or water and waste management, and programmes to address social issues are considered ([Dodds, 2007](#)). Sustainability aims to manage environmental capacity through the management of cultural heritage, water quality, visitors, parks and facilities, residents/communities, comprehensive planning and air quality management ([Bécherel, 2001](#)). According to [Xu and Sofield \(2016\)](#), tourism policies directed at sustainable tourism refer to the management of energy, water and land by aiming to protect resources, control the impacts of tourism, and reduce energy consumption. [Øian et al. \(2018\)](#), meanwhile, consider that economic instruments aim to manage capacity constraints by focusing on structuring visitor behaviour to reduce overcrowding. Fiscal instruments compensate for the negative impacts of tourism, while revenue management focuses on generating income from the sale of services and entrance fees to contribute to the financial situation of destination management and manage capacity ([Øian et al., 2018](#)). Further, visitor management approaches are discussed that focus on restrictions and formal rules through payment systems, fences and gates, and which emphasise the promotion of learning, education and visitor interpretation in order to change their behaviour ([Mason, 2005](#)).

2.2. Sustainable tourism policies in times of crisis

As demonstrated in the previous section, tourism research has already focused on sustainable tourism policies ([Guo et al., 2019](#); [Polukhina et al., 2021](#)). To a lesser extent, this also applies to tourism policies related to crises ([Kuščer et al., 2022](#)). Sustainable tourism policies implemented during the COVID-19 crisis, either to promote sustainable tourism development or to seize the opportunity to transform tourism to make it more resilient, have been insufficiently researched. As the COVID-19 crisis represents an impetus for a paradigm shift in the development of sustainable tourism ([Higgins-Desbiolles, 2021](#)), the exploration of sustainable tourism policies is highly relevant in this context.

Policies adopted in response to the crisis should lead to a sustainable post-crisis future ([Gössling et al., 2021](#); [Hall et al., 2020](#)), and tourism should be transformed to achieve this ([Higgins-Desbiolles, 2021](#)). [Ioannides and Gyimóthy \(2020\)](#) call for policies geared towards the development of sustainable tourism in view of the changes in tourism during the COVID-19 crisis. Thus, tourism development based on sustainability pillars is necessary for the response, recovery and restart of tourism after the crisis ([Polukhina et al., 2021](#)). Without sustainability, resilience and better preparedness for future shocks will not be possible ([Hall et al., 2020](#)).

According to [Persson-Fischer and Liu \(2021\)](#) some sustainable tourism measures taken by governments protected the business environment and included financial support for the tourism sector, promotion of domestic tourism, increased marketing efforts, and more intergovernmental cooperation. Tourism vouchers, which some countries resorted to, are one of the socio-economic tourism policies that have helped the industry and residents ([Persson-Fischer & Liu, 2021](#)).

During the crisis, governments have played a crucial role in tourism policy, especially in terms of the restrictions related to halt tourism activities ([Kuščer et al., 2022](#)). However, policies should focus on the natural and social environment to achieve recovery ([Sharma et al., 2021](#)). A reduction in tourism became an issue during the crisis ([Gössling et al., 2021](#)); on the one hand it resulted in lower impacts on the natural environment, while on the other, it resulted in highly negative economic and social consequences ([Jones & Comfort, 2020](#)). [Muhammad et al. \(2020\)](#) note that the crisis had a positive impact on the

¹ Destination management organisations = DMOs.

environment due to reduced pollution (e.g., lower fuel and energy demand due to less travel), but the question is whether this will continue in the future.

3. Materials and methods

Research on the implementation of sustainable tourism policies is rather scarce (Maxim, 2015). Moreover, especially in light of the currently prevailing COVID-19 crisis, studies are needed that demonstrate the impact of a prolonged crisis on the development of sustainable tourism policies (Prayag, 2020). Therefore, comprehensive descriptions and exploration of sustainable tourism policies are needed, which can be obtained through qualitative research (Sergi & Hallin, 2011). For the purposes of this paper, in-depth interviews were conducted with tourism organisations that are central players of destination governance and are responsible for the development of tourism policies to gain an insight into their perceptions and viewpoints. This corresponds to the aim of qualitative interviews to collect interviewees' life-world descriptions building on their interpretation of the studied phenomena (Kvale, 1983). According to Hall (1994), national tourism organisations (NTO)² are typically responsible for policy implementation and development through uniting policy and promotion. To this end, NTOs implement and manage responsibilities, while tourism boards at the regional or local level, as well as governments and ministries of tourism are usually involved in policy implementation and formulation (Dodds & Butler, 2010). Although, DMOs are not always involved in policy, according to Dodds and Butler (2010) they are 'the most grass roots' (p.39).

This study targeted DMOs, NTOs as well as ministries of tourism, which were identified based on purposive sampling (Miles et al., 2014). Thus, the selection of tourism organisations was built on the researchers' judgement. This subjective form of sampling allowed approaching several selected tourism organisations for participation. A total of 126 tourism organisations were contacted to participate in the interviews. An interview guideline based on existing literature was applied for the interviews (see appendix A.1 for the guideline). The interview questions were formulated in a manner that provided the interviewees with directed themes, while at the same time allowing sufficient room for the interviewees' own interpretations and opinions. Twenty-four interviews with the leading managers of tourism organisations were conducted in 2021 until theoretical saturation was reached (Patton, 2015) (see Table 1 for details of the interviewees). The interviews were conducted online (via Skype, Zoom or Microsoft Teams) in English due to the prevailing COVID-19 regulations and lasted approximately 45 min to 1 h.

In order to explore sustainable tourism policies in-depth, the flexible pattern matching approach as a qualitative data analysis method was followed (Bouncken et al., 2021; Sinkovics, 2018). The interviews conducted were transcribed, coded, and analysed using the MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software to systemise and facilitate the qualitative data analysis process. Following the deductive process of flexible pattern matching as defined by Bouncken et al. (2021) and Sinkovics (2018), as first steps (i) a priori defined research questions were (ii) translated in an initial template as an analytical framework (Brooks & King, 2014), which served as a means of identifying initial patterns building on the theoretical background of this study (Sinkovics, 2018). (iii) The succeeding matching procedure involving the comparison of the empirical collected patterns with the predicted theoretical patterns was carried out by two researchers focusing on the guidance and exploration of extant theories (Bouncken et al., 2021; Sinkovics, 2018). The flexible pattern matching approach has the main advantage of maintaining room for development of the theory while extending the theory using empirical evidence developed from the qualitative data (Bouncken et al., 2021). The validity of the resulting shifted patterns and

Table 1
Overview interviewees.

Code	Destination	Tourism organisation	Interviewee position
1	Danube Delta, Romania	DMO	President
2	Valencia, Spain	DMO	Head of Sustainable Tourism
3	Malta	NTO	Deputy CEO and Chief Officer of Strategic Management
4	Tokyo, Japan	DMO	Director
5	Florence, Italy	DMO	Director
6	Cyprus	Ministry of Tourism	Tourism officer
7	Ljubljana, Slovenia	DMO	Deputy Managing Director
8	Cologne, Germany	DMO	Managing Director
9	El Nido, Philippines	Ministry of Tourism	Tourism officer
10	Sedona, United States	Ministry of Tourism	Communication Manager
11	Switzerland	DMO	Vice President
12	Gotland, Sweden	Ministry of Tourism	Strategist
13	Jerusalem, Israel	Ministry of Tourism	Director of Statistics and Research
14	Soča Valley, Slovenia	DMO	Director
15	Azad Jammu Kashmir, Pakistan	DMO	Tourism representative
16	Costa Rica	NTO	Director of Planning and Development
17	Thompson Okanagan region, Canada	DMO	Director of Destination Development
18	Taiwan	DMO	Secretary-General
19	Lake Atitlán, Guatemala	Ministry of Tourism	Sub-regional delegate
20	Hong Kong	DMO	Tourism representative
21	Vail, United States	DMO	Environmental Sustainability Coordinator
22	Costa Brava, Spain	DMO	General Director
23	Iceland	NTO	Tourism representative
24	Mauritius	Ministry of Tourism	Tourism officer

research questions is ensured through replication logic (Sinkovics, 2018). By involving two researchers in this process, as well as the authors of this study holding a discussion on the final template, the reliability and validity of this study was enhanced (Golafshani, 2003).

4. Results

The results illustrate that sustainable tourism policies are related to the argument by Mihalic (2020) that, first (i) awareness, as the relevance of sustainable tourism, then (ii) agendas as sustainable tourism strategies (Bécherel, 2001) and (iii) measures related to environmental, economic, socio-cultural and communication instruments (Bécherel, 2001; Dodds, 2007) contribute to the implementation of sustainable tourism through policies. Table 2 illustrates the final coding template, showing which results matched the literature (where a reference is given) and the findings of the research.

4.1. Awareness: sustainable tourism relevance

The relevance of sustainable tourism emerged explicitly in all interviews with tourism organisations around the world. In particular, the European tourism organisations interviewed (Interview 2, 6, 11 and 22) stated, that the climate crisis raises the relevance of sustainable tourism in politics, as well as the need for sustainable policies in particular. Furthermore, it is shown that this is increasingly perceived in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis, as demonstrated by the following quote:

"We believe that after the crisis, the next big threat to the world will be climate change and we are definitely aware of the fact that people will be

² National tourism organisations = NTOs

Table 2
Final coding template.

Category	Codes	Sample answers
(i) Awareness (Mihalic, 2020)		
Relevance of sustainable tourism	Climate change	"At the same time, COVID-19 is hiding the big wave, which is climate change. So, we have to combat both at the same time." (Interview 2)
	COVID-19 crisis	"In addition to lockdowns and functioning problems in the industry, the crisis has brought an opportunity to implement responsible tourism, more than even before." (Interview 1)
	Carrying capacity (Mihalic, 2020)	"This boom in tourism has caused problems when it comes to environmental and social sustainability. Now, starting up again, there have been a lot of discussions about whether we want the numbers to go up again or do we want a more gradual build up? Do we want a different kind of tourism and different kinds of visitors?" (Interview 23)
(ii) Agendas (Mihalic, 2020)		
Strategy - positioning and focus (Bécherel, 2001)	Sustainable tourism as strategy (Mihalic, 2020)	"We decided to start writing and preparing our Sustainable Strategy by January 2020, just three months prior to the outbreak of COVID-19. That was the moment that, with all this knowledge, we wanted to say let's put down some goals and ideas to go ahead and to meet the gist, which is the overall plan." (Interview 2)
	Responsibilities	"The guidelines were implemented by each industry sector. Transportation, hotels, museums, MICE, and so on. Thereafter, they were endorsed by the government." (Interview 4)
	Collaborative governance	"Everything we do is always in very close cooperation with stakeholders and, as I've already mentioned, the whole industry is a stakeholder. It's not just accommodation providers and restaurateurs, but also tourist guides, taxi drivers and the whole chain of the tourism industry. It's not always easy." (Interview 6)
(iii) Measures (Mihalic, 2020)		
Environmental instruments (Bécherel, 2001; Dodds, 2007)	Protecting specific areas (Dodds, 2007)	"We are also continuing to work on the issue of the Costa Brava as a Biosphere Reserve. As I mentioned previously, this is a process that began before the crisis but is still on the table." (Interview 22)
	Water management (Bécherel, 2001; Dodds, 2007; Xu & Sofield, 2016)	"It's not only about closing down the city centre, these green topics also cover rubbish removal, tap water

Table 2 (continued)

Category	Codes	Sample answers
Economic instruments (Dodds, 2007)	Recycling and urban waste reduction (Dodds, 2007)	and clean water." (Interview 7)
	Energy management (Xu & Sofield, 2016)	"We have to reduce plastics and their plastic footprint, there are alternatives to plastic." (Interview 2)
	Environmentally friendly mobility	"In this sense, we are trying to work on green energy, through solar panels." (Interview 1)
	Emission reductions	"In terms of the mobility issue, a big effort is underway to implement mobility through the tram network, bike sharing policies and cycle mobility, as well as the implementation of a network of cycle paths." (Interview 5)
	Taxation (Dodds, 2007; 2007ian et al., 2018)	"We decided that the carbon emissions were the axis for our action because the city was already working on declaring that we wanted to be carbon neutral. So that was the point: tourism must also meet this requirement." (Interview 2)
Socio-cultural instruments (Dodds, 2007)	Revenue management (Øian et al., 2018)	"Yes, we also have a policy wherein all tourists have to pay an ecotourism development fee [...]." (Interview 9)
	Provision of individual vouchers (Persson-Fischer & Liu, 2021)	"Benefits and subsidies ensured that employees did not have to be made redundant and their workplaces were made safer. During the period when the travel campaign was carried out, most of the tourism sector had made a recovery of almost 60–80% compared to 2019. (Interview 4, Pos. 39)
	Resident/community management (Bécherel, 2001)	"The government has distributed travel vouchers of \$50 per person to promote the recovery of tourism. This money can be used in spas, restaurants and for other tourism activities. The goal of this is to encourage domestic tourism again and increase tourists' confidence to travel." (Interview 23)
Socio-cultural instruments (Dodds, 2007)	Preservation of employment	"We believe that sustainable tourism also affects the quality of life of people living in the region, while also providing a vision of the integration of tourism with the local population and trying to overcome the idea of tourism phobia." (Interview 22)
		"The government established a financial support system at the national level for employees in the tourist sector who lost their job or who are currently waiting to get started again. Hence, these people receive a monthly sum to make sure

(continued on next page)

Table 2 (continued)

Category	Codes	Sample answers
Communication instruments (Bécherel, 2001)	Visitor management approaches (Mason, 2005)	<i>that they are able to sustain themselves through the crisis.” (Interview 24)</i> <i>“Different avenues were explored roads and guided tours were created around different places, all historic centres that were overcrowded, so they are trying to diversify.” (Interview 2)</i>
	Promotion of sustainability	<i>“Our brand is already building at a global level and we are known for being a green and sustainable city. So, that is the goal we want to achieve.” (Interview 7)</i>
	Creating sustainability awareness	<i>“Responsible and sustainable tourism behaviour will be encouraged throughout these marketing campaigns.” (Interview 23)</i>
	Promoting domestic tourism	<i>“The design of policies should promote domestic tourism rather than looking for tourists on the other side of the world.” (Interview 22)</i>
	Reduction of seasonality	<i>“We can have a lot of domestic tourism, but as a DMO, we have to try to promote tourism and to adjust activities on a seasonal basis.” (Interview 22)</i>
	Length of stay/extension	<i>“It was also at this at time that we introduced the new premium visa which is dedicated to long-stay tourists.” (Interview 24)</i>

increasingly conscious of what they are buying and what they are consuming, so the opportunity to be a sustainable destination is also a business decision that this will be in demand.” (Interview 11)

In addition, the increased attention to sustainable tourism triggered by the COVID-19 crisis is reflected in the interviews. This is underlined in particular by the interviewed Spain tourism organisations' perceptions that prior to the COVID-19 crisis, sustainable tourism was of little relevance for tourism policy (Interview 22 and 2): *“This is mainly because sustainability did not appear within the action plans and objectives of the Board before the crisis.” (Interview 22)* and that the COVID-19 crisis has helped to increase the urgency of sustainable tourism among all tourism organisations interviewed: *“But I think what changed is the urgency, and let's say the timeline [...] I think that we sort of realised that we really need to speed up these changes for more sustainability.” (Interview 6).*

The relevance of sustainability in tourism is further exemplified by debates on overtourism. In this regard, the reaching of capacity limits is particularly discussed in Europe (Interview 1, 11, 12, 14, and 23), and in North America (Interview 17 and 21), which, according to the interviewees, makes sustainable tourism essential: *“Our focus was the idea of getting ahead of overtourism before it overtakes our area.” (Interview 17).*

4.2. Agendas: strategy – positioning and focus

According to the interviewees, the major relevance of sustainable tourism is manifested in strategies: *“We made sure sustainability was considered in every part of the strategy.” (Interview 12)*, serving as an agenda to guide tourism policies. Interviewees of tourism organisations

in Europe (Interview 2, 6, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14) addressed the incorporation of sustainability in tourism strategies prior to the crisis.

But also, future strategies will concentrate on sustainable tourism as a strategic positioning and focus: *“It will continue to appear in the future strategy, and specific measures and policies must be specified.” (Interview 22).*

The interviews show that the strategies refer to all stakeholders in tourism according to the tourism organisations across the globe: *“People from all the different ministries, agencies, institutes, businesses, residents and other stakeholders that are affected by tourism.” (Interview 23).* Thus, the pressing need to incorporate the views of stakeholders within the strategies is also emphasised. Tourism organisations in the United States (Interview 10 and 21), as well as in Europe (Interview 1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 11, 12, 14), showed that they involve stakeholders in their agenda development: *“All of them. I'm not joking. There are no exceptions, all the stakeholders.” (Interview 1).* In doing so, the interviewees perceive that they benefit from the different perspectives:

“Our sustainability goals and ideas will only keep progressing through collaboration, but it is up to everyone in Sedona to work together – the city, forest service, businesses, visitors and the residents – to make them a reality.” (Interview 10)

4.3. Measures: environmental, economic, socio-cultural and communication instruments

4.3.1. Environmental instruments

The measures related to the environmental component of sustainable tourism refer to the protection of the natural environment and resources, which were addressed by all tourism organisations interviewed: *“Measures must be taken to reduce the environmental impact.” (Interview 22).* The protection of particular areas was addressed across different continents, including Africa (Interview 24), North America (Interview 21), Asia (Interview 9, 20), and also Europe (Interview 8, 11, 12, 14):

“Also, there are a lot of nature parks, and nature reserves on the island and, of course, we have some restrictions on what we can and can't do. For example, there are certain paths on which tourists must stay while walking.” (Interview 24)

In addition, the interviewees mentioned measures related to water management: *“We need a better energy balance and to take care of our water resources.” (Interview 12).*

Moreover, the interviewed tourism organisations from around the world attributed special importance to the reduction of waste. Waste management approaches and recycling measures are already implemented in sustainable tourism policies.

Measures focusing on energy management were also discussed in the interviews with European tourism organisations (Interview 1, 6, 7, 11, 12) and North American tourism organisations (Interview 10, 17, 21) especially in relation to policies that emphasise energy reduction and promote green energy.

Furthermore, emissions caused by mobility were discussed. With the exception of the tourism organisations in Asia (Interview 9, 15, 18), almost all interviewees pointed out the necessity to support environmentally friendly mobility through sustainable tourism policies by creating offers, promoting infrastructure investments and travel modalities. The need for a reduction in emissions as a carbon footprint measurement, as well as taxation, were addressed.

“Carbon footprint measurements will affect economies and tourism activities: with all the regulations that are being put in place, this will also have an effect on the productivity and profitability of companies. So, if we help our companies to mitigate and reduce their carbon footprint and how to compensate it properly, we will help them to be more profitable and have less costs and taxes in the future.” (Interview 2)

4.3.2. Economic instruments

Economic instruments refer primarily to taxation as a policy measure. On the one hand, taxation is discussed as a general tourism tax, which was common as a tourism policy among almost all the interviewees across the globe in order to create infrastructure and promote products. On the other hand, a special taxation related to environmental protection is increasingly emphasised in Asia:

“Yes, we also have a policy whereby the ecotourism development fee, which amounts to Php 200, is collected from all tourists. This became legislation in 2008 and was then amended in 2011.” (Interview 9)

Revenue management became particularly evident in the COVID-19 crisis: *“And I think the important thing was the idea to use public funds to keep the industry on life support rather than letting it die.”* (Interview 3). It was about providing subsidies to support the industry, as this quote shows:

“In terms of regional policy, our government has recently developed a new regional policy which covers many things, not only tourism but the economic prosperity of areas in need. These are mountainous regions, rural areas and border regions. Its main purpose is financial support, so every four years the government allocated funds to different regions or to different projects in regions in order to support them.” (Interview 11)

Policies related to the promotion of domestic tourism are elaborated in the interviews in Malta, Hong Kong, the United States, and Iceland. They are discussed through the use of vouchers to promote tourism among domestic tourists as a strategy to combat the crisis, but also classified as a sustainable tourism policy, in the sense of encouraging domestic tourism.

4.3.3. Sociocultural instruments

In terms of socio-cultural instruments, the management of residents is a major issue. The interviewees are particularly concerned with the local community, resident involvement and policies that contribute or contradict to the well-being of residents in the various tourism organisations on different continents. The COVID-19 crisis has led to a special requirement in this regard:

“We need to look carefully at how residents are feeling and what they are thinking, though we want to bring back the industry to ‘normal’ as soon as possible.” (Interview 4)

The COVID-19 crisis gave birth to policies related to the preservation of employment during the crisis period particularly in Asia (Interview 15, 19, 20) and Africa (Interview 24). In terms of sustainability, however, this support was already necessary prior to the crisis (according to the European and North American tourism organisations interviewed) and will also be required after the crisis.

In all interviews, the preventative measures put in place to halt the spread of the virus during the crisis were discussed. According to the interviewees, there are parallels to visitor management policies in terms of the capacity restrictions that were necessary during the crisis, but which will also be of interest in addressing sustainable tourism in the future. However, visitor management policies were also necessary in Tokyo in the past: *“The number of visitors was increasing year by year, and that is what we expected, we felt the need and were planning to set some sustainable tourism policies”* (Interview 4), as well as in Europe (Interview 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 14) and were implemented accordingly:

“A policy was introduced to reevaluate the areas surrounding the city centre, to spread tourism and people around in different places, such as hills and neighbouring areas. This policy has led to less crowded places becoming more developed and areas that previously saw less visitors have begun to become more popular. Many tour operators were involved in helping to make such places known and a project was launched. It is called the City of Florence, with precise policies.” (Interview 5)

4.3.4. Communication instruments

The interviewees also consider themselves as responsible for communication, especially in terms of promoting sustainability: *“The general public doesn’t link Switzerland with being a very sustainable country, they probably take it for granted that there is beautiful nature and mountains and lakes, but when we did some market research in our source markets, Switzerland was not perceived as being a sustainable country. The Nordic countries, or countries such as Canada, etc., are much better known for being environmentally friendly. That’s what we, as an organisation, want to change, so since the crisis, we have decided to proceed with the topic of sustainability more strongly than even, hence we created this wordmark ‘Swissustainable’, which is a cross between Switzerland or Swiss and sustainable”* (Interview 11), as well as creating awareness among tourists, residents and other stakeholders in an attempt to trigger responsible behaviour:

“Another project is to encourage tourists to enjoy and respect Florence and to increase the level of quality tourism and national projects with other cities by introducing guidelines that visitors should respect during their stay. The aim of this is to make tourists understand the rules and the consequences. Examples of best practice were identified, i.e. what to see and do and where to stay. A lot of working is being carried out on ‘Feel Florence’ on our website.” (Interview 5)

Furthermore, the interviewees concentrated on communication, emphasising the promotion of domestic tourism across various tourism organisations in Europe, Asia and North America (Interview 3, 10, 20, 21, 23): *“Domestic tourism is already popular in Tokyo. After the crisis, I think the trend of travelling within the country will still be happening. The tourism industry can now have more visitors within the country as well.”* (Interview 4), not only as a result of the COVID-19 crisis when tourists had no other options, but also in terms of the long-term effect from a sustainable tourism perspective.

Furthermore, according to tourism organisations in the United States (Interview 10 and 21) and some European tourism organisations (Interview 1, 14, 22), sustainable tourism policies in the field of communication can focus on overcoming seasonality, in the sense of a reduction of peak seasons and a shift towards low seasons: *“We’d like to extend the shoulder seasons, attract more tourists and provide them with other products.”* (Interview 14) Such policies also address the extension of visitor stays, which contributes to an improvement in sustainability by reducing the emissions of a journey, for example:

“But we are positive, we want to motivate tourists to stay longer in our destination and also improve their tourism experience.” (Interview 24)

5. Discussion

Studies have already focused on describing the requirements for tourism policies (Dodds & Butler, 2010), while also highlighting the need to incorporate sustainable tourism in policy-making (Guo et al., 2019; Polukhina et al., 2021). However, research was needed to explore how the crisis has changed the rules of the game for tourism policies (Kuščer et al., 2022). Therefore, this study sheds light on the perceptions of tourism organisations around the world during the crisis. Corresponding to the findings of Mihalic (2020), the study demonstrates that tourism policymakers in different countries are (i) aware of sustainable tourism, which leads to the (ii) development of sustainable tourism strategies, as agendas and consequently to the (iii) implementation of measures as sustainable tourism policies in the four areas: environmental, economic, socio-cultural, and communication instruments (see Fig. 1). To this end, the model of environmental awareness penetration (Frey, 1985) is supported and extended, as this study reveals the awareness of environmental damage in society, which leads to discussions on environmental policies in terms of strategy development and results in the implementation of sustainable tourism policies. By showing the actual implementation, the assumptions on the penetration

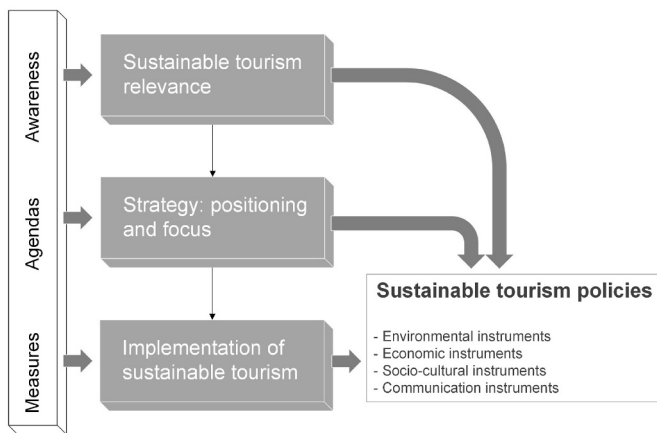


Fig. 1. Sustainable tourism policy adoption.

of environmental awareness can be strengthened (Frey, 1985).

The study findings highlight the COVID-19 crisis, as well as the climate change crisis, as triggers for raising the awareness of sustainable tourism among tourism policymakers around the world. In this context, the carrying capacity has also been highlighted as an enhancer of sustainable tourism relevance, which corresponds to the assumption of Mihalic (2020), while climate change has not yet been considered in this context (but was specifically described by the European tourism organisations interviewed), although the environmental awareness model suggests that society acquires an awareness of environmental damage after denying the facts (Frey, 1985).

According to Bécherel (2001), sustainable tourism represents the strategic positioning and focus of tourism policy. Although competitiveness is also highlighted as a key parameter of tourism policies (Bécherel, 2001), the results of this study illustrate the essence of sustainable tourism as a guiding strategy across continents (Mihalic, 2020), as a result of environmental awareness (Frey, 1985). This might be related to the enhanced need for sustainable tourism due to the COVID-19 crisis (Ioannides & Gyimóthy, 2020). In addition to previous studies, the interviewees stressed that sustainable tourism strategies need to involve all tourism stakeholders by incorporating their opinions, while collaborative governance in developing strategies is emphasised, which should be subject of future research. In particular, governance mechanisms are important to secure coordination along the tourism value chain (Song et al., 2013) among all stakeholders at an individual or institutional level (Beritelli et al., 2007; Zeppel, 2012). Thus, good communication and a strong stakeholder network is crucial for tourism sustainability, which should be managed by DMOs (Song et al., 2013; Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014). While in the United States and Europe, as described in the results section, stakeholder engagement has been implemented, other continents have been eager to engage tourism stakeholders but have not actively involved them.

This study highlights (1) environmental, (2) economic, (3) socio-cultural, and (4) communication instruments as areas for specific measures for sustainable tourism policies. Focusing on (1) environmental tourism policies, the findings of this research correspond to previous studies by highlighting policies related to protecting areas (Dodds, 2007), water management (Bécherel, 2001; Dodds, 2007; Xu & Sofield, 2016), waste reduction and recycling (Dodds, 2007), as well as energy management (Xu & Sofield, 2016). As a further measure of the environmental instruments, this study highlights in particular environmentally friendly mobility (which was addressed by all interviewees, with the exception of Asian tourism organisations), as well as policies related to reducing emissions.

Focusing on (2) economic instruments, the interviews with almost all policymakers around the world demonstrate the relevance of taxation, as suggested by Dodds (2007) and Øian et al. (2018) in an attempt to

compensate for the negative impacts of tourism. Moreover, vouchers for domestic tourists were emphasised by the European, Asian and North American interviewees, as suggested by Persson-Fischer and Liu (2021), to help both the tourism industry and residents during the COVID-19 crisis. Revenue management was highlighted in the interviews, the aim of which is to enhance the financial situation of tourism destinations and manage capacities (Øian et al., 2018). This became particularly relevant during the COVID-19 crisis in terms of providing support for the industry, similarly as taxation suggested above.

For (3) socio-cultural tourism policies, this study highlighted, as already indicated by Bécherel (2001), the importance of community management and the consideration of residents' perceptions in developing tourism policies. Moreover, visitor management approaches were discussed, which attempt to change the behaviour of tourists through formal rules and restrictions (Mason, 2005). Additionally, the interviewees discussed the preservation of employment, related to considering and respecting local community residents. According to the findings of this study, the COVID-19 crisis in particular has enhanced the relevance of visitor management approaches (particularly in Europe) and preserving employment (particularly in Asia and Africa).

Although Bécherel (2001) highlighted the need for communication in tourism policies, no in-depth examinations into actual sustainable measures following a crisis has been carried out. Thus, this study highlights the divergent sustainable tourism policies in the area of communication, which aim to increase tourism sustainability through the promotion of sustainable tourism, sustainability awareness among tourists and tourism stakeholders. During the COVID-19 crisis, the importance of promoting domestic tourism became clear, which, however, according to the findings of this study, will also be a priority in post-crisis times. Additionally, in terms of mobility, this study highlights the reduction in seasonality and an increase in the length of tourist stays as communication tourism policies, as suggested by the interviewees of tourism organisations in Europe and North America.

6. Conclusion

The implications for national, regional, and local governments are evident in the interviewees' assessments of the prevailing need to make tourism more sustainable, which all players will need to adhere to in order to emerge as winners in these difficult times. If the world returns to the hard pre-crisis tourism, serious changes towards sustainability might be harder to realise, as awareness of the need for sustainable tourism development may diminish with the end of the pandemic. This research informs policymakers about sustainable tourism policy across the globe, by involving tourism policy-makers of various countries and comparing their perceptions on policy measures.

The findings of this study serve as a basis for policymakers and researchers to examine sustainable tourism policies during and after crises. Although rigorous standards were applied in conducting this research, it is not without limitations. First, the research was conducted during the crisis, which meant that the interviewees were often overwhelmed with coping with the crisis. Nevertheless, they sacrificed some of their precious time to participate in an online interview, although this could have been better done in person through a face-to-face interview. However, the interviews provide an insight into the minds of the leading managers of tourism organisations, although the design of the qualitative research limits the generalisability of the findings. Therefore, for future research, it is recommended that a quantitative study is carried out on sustainable tourism policies based on the findings of this research. Moreover, a large, cross-regional study that gathers information on examples of good practice that could be applied in other destinations would be great added value to tourism research and could solve several problems that the industry is facing today.

Credit author statement

Author's specific contribution to the manuscript: Sarah Schönherr: Conceptualization; Formal analysis; Methodology; Project administration; Resources; Software; Validation; Visualization; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing. Mike Peters: Conceptualization; Data curation; Project administration; Resources; Validation; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing. Kir Kuščer: Conceptualization; Data curation; Funding acquisition; Investigation; Methodology; Project administration; Resources; Software; Validation; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing.

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Declaration of competing interest

None.

Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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A.1 Interview guideline

Interview question	References
What policies did your destination adopt prior to the COVID-19 pandemic that contribute to sustainable tourism development?	Dodds (2007)
What goals did your destination pursue with this policy?	Mihalic (2020)
How has your destination implemented sustainable tourism policies?	Bécherel (2001)
Why has your destination already implemented sustainable tourism measures?	Xu and Sofield (2016)
Which factors influenced the creation of these policies?	
Who was responsible for the implementation of these policies?	
What were the challenges faced in the implementation process of sustainable tourism policies?	
What policies did your destination adopt as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic that contribute to sustainable tourism development?	Kuščer et al. (2022)
What goals did your destination pursue with this policy?	Higgins-Desbiolles (2021)
How has your destination implemented sustainable tourism policies?	Gössling et al. (2021)
Why has your destination implemented sustainable tourism measures?	Hall et al. (2020)
Which factors influenced the creation of these policies?	Ioannides and Gyimóthy (2020)
Who was responsible for the implementation of these policies?	
What were the challenges faced in the implementation process of sustainable tourism policies?	
What policies will your destination adopt in the future that will contribute to sustainable tourism development?	Kuščer et al. (2022)
What are the objectives of your destination with this policy?	Higgins-Desbiolles (2021)
How will your destination implement sustainable tourism measures?	Gössling et al. (2021)
Why will your destination introduce sustainable tourism measures?	Hall et al. (2020)
What factors influence the development of these measures?	Ioannides and Gyimóthy (2020)
Who is responsible for the implementation of these measures??	
What are the challenges in implementing the sustainable tourism policy?	

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