



University of Sopron
István Széchenyi Economics and Management Doctoral School

**Marketing Strategies promoting Sustainable Tourism
Development in the country of Albania**

Booklet of Doctoral Thesis

MSc. Arjana KADIU

**Sopron
2024**

University of Sopron
István Széchenyi Economics and Management Doctoral School

Head of the Doctoral School: Prof. Dr. Csilla Obádovics, PhD

International Joint Cross-Border PhD Programme in International Economic
Relations and Management

Supervisors: Dr. habil. Zoltán Szabó PhD MBA
Dr. habil. Árpád Ferenc Papp-Váry PhD

Signature of the supervisor(s)

Table of contents

1. Aim of the research.....	1
2. Literature review.....	3
2.1 The opportunity of the Western Balkan.....	4
3. Methodology.....	6
4. Qualitative and quantitative findings.....	8
4.1 Results of the qualitative analysis.....	8
4.2 Results of the quantitative analysis.....	9
4.2.1 Nationals sample survey.....	9
4.2.2 Internationals sample survey.....	11
4.3 The Balanced Marketing Model for sustainable tourism development in Albania.....	16
4.4 New scientific results.....	17
5. Conclusions and recommendations.....	19
6. References and statistics.....	21

List of Figures

Figure 1. Association between variables of interest analysed through empirical research.....	15
Figure 2: The Balanced Marketing Model for sustainable tourism development in Albania.....	16

List of Tables

Table 1: The total contribution of tourism in the country's GDP.....	3
Table 2: The average number of employed citizens in tourism -related activities.....	3
Table 3: Research process.....	6
Table 4: Expert Interviews main results.....	8
Table 5: Basic data questionnaire: nationals' sample.....	9
Table 6: Anova analysis: nationals' sample.....	10
Table 7: Chi-Square Tests: nationals' sample.....	10
Table 8: Multivariable linear regression analysis: nationals' sample.....	11
Table 9. Basic data questionnaire: internationals sample.....	12
Table 10: Anova analysis: internationals sample.....	12
Table 11: Chi-Square Tests: internationals sample.....	13
Table 12. Multivariable linear regression analysis: internationals sample.....	14

Abbreviations

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

EBRD – European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

WB – Western Balkans

OECD - Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

UN SDG – United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

1. AIM OF THE RESEARCH

Although it is one of the most ancient countries in the world, Albania is new in the tourism industry. Due to historical and political factors the industry was almost inexistent and undeveloped until 1990. Only after the nineties, it was given priority and from that time on tourism has continued to develop exponentially. It has recently become a main pillar of economic development for Albania and its contribution in 2022 was about 24% of the total economy (UNDP & Lena, 2022). Today, it is an aim of the country and its scientists and researchers to make the destination familiar to travellers, designing new and appropriate marketing strategies that will contribute to a long-term, stable development.

Tourism as a fast-growing world industry offers a multidimensional development related to higher incomes, job opportunities and increased quality of life. During the last decade (pandemic period excluded), the number of visitors had kept increasing each year in Albania. In the first eight months of 2023 the country has seen a record number of visitors, with 27% annual increase in arrivals according to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD, 2023). In this situation, it is necessary to monitor visitor impact and understand implications of intensive tourism growth to make better decisions based on the needs and resources of the country.

A fast and not professionally managed economic development may put a lot of pressure on natural resources and evoke long-term consequences. To prevent irreversible damage to the environment and human well-being, it is important to engage in the protection of these natural resources.

If the country of Albania is alone in the development path, it may be exceedingly difficult to overcome challenges along and master its approach toward sustainability, considering that it is a developing country and is focused on economic growth. The engagement of all stakeholders, like business owners, government officials, scientists, and residents will ease the transition and help to determine priority issues. On a world level, new opportunities, and collaboration, which may contribute to this new path are to be researched. Therefore, questions arise that may be further explored.

The main research question of this dissertation aims to explain if an integrated destination of six nature-blessed countries, the countries of the Western Balkans (WB), may ease the path toward sustainability? If collaboration may save the future of Balkan tourism and contribute to the economy of these countries?

To gain a deeper understanding of the main research question, it has been broken down into sub-questions to be answered individually.

Sub-question 1: What may be the benefits of working as an integrated destination of the Western Balkans? May engagement and bond as an integrated destination of the Western Balkans facilitate the development of sustainable tourism?

Sub -question 2: What are the main reasons that drive interest among tourists? Are travelers interested in visiting a diverse destination of the Western Balkans?

Sub-question 3: How does a frame of a marketing strategy for sustainable tourism development in Albania look like?

It is the aim of this research to develop an adequate marketing strategy frame for Albanian tourism based on the principle of sustainability and with Albania as part of an integrated destination of the Western Balkans. A strategic marketing plan, highlighting the importance of economic growth integrated with environmental protection and social wellbeing as well as the importance of collaboration as a common region of Western Balkans may ease the road toward sustainability.

A shared vision, a single investment space of WB, with harmonizing legislation and economic agreements would be beneficial for the economy and increase consciousness and engagement in environment protection. This research studies Albania's stakeholders' attitude toward this initiative and aims to suggest important steps for future sustainable marketing strategies. A better future is built on collaboration.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Travel and tourism expansion over time, despite occasional shocks, has shown strength and resilience. According to (UNWTO,2020), the total number of international tourists in 2019 reached 1.5 billion globally compared to twenty-five million in 1950. This progressive growth was interrupted by a global pandemic wave that began at the end of 2019. After the standstill of the pandemic period, in 2022, international tourism receipts grew back to about 50%. International visitor spending reached 64% of pre-pandemic levels (-36% compared to 2019, measured in real terms). Europe was the region with the best outcome in 2022 with EUR 520 billion, or 87% of pre-pandemic levels achieved (UNWTO, 2023).

The Mediterranean and Balkan country of Albania ranks today among the countries that are highly dependent on tourism. Over the last decades, the contribution of travel and tourism to Albania's GDP has steadily increased (Table 1) creating jobs and generating higher incomes. The country is rich in natural and cultural resources that make it possible to develop the tourism sector, and this is a wonderful opportunity for the future.

Table 1: The total contribution of tourism in the country's GDP

Years	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
TC to GDP (%)	19.90	21.00	21.10	26.00	26.20	27.30	20.30	10.50	17.40	24.00

Source: Albanian Tourism Ministry (2023)

While gradually moving toward becoming the main industry of the country, tourism opens new employment possibilities for Albanian citizens. In Table 2 is presented the number of employees in tourism and tourism-related activities from 2013- 2021.

Table 2: The average number of employed citizens in tourism -related activities

Years	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total number	17,138	19,208	21,286	30,300	33,361	36,533	41,439	32,745	34,131
Accommodation	2,467	3,344	3,836	4,718	5,582	6,770	8,181	6,535	7,864
Food and beverages	13,667	14,713	16,221	23,732	25,582	27,392	30,237	24,029	23,507
Travel agencies & renting	1,004	1,151	1,229	1,850	2,197	2,371	3,020	2,181	2,760
TC in employment	19%	19%	19%	24%	24%	25%	21%	17.5%	20%

Source: Albanian Tourism Ministry (2023), World Travel & Tourism Council (2022)

It is crucial to take into consideration risks associated with overdevelopment and dependence upon an activity that can be characteristically unstable. Becoming very dependent on one

industry alone carries its own risks. Tourism is an industry which demand is influenced by seasonal, economic, political, and other factors. High inflation rates, oil price fluctuations, or other global issues have their influence on tourism development. Developing other industries as well will also contribute to a balanced economic development of Albania. A total contribution of 24% to the GDP is a high percentage compared to other industries and if the economy relies heavily on one industry it may hinder the possibility to be economically flexible.

Nevertheless, referring to tourism, a managed growth, aiming a symbiosis between tourism development, nature conservation and culture preservation is possible with the right planning and organizing.

2.1 THE OPPORTUNITY OF THE WESTERN BALKANS

To successfully achieve goals large projects and partnerships are important. Likewise, they are particularly important for sustainable development projects. The Western Balkans is a region with immense potential. It comprises the following six countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia. The region lies between West and East Europe and its unique culture and traditions indicate great opportunities for future development. With a population of around twenty million, it achieves today a combined gross domestic product of close to EUR 100 billion (OECD, 2022).

Focusing on main components like trade, investment, digital integration, and mobility will further contribute to sustainable development in the Western Balkans. A single investment space of the six countries, with harmonizing legislation, free of barriers, will improve both the depth and horizontal links of capital markets, will strengthen the business in the region, and will facilitate and increase foreign investment. All of these will contribute to achieve easier global sustainability goals in the field of tourism.

Returning to Albania, a marketing strategy is an important part of a successful overall tourism strategy. A tourist destination must fulfil various tasks in coordination with each other. It is at the same time a natural territory, a political administrative unit, an economic zone, and a place where people build their present and future. It represents a cluster (co-location) of products and services, of activities and experiences along the tourism value chain and a basic unit of analysis of tourism. A destination incorporates various stakeholders and can network to form larger destinations. It is also intangible with its image and identity which may influence its market competitiveness (UNWTO, 2022).

The mission of the tourism industry in Albania is providing travellers with exploring and leisure possibilities in a remarkably diverse nature, with the following vision in mind:

We can make the world a better place by traveling.

Government is among the main stakeholders in the industry but not the sole. It manages setting the right environment for tourism, regulating the industry, marketing Albania as a tourism destination, for ensuring an improved tourism product, particularly in publicly owned spaces. Whilst the private sector's aim is profitability, it is also its responsibility to deliver a value-for-money tourism offer to our guests. The host community is among the main stakeholders of the industry too. Community participation is necessary when aiming to design the right strategy. For Albanian tourism to develop sustainably, the opportunity of developing as a common region of the Western Balkans may be very favourable.

The scenario of “banding together” (Polijak-Grujic & Domaratzki, 2022) if embraced and understood by all six countries, may speed up the development of the region and have a positive impact in many ways. Region-wide solidarity inspires governments and civil societies to work collectively in tackling the most pressing issues facing the Western Balkans. A robust economic cooperation between the countries may ease past grievances towards each other, contributing to better democracy and prosperity. Furthermore, they will be united around global challenges, which are harder to face alone. Two recently-relevant challenges — the pandemic and environmental issues — have shown that when faced with serious challenges, the WB states can transcend their differences (Polijak- Grujic, 2022).

If all six WB countries will be focusing their minds and energy on the economy, many issues may be overcome; directing the political thinking towards the future and defragmenting political attitudes, as well as helping resolve other important problems.

2. METHODOLOGY

The entire research is based on four main objectives (O1-O4). These are organized into 6 stages (S1-S6), which deliver eight results (R1-R8). A comprehensive literature review will be the basis of the entire dissertation (S1/O1/R1). From qualitative research, based on interviews with experts in the field (S2/O2/R2), hypotheses are formulated (H1, H2, H3). Through primary quantitative research, data are generated, and hypotheses are tested. Table 3 presents the methodological overview and the methodology frame for this dissertation.

Table 3: Research process

Objectives	Hypothesis	Stages	Processes	Results
O1: Secondary data analysis		S1	Examine an alternative perspective on the original question referring to earlier studies.	R1: Have a clear understanding of the subject matter
O2: Answering Sub-Question 1 and 2 through primary research		S2	Qualitative Interviews	R2: Perspectives and difficulties of developing sustainably and opportunities rising from a common region.
	H:1 H:2 H:3	S3	Quantitative surveys	R3: Understand the approach toward sustainability as a common destination of WB.
		S4	Analysis of gathered data	R4: Express the data through graphs and explain the relations
O3: Answering Sub-Question 3		S5	Developing the Scheme referring to literature and based on results of Qualitative and Quantitative research	R5: A proposed Marketing Model for sustainable tourism development in Albania
O4: Answering the main research question		S6	Results and conclusions	R6: Scientific results R7: Contribution R8: Further research

Source: own research and analysis, 2023

Based on secondary research, and on primary qualitative and quantitative analysis, it is aimed to develop a model that includes the interrelation of environment protection, economic processes, and human wellbeing as pillars for sustainable tourism development in Albania. The framework aims at integrating the approach of a common region of Western Balkans as well. As a first step of primary research, ten interviews with experts were conducted to explore the research field. All experts interviewed have profound practical and theoretical knowledge in their respective fields of work. Interviewees are stakeholders of the tourism industry representing the public and private sector. The interviews were structured based on the research questions of the dissertation and from a theoretical analysis during the

preliminary research. Indicator themes are related to economic, ecological, and social sustainability elements that influence the overall sustainable tourism development. The methodology of qualitative content analysis was used to evaluate the results (Mayring, 2015). As a further step, the following hypothesis were formulated and assessed through empirical research.

H₁: The belief of investing in green development in Albania is associated with the belief that an integrated Western Balkan enhances engagements toward sustainability.

H₂: The perception that a tour combining different destinations in the Western Balkan countries is a good possibility for the respondents is associated with the preference to buy local rather than global products.

H₃: The perception that a tour combining different destinations in the Western Balkan countries is a desirable choice for the respondents is associated with the belief that their touristic trip to Albania is satisfactory.

For the quantitative analysis, two quantitative surveys were distributed, and data analyses were performed. These provided an answer to the main research question of the dissertation and helped to integrate the answer into the proposed marketing model for sustainable tourism development in Albania.

The quantitative analysis used in this paper comprises following steps:

- Descriptive analysis
- One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)
- Correlational analysis
- Multivariable linear regression analysis

3. QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

This chapter summarizes qualitative and quantitative analysis and findings. From the results of qualitative interviews derived the hypothesis of this study. They were confirmed by statistical test procedures from quantitative survey results and the assessment of the formed data set.

3.1 RESULTS OF THE QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Based on the qualitative content analysis, following results from experts' interviews were reached (Table 4). The focus of the interviews was on topics related to tourism development, sustainable development, environment and especially the integrated destination of the Western Balkans and its future.

Table 4: Expert Interviews main results

Tourism development in Albania	<p>Tourism must be given priority as a sector with high contribution to Albania's development.</p> <p>Despite economic challenges Albania should embrace sustainable tourism development.</p> <p>Engagement among stakeholders will help create a mindset to adapt to new strategies of sustainable development. This development should happen in balance with environment protection and care for Albanian society.</p> <p>Negative practices, such as hydropower building and excessive building in touristic areas should be managed carefully.</p>
Sustainable development & a common destination of WB	<p>Regional collaboration creates added value.</p> <p>Careful planning is at once necessary to avoid over-tourism.</p> <p>Capacity carrying studies and analysis are crucial and an emergent step</p> <p>Stakeholders already engaged in green development in Albania may incite among others the belief that an integrated Western Balkan enhances engagements toward sustainability.</p>
The Tourism Marketing Strategy for Albania	<p>The design of a strategy that includes sustainability is necessary for Albanian tourism.</p> <p>Among sustainability, the idea of a common region of Western Balkans may be included in the strategy along with its benefits toward the road to sustainability.</p>

Source: own research and analysis, 2023

Experts' opinions revealed that collaboration between countries and a common, integrated destination may contribute to the road toward sustainability better than facing it alone.

4.2 RESULTS OF THE QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

The analysis and results of both surveys directed to Albanian citizens and foreign travellers are presented in the following section.

4.2.1 Nationals sample survey

The answers were collected from “Question Pro Survey” and analysed with SPSS Statistics software. The questionnaire was based on five main pillars: natural resources in Albania, economic challenges, the region of the Balkans, integrated destination of the Western Balkan countries, and sustainability.

a. Descriptive statistics and analysis:

Overall, 685 respondents from the Albanian sample participated in the survey on sustainable tourism development as integrated part of the Western Balkan countries (Table 5).

Table 5: Basic data questionnaire: nationals sample

The questionnaire was viewed	1361
Total responses	936
Responses completed	685
Completion rate	63.36%

Source: Own research and analysis, 2023

There was a significant overrepresentation of women in the sample, comprising of 72% of the respondents. Age distribution and education level are presented as follows:

Table 5a: Age distribution

Age	
25 or younger	47.70%
26-41	27.20%
42-57	23.10%

Table 5b: Education level

Education	
PhD or Masters	47.70%
Bachelor	36.10%
High school	8.20%

A similar share of respondents worked in the private and public sectors (42.2% and 38.7%). A smaller share was unemployed (15.8%). More than half of the respondents were low-income (58.7%), 30.1% were middle-income and only 11.2% were high-income.

b. One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

The hypothesis tested by one-way Anova analysis of variance concerned whether there is a significant association between the dependent variable, the belief that an integrated Western Balkan enhances engagements toward sustainability, and the independent variable of the

belief to invest in recent technologies and education related to green development. If the relationship is not statistically significant, there is no evidence to confirm the hypothesis as there is no association between the variables of interest.

Results in Table 6 show that there is a statistically significant association between the two main variables of interest: the perception of an integrated Western Balkan enhancing engagements toward sustainability and perception of investing in innovative technologies and education related to green development. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 6: Anova analysis: nationals sample

Anova ^{a b1}					
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	21.115	4	5.279	4.515	.001 ^b
Residual	795.075	680	1.169		
Total	816.190	684			

Source: own research and analysis, 2023

c. Pearson Chi Square Coefficient

The Chi-square test of the relationship between the two main variables of interest is statistically significant. Chi-square tests are presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Chi-Square Tests: nationals sample

Chi – Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	53.493 ^a	20	<.001
Likelihood Ratio	50.930	20	<.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	15.388	1	<.001
N of Valid Cases	685		

Source: own research and analysis, 2023

Both perceptions go in the same direction and the relationship is statistically significant.

This analysis assesses the hypothesis of an association between the perception of the

¹ a. Dependent Variable: ID b. Predictors: (Constant), What is your highest completed education grade, SC, Gender, Age group

respondents of investing in innovative technologies and education related to green development *and* their belief that an integrated Western Balkan enhances engagements toward sustainability².

d. Multivariable linear regression

Multivariable linear regression shows a statistically significant relationship between the variables of interest. When there is *higher* belief of investing in innovative technologies and education related to green development, this *increases* the belief that an integrated Western Balkan would enhance engagements toward sustainability (0.156, p-value <.001)³. This relationship holds after adding for precision demographic controls such as gender, age group and education level.

Table 8: Multivariable linear regression analysis: nationals sample

Variables	B	β	SE B	t	95.0% Confidence Interval for B Lower Bound	95.0% Confidence Interval for B Upper Bound
Constant	3.938***		0.261	15.087	3.425	4.45
Investing in green development	0.156***	0.149***	0.04	3.914	0.078	0.234
Gender	0.138**	0.057**	0.093	1.477	-0.045	0.322
Age group	0.005	0.004	0.055	0.093	-0.103	0.113
Education	-0.016	-0.012	0.06	-0.273	-0.133	0.101
R square			0.026			
Adjusted R square			0.02			

Source: own research and analysis, 2023

Therefore, there is evidence to reject the null hypothesis, and there is a relationship between the variables of interest (Table 8).

4.2.2 Internationals sample survey

The answers were collected from “Question Pro Survey” and analysed with “SPSS Statistics” software. Visitors in Albania and other travellers, who would like to visit it participated in the questionnaire.

² Note: 9 cells (30.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .29.

³ Note: n=685, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

a. Descriptive statistics and analysis

Overall, 249 respondents participated in the international survey (Table 9).

Table 9. Basic data questionnaire: international sample

The questionnaire was viewed	387
Total responses	249
Responses closed	249
Completion rate	87.55%

Source: own research and analysis, 2023

Age distribution and education level are presented in Tables 9a and 9b. Out of 213 responses, most of the respondents earned above 20,000 Euros in the last year (40.6%), 28.9% earned between 12,000-20,000 Euros, 9.6% earned 5,000-12,000 Euros and 6.4% earned less than 5,000 Euros.

Table 9a: Age distribution

Age	
15-24	12.10%
25-34	36.70%
35-44	29.80%
45-54	17.70%

Table 9b: Education level

Education	
PhD	2%
Master's degree	16%
Bachelor	47.70%
High school	10%

Source: own research and analysis, 2023

b. One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

The hypothesis tested concerned whether there is a significant association between the dependent variable: In overall how satisfied you with your trip to Albania were, and the independent variable of the belief that a tour combining different destinations in the WB would be a good option for travelers (Table 10).

Table 10: Anova analysis: international sample

Anova ^{a b4}					
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	3.548	3	1.183	13.759	<.001 ^b
Residual	17.709	206	.086		
Total	21.257	209			

Source: own research and analysis, 2023

⁴ a. Dependent Variable b. Predictors: (Constant), Age, Independent Variable

If the relationship is not statistically significant then there is no evidence to confirm the hypothesis as there is no association between the variables of interest.

Results show that there is a statistically significant association between the two main variables of interest: the perception of a satisfying trip to Albania enhances the desire to take a tour that combines different destinations in the Western Balkans. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

c. Pearson Chi Square Coefficient

The chi-square test of the relationship between the two main variables of interest is statistically significant. In Table 11 are presented the Chi-Square Tests.

They test the hypothesis of an association between the perception of the overall satisfaction with a trip to Albania and their belief that that a tour combining different destinations in Western Balkan would be a good option for travellers.⁵ Both perceptions go in the same direction and the relationship is statistically significant.

Table 11: Chi-Square Tests: internationals sample

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	37.050 ^a	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	27.899	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	29.052	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	215		

Source: own research and analysis, 2023

d. Multivariable Linear Regression Analysis

To test if there is any association between people's perceptions about an integrated Western Balkan destination and satisfaction with Albania's tourism based on their trip there, multivariable linear regression analysis was used (Table 12).

We test the significance of the association between people's perceptions that a tour combining different destinations in Western Balkans is a desirable choice for them and finding their trip to Albania satisfactory for them. The hypothesis is that people finding an integrated Western Balkan destination a good option for them also tend to think their trip to

⁵ a. 5 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .22.

Albania and its tourism is satisfactory. Consequently, from the international sample, a one unit increase in belief that a tour combining different destinations in the Western Balkan is a good choice for them is associated with a 0.135 increase in satisfaction of their trip to Albania⁶ (Table 12).

Table 12. Multivariable linear regression analysis: internationals sample

Variables	B	β	SE B	t
Constant	0.331**	0.127**		2.6
WB combined destination tour	0.135***	0.024***	0.36	5.64
Income	0.054*	0.024*	0.155	2.211
Age	-0.005*	0.002*	-0.157	-2.245
R square			0.167	
Adjusted R square			0.155	

Source: own research and analysis, 2023

This means that from people’s perceptions of an integrated Western Balkan would lead to more tourist development, growth, and sustainability for Albania. Hence, the null hypothesis of no association between these two main variables of interest was rejected, at the 0.001 level of significance, while controlling for demographics for precision.

CONCLUSION

Findings from both samples, showed similar statements about an integrated destination of Western Balkan countries and the sustainability of tourism and economy of Albania that could potentially inform the strategy on sustainable tourism development. Both perceptions of respondents from the two samples are statistically significant.

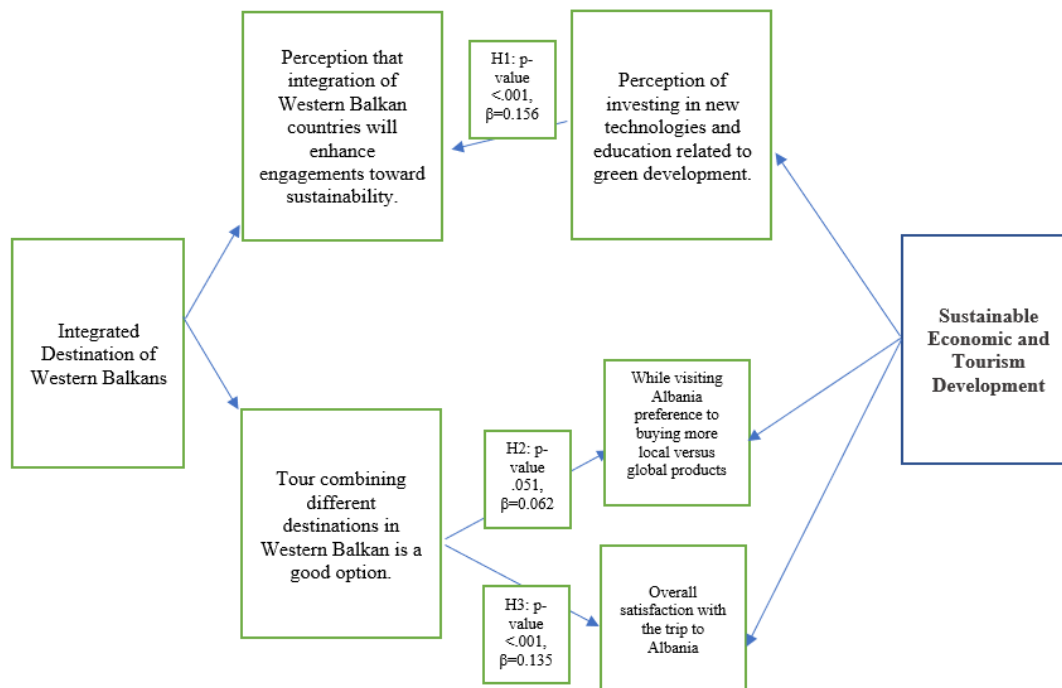
Respondents from the Albanian sample stated that an integrated Western Balkan enhances engagement toward sustainability which points in the same direction as their belief in investing in innovative technologies and education related to green development. Higher belief of investing in green development in Albania leads to increased belief that an integrated Western Balkan and enhances engagements toward sustainability. The slope of the regression line is positive, 0.156 and statistically significant.

Similarly, respondents from the international sample who found a tour combining different

⁶ Note: n=249 *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

destinations in the Western Balkan countries a good option for them, also tended to find their touristic trip to Albania satisfactory. Specifically, one unit increase in the belief that a tour combining different destinations in the Western Balkan countries is a desirable choice for the international sample, is associated with a 0.135 increase of satisfaction with their touristic trip to Albania.

Figure 1. Association between variables of interest analysed through empirical research



Source: Own research and analysis, 2023

Figure 1, represents the association between variables of interest, analysed through empirical research. Taking these two findings from respondents from both samples, it can be concluded that the idea of an integrated or combined destination of Western Balkan countries goes hand in hand with the perception of sustainable tourism and economic development via channels of investing in technologies and education related to green development.

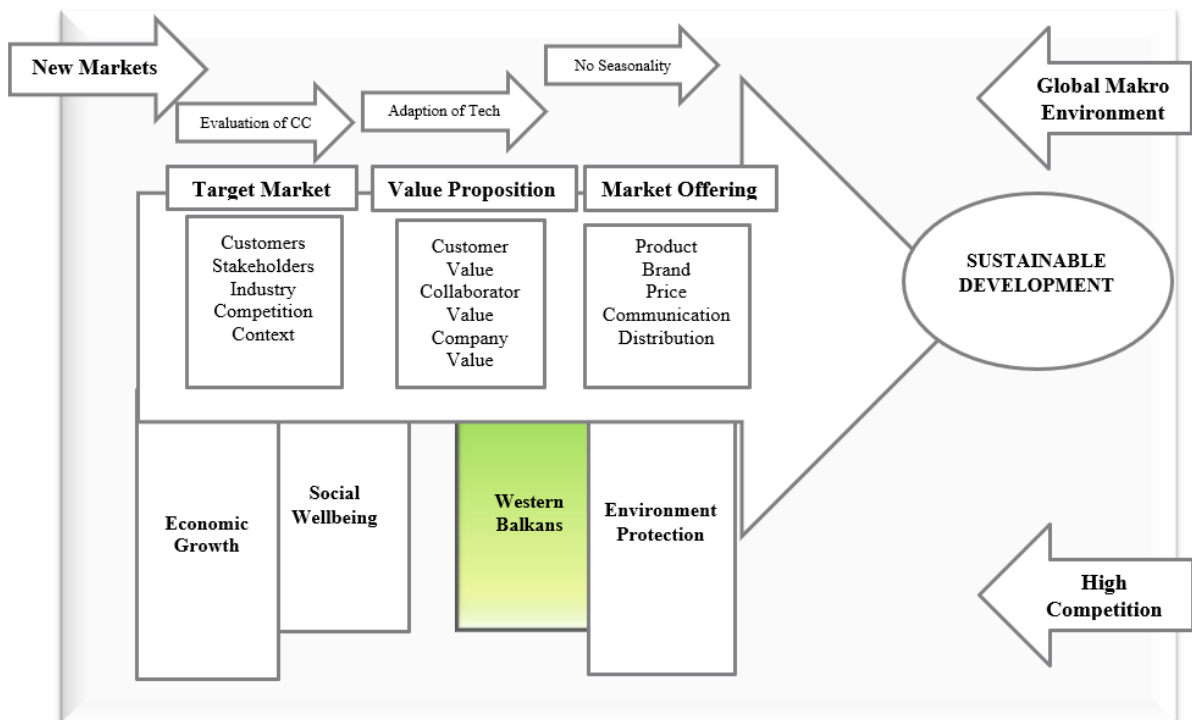
This is also in line with the UN SDG 17 (UN, 2023) on building and improving collaboration and partnerships between countries to achieve goals and foster sustainable development.

4.3 THE BALANCED MARKETING MODEL FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN ALBANIA

The philosophy of a new tourism marketing strategy is one that focuses on what Albania has to offer so that tourists can slow down, reconnect, and discover nice places and extraordinary people along the way. However, the challenge is to provide solutions by developing tourism awareness that is respectful of the environment and the local way of life of its inhabitants. The opportunity of the Western Balkans will give the countries of the region advantages in terms of sustainable tourism development and overall sustainable development.

The Balanced Marketing Model in Figure 2, was created based on the results of the literature review, and on the results of the empirical survey, aiming to give an answer to *Sub-question 3: What does a frame of a Marketing Strategy for sustainable tourism development in Albania look like?*

Figure 2: The Balanced Marketing Model for sustainable tourism development in Albania



Source: Own research and analysis, 2023 Based on: Chernev (2019), Kotler et al., 2022, Chernev & Kotler (2018), UNWTO (2022), UNWTO (2019), World Trade Organization (2017), Williams & Lew (2014), WTTC, Albania (2022)

The model includes tourism stakeholders, who should partake and collaborate in the development process; the market offering, and all its elements, which aim for better

performance, to create value not only for customers but also industry and collaborators. All these elements stand firm and on four equilibrated pillars. In the case of Albania, among the three globally recognized pillars is presented a fourth one. The pillar of regional collaboration of the six countries of Western Balkans, Albania included. The four pillars are of similar importance and should stand in balance during the development process.

4.4 NEW SCIENTIFIC RESULTS

This subchapter presents a summary of stage six S6 of the research process. The five following scientific results derived from the whole process of research.

Scientific outcome 1:

Based on secondary and primary research, combined SWOT strategies are carried out in this dissertation. These strategies focus on highlighting sustainability practices and collaboration between Western Balkan countries and offer an opportunity that may ease the path toward Albanian tourism development in the long term. The present dissertation contributes to deepening the understanding of the importance of sustainable tourism development in developing countries and raises awareness of a relationship between local communities and travellers as two parts of society that may influence and interact in harmony with each other.

Scientific outcome 2:

The quantitative research revealed that within the nationals sample the perception of the respondents about investing in innovative technologies and education related to green development and their belief that an integrated Western Balkan enhances engagements toward sustainability show a statistically significant correlation. Similarly, respondents from the international sample who found a tour combining different destinations in the Western Balkan countries a good option for them also tended to find their touristic trip to Albania satisfactory.

Taking these findings from both samples, it can be concluded that the idea of an integrated destination of WB countries goes hand in hand with the perception of sustainable tourism and economic development via channels of investing in technologies and education related to green development. This could potentially inform the strategy on sustainable tourism development in Albania. This is also in line with the UN SDG 17 on building and improving collaboration and partnerships between countries to achieve goals and foster sustainable development.

Scientific outcome 3:

One main new outcome of this study, is the creation of the Balanced Marketing Framework for Albanian tourism. This is suitable to tourism development in Albania and integrates a new pillar that will co-contribute to sustainable tourism development. Among the three globally recognized pillars of economic growth in harmony with social well-being and environmental protection, the pillar of regional collaboration of the six countries of Western Balkans may be a great advantage inciting a sustainable approach to development.

The new framework (Figure 2) represents a marketing strategy for the tourism development of a country that is open and ready to collaborate for a better future. It highlights the presence of all stakeholders of the tourism industry, all the elements of the marketing mix and the core marketing mission of value creation among customers but also among the industry and collaborators. The marketing strategy stands on four balanced pillars. This result was indicated from primary quantitative analysis and findings in this dissertation.

Scientific outcome 4:

Qualitative as well as quantitative analysis indicate the fourth scientific result of this dissertation, which is related to Albanian stakeholders' positive approach toward regional cooperation. This is a key step to sustainable development. Firstly, citizens of WB countries must be ready and wish for collaboration, to have a successful touristic performance of the region. According to this research Albanians are ready to embrace this initiative. The study indicates that a common destination would motivate them to invest in technologies and trainings to facilitate sustainable development. The research should be carried further to the other WB countries.

Scientific outcome 5:

The development of an advanced tourism policy, focused on sustainability is the fifth scientific result of this dissertation. Based on secondary and primary research, this policy represents own recommendations of a new set of tourism policies, related to tourism offer and products, economic and technological development and collaboration and education. An updated tourism policy, representing global sustainability goals is a must for the country. This is one step that may incite the engagement toward further improvement of tourism policy.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this study was to determine a connection between the development as a common region of Western Balkans and a better approach to sustainable tourism development. Collaboration would not only enhance the economy but would contribute to sustainability. This research reveals an important approach of Albanian stakeholders regarding sustainable tourism development in their country. Stakeholders of the tourism industry affirm to be aware of the touristic potential of their own territory, and they agree that society should embrace sustainable practices to protect it.

From qualitative research, experts share the same opinion that tourism is a wonderful opportunity for resilient growth. To facilitate the adaptation of new sustainable strategies it is crucial that all stakeholders of the tourism industry engage. Additionally, experts share the same viewpoint that regional collaboration creates added value. A common, larger region, may create the opportunity to plan better, manage excessive tourism in one country alone and adapt easily to sustainability practices.

Quantitative research and analysis revealed similar results that could potentially inform the strategy on sustainable tourism development. Both perceptions of respondents from the two samples are statistically significant. The idea of going forward as an integrated destination of Western Balkans is clearly linked to the perception that entrepreneurs, private companies, tourist agents, government as well as community will have an active response to sustainability initiatives. This approach goes alongside with the EU Commission statement that joint action is essential for further development and growth of the region (European Commission, 2018).

The initiative of an integrated Western Balkans as part of a Marketing Strategy for sustainable tourism development in Albania was integrated in a proposed marketing model for Albania. The suggested framework for sustainable tourism development in Albania (Figure 2) proposes a new plan for sustainable tourism development.

The collaboration of Western Balkans is an attempt to create mutual advantage to partner countries and at the same time deliver added value for international tourists visiting the region.

The empirical investigation as well as theoretical findings show that engagement toward sustainable initiatives is linked to the idea of collaboration as a single space of Western Balkans. From respondents' perceptions, the main benefits derived from this collaboration may be regional stability, increased interest of large investments and enhanced engagement

in sustainability. Among cultural legacy, Mediterranean uniqueness and eco places, another reason that travellers would love to visit is the idea of a common space of the six countries, which seems incredibly attractive and translates to diversity of products offered at a special price and in a friendly host community.

A new marketing strategy for Albania, aiming to achieve sustainable goals is to balance among economic, social, and cultural elements the opportunity of regional collaboration.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Further recommendations may contribute to a sustainable development and may be further explored by researchers.

- Dynamic destination management would help to plan according to the carrying capacity. An indicator framework for monitoring capacity and acting accordingly is necessary.
- Continued monitoring of visitors' impacts will ensure environmental protection, a quality visitor experience and well-being of locals.
- More renewable sources of energy may be used.
- Further construction of accommodation must be managed carefully to avoid mass tourism.
- New tourism policies, guided by principles of sustainable development will create more customer value. Suggested policies for this kind of approach are presented in detail in the dissertation.
- Albania does not have a large surface area; however, it is very diverse, and many kinds of tourism can to be developed. Managing the country by tourism clusters may be a good strategy. Suggested policies for this kind of approach are presented in detail in the dissertation.

Lastly, the aim of this dissertation is achieved by presenting a road to collaboration, which will contribute to tourism development and the protection of a beautiful region and society.

“Tourism must prosper in harmony with nature”

6. REFERENCES AND STATISTICS

- Albanian Tourism Ministry. (2023). Tourism Data in Albania [Personal communication].
- Chernev, A. (2019a). Marketing Strategy and Tactics. Cerebellum Press.
- Chernev, A., & Kotler, P. (2018). Strategic Marketing Management (9th ed.). Cerebellum Press.
- EBRD. (2023). Transition report 2023-24 Transitions big and small.
- European Commission. (2018). Enlargement Negotiations. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2019-03/western_balkans_strategy_brochure.pdf
- Kotler, P., Keller, K. L., & Chernev, A. (2022a). Marketing Management (16th Edition Global Edition). Pearson Education Limited.
- Mayring, P. (2015). Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse: Grundlagen und Techniken (12th ed.). Weinheim, Bergstr Beltz, J.
- OECD. (2022). Multi-dimensional Review of the Western Balkans: From Analysis to Action. In OECD iLibrary. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/multi-dimensional-review-of-the-western-balkans_8824c5db-en
- Polijak-Grujic, T., & Domaratzki, S. (2022). Wester Balkan Futures. Executive Summary Western Balkans 2030. <https://visegradinsight.eu/app/uploads/2022/03/Western-Balkans-Final.pdf>
- UNDP, & Lena, O. (2022). Tourism and Hospitality in Albania 2022 An assessment of tourism trends and performance.
- United Nations. (2023). The 17 Sustainable Development Goals. United Nations; United Nations. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
- UNWTO. (2019). International Tourism Highlights, 2019 Edition. International Tourism Highlights. <https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284421152>
- UNWTO. (2020, January 20). International Tourism Growth Continues to Outpace the Global Economy | UNWTO. www.unwto.org. <https://www.unwto.org/international-tourism-growth-continues-to-outpace-the-economy>
- UNWTO. (2022). Glossary of Tourism Terms. www.unwto.org; United Nations World Tourism Organization. <https://www.unwto.org/glossary-tourism-terms>
- UNWTO. (2023, May 9). Tourism on track for full recovery as new data shows a strong start to 2023. www.unwto.org. <https://www.unwto.org/news/tourism-on-track-for-full-recovery-as-new-data-shows-strong-start-to-2023>
- Williams, S., & Lew, A. A. (2014). Tourism Geography. Routledge.
- World Trade Organization. (2017). WTO | The WTO and the Sustainable Development Goals. [Wto.org](https://www.wto.org). https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/coher_e/sdgs_e/sdgs_e.htm
- World Travel & Tourism Council. (2022). Economic Impact | World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC). [Wttc.org](https://wtcc.org). <https://wtcc.org/Research/Economic-Impact>

List of Author's Publications

- Demi, A., & Kadiu, A. (2021). Public and private social system in Albania. IBANESS, 11–17. https://www.ibaness.org/conferences/plovdiv_2021/ibaness_plovdiv_proceedings_draft_6.pdf
- Draci, P., & Kadiu, A. (2023). Evaluation of residents for the impact of tourism development and their participation in local governance. *Current Issues in Business and Economic Studies*, 3. <https://soberproceedings.com/index.jsp?mod=tammetin&makaleadi=&makaleurl=b54b8cd2-c13f-4571-a844-6def616829a4.pdf&key=71167>. ISBN: 2980-3160.
- Kadiu, A. (2017). A Secret in European Tourism . Conference Proceedings of the Second International Scientific Conference for Doctoral Students and Young Researchers, 61–76. <https://fhburgenland.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16083coll2/id/1705>
- Kadiu, A. (2020). Pandemic 2020 Marketing Strategies for Albanian Tourism. *Crisis and Recovery: Innovative Solutions*, 424–432. <http://publicatio.uni-sopron.hu/2096/1/SOELKKConferenceProceedings2020.11.05.pdf>
- Kadiu, A. (2021). Building up tourism resilience after Covid-19. The case of Albania. *Economy & Business*, 15(1), 392–400. <https://www.scientific-publications.net/en/article/1002260/>
- Kadiu, A., Demi, A., & Szabo, Z. (2022). *Economy & Business*, Volume 16, 2022 — International Scientific Publications. [Www.scientific-Publications.net](http://www.scientific-publications.net). <https://www.scientific-publications.net/en/issue/1000055/>. Pages 407-418.
- Kadiu, A., & Szabo, Z. (2022). Developing countries and sustainability. *Society – Economy – Nature: Synergies in sustainable development*, 504–519. http://publicatio.uni-sopron.hu/2625/1/MTU_2022_Conf_Proceedings_SOE_LKK_s5_Challouf_Nemeth.pdf
- Kadiu, A., & Tivari, S. (2022). Vol. 9 No. 4. S1 (2022): November 2022 - Special Issue| *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research and Development*. [Www.journal-Uamd.org](http://www.journal-uamd.org). <https://www.journal-uamd.org/index.php/IJRD/issue/view/16>
- Puci, J., Demi, A., & Kadiu, A. (2023). Impact of macroeconomic variables on the construction sector. *Corporate and Business Strategy Review*, 4(1), 22–30. <https://doi.org/10.22495/cbsrv4i1art2>