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Marketing Strategies promoting Sustainable Tourism Development in the country of Albania

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List of Abbreviations

CEFTA–Central European Free Trade Agreement
EBRD–European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
DMO–Destination Management Organization DMO
BRD–European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
GDP–Gross Domestic Product
IMC–Integrated Marketing Communications
NTB–National Tourism Board
OECD–Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
SDG–Sustainable Development goals
UN–United Nations
UNWTO–United Nations World Tourism Organization
WB–Western Balkans
WCED–World Commission on Environment and Development
WTTC–World Travel and Tourism Council

Abstract

In the last decades tourism has become one of the fastest growing industries and one of the largest economic sectors globally. This industry contributes to a multidimensional development of the world's countries. It elevates the quality of residents' life by providing higher income, creating new job opportunities, and enhancing the economy. However, exponential growth is also related to potential risks. Especially in developing destinations like Albania, if tourism grows beyond the carrying capacity, it places increased pressure on natural resources, coastal ecosystems, and consequently, it may reduce the quality of life of its residents.

Therefore, it is necessary to manage these effects in a way that avoids damage to fragile ecosystems, protects local systems, residents' wellbeing, and visitors' experience as well. This thesis firstly presents a general view of the global situation of tourism development, gradually shifting the focus to Albania and the difficulties of a developing country to approach a sustainable philosophy of tourism development. The analysis aims to find elements that contribute to such development and integrate them in a complete tableau where industry, ecosystems, nature, culture, and communities are involved.

It is the main aim of this dissertation to research if the perspective of an integrated destination of Western Balkans may influence Albanian stakeholders' beliefs and engagement toward sustainable development. A positive relation aims to be reflected in the design of a marketing model that is supported from a balanced growth of the four pillars of social, economic, environmental health and integrated destination of Western Balkans.

To achieve the research aim, a multi-method approach has been applied. Qualitative and quantitative research contributed to the main results of the dissertation. Ten interviews with experts of the field and two questionnaires make the basis of the empirical research.

Findings indicate that the willingness of Albanian citizens to embrace a sustainable approach in developing tourism relates to the desire to collaborate as a broader region of Western Balkans. Furthermore, research reveals that travellers visiting Albania embrace the idea of exploring a common destination of the Western Balkans. An integrated destination can positively enhance economic growth and create higher value for local communities and visitors.

Key Words; *Marketing strategy, sustainable tourism development, integrated destination of Western Balkans, collaboration, Albania.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Although tourism is considered a recent phenomenon, activities like today's tourism were found as early as in the ancient Greco- Roman world, when people travelled for trade, religion, sports, or other reasons, including visiting new, unknown places. Archaeological sites have revealed that early civilizations like the Mayans, Phoenicians, and Shang Dynasty travelled in pursuit of commerce but also curiosity (Graham- Harrison, 2019).

Over time, tourism around the world kept evolving, passing through four main stages of development until it reached the current contemporary tourism stage. From Ancient Tourism to Classical Tourism occurring from 600 B.C to 600 A.D, evolving to Modern Tourism of the 16- th century and gradually transitioning to the Contemporary Tourism of our times, many surprising developments have happened. Two milestones, the Industrial Revolution and Technological Revolution, have significantly influenced trade and the world economy, and became an incitement for contemporary travelling and tourism. It became easier and less expensive to travel from one place to another. Furthermore, technological improvements granted people more free time. These factors increased the desire to travel. From north to south, to sea- sand- sun places and from the east to the west, to totally different cultures and experiences, surprisingly quickly, tourism changed into an international industry.

Most countries, be they developed or developing, rich or poor, and large or small compete for a larger share of the international tourism market. They capitalise on their cultural heritage, historic landmarks, rich wildlife, ancient monuments, scenic beauty, and other distinctive attractions and invest in world class resorts, hotels, and entertainment facilities to increase their appeal to the greatest numbers and different types of international travellers (Makhlouf, 2012). Tourism may be possible almost in every corner of the world. Every country may promote their own individuality and treasures. This industry accounts currently for a global multidimensional development. It elevates the quality of residents' life by providing higher income, creating new job opportunities, and enhancing the economy.

Inevitably and expectedly, among positive impacts, travelling has caused some negative impacts too. The natural, global environment has been forced to change significantly.

Over time, different perceptions about tourism have been developed. Although many perceive tourism to have only negative impacts on the physical environment, the relationship between

the two is multifaceted. According to Gössling and Hall (2006) tourism is both a major contributor to and increasingly affected by global environmental change. Although tourism can be a contributor to environmental conservation at the local scale, particularly through instances of ecotourism or nature-based tourism – where specific charismatic species or ecosystems are conserved – on a global scale tourism is a significant element in environmental change.

The popular perception that the tourist–natural environment relationship is necessarily one of inverse linearity began to be questioned in the 1970s and 1980s (Lew, Hall & Williams, 2004). Landscape architects and planners have argued that, with effective design and management, a coexistence or “symbiosis” between tourism and the environment is possible (Budowski 1976; C. Michael Hall & Page 2014; Mathieson and Wall 1982; Romeril 1989)

According to Budowski (1976) there are many reasons and examples which prove that a change of attitude, leading to a symbiotic relationship between tourism and conservation in the larger sense, will offer a variety of physical, cultural, ethical, and economic advantages to a country. The future of tourism may be great if it is based on environmental natural assets and if ecological principles are protected and guide resource-use. He draws a distinction between the following three kinds of relations:

- The conflicting relation between tourism and nature, particularly when the presence of tourism and what it implies is detrimental to nature and its resources.
- The coexistence between tourism and nature, when the tourist industry and those promoting the cause of conservation of nature establish relatively little contact. This can be because neither tourism nor conservation is well developed in an area, or because of administrative barriers, or, very widely, because of the ignorance of each concerning the other's field. This relation, however, has the tendency to change, because when tourism keeps developing it will induce important changes. Therefore, this relation tends to transform either to a mutually satisfactory relationship (the relation of symbiosis) or to a conflicting relation (like the one explained above).
- Symbiosis is the third state, in which the tourism industry and promoters of nature conservation both attain benefits from the mutual relationship. An increasing number of people derive wider benefits from nature and natural resources—whether in a physical, aesthetic, cultural, scientific, or educational sense. Of course there are economic advantages too (Budowski. G, 1976).

Such a “symbiosis” is necessary to “sustain” the environment in tourism, and “sustainability” of the environment is now often interchangeably used with “sustainable tourism” (Lew et al., 2004). A country like Albania, although with very favourable conditions for tourism development, is young in the industry. Currently the country is experiencing a coexistence of tourism and nature, and the matter seems very delicate. Considering the lack of experience in tourism development, it is especially important to develop strategies that lead to the “symbiosis” and try to avoid ending in a conflicting relationship. Furthermore, as a developing country Albania needs to grow faster economically and growing green may not be easy, considering that this path is closely related to economic factors. However, eventually, every country in the world will have to adapt to global regulations. If future strategies of economic development incorporate initiatives for environmental protection, the world will again become a better place. Green initiatives are thought to be the saviours of our planet, which would contribute to the protection of future human wellbeing. Therefore, society must be ready to commit to these initiatives for the future of the next generations.

1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Although it is one of the most ancient countries in the world, Albania is relatively new in the tourism industry. Due to historical and political factors the industry was almost non-existent and undeveloped until 1990. Only after the 90s, it was given priority and from that time on tourism has continued to develop exponentially. Tourism has currently become a main pillar of economic development for Albania and its contribution in 2022 was around 24% of the total economy. 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. However, fast, and not well managed economic development may put a lot of pressure on natural resources and cause 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.

During the last decade (pandemic period excluded), the number of visitors had kept increasing each year in Albania. During the first eight months of 2023 the country has seen a record number

of visitors, which exceeded 5 million. 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. To achieve these objectives research must focus on the destination as a whole or as a collection of clusters, which analyse economic, social, and environmental conditions necessary for the future. Several indicators have been examined lately, such as the amount of waste generated by hotels, the number of cruise ship passengers, and visitor perceptions of varying levels of crowding at beaches (Sustainable Travel International, 2023). These studies will contribute to creating a path towards sustainable, high-value and low-impact tourism – a balance between growth and risk.

For Albania alone it may be difficult to overcome challenges along the path and master its approach toward sustainability, considering that the country is a developing one and is very focused on economic growth. However, achieving sustainable growth should be the aim of all countries around the globe. 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. May an integrated destination of six nature-blessed countries, the countries of the Western Balkans, ease the path toward sustainability? May collaboration save the future of Balkan tourism and contribute to the economy of these countries?

The aim of this research is 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 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 harmonising legislation and economic agreements would be beneficial for the economy and increase consciousness and engagement in environment protection. It is important to study Albania's attitude toward this initiative and, if the approach is positive, to find ways and project management and marketing strategies that encourage this collaboration. A better future is built on collaboration.

In summary, the research focuses on analysing if an integrated destination would improve the economy of all countries in the region and ease the road toward sustainable development.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Lately, a lot of studies have researched the importance and interface between sustainable tourism development and stable economic growth. However, in developing countries, the research regarding real possibilities to develop sustainability, while facing many economic problems, is complex and needs to be studied further and more in-depth.

Current events or occurrences related to climate change or mass tourism make the situation even more complex. The importance of setting up the key elements of green growth processes in Albania is a key step to be analysed and defined. Although green approaches may take more time in terms of economic growth, they will eventually lead the country to an overall sustainable development.

The main research question that summarises all the activities and analyses of the thesis is:

Can an integrated destination of the Western Balkans raise awareness and engagement and facilitate the development of sustainable tourism? What is the right marketing strategy frame to achieve sustainable tourism goals?

To gain a deeper understanding of the main research question, it has been broken down into sub-questions to be answered along. In the end, all answers will be brought together into a main overall view that answers the main question.

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?

The European Union, a region very close to the Western Balkans, may be the best example that illustrates that there are benefits but also difficulties to collaborate with neighbouring countries. However, to achieve bigger goals that will improve the life of tomorrow's generation, collaboration is necessary.

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

Through this question, it is important to understand what attracts tourists' attention and try to highlight these particularities. Among national citizens, tourists' approach regarding travelling to a common destination of the Western Balkans is very interesting to research and understand. Based on secondary research and on primary qualitative and quantitative analysis, this dissertation aims to develop a model that includes the interrelation of environment protection,

economic processes, and human wellbeing as pillars for sustainable tourism development in Albania. Additionally, the pillar of a common region of Western Balkans is aimed to be integrated in the framework as well. This aims to answer to *Sub-question 3: How does a frame of a marketing strategy for sustainable tourism development in Albania look like.*

1.3 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Trying to answer the main research question and the sub-questions in a comprehensive way, a multi-stage empirical procedure was conducted.

The entire research is based on four main objectives (O1-O4). These are organised 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 assessed. Two quantitative questionnaires were distributed by a snowball system characterised by an ad-hoc sample. The first questionnaire was the longest and it was directed to Albanian citizens. It aimed to understand their attitude towards an integrated destination of Western Balkans and their level of understanding and engagement toward sustainable tourism development. The research would not be complete without the travellers' opinions and thoughts. Therefore, the second questionnaire was directed to foreigners and aimed to assess their experience and wishes regarding travelling to Albania and the idea of a visiting a common touristic destination of Western Balkans. Data were analysed through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and hypotheses H1, H2 and H3 were assessed (S3, S4/ O2/ R3/ R4) to explain possible relations. Based on the qualitative and quantitative research a scheme was designed, which offers a proposed marketing model for future sustainable tourism development in Albania (O3/ S5/R5).

All the findings from the research were compared. After that, a scientific research contribution was obtained (S6/O4/R6). All the answers contributed to answering the main question (O4). Thereafter, conclusions about the practical feasibility of the results were drawn, and professional implications were developed (S6/O4/R7). In the end, open research questions are discussed (S6/O4/R8).

Table 1 presents the methodological overview and the methodology frame for this dissertation.

Table 1: 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 arising 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

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter delineates the theoretical approach of the thesis and spans essential knowledge that would contribute to answering the central research question and sub-questions. Different studies have been gathered and discussed from current perspectives. There is a summary of the main conclusions reached for every sub-chapter of this part of the dissertation.

The theoretical framework is based on secondary sources, from books and digital or offline libraries of the University of Applied Sciences in Burgenland and the University of Sopron, “Alexandre Lamfalussy” Faculty of Economics, as well as from other books and accessible scientific journals (ScienceDirect, Elsevier, The Guardian, New York Times, or Scopus indexed Journals).

Most importantly, insights from the theoretical background are integrated with results from primary research. Secondary research also helped to provide the background for the interviews and questionnaires (S2, S3). Existing databases and tested measurement scales are used for the questionnaire or the analysis of data. Furthermore, previous models of sustainable development and models that analyse the relations between tourism, economic growth, and the environment are taken as a reference and have contributed to the general results.

In the end, it is the theoretical framework integrated with primary research that provides an important contribution to the design of a new model of marketing for Albania, where economic, environmental, social elements and an integrated destination are included.

2.1 TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

The tourism industry is the fourth largest industry in the world, and it accounts for above 10% of the world’s income. Because of its labour-intensive nature, tourism creates great employment possibilities. Additional jobs in tourism-related sectors, which are called indirect jobs in the tourism-related economy increase the overall employment. One in ten jobs worldwide is tourism related. (UNWTO, 2019a). Some other beneficial effects of tourism development worldwide include the wealth redistribution from developed to poorer regions, substantial improvements in infrastructure, strengthening of local economies as well as generation of earnings from foreign exchange. Tourism is a wonderful opportunity for foreigners to enjoy and relax in new destinations and learn about new cultures, but it also creates many opportunities for local

citizens. It offers a great opportunity to young entrepreneurs to establish new products and services that would not be sustainable if they were distributed only to the locals. These days, travel and tourism have become a genuine experience. People may enjoy lofty standards of tourism, motivated by the human desire for new experiences, more entertainment, fantastic adventures, or high-quality education. Many employment opportunities in all its related sectors, such as construction, telecommunication, transport, and others, are offered by this industry, and therefore, it has a great social and cultural impact. Tourism has a multiplier effect across economic sectors – such as accommodation and food services, agriculture, retail, and transport – and when sustainably managed can contribute to economic diversification, enhance local culture and products, promote local enterprises and support job creation (ILO, 2022).

2.1.1 International tourism and economic growth

After the 50s until the end of 2019, before the pandemic, the tourism industry showed a steady growth and was a driver of the world economy over the years. Compared to oil exports, the automobile industry, or the food industry, the volume of tourism is similarly high. Therefore, the industry is ranked among the leading ones, which have a strong influence on international commerce. Referring to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Report (2019), from 1950 to 2018 the number of international tourist arrivals increased from less than 50 million to 1.4 billion. This number exponentially increased until the pandemic broke out in 2019.

Representing a main industry for global economic development, tourism offers great opportunities for emerging economies. Besides the economic impact mentioned previously, if managed in the right way, it may help to conserve the natural environment and cultural assets and traditions, and to reduce poverty and inequality. This can be achieved if local people benefit from the income opportunities arising from tourism (BMZ, 2022). Developing countries are emerging as important players and are increasingly aware of their economic potential. Once essentially excluded from the tourism industry, the developing world has now become its major growth area. For the world's forty poorest countries, tourism is the second-most important source of foreign exchange after oil industry (Rasool et al. 2021).

The relation between tourists and hosts incites new employment opportunities, especially for women, empowering them through more independence, promoting more egalitarian social

forms and practices as well and unbinding them from traditional social structures. In this way, new employment patterns are created.

The growing number of new destinations worldwide over the last decades significantly has affected not only economic but social progress as well. However, among benefits, especially for those countries highly dependent, the fast development of the industry may at the same time increase the risk of long-time consequences, especially in terms of environmental degradation and consumption of resources. In addition, fast development will also make the competition tougher. Countries will have to work harder for a balanced overall development.

Travel and tourism expansion over time, despite occasional shocks, showing the sector's strength and resilience (UNWTO, 2019a) is presented in the following Figure 1.



Figure 1: International tourist trips by destination region (1950-2018)

Source: United Nations World Tourism Organization - World Tourism Barometer (2019), UNWTO (2020)

It shows the number of international tourist trips by destination region from 1950 to 2018. The total number of international tourists in 2018 reached 1.41 billion.

It is interesting to note that the destination of Asia and Pacific has gained a particular interest over the years and from 2010 the number of visitors in this region has surpassed the number of visitors in the Americas. Meanwhile the following graph (Figure 2) represents the total, global number of international trips from 1950 to the time before the pandemic.

Among great developments witnessed, like the technological boom of the last century, the planet was confronted with a rough pandemic period, which has had its influence on overall global development. Tourism was one of the most dramatically affected industries, because travelling at the time was not allowed. The pandemic generated a loss of 2.6 billion international arrivals in 2020, 2021 and 2022 combined.

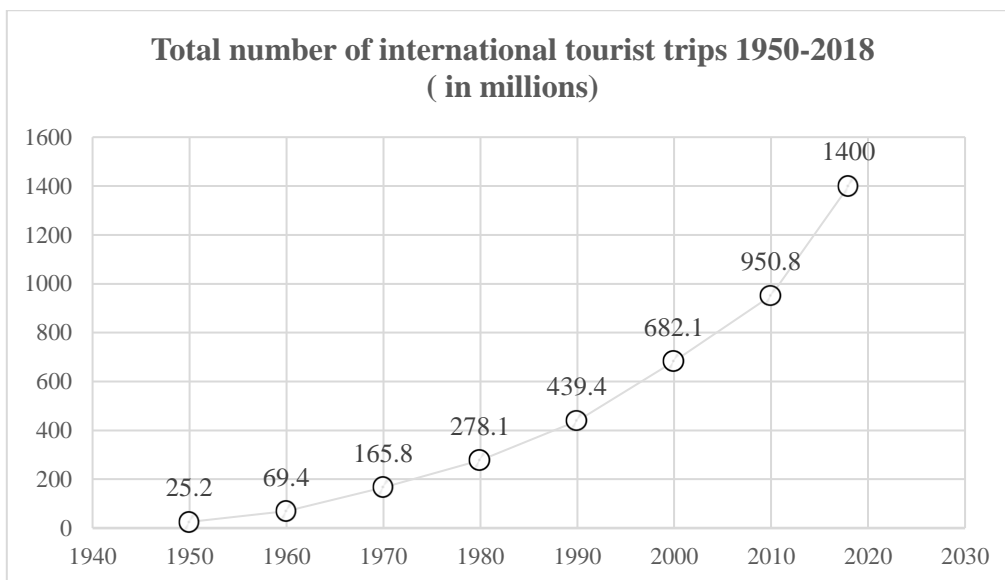


Figure 2: Total number of international tourist trips from 1950 to 2018

Source: United Nations World Tourism Organization - World Tourism Barometer (2020), UNWTO (2020)

Export revenues from international tourism dropped 62% in 2020 and 59% in 2021, versus 2019 (real terms) and then rebounded in 2022, remaining 34% below pre-pandemic levels. The total loss in export revenues from tourism amounts to USD 2.6 trillion for that three-year period. (UNWTO, 2022 b.)

In 2022, after three long years, the pandemic time was over, and countries have changed and adapted their strategies, to recover as fast as possible. In every part of the world tourism is recovering fast and strong. Arrival numbers reached 84% of pre-pandemic levels between January and July 2023, according to the latest data from UNWTO. The Middle East, Europe and Africa lead the global sector's rebound (UNWTO, 2023c). An estimated 235 million tourists travelled internationally in the first three months, more than double the amount in the same period of 2022. The number reached 700 million internationally between January and July 2023. This is 43% more than in the same period during 2022 (UNWTO, 2023a).

Referring to Figure 3, international tourism is on track for almost full recovery by the end of 2023. Europe, the world's largest destination region, reached 91% of pre-pandemic levels, supported by robust intra-regional demand and travel from the United States (UNWTO, 2023c). Additionally, international tourism receipts grew back to 50% in real terms compared to 2021.

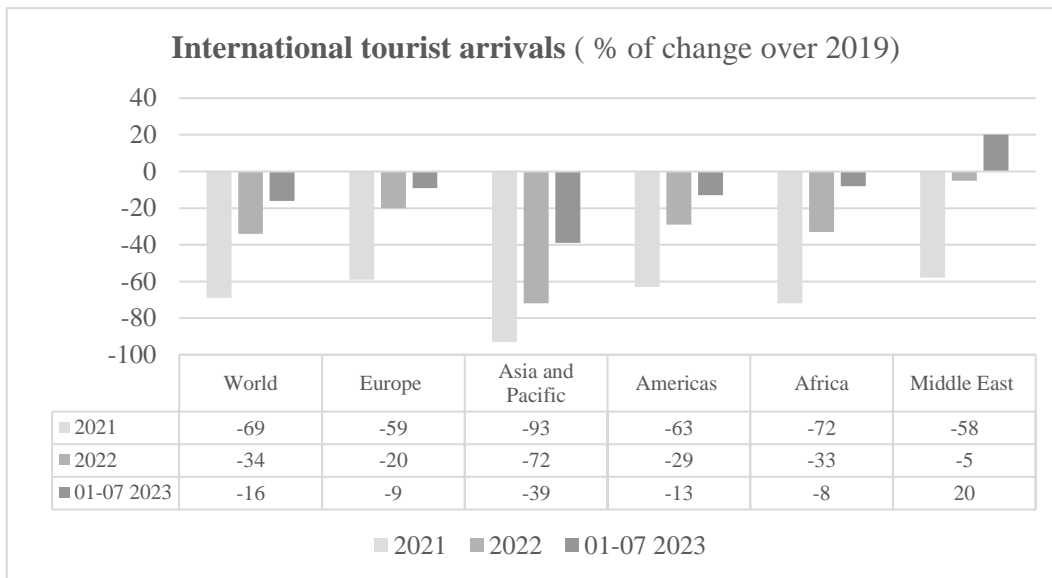


Figure 3: International tourist arrivals. Percentage of change over year 2019

Source: World Tourism Organization, September 2023

They reached the USD 1 trillion mark in 2022. International visitor spending reached 64% of pre-pandemic levels (-36% compared to 2019, measured in real terms). The region of Europe enjoyed the best outcome in 2022 with EUR 520 billion, or 87% of pre-pandemic levels (UNWTO, 2023b).

Economic statistics on total tourism demand, including those related to the amount of visitor consumption expenditure are among the most important indicators required by the tourism industry, for policy makers, marketers, and researchers. They are used for monitoring and assessing the impact of tourism on the national economy and on the various sectors of industry. Visitor consumption expenditure (VCE) is the basic part of total tourism demand. It is defined as the total consumption expenditure made by a visitor or on behalf of a visitor for and during his/her trip and stay at a destination (Leimer, 2006).

According to Williams and Lew (2015) the entire flow of money happens on three levels of tourism development:

01- The first stage includes limited spatial tourism economy: low levels of local supply and elevated levels of foreign dependency.

02- At an intermediate stage, the tourism economy spreads, local supply increases, and foreign dependency diminishes.

03- Advanced stage happens when there is an extensive local tourism economy, important levels of local supply, and low level of dependency on foreign suppliers.

Tourism has come to be a major force for change, an integral and indispensable part of the places in which we live, their economies and their societies. “When scarcely a corner of the globe stays untouched by the influence of tourism, this is a phenomenon that we can no longer ignore” says Lew Williams (2015) in his book *Tourism geography: a new synthesis*.

2.1.1.1 Albania, among the countries very reliant on tourism

The country of Albania, a southeast European country, situated in the Balkan Peninsula, stands somewhere between the first and the second stage of development. The coastal country is part of the large and extensively visited destination of the Mediterranean. Due to an exceedingly long communist regime, the country started its real path of economic development, only after the regime was overthrown, in the beginning of the 90s. Currently, Albania is considered a developing country, with many economic challenges. But tourism has lately become one of the main branches of economic development in the country.

Compared to the real economy GDP growth, which increased by 2.7% in 2019, the GDP growth from travel and tourism increased by 8.5%. There are 44 countries worldwide, which rely on the travel and tourism industry for more than 15% of their total share of employment.

Table 2: 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: Ministry of Tourism (2023)

Albania is one of them and is ranked in place 30 (Tirana Times, 2020) with nearly 244.000 jobs, and 2,652.7 MN USD international visitor spending in 2019 (WTTC, 2022).

The tourism industry has grown exponentially over the last years (except for the pandemic period) and is expected to grow more in the future (Table 2).

In Figure 4 are presented graphically the data from the above table, to create a better view of the increased or decreased levels of the GDP under the influence of the tourism industry.

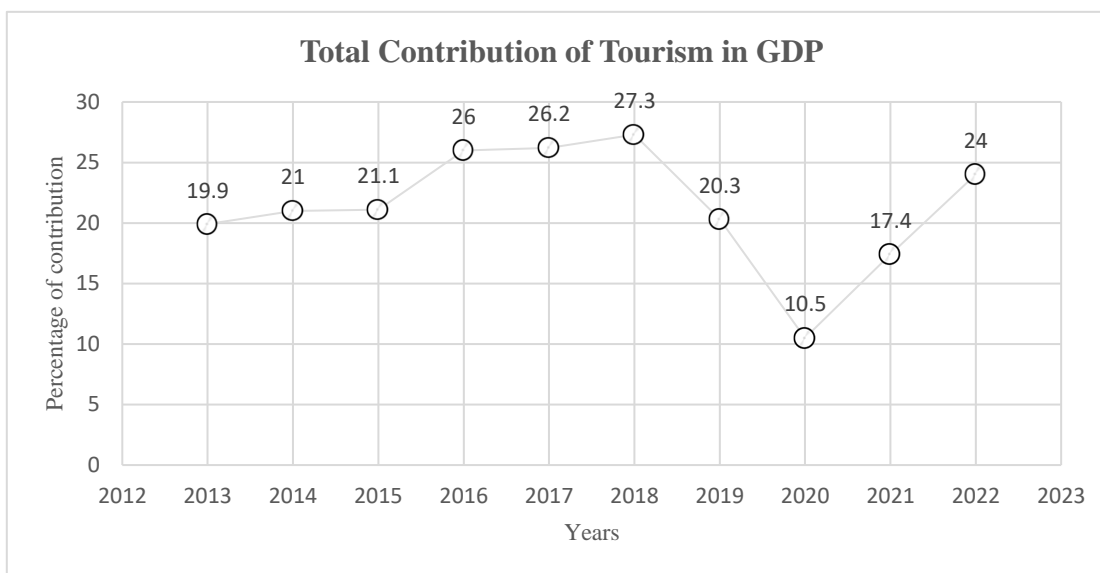


Figure 4: Total Contribution of Travel and Tourism to GDP in Albania, 2013 to 2021

Source: Ministry of Tourism in Albania (2023), INSTAT, World Travel and Tourism Council (2022)

While in Table 3 is presented in more detail, the contribution of tourism related industries. Gradually moving toward becoming the main industry of the country, tourism opens new employment possibilities for Albanian citizens.

Table 3: Contribution of economic activities related to tourism in Albania /000 ALL, from 2013-2021

Years	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Tourism related industries (total)	27,340	28,333	30,785	34,042	38,411	46,062	56,857	42,410	58,043	73,853
Accommodation (total)	3,615	4,158	4,709	6,274	8,929	11,013	13,505	10,234	17,545	18,301
Food and Beverages (total)	19,600	20,275	21,489	23,250	24,896	28,130	32,474	24,655	26,522	43,684
Renting activities	896	1,076	1,299	1,095	1,067	1,778	2,845	1,863	2,182	2,190
Travel agencies, touristic operators, and other activities related to the service of reservation	3,229	2,824	3,288	3,423	3,519	5,141	8,033	5,658	11,794	9,678

Source: Ministry of Tourism and Environment (2023), World Travel and Tourism Council (2022)

In Table 4 is presented the number of employees in tourism and tourism-related activities from 2013- 2021. For developing countries like Albania, the apparent capacity for tourism to create considerable wealth from resources that are perceived to be naturally and freely available has proven understandably attractive, but the risks associated with overdevelopment and dependence upon an activity that can be characteristically unstable are to be taken into consideration. There are benefits, but there are also costs attached to the physical and economic development of tourism. (Williams S, 2009b).

Table 4: 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 and renting	1,004	1,151	1,229	1,850	2,197	2,371	3,020	2,181	2,760
TC of tourism in employment	19%	19%	19%	24%	24%	25%	21%	17.5%	20%

Source: Ministry of Tourism in Albania (2023), WTTC (2022)

Like many regions or areas, tourism in Albania is subject to the effects of seasonality, due to climatic constraints. The resources of the country are many, but until now, the main developed type is sea and sand tourism, which is seasonal.

Other types, like winter, eco, and sports tourism need to be further developed, to attract visitors during the whole year. Seasonal tourism may affect many issues like changes in prices of holidays, and in transportation costs, which will further bring economic instability to the relevant destination. It may become a factor hindering sustainable development (Martin Martin, 2019). The well- known risk that the whole world is also facing, the risk of environmental degradation, is also very present in the touristic country of Albania and future tourism strategies must consider the issue carefully while aiming for sustainability.

2.1.2 Global environmental and socio -cultural implications

Going back, fifty years from now, around the beginning of the tourism boom, there was little, almost non-existent concern about nature or environmental changes. However, until then the

real boom of tourism development had not come yet. The dynamism of technology and innovation is pushing society to the limits of adaptation and limits of creativity as well. In these dynamics a very delicate occurrence needs society's special attention. Our natural, global environment has been forced to change significantly. Therefore, green initiatives are not a question anymore, but an urgent global engagement (Kadiu, 2022). Without consideration, over the past 50 years, humans have changed ecosystems more rapidly and extensively than in any comparable period in human history, to meet rapidly growing demands for food, fresh water, timber, fibre, and fuel. All these changes have resulted in a large and mostly irreversible loss in the diversity of life on Earth (Millenium Ecosystem Assessment, 2019). It is a metamorphosis unfolding in ecosystems around the globe. On average, more than a quarter of all plant and animal species within an ecosystem are being replaced every decade — probably the result of local extinctions, the introduction of invasive species and migrations motivated by climate change (Kaplan, 2019).

While changing ecosystems has brought actual gains in terms of economic development and human well-being, there are risks and costs in terms of ecosystem degradation, nonlinear changes due to adaptations, and sometimes even increased poverty for certain communities.

Human-induced global warming reached approximately 1 degree Celsius (between 0.8 and 1.2 degree Celsius) above pre-industrial levels in 2017, increasing at 0.2 degree Celsius (likely between 0.1 and 0.3 Grade Celsius) per decade (IPCC, 2015). This occurrence may have a devastating impact on nature as well as human systems. With global warming up to 1.5°C, increases in intensity and amount of heavy precipitation are expected, frequency of droughts in different regions, loss of local species, and even the irreversible loss of ecosystems (IPCC, 2018). Regarding food availability, a reduction is predicted to be larger at 2°C of global warming than at 1.5°C or lower, especially in southern Africa, the Amazon, central Europe, and the Mediterranean, where Albania is located. Ecosystems worldwide are at increased risk of long-term changes and damage.

Changes to plant life cycles and animal behaviour are observed in both land and marine ecosystems (OECD, 2021). Tourism is, even from this point of view, one of the most affected industries, and even greater risks are projected with temperature-related degradation, which is associated with extreme heat and storms. In this global situation, communities around the world are willing and ready to engage in initiatives for ecosystem preservation. To achieve a stronger

and more decisive global response, it is necessary to engage and raise the ambition level. This will be possible only through enhanced institutional capabilities at country levels, especially focusing on using local knowledge. A ‘whole systems’ approach would be needed for the type of transformations that could limit global warming to 1.5°C. This means that all relevant companies, industries, and stakeholders would need to be involved in increasing the support and chance of successful implementation (IPCC, 2018).

To achieve an integrated climate approach, societies must first recognize the existence of a climate crisis, the growing threat to the environment and the potential influences it may have on people around the world. Climate action is a business and economic imperative, and there are risks and opportunities involved in the energy transition (ING, 2021).

“For too long, we have put health and the environment in different boxes. The work of our one world is to bridge the two, to understand that, in fact, they belong in the same box. The truth is, human health and the health of our environment are inextricably linked, and as we improve one, we will improve the other as well. Our collective resilience is fully connected to the health of our planet. The health of the climate, and that of our populations, requires global collaboration, increased finance, and the equitable sharing of solutions” (Gasiorowski – Denis, 2022). Significant changes in policies and institutions may be necessary to reverse the degradation of ecosystems. There are options that contribute to conserving or enhancing specific ecosystem services in ways that reduce negative trade-offs or that provide positive synergies with other ecosystem services (MEA, 2005).

Sustainability and competitiveness go hand in hand as destinations and businesses can become more competitive through the efficient use of resources, the promotion of biodiversity conservation and actions to tackle climate change. Sustainability has become a key part of tourism policies in 101 UNWTO Member States referring to sustainability as their aim, and resource efficiency for an average duration of tourism policies for about 10 years (UNWTO, 2019).

According to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005), human well-being is assumed to have multiple constituents, including the basic conditions for a good life, such as secure and adequate livelihoods, enough food at all times, shelter, clothing, and access to goods; health, including feeling well and having a healthy physical environment, such as clean air and access to clean water; good social relations, including social cohesion, mutual respect, and the ability

to help others and provide for children; security, including secure access to natural and other resources, personal safety, and security from natural and human-made disasters; and freedom of choice and action, including the opportunity to achieve what individual values doing and being. The conceptual framework presented in Figure 5 perceives people as integral parts of ecosystems. Referring to this framework, a dynamic interaction between people and various parts of ecosystems exists. Therefore, changes for the better or worse in ecosystems will influence people and their well-being among other things.

Additionally, it is interesting to point out that humans, in their reactions, are influenced not only by their concern about human well-being but by what they believe about the value of something, regardless of its use for someone else.

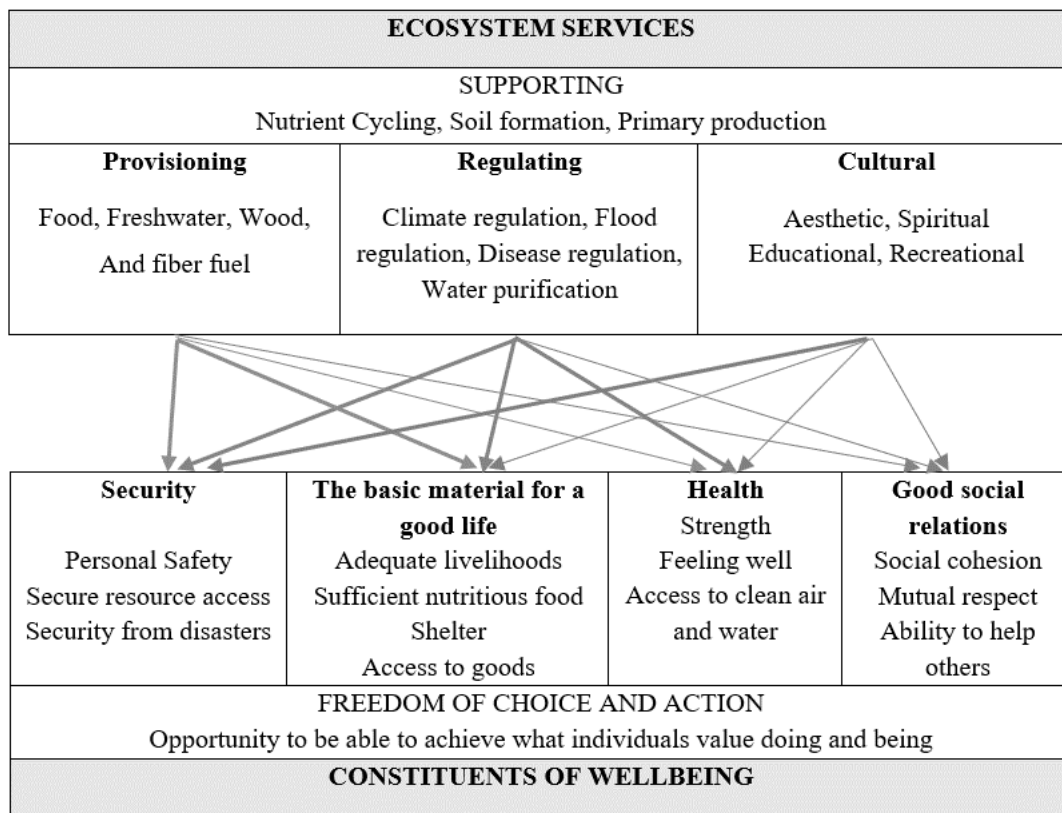


Fig. 5: The interrelation of ecosystems and human well being

Source: Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005

The figure explains the interaction between categories of ecosystems and human well-being; however, the strength of these interactions may be different in different ecosystems and regions.

The levels of adaptation may be quite different as well. Unrelated to ecosystems, other economic, social, and cultural factors influence human wellbeing.

“We face the double emergencies of human-induced climate change and biodiversity loss, threatening the well-being of current and future generations” says Marco Lambertini, Director General of World Wildlife Fund (WWF) International (WWF, 2022). Despite this emergency, collective action to address global trends has been slow to materialise. The reason for this may in part be the fact that every day fewer people live close to rural environments and see environmental degradation closely. Over 55% of the world’s human inhabitants now live in urban environments – a figure projected to reach 68% by 2050, and which is already above 81% in higher-income regions such as North America (Soga, 2016).

Returning to tourism, we may say that it boosts the revenue of the economy, creating thousands of jobs, developing the infrastructure of a country, and establishing a sense of cultural exchange between travellers and the local community as well. Many tourists like to travel to experience the destination’s culture, traditions, and gastronomy. It offers a great advantage in terms of cultural exchange. Furthermore, tourists bring diversity and cultural enrichment to the host country and citizens (Yehia, 2019). This socio-economic transformation incites changes between socio-economic groups and locations. Alongside the social environment, social vulnerability is reported due to the overutilization of land, intrusion from external cultures, and pollution in air and water due to traffic congestion, accumulation of solid waste, sewage, and carbon emissions. This complex relationship represents conditions under which tourism is developing. These conditions also affect the efforts to embrace global regulatory frameworks regarding tourism development (Baloch et al 2022).

In seeking to go beyond the emphasis within many of tourism studies on the tourist as a “*flaneur*”, for whom travel is a way of looking at, but not engaging with predetermined destinations, some studies have sought to consider travel as a process whereby engaged travellers experience and encounter spaces, places, and identities to extend their cultural boundaries beyond those imposed by everyday life (Wearing, et al. 2010).

But is this just a question of tourism impacting host societies and cultures? According to Hollinshead (2008) tourism study was (and still may be) a severely undertheorized field in terms of the function that tourism plays in the dynamics of change and transformation of space and place under the contemporary conditions of globalisation. For international tourists – at least

those who originate in the developed world – the appeal of foreign cultures, with their distinctive traditions, garments, languages, handicrafts, food, music, art, and architecture, has become a dominant pretext for tourist engagement with their destinations. Societies and their culture have become central objects of the tourist gaze.

Table 5: Tourism impacts upon the host community culture and social life

Main Positive Impacts
<p>Increased knowledge and understanding of host societies and cultures</p> <p>Promotion of the cultural reputation of the hosts in the world community</p> <p>Introduction of new (and by implication more modern) values and practices</p> <p>Revitalization of traditional crafts, performing arts and rituals. Generate revenue and monetary support for people and the community through local arts and culture commercialization.</p> <p>Rehabilitate and conserve socio-cultural and historical heritage, including archaeological and natural sites.</p>
Main Negative Impacts
<p>Debasement and commercialization of culture</p> <p>Removal of meanings and values associated with traditional customs and practices through commodification for tourist consumption</p> <p>Increased tensions between imported and traditional lifestyles</p> <p>Erosion in the strength of local language</p> <p>New patterns of local consumption</p> <p>Risks of promotion of antisocial activities such as gambling and prostitution and increased incidence of crime</p>

Source: Baloch et al. (2022) Williams (2009); Mathieson and Wall (1982); and Wall and Mathieson (2006)

Tourism is not a monolithic force, nor does it stand apart from wider processes of development and change. It can be considered both a cause and a consequence of socio-cultural development, and since it comprises a diversity of participants, agencies and institutions with differing motives and goals, its effects are socio-cultural (Williams, 2009a). It is not easy to define socio-cultural relations between tourists and host communities.

As culture is not a fixed, unchangeable reality, it may develop or transform because of influences, one of which may be tourism. These relations have received less attraction compared to economic and environmental consequences of tourism development (Williams, 2009b). One reason for that may be because socio-cultural beliefs and practices are more difficult to measure.

Researchers have also hypothesised that communities may adapt to socio-cultural changes that tourism brings to their lives to gain the economic benefits that come from industry.

Indeed, several authors have made an implicit observation that social acceptance of tourism is often tied to its economic impact and to the positionality of the subject in relation to tourist activity (Wall and Mathieson, 2006b). In table 5 are explained the main positive and negative impacts that may arise from tourism upon the host community culture and social life. Tourism's impacts on the culture and social life of host societies tend to be diverse and often inconsistent. This relates to the diverse ways under which people travel and different local conditions travellers encounter.

The dynamic relationship between tourism and culture means that the cultural tourists and the culture they consume are changing rapidly. Models of cultural tourism based on tangible heritage are being augmented by growth in intangible heritage and creativity (UNWTO, 2018).

2.1.3 Development that puts an emphasis on sustainability

The modern concept of sustainable development originates from the report of the Brundtland Commission or World Commission on Environment and Development (1987). This commission established the definition of sustainability that is familiar now. Sustainable development is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. According to Wall and Mathieson (2006b), the key elements in the Brundtland approach to sustainable development are to:

- maintain ecological integrity and diversity
- meet basic human needs
- keep options open for future generations
- reduce injustice
- increase self-determination

These key elements remain valuable nowadays and are part of sustainable development goals. Among the above-mentioned elements, one other principle of sustainable development is considered the empowerment of people to be involved in decisions that influence the quality of their lives and enable cultures to be sustained (Williams, 2009b). Community participation in tourism is essential to support tourism because it provides sustainable benefits for the

community's survival, especially for people in developing countries. Unfortunately, it remains a challenge for developing countries because of operational, structural, and cultural obstacles that hinder community participation (Reindrawati, 2023).

Referring to the tourism industry, the concept of UNWTO about sustainable tourism is "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities" (GSTC, 2018). "Tourism must be pursued in the context of a broader strategy of sustainable development, requiring the mobilisation of several actors at all levels from both the public and private sectors," says Koliopanos, Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Physical Planning and Public Works of Greece. Constructive interaction of the various actors, a flexible policy mix, and appropriate action are essential components of achieving sustainable development through tourism. At the international level, policy coordination would minimise the negative impacts of international tourism on destinations with valuable cultural and natural heritage (UN, 1999).

There are a lot of interpretations, which vary from one extreme, a 'zero-growth' view that argues that all forms of development are essentially unsustainable and should therefore be resisted, to very different perspectives that argue for growth-oriented resource management based on the presumed capacities of the technology to solve environmental problems and secure a sustainable future (Wall and Mathieson, 2006). The issue of turning theory into practice may be an additional challenge for regions around the world. Surely, the concept of sustainable development will offer a much wider range of countries a new vision of development. An approach that integrates economic, social, political, cultural, and ecological contexts. This innovative approach comprises both a strong ethical dimension and possesses a clearer emphasis on the adoption of long-term views of developments and their potential impacts, says Sharpley (2009).

A question arises when trying to understand the integration of different systems. What happens to one system if efforts are made to sustain another one. If society engages in sustainable tourism development, how does that affect economic growth? There may be ways to improve both systems, but finding the balance is a challenging task. Developed countries are in a better position, having more stable economies and more possibilities to invest in green approaches. But for developing countries, this will not be an easy task. However, peoples' level of

understanding of the importance of environmental protection, alongside economic challenges, plays a vital role. The future should be seen not as a dilemma of economic growth versus environmental protection, but better as an economic growth and nature protection engagement (Kadiu, 2021). Sharpley (2009) draws attention to this, arguing that holistic approaches are difficult to implement in sectors (such as tourism) that are characteristically fragmented and therefore dependent upon large numbers of small, independent enterprises (not to mention their customers) adopting sustainable principles and practices in a coordinated fashion.

This may be a good reason to explain why very often, sustainable projects in the field of tourism have been implemented at a local level. Otherwise, it would be exceedingly difficult, not to say impossible. Returning to the above arguments, today one encounters definitions like eco-tourism, green-tourism, responsible tourism, nature -tourism, and many more, which may be easily confused with sustainable tourism. However, although these definitions share some attributes with sustainable tourism, they may be considered more as alternative forms of travel. While sustainability is not bordered by alternative travel, they cannot be synonyms. *Sustainable tourism development guidelines and management practices are applicable to all forms of tourism in all types of destinations, including mass tourism and the various niche tourism segments. Sustainability principles refer to the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, and a suitable balance must be established between these three dimensions to guarantee its long-term sustainability* (UNWTO, 2023a).

The concept is strongly related to three main pillars of development: environmental, social, and economic. However, there are also other elements related to sustainable development. According to conclusions from the UN Summit (2015) regarding a new future of the world, if countries aim for future sustainable development, there are some goals that they need to meet. The goals may be divided into three main groups, which also form the three main pillars of sustainable development.

While looking at the three figures below (Figure 6, 7 and 8), it looks like society has designed the perfect world. If all these were to be achieved, humans would be living in an idealistic world. *“The closer we get to ending extreme poverty, the harder it is going to be to do it. We’re going to have to pretty much end violent conflict, experience a Damascene climate conversion, sustain high rates of economic growth, avoid any recession in poor countries and make sure nobody*

who is disabled or seriously ill sees their income drop to less than \$1.25 a day” - writes Jonathan Tanner for the Guardian, in his article of 2014, “Ending world poverty is an unrealistic goal.”

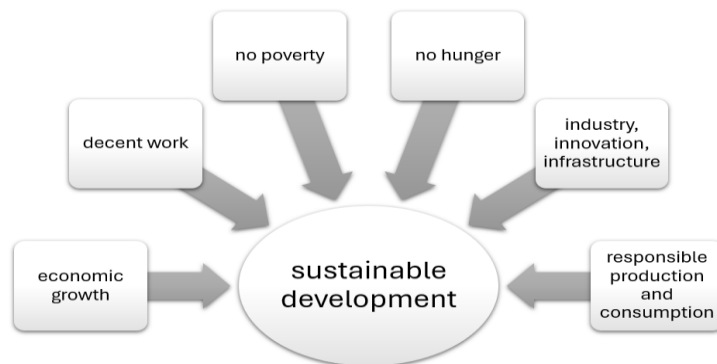


Figure 6: Economic Goals for a Sustainable Development

Source: United Nations (2015). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The world population keeps growing. It is obvious that more resources will be needed in the future, some of which are not renewable.

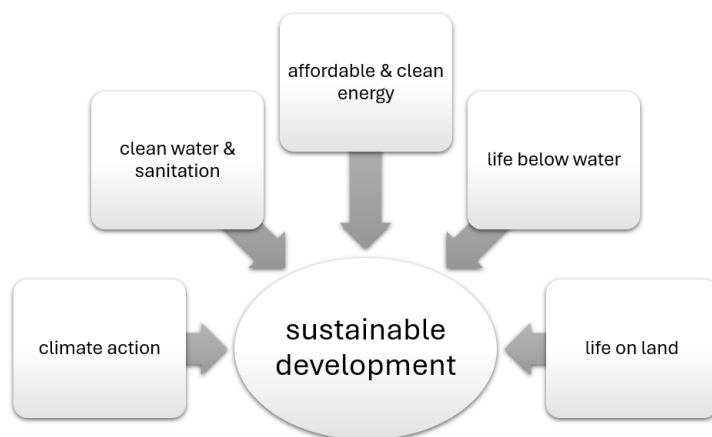


Figure 7: Environmental Goals for a Sustainable Development

Source: United Nations (2015). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Resources that become scarce may be a threat to development. The main world industries do rely on technology today and therefore a lot more engagement and adaptations may be necessary.

Additionally, inflation has plunged countries into extended periods of instability. Pressures on

the supply or demand side of the economy can also be inflationary. Supply deficiencies that disrupt production, such as natural disasters, or rising production costs, such as high oil prices, can reduce overall supply and lead to “cost-push” inflation.

The food and fuel inflation of 2008 was such a case for the global economy—sharply increasing food and fuel prices were transmitted from country to country by trade (Oner, 2022). The increased global demand for food is another related issue.

In developed countries, consumers and retailers throw away between 30% to 40% of all food purchased. The world has lost a third of its arable land due to erosion or pollution in the past 40 years (Lyons, 2015).



Figure 8: Social Goals for a Sustainable Development

Source: United Nations (2015). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

New research has calculated that about 33% of the world’s adequate or high-quality food-producing land has been lost at a rate that far outstrips the pace of natural processes to replace diminished soil (Milman, 2015). In these times it is important to look for new alternatives. Therefore, all countries, depending on their potential, must adapt to sustainable approaches in industry.

In some of the world countries, sustainability is a key word of tourism strategies for development for the next decades heading to 2050. Tourism is understood as an experience that delivers pleasure, as a means of running from the everyday routine. Every day there is more evidence of an increased tendency amongst tourists to approach and adopt sustainable lifestyles, as tourists and as individuals in their everyday life. Encouragement of new patterns of behaviour has

become an integral objective of sustainable tourism policies. Citizens have become more responsible, understand the importance of the environment, and want to engage in its protection. Despite doubts about the true sustainability of tourism McKercher (1993) and Weaver (2000), were right to agree that a sustainable approach – one which manages growth within acknowledged resource conservation limits – offers the best prospects for continued tourism development. The main steps to follow to develop sustainable tourism, suggested by Murphy (2005) are still relevant today.

- Ensure that renewable resources are not consumed faster than natural replacement rates.
- Protect/ maintain biological diversity.
- Recognize and value the aesthetic appeal of environments.
- Follow ethical principles that respect local cultures, livelihoods, and customs.
- Involve and consult local people in development processes.
- Promote equity in the distribution of both the economic costs and the benefits of the activity amongst tourism developers and hosts.

While at present, the United Nations World Tourism Organization is guided by the following principles:

1. Make optimal use of environmental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity.
2. Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance.
3. Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation (UNWTO, 2023b)

While analysing the benefits and consequences of tourism development, in a time when consequences may increase even faster and become irreversible, the entire world is trying to lean on the approach of sustainable development, which will contribute to the future of next generations.

The 2018 global sustainable travel Booking Report, summarised in Table 6, indicates that the green travel trend continues to gain momentum with a large majority of global travellers (87%) stating that they want to travel sustainably, and four in 10 (39%) confirming that they often or always manage to do so. However, 48% indicate they never, rarely, or only sometimes manage to travel sustainably, suggesting that while promising strides are being made for a greener future, there is still plenty of room to turn intentions into action (Booking global, 2018).

The new trend does not focus so much on where to go, but rather how to contribute to a beneficial thing. Considering oneself as someone who cares for the planet, its extraordinary places, and its local cultures has become popular. Shorter, domestic trips have turned out to be remarkably interesting, easy to organise, and another way to improve and influence the world. More people tend to focus on their spiritual and mental well-being and place a lot of importance on their connection with nature.

While assessing what inspires people to travel more sustainably, it seems that travel itself is the biggest motivator. Six in ten (60%) travellers indicated that they saw the impressive natural sights visited on past travels as their inspiration to travel more sustainably, while more than half (54%) said seeing the visible impact that tourism can have on destinations serves as their motivation (Booking, 2018).

Table 6: Factors that inspire sustainable travel

Factors that inspire sustainable travel	% global travellers who found this inspiring
Being impressed by natural sights during their own travels (e.g., coral reefs, rain forest)	60%
Noticing a visible impact of tourism at the destinations they have visited	54%
Seeing the positive effect that sustainable tourism can have on the local people	47%
Seeing the unsustainable effects of tourism in their home country	42%
Feeling guilty about the impact their vacation has had on the environment	32%

Source: Booking, 2018

In Table 6 are presented the main factors that drive interest and inspire sustainable travel among tourists. It is currently a common approach of scientists and researchers that tourism forms

identified as being “sustainable” are numerous: ecological tourism (ecotourism), green tourism, soft, rural tourism and agritourism, community tourism, solidarity, and responsible tourism (Junganaru, 2008) among others.

Although the category of travellers that understand and value sustainable tourism increases, there is still a percentage of travellers who are not sure what makes travel sustainable. There is no one-size model that fits all regarding green development, but awareness and collaboration are necessary to move forward. Referring to environmental protection, all countries are globally interrelated. Therefore, the initiative should not only be evident in developed countries, but a further, global initiative should be incited. International institutions and organisations are willing to support countries that try hard for green development (UNCTAD, 2018). Collaboration with international organisations will help protect agrobiodiversity and rural tourism. This brings major benefits to protecting the uniqueness of a country. The modern traveller aims for untamed places, authenticity, local products, and organic food.

Summary: Tourism development and sustainability

Tourism may be developed in almost every corner of the world. Emerging or developing, large or small, all countries are unique in their own way and have resources that make them attractive for travellers. They try to make the most of their natural richness, historic landmarks, cultural heritage, and other attractions and invest in tourism infrastructure aiming to attract travellers. Tourism industry is the fourth largest industry in the world and accounts currently for a global multidimensional development. It contributes to 10% of the world’s income. Many employment opportunities in related sectors, such as construction, telecommunication, transport, gastronomy, and others, are offered by this industry, enhancing the world’s economy and at the same time having a great social and cultural impact.

The mediterranean 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 reaching more than 8,5% (Shahidsaless et al. 2023).

The aim for the future is not just tourism development but sustainable tourism development. This innovative approach may differ from a developed to a developing country, however sustainable development is equally important and worth considering in both developed and developing countries. The rich and diverse Albanian territory, where sea, lakes and mountains

can all be found inside a surface of 28.000 square kilometres, offers great advantages to develop a year-round tourism and increase the country's economy. However, the risks associated with overdevelopment and dependence upon an activity that can be characteristically unstable are to be taken into consideration.

Among benefits, especially for those countries highly dependent on tourism, the fast development of the industry may increase the risk of long-time consequences, mainly in terms of environmental degradation and consumption of resources. While aiming to meet increased demands of society and supporting tourism development and economic growth, humans have changed ecosystems, causing an extensive and irreversible loss in the diversity of life. Additionally, societies and their cultures are alterable entities, or active receivers of what travellers may bring. Host communities evolve in continuity, influenced by internal or external factors, like international tourism.

Focusing on this three-dimensional development a question arises; Is there a way to find the balance between growing economically and preserving the environment and what is important to a society?

Tourism can and should be projected to transform to a means of empowerment, which sustains cultural identities of local communities and protects identities in a globalising world. If there are just a few means remaining to protect national identity, tourism may be one of them. The benefit will be a dual one, protection of identities and preservation of uniqueness, an element that contributes to sustainable development. A symbiosis between tourism development, nature conservation and culture preservation is possible with the right planning and organising. If the industry is managed in the right way, it may contribute to economic diversification, promote local culture and products, and offer possibilities to young entrepreneurs to establish new products and services.

2.2 ALBANIA AND THE CHALLENGE OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Many are the issues society encounters today around the globe. Income inequality and uneven distribution of wealth, poverty, irresponsible production, and consumption, and draining of natural resources are just a few to mention. Countries work on these issues every day and try to minimise them. While trying to solve these issues society aims for stability and a better quality

of life from a global point of view. Referring to the WCED's definition of Sustainable Development, as a development that meets the needs of the present generation, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs, it is comprehensible that this is a better option for development in the long - term. This approach will take care not only of the current generation but also aims to guarantee a safe society and economy for the generations to come.

It is not always easy to differentiate between a developed and a developing country. There are several metrics that can be used to measure it and most of the world's countries cannot be clearly categorised. The GDP (gross domestic product) is one of the best-known values for evaluating economic growth. However, even countries that meet the GDP criteria for being "healthy" may still be developing. According to the UN (2014) country classification, countries are classified as developed or developing economies based on "basic economic conditions". There may be even more categories like the living standard, technology, infrastructure, and industrialization level, among the main factors.

The International Monetary Fund (2021) points out these three main categories for world countries and their state of economic development, taking more than one factor into account to determine their economic status.

- Advanced economies
- Emerging economies (upper-middle income and lower-middle income)
- Low-income economies.

Developed countries refer to the sovereign states, whose economy has highly progressed and possesses great technological infrastructure, as compared to other nations. The countries with low industrialization and low human development index are termed as developing countries (Surbhi 2015). The Human Development Index (HDI) is a measurement system used by the United Nations to evaluate the level of individual human development in each country. People's opportunities to realise satisfying work and lives, which goes beyond standard economic growth statistics and GDP measuring. The economist who developed it in 1990, Mahbub ul Haq, explains that this index helps to measure various countries' levels of social and economic development. It is composed of four principal areas of interest: mean years of schooling, expected years of schooling, life expectancy, and the total income received by the country from residents and businesses from the country and abroad (GNI) (Dasic, et al 2020).

According to the UN, in 2022, 36 countries were considered "developed." All developed countries were in either North America, Europe, or "Developed Asia and Pacific."

There are some common characteristics that developed countries share with each other:

- Stable birth and death rates. This is strongly related to quality health care and remarkably high living standards. The number of children in a family tends to be low because of the safety of living (G. Nargund, 2009).
- The percentage of women employees is higher. Usually, women that are career-oriented tend to have fewer children (I.L.O, 1995).
- People that live in developed countries have more access to technologies that require the use of cars, aeroplanes, electricity, or gas.
- Higher levels of debt are a characteristic as well.

On the contrary, if birth and death rates are unstable, living standards are low, health care is below an average standard and other additional economic, as well as social criteria, as mentioned above are not met, a country is categorised as a developing country. A developing country is otherwise called a less developed country. According to the UN (2022), in 2022, 126 countries were considered "developing". The country of Albania ranks among them. However, since the GDP of these countries is relatively low, the rate of growth is higher compared to advanced economies. All world countries are trying to find their best way toward sustainable development.

Table 7: Definitions of sustainability levels

Very Weak Sustainability	Strong Sustainability
Constant per capita consumption /The usual economic growth model	Constant environmental quality (London Sch./ Safe minimum standards theory)
Weak Sustainability	Very Strong Sustainability
Some non-decreasing social welfare (Hartwick and Solow)	A set of stationary-state conditions (Common and Perris)

Source: Panth, 2017

To achieve strong sustainability is not easy, because the necessity for economic development will be the main factor to interfere with it. According to Panth (2017), strong sustainability gives priority to the protection of ecological goods and functioning ecosystems.

Referring to the eco-centric point of view, species, and ecological systems which nurture life, should be sustained for their intrinsic value. As well, natural resources are essential input for economic production, consumption, or welfare, and cannot be substituted for by physical or human capital. While strong sustainability acknowledges “the right to life” of other species and requires that every part or subsystem of the natural environment, every species, and every physical stock be preserved for present and future generations, a compromise is necessary in our global phase of development. Keep a minimum amount of certain environmental assets, assuming that these assets are partly complementary to, and partly substitutable by economic assets (Panth, 2017). These concepts are presented in Table 7.

Table 8: Core Indicators of Sustainable Tourism Development

Dimensions	Indicators	Measures
Economic	Employment	Number, type, and duration of jobs, Gender equity
	Business viability	Expenditure, Arrivals Profitability Satisfaction, and others
Environmental	Water quality and water management	Volume and changes in volume water treatment
	Solid waste management	Recycling
	Energy conservation	Reduction in energy usage
Social	Quality of life	Resident empowerment, Congestion and crowding, Community attitudes to tourism, Access to amenities, Changes in crime rate
Cultural	Maintenance of the integrity of local communities	Retention of local cultures and traditions, Maintenance of cultural sites, Authentic representation of local cultures

Source: Agyeiwaah, E., McKercher, B., & Suntikul, W. (2017)

There are a few elements that are necessary to measure the impact that tourism leaves on a host country. As discussed above, the main dimensions of sustainable development are economic, environmental and socio- cultural. Therefore, these elements are also oriented toward these dimensions. According to Agyeiwaah, et al. (2017) the indicators presented in Table 8 are considered key indicators of sustainable tourism development between 2000 -2015. The authors suggest measurement variables for each indicator as well. They recommend reducing the number of measurement variables, which would also be easier to implement in practice than an

overly complex measurement instrument (Agyeiwaah et al., 2017).

The UNWTO and its current agenda offers great opportunities in terms of international sustainable tourism development. Developing countries can take advantage of some of these initiatives.

UNWTO's work is built around six main following pillars (UNWTO, 2022).

- Including tourism as a priority in national and international economic and development policies.
- Supporting policies and practices, above all policies which make best use of the environment.
- Respecting socio-cultural identity and authenticity of host-communities and provide socioeconomic benefits for all.
- Fostering knowledge, education, and capacity building. Helping Member States assess and address their needs in tourism education and training and providing networks for knowledge creation and exchange.
- Improving competitiveness in tourism through the promotion of excellence in policy.
- Planning, sustainable tourism development, marketing and promotion, product development and risk and crisis management.
- Advancing tourism contributes to poverty reduction and development. Maximising the sector's contribution and promoting the inclusion of tourism in the wider development agenda.
- Building partnerships. Engaging with the private sector, regional and local tourism organisations, academia and research institutions, civil society, and the UN system.

While keeping in mind these pillars and adapting according to its particularities, Albania may develop successful and coherent marketing strategies for a sustainable development of tourism. From the initiatives mentioned above, developing countries may benefit especially from policies regarding socio-cultural identity and authenticity of host communities, networks for knowledge creation and exchange and partnership building.

2.2.1 Present economic, environmental, and social challenges in Albania

Referring to the above classifications and rankings from world organisations, Albania is considered an emerging economy or a developing country. The World Bank describes Albania's

transformation from one of Europe's poorest countries to a middle-income country. Despite the advantages of growing, there are still many issues. According to studies from the World Bank, a robust recovery took place in Albania in 2021 thanks to policy stimulus and a resurgence of travel, construction, and extractive activity. However, private investment, consumption, and public spending drove growth, while public debt remained high. Further data from the World Bank shows that Albania's GDP in 2021 was 18.2 billion. It grew by 6 percent during the first quarter of 2022 driven by private consumption, exports, and investment. The labour market improved, and unemployment fell to 11.3%. After a significant decrease in 2021, poverty is expected to continue declining, but rising inflation pressure will slow the recent gains (WB, 2022).

The geopolitical world situation may further influence inflation and negatively affect supply chains and economic markets all around the world and hinder Albania's development. Furthermore, if the employment rate dropped and purchasing power decreased, this may directly influence and hinder the progress in poverty reduction. There is still a lot of instability in the country. Improvement is possible and is highly dependent on the approach of all stakeholders to development and sustainability. The living standard, technology, infrastructure, and industrialization level, social and environmental issues are very present and challenging for Albania. Poverty is another issue. It is true that the link between tourism, economic growth and poverty reduction is not automatic. It very much depends on whether tourism generates employment opportunities, creates linkages – with agriculture and service-providing sectors – and stimulates the development of basic infrastructure through the construction of roads, ports and airports facilities and the provision of financial services from which the economy can benefit (UNCTAD, 2013).

a. Economic Challenges

As time passes all world countries establish their own path of economic development. Although some of them may follow similar reforms and paths, they still have their own way of development. There are a lot of challenges along the way and some countries cope better, some other countries have difficulties and experience longer times of transition. The case of Albania is even more unique referring to factors like its location or its history and politics. The country was under Ottoman occupation for 500 years until the beginning of the 20th century. Therefore, not much was happening, and no real development occurred during these years. Albania did not

know a great development during the industrial revolution. It was an agricultural country and remained so for a long time. After the Second World War, it became part of the East communist alliance, carrying on as an extreme dictatorship, accompanied by a self-isolation policy. Only after 1990, the country entered the real path of a market economy, a path which was not easy. Reforms and engagements have been taken. However, it remains not clear if everything was done in the right way (Muco, 1997).

Data regarding the development stages is scarce and originates mainly from foreign research. Some economic issues remain unsolved due to internal and external factors, but the country's commitment to becoming part of the European Union is remarkably high. This path requires some time and especially the pace of transformation must be carefully regulated if a stable development is aimed. During the transition phase, the economy shrunk faster due to political instability. In 2001 it began to recuperate, and the GDP growth rate was around 5% per year. However, in 2008 a monetary crisis spread around the world, which affected the Albanian economy too.

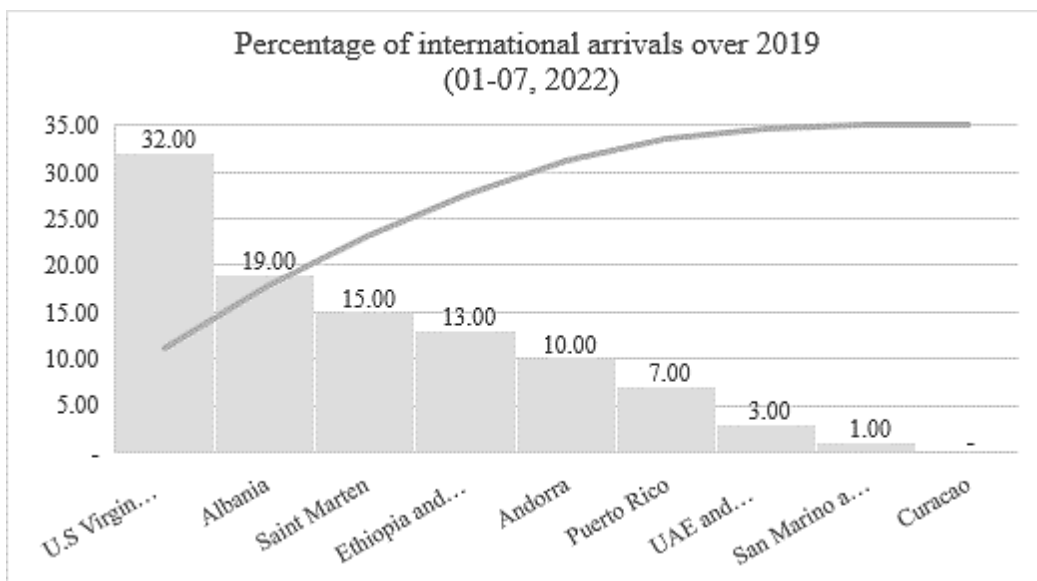


Figure 9: Percentage of international arrivals over 2019

Source: UNWTO, (2022c)

Albania has a total land area of 28,750 square kilometres, of which 24% is agricultural, 36% forest, and 15% pasture or another type of land. The most important branch of the economy used to be agriculture, which accounted for about 20%. While currently the tourism sector is

becoming a key economic sector, with large potential that may highly contribute to the development of the entire country. According to data from the Ministry of Tourism of Albania regarding the last 10 years of tourism development, from 2003 to 2022, the total number of visitors doubled. A little less than 90% of travellers come to Albania for holidays. The other part visits for business purposes or other reasons. Also, around 90% of them were overnight visitors, who spent a minimum of one day in the country. In 2019, the number of tourist arrivals to Albania reached its peak with 6.4 million (Ministry of Tourism, 2023).

In 2020, due to the global disruption of the tourism industry after the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of tourists decreased to 2.65 million visitors (Ministry of Tourism, 2023). However, after Covid recovery seems to be amazingly fast and in 2022, Albania was ranked in the second place worldwide regarding number of visitors. Among destinations reporting data on international arrivals in the first five to seven months of 2022, those exceeding pre-pandemic levels were the countries presented in Figure 9.

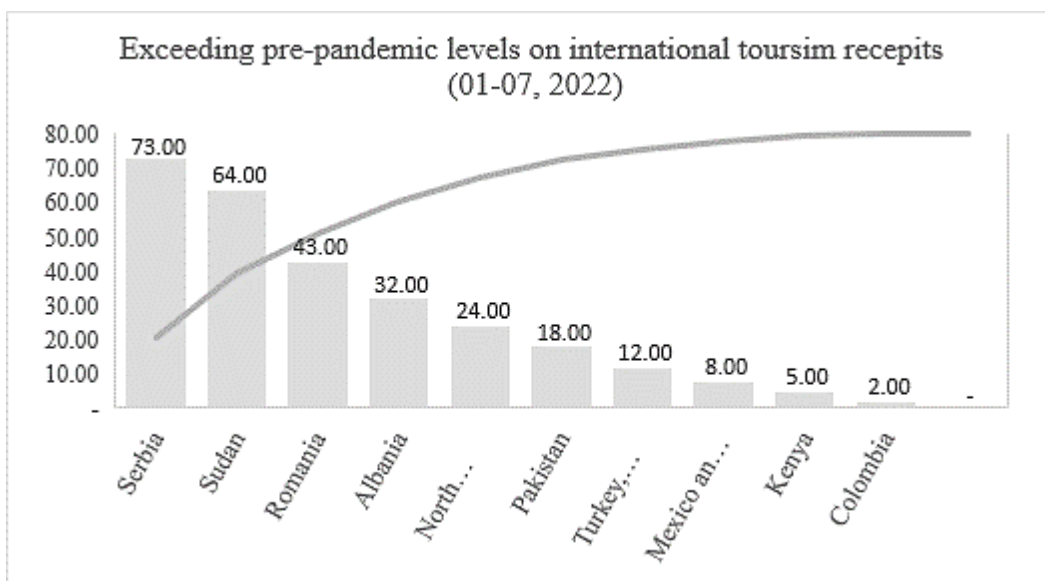


Figure 10: Exceeding pre-pandemic levels on international tourism receipts

Source: UNWTO (2022c)

Destinations reporting data on international tourism receipts in the first five to seven months of 2022, are presented in Figure10. They all exceeded pre-pandemic levels in January-July 2022. According to World Bank data, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Albania was worth 18.26 billion US dollars in 2021.

The GDP value of Albania represents 0.01% of the world economy. While during Covid-19, from 2019- 2020 the GDP growth declined, the growth rate was 8.5% from 2020 to 2021 (IMF, 2021).

In an emerging economy, it is difficult to have enough financial resources to plan for sustainable development. It requires more than a normal plan and regular expenses to develop sustainably. Innovative technologies should be adopted, and this translates into added costs. Some of the government's financial resources were used after the earthquake that hit Albania at the end of 2019.

Corruption in emerging economies is another factor. Funds are offered from foreign countries to support sustainable development, but because of corruption, processes slow down. There are few incentives to attract investment to the industrial sector, for those willing to invest in recent technology as a direct contribution to improving environmental protection.

The hope to become a part of the EU still is an important driver of engagement toward sustainable development for Albania. To cope with international institutions, financial and human resources are necessary at all levels of society. However, sometimes the legislation is too advanced vis-à-vis the administrative, institutional, and financial abilities in place. Environmental economic instruments are not grounded on evaluations of environmental damage or externalities. Nevertheless, consumers and producers are somehow motivated to behave in an environmentally friendly manner (UNECE, 2018).

Until now, tax rates in Albania related to the environment have not been set with the appropriate calculation of externalities. The impacts of discharges on the environment, humans, or businesses have not been seriously considered. Furthermore, an appointed unit does not exist, as part of the whole structure of the central government, which may be responsible for taxes related to the environment. No specific financial resources have been established yet for environmental purposes and protection (UNECE, 2018a). Environmental taxation and fiscal instruments are not subject to harmonised regulation or management at the central level and no specific unit within the central ministries (finance, economy, and environment) is vested with direct responsibility for the environmental tax system (UNECE, 2018b). There is no relevant evidence that financial resources are set aside for investments toward environmental protection. There are no favourable conditions known for expanding public and private environmental investments. Financial conditions are a burden to sustainable development. As developing

countries have financial difficulties, this will stand in the way of green growth. However, before the factual issues, there is a desperate need for better organisation. This step will not require as many financial resources, but it is crucial to have a clear panorama of the situation and design the necessary strategies.

Another phenomenon that is taking place is the immigration of middle-class citizens. It has increased notably over the last 20 years. Due to unemployment and economic factors, many middle-class Albanians have immigrated during the last decade.

b. Environmental Challenges

The country of Albania has a particular geographical location. It is positioned between East and West Europe. Although the recent development phase began after the communist dictatorship, the country is in an advantageous position for further development. The entire development phase began about three decades ago; therefore, Albania still faces many challenges. The lack of information and awareness about environmental issues is one, which has led to inefficient use of many abundant resources of the country, making the situation worse. According to the third synopsis related to environmental performance, published by the UN Economic Commission for Europe, in 2018, knowledge about the Sustainable Development Goals among central government authorities is insufficient. Awareness of the SDGs among local government authorities, civil society, academia, and the private sector is low as well. Although the country has adopted new and modern environmental legislation, especially after the year 2014, when it was granted the candidate status of an EU member, some regulations are still lacking adaptation and the implementation of legislation lags.

There are three main levels of environmental pollution including land, air, and water. Air pollution is a major environmental problem in major cities in Albania. Transport is considered the main source of air pollution. A factor hindering the possibility to provide more sustainable modes of transport is the absence of multimodal transportation facilities in Albania. Until now there have been few investments in rail transport, which have kept decreasing during the last decades. Its share in the transport sector is insignificant. Better rail transport would compete with other modes of transport, and this would contribute to decrease the levels of pollution from second hand cars. According to the National Inventory on Air Emissions, in 2015, road transport accounted for 73% of NO_x emissions in Albania. Unlike in many countries, forests in Albania

became a net CO₂ emitter. This occurred due to the reduction in the volume of forest from 83.295 million m³ in 2000 to 75.726 million m³ in 2009 (UNECE Review 2018b).

Environmental degradation is an alarming problem in the Western Balkans, therefore in Albania too. Considering the lower economic level of these countries, compared to developed countries, the problem intensifies, and society and its health is at risk. The Lancet Commission (2017) noted pollution's deep inequity: 92% of pollution-related deaths, and the greatest burden of pollution's economic losses, occur in low-income and middle-income countries (LMICs) (The Lancet, Planetary Health, 2022).

Albania's total land area covers 28748 square km, and it has a rich hydrographic network (groundwater streams, rivers, springs, lakes, wetlands). This includes over 200 large natural resources of groundwater. The degradation of the water quality of many rivers is significant. In addition, Albania is also vulnerable to the impacts of natural phenomena. Very often, floods, heat and cold waves, fires inside forests, erosion, and other phenomena may become dangerous. Implementing policies that build and strengthen resilience to climate-related and anthropogenic dangerous phenomena is a crucial step toward achieving sustainability goals.

Recordings of water pollution in Albania show various levels; moderately polluted, organically polluted, and industrially polluted for rivers, lakes, and sea areas. As in other fields there is a problematic lack of studies and information explaining the impact of climate change on natural resources like water, land, biodiversity, or ecosystems. Generally, most of the rivers are polluted in their middle or lower reaches. Most groundwater bodies appear to be still of decent quality, although there is insufficient monitoring data to assess their pollution with pesticides or heavy metals (UNECE, 2018b).

The country lacks an effective river basin-based water management approach. Therefore, integrated management of water resources is not possible (WFD RBM Implementation in 6-year cycles: 2021/2027/2033). The budgetary framework and Economic Analysis of water extraction and water use at basin level have improved in line with WFD principles, incl. analysis of water (use & pollution) charges. The River Basin Management Plan outlines the innovative approach that Albania will take to protect all waters over the 6-year RBM cycle to 2021/2027/2033/2039/2045 and beyond (Delegation of EU in Albania, 2019).

Plans related to river basin-based water management are being developed. If these plans do not work, it will clearly prevent Albania from progressing toward the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable

Development. More urban wastewater treatment plants (WWTP) are under construction, but low financial capacities and limited technical skills cause unclear long-term operational arrangements. Additionally, non-revenue water is a serious challenge: on average, 67% of drinking water produced is non-revenue water. Non-revenue water causes significant commercial losses that translate into budgetary imbalances and financial sustainability problems for water service providers (UNECE, 2018).

Infrastructure for waste management is another environmental issue of the country. Waste has for some time become part of the landscape in Albania. Investments in this direction are low. Some of the existing initiatives are not working properly due to corruption and other similar problems. Additionally, some businesses and other organisations continue working without paying taxes. Because of missing information, the amount and origin of dangerous waste that is being released remains vague. Waste sorting is a less known procedure yet. The lack of data hampers the establishment of sound management of hazardous waste. Albania is not able to measure progress against indicators (hazardous waste generated per capita and proportion of hazardous waste treated, by type of treatment) to allow the tracking of progress towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development targets (UNECE, 2018).

Hydropower plants have been built and further projects are still in progress in Albania. Hydropower constructions have rocketed by 300% across the western Balkans in the last two years, according to a new analysis, sparking fears of disappearing mountain rivers and biodiversity loss (Nelsen, 2017).

The legal framework for biodiversity and forestry monitoring has already been established. But the phase of implementation looks difficult, due to different financial reasons or the inability to monitor the situation and keep it under control. A long-term strategy and a policy framework for environmental protection are missing in Albania. Some 8.2% of all national forests are identified as high-nature-value forests. However, the country still lacks a specific legal framework for the protection of these forests (UNECE, 2018). Platforms and databases are present, but these remain unconnected or not integrated. Many international projects are in place, but there is no active national integrated environmental management system. While the monitoring system is not working properly, due to unclear reasons such as overlapping responsibilities, this malfunction brings limited information regarding economic,

environmental, and social influence. This will further bring difficulties in the implementation of SEIS (shared environmental information system) principles.

Now that the country is undergoing territorial reform, administrative and financial decentralisation is expected to happen. All municipalities should implement, besides new functions, other environment-related functions. Only a few of them may have managed to adopt local plans related to the environment, although the legal requirements are to do so.

Despite certain improvements, the annual national environmental monitoring program is significantly underfunded. According to the same report as mentioned above, from the UNECE, the National Environment Agency receives only 3 percent of the budget needed to implement the program and is required to prioritise activities. Meanwhile no accredited laboratories for analysing air quality are established.

c. Social Challenges

The social dimension of sustainability recently attained acceptance as an elemental part of sustainable development. Today, even more, concepts of happiness, social connections and interactions, social maturity, social diversity and equity, corporate sustainability, integrated governance, and social quality of life and similar concepts are added to the dimension of social sustainability (Talan, et al 2020). Further, Talan explains that the understanding and clarifying have become more complex with these new topics. Social sustainability assessment is mainly conducted through social impact assessment (which is used to integrate all biophysical and economic variables) and by widening the coverage of environmental issues.

Tourism may cause the debasement and commercialization of culture in Albania. Because the host community would like to have as many tourists as possible to increase incomes and aim for a better quality of life, they may make compromises regarding culture adaptation. There are meanings and values associated with traditional customs and practices and if communities do not protect and care for them, they may gradually be lost. While caring more for tourist consumption, local communities may commodify these values.

It is difficult to find a balance between imported and traditional lifestyles. It may happen with neighbouring countries that societies borrow each other's styles and ways of living. This may be a risk in terms of losing tradition, especially in developing countries, highly dependent on tourism.

Additionally, many countries learn a new language to be able to communicate with tourists. This

may be necessary and a benefit from one perspective since it increases communication and exchange. However, speaking a foreign language fluently and making it easy for travellers and visitors decreases the possibility that they learn a small fraction of the host- community's language. Somehow, this is a one-sided benefit.

Gender inequality continues to be another hindering factor. Female power may have a considerable influence on sustainable development.

2.2.2 An extended SWOT analysis of Albanian tourism

The analysis of a destination would not be complete without a detailed SWOT analysis. When conducting a SWOT analysis for Albanian tourism it is important to consider and list main strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the industry. These elements are not static and may change over time. While strengths and weaknesses delineate the inner environment, opportunities and threats portray external factors which may have an influence on the industry. A SWOT analysis is rarely completed in isolation; it makes up one part of a broader analysis. And while it is itself an assessment framework, a SWOT analysis is also an effective tool to help summarise other findings (Peterdy, 2023).

The SWOT analysis for the tourism industry in Albania is concentrated on making connections between the four parts of the analysis and combining information to create actionable strategies (Furgison, 2018). This analysis, along with the other steps of the strategy aims to help create better customer value and enhance sustainable development.

1. Strengths and Weaknesses

Although not large Albania is a unique destination in terms of ecosystem diversity. Two biogeographical regions are present in Albania, the Mediterranean and the Alpine. A major part of the country belongs to the Mediterranean biogeographical region which is a biodiversity hotspot. Its territory consists of maritime ecosystems, coastal zones, lakes, rivers, evergreen and broadleaf bushes, broadleaf forests, pine forests, alpine and sub-alpine pastures and meadows, and high mountain ecosystems. Albania is also well known for its rich and complex hydrographic network of rivers, lakes, wetlands, groundwater, and seas. Wetland ecosystems are important migration routes for migratory species of wild fauna (3 Ramsar sites of international importance have been designated, namely, Karavasta Lagoon, Butrinti Lake and

Shkodra Lake). About 247 natural lakes of diverse types and dimensions, and a considerable number of artificial lakes, can be found in the country (Convention BD, 2018).

The *cultural legacy* of Albania is a main characteristic because the country is one of the most ancient countries in the world. This is one of the assets that are difficult to imitate or substitute. This particularity is important for all countries. As such, it should be protected and nurtured. The appreciation of one's own culture, and other countries' culture, is a sign of respect and enhances serenity among travellers. Tourism has been an economic driver for a few decades now. It has also been a driving force in focusing on and caring about natural and cultural heritage, preserving them for future generations to enjoy (UNWTO, 2022). A lot of tourists visiting Albania are primarily interested in culture and history. Albanians represent one of the most ancient populations in Europe. At the beginning of the third millennium B.C. an Indo-European population was established in the area and because of a merger, there was conceived a population that kept specific cultural and language characteristics in the Balkan Peninsula (Pelasgians tribe).

Between the second millennium and the first century B.C., the Illyrian population was founded. Like the Greeks, the Illyrians succeeded in preserving their language and traditions despite Roman occupation. The first three Byzantine emperors (Anastasius I, Justin, and Justinian I) were of Illyrian origin (Albanian National Tourism Agency, 2019). "Via Egnatia," which passes through the Port of Durrës, used to be the most important trade route between Rome and Constantinople.

The language is amongst the oldest in the world. It stems from the Indo-European group of languages and sits on its own unique branch of the tree of languages. The folk dance and costumes are unique. Albanian Folk Iso-polyphony has been proclaimed a "masterpiece of the oral heritage of humanity" protected by UNESCO (Albanian National Tourism Agency, 2019). Lately, in 2022 the "Xhubleta", a traditional folk costume, was added to the national ICH Registry of Albania, as a unique traditional artisanship. Music and art are reflections of the beautiful spirit of Albanians. Travellers may discover a little bit of everything while visiting Albania. Not only, unique nature and culture, but a *religious symbiosis*, is another particularity, as well as a strength of the Albanian culture. Three religions, the Catholic, Orthodox and Muslim coexist in harmony during the long history of the country.

Within 28.000 square km, a lot of *diverse offerings* may be found. If one is "sated" with sand

and sea, one may travel to the fresh air of the mountains in less than one hour. Tourists may visit pure, untouched nature and wander through the forest. If they are looking for more adventure, many sports and activities await. Locations, people, and activities are some main attractions that draw a traveller's attention. Albania offers the three of them in an incredibly attractive form. The friendly atmosphere travellers find in Albania surprises them in an effective way, and it creates a peaceful environment for them, and it introduces a relatable place for future tourists. This element must be cultivated through the next generations because it will teach them a sense of reliability, courtesy, and communication, which all may contribute to the performance of tourism services.

Rich hydrography and high possibilities to use solar energy are a strength of the country. With 45% of the total primary energy supply (TPES), Albania has one of the largest shares of renewable energy in its energy mix in South-East Europe. The renewable energy share in Albania is predominantly hydropower which accounts for 95% of all generating capacity, with the remaining divided between solar (1%) and crude oil (4%) (UNECE, 2021). Furthermore, huge resources of sun and wind, which Albania has all year long, are almost completely untapped.

Table 9: Potential of renewable energy in Albania

Technology	Capacity 2019 MW	Economic Potential 2030 MW	Technical Potential 2030 MW
Hydropower	2105	2150	4813
PV	3	1074	2378
Wind	0	616	7483
Bioenergy	1	86	1832

Source: UNECE Renewable Energy Uptake: Development of Renewable Energy in Albania (2021)

Energy demand keeps growing; therefore, it is necessary to take advantage of these available, renewable energy sources. In addition, this transition would improve climate resistance and energy security.

It has some of the most sunshine hours per year in Europe, being a significant potential for solar energy development. The coastal south and far north of the country also hold immense potential

for wind power development. Both solar and wind could effectively complement the existing hydropower plants (UNECE, 2021). Table 9 presents the potential of renewable energy in Albania, toward the year 2030.

Travel facilities are an additional advantage for travellers. Expanding markets and aiming to attract visitors from the East relate to visa restrictions. While many EU countries may require visas to enter, Albania and WB countries do not have very tough procedures or restrictions for visas. This makes it easier for travellers to visit these countries.

Ecotourism is another asset to be managed carefully. The approach to developing this kind of tourism should be according to current and future sustainable development goals. Eco-tourism development is a delicate matter. A good strategy to follow would be offering eco-friendly lodgings and services of high quality in all areas that are still untouched. If managed in the right way, it will offer a great advantage and become a strength for further development.

Among strengths, weaknesses have their influence on development as well. They represent areas where competition may outperform the country of Albania.

Un-updated strategies, especially focusing on sustainability currently represent a weakness for Albanian tourism development. Traditional marketing tactics must be substituted with new, effective tactics. As developments in many areas are happening rapidly, it is important to stay alert, adapt and change processes, embrace innovation, and work creatively.

An updated tourism policy, following European countries' regulations, is necessary to develop sustainably. If the country aims to achieve this, it may be easier to move toward this road as an integrated destination of Western Balkans. A common framework of regulations and agreements would be a better approach to achieve sustainable development goals.

The lack of creative and innovative marketing services is a factor that genuinely hinders the whole development. Businesses and governments should take advantage of the latest technologies to present the country in all its beauty. This weakness, among other factors, may also arise from the absence of qualified employees in tourism in Albania.

Not satisfactory accommodation and facilities are a main issue that requires the attention of engaged stakeholders. The country does not yet have many prestigious restaurants and hotel chains. Building these chains may have a double effect, resulting in excellent accommodation for tourists and increased revenues for locals. It will be a great advantage to support the building of hotels that are eco-friendly or have eco-friendly elements. This perspective communicates a

sense of social responsibility that will attract the attention of many new responsible travellers. Another element showing elevated levels of dissatisfaction and negatively influencing tourists' experiences is the *non-standardised service* in touristic destinations. An all-year-round tourism destination will make locals aware that they should be prepared to welcome tourists anytime and recruit specialised employees for the sector. Personnel is often employed on a short-term basis. This is not good because the staff are not qualified and inconsistent. They are local people, whose wages are also quite low. This will directly affect customer satisfaction.

In coastal regions, more precedence should be given to culinary tourism. This kind of tourism is underdeveloped all over the country. By developing local products and local cuisine, the economy of locals will improve and referring to quantitative research from this study, tourists are curious and happy to try local products. Especially in the coastal zone, during winter, when there is less movement and less visitors, the offer of local cuisine may attract more travellers and keep tourism alive all year long. Inbound tourism may increase more from this initiative. Additionally, demographic and emigration trends are causing a labour shortage crisis, which is likely to persist during the coming years (Lena, 2022).

During high season, when the tourist number is expected to increase, the service quality tends to decline even more. More professional schools and training are necessary, considering that this sector is going to gain an even bigger share of the economy of the country. Returning to the initiative of the Western Balkans, the exchange of employees and their experiences may be a reciprocal benefit for all the Western Balkan countries.

The opinion of stakeholders is essential, but it is not clear enough. Business managers and entrepreneurs' advice regarding the needs of tourists and their complaints is important. Forums and meetings, as well as events related to tourism development where stakeholders participate and share their opinions and experiences are necessary and they remain very limited.

High rates of informality affect tourism development in Albania. It is necessary to improve regulations and monitoring mechanisms that will make possible a fair business environment.

2. Opportunities and Threats

The opportunity of Western Balkans and the advantage of working as a common region is in focus of this study. This initiative has been analysed through quantitative analysis, aiming to understand the importance of collaboration and its influence in sustainable tourism development. Collaboration is a keyword to success. Western Balkans could combine resources

and find a common, easier way toward sustainable development. The interest in tourism keeps increasing and the Mediterranean region is a main world destination. This is a good opportunity for Albania and the whole region.

Emerging markets from the East are a good opportunity, however it requires a strong strategy to manage the overflow. It is vital to address the question whether Albania has capacity for large groups of tourists from the East. If yes, this could be exploited as a great advantage and help to market a destination in the Balkans that offers much diversity, is closer than Europe and has an interesting culture and history.

The online presence of the country, through social platforms or national campaigns, broadcasts, or television programs influences travellers who would like to plan an earlier and safer journey. If they see a comprehensive, detailed online presence and website this will incite a better and safer feeling. If the destination is marketed as a region this may also attract collaborators from other countries. Additionally, social media is the current most effective tool for finding and promoting the target customers.

Participation in tourism fairs in East and West represent another opportunity. Travel agencies and operators may market the country to specific destinations that have shown interest in Albania, like Poland, Germany, and Austria. While promoting Albania, agencies must try to understand what they can do better for visitors who come to Albania. If they can offer them further options, they can convert them into loyal customers. Presenting them with the offer of Albania, the new possibilities of eco-tourism, agricultural-tourism, or MICE tourism, and all new adventures they may experience may spark their interest.

Outer threats may have an influence on sustainable tourism development in Albania as well. Unexpected threats may occur during a development phase.

The world witnessed a global *Pandemic*, which suspended the global economy and life for two years. The consequences were disastrous, especially for tourism. Hotels, restaurants, and air - travel stopped their activities for an unknown period and the cost was raised to billions. People lost their jobs, and many lost their lives. High inflation rates, oil price fluctuations, due to the existing war in Ukraine have led to higher prices in transport and accommodation.

These threats are difficult to forecast, but possible. What the pandemic taught society is that preparation, flexibility and having a contingency plan are a necessity. Nothing is secure and one cannot plan too much ahead. It is vital to be attentive and prepared to be resilient.

Table 10 explains how a TOWS analysis matrix, suggested by Weirich (1982) would combine the four SWOT elements and try to find new strategies based on strengths and opportunities while aiming to minimise weaknesses and threats.

Sustained growth happens when structural reforms and effective strategies take place. Investing in human capital, strengthening governance, boosting productivity and more, are all initiatives that need to improve in Albania.

Table 10: The TOWS matrix

	Opportunities (External, positive)	Threats (External, negative)
Strengths (Internal, positive)	Strength- Opportunity Strategies Which strengths can be used the maximise the identified opportunities	Strength- Threats Strategies How to better use the strengths of the industry to minimise the identified strengths
Weaknesses (Internal, negative)	Weakness - Opportunity Strategies What actions may be taken to minimise the weaknesses, focusing on the opportunities presented	Weaknesses - Threats Strategies How can the weaknesses be minimised to avoid the identified threats

Source: Weirich (1982)

If these necessary reforms are undertaken, they will support an uncertain environment. Combining strengths and opportunities, weaknesses and opportunities, strengths and threats and weaknesses and threats, this research aims to explore and consider new strategies that will improve weaknesses and minimise threats.

1. Strength – Opportunity Strategies

When combining both strengths and opportunities the result should be the best and most successful strategies because there is a combination of positive elements that contribute to tourism development. The strategies below are developed focusing on these positive forces.

1. Marketing an integrated destination of six countries of Europe, with unique nature and culture. All six countries have an interesting culture and history and beautiful landscapes. If taking advantage of the region and Western Balkans and marketing a

whole region, travellers would have more diversity and options inside a destination. In one journey they may visit different landscapes and cultures not far from each other.

2. Build eco- friendly lodges in eco locations. There are still unexplored places, and Albania is implementing the appropriate strategies to develop eco-tourism and offer something that cannot be found very easily.
3. Increase awareness of sustainable development and highlight why, as a regional space, it may be easier to achieve sustainable development. More information is necessary among young people, entrepreneurs, students, and teachers as well as more encouragement to collaborate if the country aims for sustainable tourism development.
4. Market a place inside Europe where religions coexist in peace. That is an extraordinarily strong point that may attract visitors from all over the world. Religious symbiosis is rare, not to say impossible. Especially for people coming from the East, this may be an interesting aspect and the fact that they can visit a place in Europe that is still different from Europe may spark interest among tourists.
5. Build partnership bridges, create an attractive environment for companies and attract investments in local projects. Integrate environmental local taxation in the strategy.
6. Make the country known in the East and West. Using today's means of communication, the destination may present its values and particularities in the unexplored market of the East but also in the West, where interest has kept increasing over time.

2. Weakness – Opportunities strategies

1. Design new strategies that focus on sustainable development, as a common space, and increase reliability and reputation. If the countries of the Western Balkans market the destination as one place, this will ease engagement in international policies related to sustainable tourism development.
2. Invest in infrastructure as one important element that affects tourists' comfort and satisfaction.
3. Build new capacities to lead the new strategies in tourism - exchange employees between WB and EU and gain different experiences that will also strengthen the destination more.
4. Develop strategies for an all-year tourism. Develop additional forms of tourism like eco, winter, sports, mountains-tourism, or MICE to attract new markets. The destination has

many resources to realise this. A good management will increase the number of visits in the region of Western Balkans.

5. Avoid practices that damage the environment and lobby and collaborate with international organisations to protect nature and the environment. " Vjosa", the first wild river in Europe became a national park thanks to the collaboration with local and international experts, environmental NGO-s, IUCN, and other collaborators.

3. Strength – Threats strategies

1. Together the countries of the Western Balkans, may become competitive with neighbouring touristic countries like Greece or Italy, which are tough to compete. One country alone would not be able to do this, but as a compact destination there may be great advantages.
2. Promote ecological tours and highlight the value and satisfaction that tourists may gain from these undiscovered, ancient, breathtaking touristic spots.
3. Aim to attract more investments from partner countries or private companies as a broader space.
4. Plan carefully regarding the target market. Conduct detailed capacity studies that will help plan how much and whom to attract.
5. Local government will make it possible that different destinations develop at a different pace. It is difficult to follow a comprehensive approach in tourism because of its segmented nature. However, developing in clusters or touristic zones is a good and effective initiative. This will contribute to the overall development.

4. Weakness – Threats Strategies

1. Reduce the threat of competition by offering diversity and a broad range of products inside the Western Balkans. Competitive prices may contribute to reduce the threat of competition too.
2. Build eco-friendly accommodations and create a competitive advantage from other Mediterranean countries. Countries in the Western Balkans must take advantage of the still untouched natural spaces. There are many travellers that are in search of nature and

tranquillity. Albania and its neighbours still have these spots and should offer them in an ecofriendly way.

3. Take advantage of UN initiatives and attract and engage specialists that will offer the right strategies to attract investors. Among country stakeholders the engagement of international experts may be immensely helpful to guide toward sustainable development.

Table 11: Extended SWOT Analysis Table of Tourism Industry in Albania

Extended SWOT Analysis Table of Tourism Industry in Albania	Internal Strengths 1. <i>Natural resources</i> 2. <i>Eco – friendly places</i> 3. <i>Stakeholders that believe in sustainability.</i> 4. <i>Mediterranean gem/ Religious symbiosis</i> 5. <i>Decentralization reform/ local authority</i> 6. <i>Strategic geographical position, a bridge between East and West</i>	Internal Weaknesses 1. <i>Weak marketing of tourism</i> 2. <i>Non satisfactory accommodation and facilities.</i> <i>No standardized service quality</i> 3. <i>Un-updated strategies</i> <i>Stakeholder’s opinion is missing</i> 4. <i>Seasonal employment</i> 5. <i>Hydropower building and Excessive construction in touristic zones</i>
External Opportunities 1. <i>The Western Balkans</i> 2. <i>Technological innovation</i> 3. <i>The UN initiative for international sustainable tourism; - Fostering knowledge, education, and capacity building</i> 4. <i>Emerging markets from the East</i> 5. <i>Partnerships with the private sector, regional and local tourism organizations, academia and research institutions, civil society, and the UN system</i> 6. <i>International Tourism Fairs East & West</i>	Strength Opportunity Strategies 1. Market an integrated destination of 6 countries of Europe, with unique nature and culture 2. Build eco-friendly lodgings in eco locations 3. Increased awareness on sustainable development and highlight why as a regional space may be easier to achieve sustainable development 4. Market a place inside Europe, where religions coexist in peace 5. Build partnership bridges and create an attractive environment for companies and environmental local taxation collection and attract investments in local projects. / Integrate environmental local taxation in the strategy. 6. Make the country known in East and West	Weakness- Opportunity Strategies 1. Design new strategies that focus on sustainable development, as a common space, and increase reliability and reputation 2. Invest in infrastructure, as one of the main elements that concern tourists 3. Build new capacities to lead the new strategies in tourism - exchange employees between WB and EU 4. Develop strategies for an all-yearlong tourism. Develop eco, winter-tourism or MICE to attract new markets 5. Avoid practices that damage the environment and lobby and collaborate with international organizations to protect nature and environment. " Vjosa", the first wild river in Europe became a national park thanks to collaboration with local and international experts, environmental NGO-s, IUCN, etc.
External Threats 1. <i>High competition around the Mediterranean</i> 2. <i>Inflation and increased oil prices</i> 3. <i>Slow trade and investments due to inflation</i> 4. <i>Emerging markets from the East</i> 5. <i>The Pandemic</i>	Strength -Threats Strategies 1. Become competitive as a WB, offer most of the all the gathered competitors in a smaller region 2. Promote ecological tours 3. Aim to attract more investments as a broader, reliable, space of WB from private sector 4. Plan carefully about the target market to attract 5. Local government will make possible that different destinations, develop at different pace	Weakness -Threats Strategies 1. Reduce threat of competition by offering diversity and a broad range of products inside the WB 2. Use more local products like wood and build eco-friendly accommodations. 3. Take advantage of UN initiatives and attract and engage specialists that will offer the right strategies to attract investors 4. Think carefully about the target market to attract and about minimizing mass tourism 5. Design flexible scenarios for unexpected situations

Source: Own research and analysis, 2023

4. Think carefully about the target market to address and about minimising mass tourism.

5. Design flexible scenarios for unexpected situations. The pandemic has taught lessons to society. Societies cannot plan in the exceedingly long term. They must be adaptable and flexible to be able to survive and be competitors in the market.

In table 11 is summarised a detailed description of the strategies that may contribute to Albania's tourism performance based on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

2.2.3 Sustainability through collaboration. The opportunity of Western Balkans

Partnerships are important for large projects. Likewise, they are especially important for sustainable development projects. The UN SDGs are a call to action to promise a better world for everyone. *Goal 17 focuses on building and improving partnerships between countries and international organisations.* (UN, 2015) This is arguably the most important of the UN SDGs, because achievement of the other goals is strongly related to it. To reach these goals, governments, the private sector, academics, and citizens must work together.

The Western Balkans is a region with immense potential. It comprises the following six countries of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia. The region lies between East and West of Europe. It has a population of around twenty million and achieves today a combined gross domestic product of close to EUR 100 billion (OECD, 2022). However, economic challenges and political instability have hindered prosperity of the region. The need for an integrated approach comes from the above-mentioned Agenda of the UN for sustainable development, where goals and targets are meant to stimulate action in the following areas: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership (Mariani, 2022).

Existing problems may be successfully addressed through collaborative innovation, which involves constructive integration of partner's differences and resources, and the development of innovative solutions that disrupt established practices. The collaborative innovation framework draws attention mostly to the 'meso' and 'macro' level of policymaking (including challenges posed by SD) rather than to the 'micro' level of collaborating organisations (Mariani, 2022).

Collaboration does not only mean that developed countries help developing countries. It is also important for developing countries to collaborate. Besides Albania, there are five other Balkan countries, which may aim to find the collaboration path. The goal of a common path will ease trade between them but, most importantly, attract the attention of investors for tourism projects which incite economic development. Additionally, as a common region the countries of the Western Balkans may cope better with sustainable development. A national as well as an outer collaboration is necessary to generate innovative solutions that will be beneficial for all the communities involved. These initiatives are often referred to as 'collaborative innovations for

sustainability’ (Mariani, 2022). Bommert (2020) argues that collaborative innovation is especially appropriate to solve persistent and emergent problems “because it opens the innovation cycle to a variety of actors and taps into innovation resources across borders, overcomes cultural restrictions and creates broad socio-political support for public innovation.” The countries have strong economic potential but face a major convergence challenge in relation to comparable countries in the European Union.

The fundamental problem holding back the region’s economic development is low productivity. This reflects years of under-investment, weak institutions, and a difficult business environment. The private sector is the main contributor to economic output in all countries; nevertheless, the state retains a dominant role in key industries in several countries of the region, and a significant privatisation agenda lies ahead (Sanfey, 2018).

Challenging obstacles need to be overcome to achieve sustainable market economies in the Western Balkans. Some of these obstacles are common across the region. Weak rule of law, corruption, unjust tax administration, informalities related to competition, lack of electricity supply, or financial constraints are some of the most shared challenges.

1. Regional Cooperation in the Western Balkans.

A notable convergence on inflation occurred until 2018 between the Western Balkan’s countries. There was price stability and inflation rates like those of advanced EU countries. Low inflation in the eurozone and the fall in global commodity prices were important contributors, but stable exchange rate regimes were also key pillars of this stability (EBRD, 2018).

Regional collaboration in the Western Balkans has increased during the past decade and it represents a great achievement for the countries, which has supported the overall economic activity of the region. Such cooperation also contributes to reducing tensions and creating more stability across the destination. While focusing their energy on the economy these countries give a better chance to regional stability and the destination becomes more attractive for investors as well as for travellers. In addition, increased collaboration will increase the exchange of people, capital, services, and goods.

Important initiatives, beginning with the Stability Pact for Southeast Europe after 2001, initiated numerous projects, including trade liberalisation among the Western Balkans in 2001 that led to the conclusion of the Central European Free Trade Agreement in 2006. A new format for

high-level regional cooperation was established later. On 24 February 2014, the EBRD hosted at its headquarters in London a Western Balkans Summit, which brought together, for the first time in such a format, the prime ministers of all six countries of the region, de facto launching a new format of regional cooperation: “Western Balkans Six at the level of Prime Ministers” (EBRD, 2018).

The promotion of the Western Balkans as an investment destination by this summit, was a highlight in terms of better cooperation and stability of the region. This summit emphasised the need for major regional projects especially supported by the European Commission, the European Bank for Regional Development, and other international financial institutions and donors. This opportunity, to extend the trans-European network and the incitement to major projects, peaked in the Brussels agreement, in April 2015 on the regional core transport and energy network for the Western Balkans as an extension to the region of the Trans-European Network (TEN-T). Various joint projects in different areas implemented through the Regional Cooperation Council after 2008 were the Connectivity Agenda of the Berlin Process during 2013-2020; and the latest EU initiative to create a Common Regional Market.

All the countries of the Western Balkans have established National Investment Committees, to achieve better coordination and collaboration in regional projects and keep track of goals realisation related to investments funded from European institutions. Besides physical infrastructure, one other regional goal to achieve has been the “soft connectivity” agenda.

By collaborating, the six countries of the Western Balkans will gain a distinct perspective to help them in the processes of solving demanding situations or making decisions related to sustainable tourism development. If this region is seen and promoted as a collaborative environment by all participating countries, such an environment itself will drive sustainable practices. Collaboration stands for a successful long-term partnership which creates stability and contributes to sustainable development.

During the 2001-2008 period, the Western Balkans experienced a strong economic recovery, with the average Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate exceeding 5%, gradual macroeconomic stabilisation and a rapid increase in foreign trade, particularly with the EU, which has become the region’s main trading partner (European Parliament, 2022). An increased inflow of foreign direct investment (FDI), especially after 2001 and coming mainly from EU Member States, has also contributed to economic development, facilitating the establishment of

enterprise networks and links to global value chains. Like all over the world, economic development in the Western Balkans was interrupted in the last quarter of 2008 by the global financial and economic crisis. These economies showed high vulnerability to external shocks. The economic crisis of 2008 revealed several structural weaknesses in their economies like external imbalances, increased unemployment rate and fast structural changes, which caused fast deindustrialization.

However, there have been a lot of initiatives to promote regional cooperation and integration among Western Balkan countries over the past 20 years. The above-mentioned Western Balkans Summit was another initiative that showed the willingness and dedication of European countries to support the common future of these six countries.

2. Potential benefits and implications from the common region of WB

The EU is highly committed to the EU integration of the Western Balkans. This is a shared strategic goal that unites the whole region and the EU, and it cooperates closely to address shared security challenges. It also provides political and financial support for the countries of the region to foster good relations and build shared prosperity through regional integration. In addition to its strong political support for the Western Balkans and the Berlin Process, the EU supports regional cooperation organisations, to boost economic development, improve connectivity, and enhance security and many other benefits across the region (European Union, 2022).

Through the Economic and Investment Plan, the EU has mobilised unprecedented resources to support connected, green, and people-focused growth, benefiting the region and Europe as a whole. The Green Agenda for the Western Balkans (GAWB) stays the top priority of the Economic and Investment Plan (EIP). The five-pillar agenda relies on regulatory reforms in the region to align it with the ambitions of the European Green Deal, as well as relevant investments. Four out of the six EIP priorities are core pillars of the GAWB: Clean energy, Sustainable transport, Private sector development and Environment and climate (EU, 2021).

The European Commission has presented in November 2022 the initiative of implementing a green agenda for the Western Balkans. This agenda focuses in five principal areas:

- Decarbonization and climate resilience
- Circular economy
- Depollution: air, water & soil

- Sustainable food systems & rural areas
- Biodiversity: protection & restoration of ecosystems

About 730 million Euros have been invested to support the implementation of the Green Agenda in bilateral and regional projects since 2021, including technical assistance and investments in energy efficiency, renewable energy, transition from coal and investments in environmental management. Further investments and grants under the Western Balkan Investment Framework will support the green transition, together with the recent energy support package (European Commission, 2023).

On 6 October 2020, the European Commission adopted the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans (EIP). It aims to boost economic growth and development, support a green and digital transition, promote regional integration among the six Western Balkan countries – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia – and foster their transition towards the European Union’s (EU) standards of living. The EU and the Western Balkans economic integration has taken place in some levels including goods markets, capital markets and labour markets reflected by the considerable amount of labour migration to the EU. However, the Western Balkan countries are still in low level economic development, and this is reflected in the region’s limited convergence towards EU average income levels. Moreover, the political process of EU–Western Balkan integration has been extremely slow (Barlett, et al 2022).

This is a good reason for Balkan countries to collaborate to accelerate this process and their own development. Interest in EU-Western Balkan integration has recently been stimulated by the Berlin Process, an intergovernmental initiative of engagement with the region’s six countries launched by Germany, that since 2014 has promoted stronger connectivity and a Regional Economic Area in the Western Balkans, with the conviction that regional integration can positively influence faster economic development and major political stability (Berlin Summit, 2021). The Berlin Process is a series of annual meetings of the Western Balkan’s prime ministers and six EU states with a particular interest in the region, hosted by different EU countries, launched in August 2014 in Berlin, and serving to discuss important regional topics related to future EU membership of the region (EBRD, 2018). The European Commission’s new enlargement strategy (February 2018), the Sofia EU-Western Balkan Summit (May 2018) and

EU renewed negotiation methodology (February 2020) are additional signs of EU commitment for the integration of the Western Balkan countries.

There are difficulties in internal developments in the individual Western Balkan countries. These may hinder the smooth integration of the six West Balkan Countries. However, a major improvement in the region's economic situation could help the political context and ease progress in other fundamental areas of reform. Acceleration of the Western Balkan countries' economic development is considered important in view of the limited economic results achieved to date (EU Parliament, 2022).

Despite the ardent desire that some of the countries of Western Balkans may have to collaborate with each other, there are conditions that may make the process difficult. Political instability in these countries is a factor that may put collaborations at risk. This phenomenon is known in Balkan countries, inside one country or among countries. Local political crises cause an unstable situation and take a lot of attention and energy. Unresolved bilateral issues between Belgrade and Pristina are present and need the engagement of national and international parties. Additionally, there has been heavy external involvement over time, in the making of states in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as Kosovo.

Additionally, administrative capacities, especially those that will contribute to sustainable development strategies are exceptionally low and insufficient. This is accompanied by a slow progression of administrative reforms.

One other issue that is noticed in most of the Western Balkan countries is the lack of transparency in processes like the public procurement process, policy making process or public private partnerships. The inclusion of civil society in consultation processes is incredibly low, almost non-existent. This is necessary for a country to develop sustainability practices and strategies. Human capital development is surely a challenge for all countries, especially those that are in a development phase. This phenomenon, if accompanied by elevated levels of corruption, hinders all development processes, including sustainable development practices. The transition of these countries from authoritarian regimes to new democratic ones has happened later, compared to other European countries, and still requires more time to stabilise. Cultural diversity is surely a positive aspect in the region; however, it should be considered carefully, to respect all countries and their particularities at the same level. Media freedom is another issue that needs improvement. The level of freedom is low and most of medias seem to

be politically influenced. There is ambiguity to be noticed in politician's foreign policy stances. All countries need to be dependable partners and support regional factors that contribute to preserving and strengthening political and economic stability in the region and beyond. Project proposals of all Western Balkan countries to obtain finance through the Western Balkans Investment Framework, must reflect maturity and the powerful desire to collaborate with each other, to grow together, to show the readiness toward overall sustainable growth.

Summary: Albania and the challenge of sustainable development

Sustainable development is defined as the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. According to WTO, it takes full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, industry, the environment, and host communities.

A suitable balance must be established between the three dimensions to guarantee long-term sustainability. A constructive collaboration of the various actors, a flexible policy mix, and appropriate action are essential components of achieving sustainable development. Policy coordination not only at the national, but at the international level as well would contribute to minimising the negative impacts of international tourism on destinations with valuable cultural and natural heritage.

The necessity for economic development in developing countries will be the main factor interfering with sustainable development. Albania is also a developing country, which is fighting its challenges on the development path. Engaging to stabilise the economy, decreasing poverty rates, and enhancing life quality has its own risks. It will take away the attention from other dimensions which are equally important to achieve stable and continuous growth.

To successfully achieve goals large projects partnerships are important. Likewise, they are very important for sustainable development projects. The Western Balkans is a region with exciting potential. It comprises the following six countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia. The region lies between East and West Europe and its unique culture and traditions indicate great opportunities for future development.

With a population of around 20 million inhabitants, it achieves today a combined gross domestic product of close to EUR 100 billion (OECD, 2022). During the last decades, increased regional collaboration in the Western Balkans has contributed to overcoming regional challenges and has

incited the overall economic activity of the region. This contribution has additionally helped to reduce tensions and create more stability across the destination. Focusing on main components like trade, investment, digital integration, and mobility will further contribute to sustainable development. In Table 12 is presented a summary of present economic, environmental, and social challenges in Albania.

Table 12: Summary of present economic, environmental, and social challenges in Albania

ECONOMIC	ENVIRONMENTAL	SOCIAL & OTHERS
Past centralised economy	Absence of public transport increases air pollution	Lack of awareness about environmental issues
Long transition phase	Poor air quality in the region of Western Balkans	Increased middle-class emigration
Agriculture dominated economy	Unstudied construction at the expense of green spaces	Limited knowledge about the S.D.G most sectors
High corruption	Extensive use of coal for energy production	Discrepancy between legislation and capacity
High unemployment rate	Underfunded and malfunction of EMS	Absence of studies regarding air pollution and people's health
Extreme poverty rate	Poor waste infrastructure and management	No common framework including principles of a green economy
Poor healthcare system	Reduction in forests volume	Gender inequality
Natural disasters required part of budget	Lack of effective river basin-based water management	Quality of Education
No appointed unit, in central government structure for environmental taxes	Natural disasters	Risk of commercialisation of culture
Acquisition of expensive technologies related to SD	Slow implementation of legal framework for biodiversity	Risk of traditions loss

Source: ITA Albania (2021), INSTAT (2021), WB (2022), Halili (2022), UNECE (2018), Nelsen (2017), WB (2020)

A single investment space, with harmonising 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. Some of the main benefits that arise from a strong relation between these six countries are summarised in Table 13.

The Western Balkans region has made great steps over the last two decades in terms of economic and social progress. Many of the important initiatives to help the integration of the region and strengthen its neighbourly relations have been incited from international stakeholders, mainly from the European Union.

All the countries of Western Balkans have established National Investment Committees, to achieve better coordination and collaboration in regional projects and keep track of goals realisation related to investments funded by European institutions.

A greater aim would be to move the six countries beyond the existing free trade agreement and towards a more comprehensive economic cooperation. Beyond practical and financial constraints, future solutions must address considerable institutional and governance challenges that remain across the region. The region itself needs to set strategic priorities that will facilitate sustainable development.

Table 13: Benefits from collaboration of the Western Balkan countries

BENEFITS
Larger economies are more appropriate for major investments
A diverse, interesting destination, rather than one country may attract tourist attention more
A single investment space with harmonising legislation will ease large investments
Improved reputation of collaborating countries
Trade agreements will facilitate economic transactions
Increased trust among each other, tourists, and outside investors
Improved stability of the region
Higher engagement toward sustainability
Easier approach to global sustainability goals
Employee exchange and skill development
Cultural diversity within a destination

Source: Own research and editing, 2023

New opportunities must be chased and embraced. Improved education and training possibilities, the participation of citizens in policy making should be a priority when designing new strategies. Better labour market policies and better social protection will create a resilient society. A legal framework for environmental protection must be a priority aiming for sustainable development. Respecting the principles of precaution, prevention, and rectifying pollution at its source on the 'polluter pays' principle according to the EEP, the framework for future action related to environment protection is necessary.

2.3 HIGHLIGHTS FOR A MARKETING STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

A marketing strategy is an important part of the successful performance of a touristic destination. A destination's management consists of the coordinated management of all the elements that make up a tourist destination. Destination management takes a strategic approach to link these sometimes very separate elements for the better management of the destination (UNWTO, 2023a). The natural environment today forms a considerable proportion of the tourist experience. The demand for nature experiences has brought tourists and tourism developers to the most far-flung corners of the earth (Meyer-Arendt, 2004). It was high time that Albania was discovered.

A destination must execute 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 is the cluster (co-location) of products and services, and 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 through its image and identity which may influence its market competitiveness (UNWTO, 2022a).

There are several steps that will lead to good marketing management according to Philip Kotler, the father of modern marketing. Firstly, and most importantly, one must *understand the market*, analyse consumer markets by conducting market research. The art and science of choosing target markets and getting, keeping, and growing customers through creating, delivering, and communicating superior customer value (Kotler et al., 2022a) will lead to good marketing management. The development of a viable market strategy that identifies market segments and defines the market to target and management of products and services through building a strong brand are key steps in the management process. An integrated marketing campaign will communicate the value that the industry has to offer to its customers and distribute it to the customer in the desired time.

Managing growth makes a country's tourism offer strong and stable in the present and future. The competition is high; therefore, much creativity and engagement are needed to develop new

market offerings. Additionally, building loyalty through customers, tapping into larger, international markets, and conducting socially responsible marketing are all keys to success.

2.3.1 Forces that shape the new Marketing reality

The realities of the last decades have varied significantly. There are many new opportunities, different behaviours to manage, and a lot of new challenges. Innovation and imaginative ideas are some main approaches to the new era of marketing.

Market forces, market outcomes, and holistic marketing are important concepts to refer to. These may be an immense help to find opportunities and specify important duties, to succeed with marketing strategies. Innovative technologies have made it possible to have plenty of data available and have generated new business models. Through data, it is possible to understand better what customers need and like.

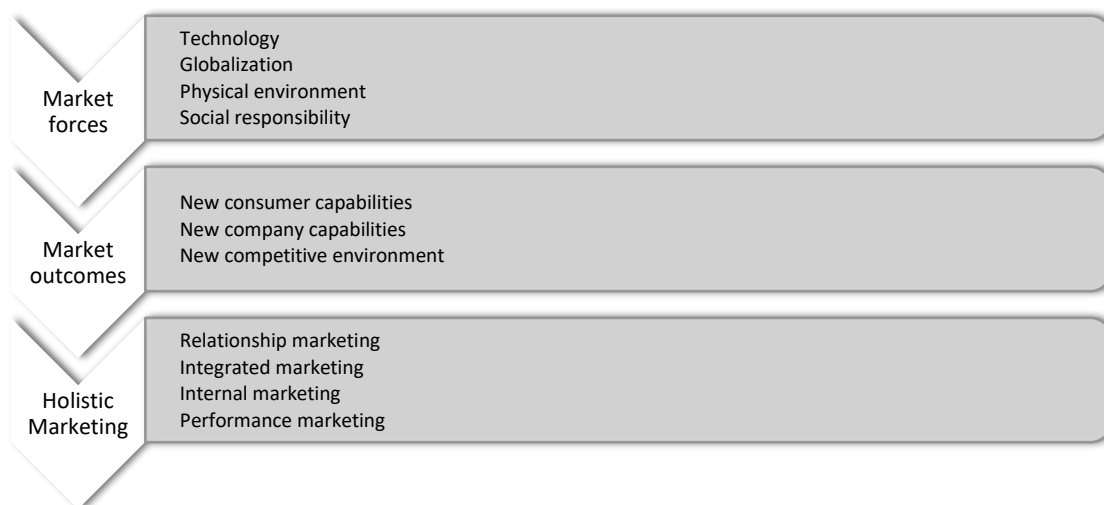


Figure 11: The new marketing realities

Source: (Kotler et al., 2022c)

In Figure 11 are presented the innovative marketing realities suggested by (Kotler et al., 2022a). There is some lack of detailed information related to the industry of tourism in Albania, especially during its first years of development after the 1990, and this makes it more difficult to make calculations or predictions for the future.

Therefore, it is critical to organise platforms and tools to gather more specific data about tourists'

needs and their behaviour. To tailor offerings according to consumers' needs one should learn a lot more about them.

Thanks to eroded geographical and political barriers, collaboration, and interaction possibilities have increased. Taking ideas from one place and adapting and applying them to another has become common sense and often extremely helpful. Albania has the possibility to exchange experiences with other touristic countries, which have a similar offer and a comparable size. The physical environment has also changed significantly and has caused changes in many other activities. As extensively discussed in the first chapter of this research, the effects of climate change are forcing other activities to change. In addition, the pandemic has had an extreme influence on industries like tourism, transport, and on many businesses.

As Kotler defines in his book *Marketing Management* (Kotler et al., 2022a) the pandemic was a virtual standstill of global commerce. The same was true for the emerging tourism destination of Albania, where many activities slowed down, and in addition, other social problems increased. There was no space for developing and improving marketing strategies for tourism. But the standstill may have been positive in one context; The resilience paradigm and the recovery process now have the possibility to re-begin, based on the principles of sustainable development.

The public and private sectors must develop sustainable management and commit to protecting cultural heritage and the environment and increasing social as well as economic benefits. Social responsibility is an aim to make society and the world a better place.

Telecommunications is one of the world's trillion-dollar industries, along with tourism, military, food, and automobiles (Kotler, et al 2022a). Conducting fresh marketing research by using the internet is a powerful tool today. Along with data from other institutions, researchers will have a larger and more powerful database. This will help gain a better understanding regarding price, availability, customer reviews, and experiences.

Through digital marketing channels, tourists can communicate, show their interest in tourist destinations, share opinions, and show loyalty or not. On the one hand, data on international arrivals is gathered. On the other hand, through internet communication, more may be discovered about tourist experience or if they would like to revisit the country or further recommend it to friends and family. Furthermore, through active online interaction, the intensity of a visitor's desire to recommend the country can be detected. This is a good and cost-effective

means to collect information and communicate. Thanks to online platforms the speed and ease of spreading information and raising awareness through campaigns are remarkably high. Albania can be found today at the speed of a click on the internet. Videos and documentaries, distributed through the official page of the Ministry of Tourism or other international channels, promoting unique or rare assets of Albania will increase interest and knowledge about the country.

Word of mouth propaganda from satisfied tourists who love the destination is an influential feature too. Through Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram people have spread a lot of information and experiences related to Albania, and they continue to do so every year, very easily.

In addition to the above and referring to the new marketing realities, it would make more sense nowadays to adopt more holistic and less departmental marketing. Like smaller organisations, where marketers should have a broader influence overall on the company and communicate their innovative ideas, an overall strategy for tourism development in the country of Albania should embrace an integrated approach to marketing. Well-integrated information and communication systems and marketing must interact with all stakeholders or links of the industry. The marketing reality should be about building relationships, automated and creative marketing, internal marketing that reflects a strong corporate culture, and performance-focused marketing that is driven by science (Kotler et al., 2022a).

In the tourism industry, the government is the central actor. It is the main participant that would engage intensively in building mutually satisfying, long-term relationships with all stakeholders, for a successful tourism development and the country's economic growth. This collaboration and the successful creation of a strong network will surely bring profits to all key stakeholders. Marketing is a science, and it should aim to understand financial and non-financial returns from activities of marketing too. Market share, customer satisfaction, and others are indicators of good or deficient performance. At once, marketing performance is also about better social responsibility and environmental responsibility. Developing a marketing strategy must be both a combination of discipline and flexibility.

Every day the tourism industry in Albania gains a lot of attention and is transforming into the main industry for the country's economy. While thinking about its existence and its future the mission of the tourism industry in Albania is to provide its travellers with numerous exploration and leisure possibilities in a remarkably diverse nature and, furthermore, aims to develop with

the following vision: *We can make the world a better place by travelling.*

Findings from the empirical analysis, presented in detail in chapter 4, reveal that stakeholders of the tourism industry in Albania are aware of the resources and capabilities, of the importance to protect them and are ready to engage in a collaboration with neighbouring countries, to develop sustainably. They have a good understanding of their customers' needs but lack better coordination to fulfil them optimally.

While designing a marketing strategy, among other elements, a main element was taken into consideration in this dissertation; the awareness of stakeholders of the touristic potential to be developed in the specific destination and their desire to be part of a sustainable development.

Table 14: Market Value Map: The strategy

	THE STRATEGY
TARGET MARKET	
Customers	What customer needs are aimed to be fulfilled? Who are the customers?
Stakeholders	What other entities will co-work to fulfil customer needs?
Industry	What are the necessary resources?
Competition	What other offerings aim to fulfil the same need of the same target market?
Context	Socio- cultural, technological, regulatory, economic, and physical aspects of the environment
VALUE PROPOSITION	
Customer Value	What value does the offering create for target customers?
Collaborator Value	What value does it create for collaborators?
Company Value	What value does it create for the company?

Source: Chernev, A. (2019a)

Strategy and tactics are presented respectively in Table 14 and Table 15. Elements have been adapted according to the industry focusing on the ability to create value for not just one but three important entities. They are the customers, the collaborators, and the country itself (Chernev, 2019a).

Value creation will be achieved through strategy and tactics. The market value map suggested by Chernev (2019) offers a complete visual representation of the main components through which value is created. This research has taken as a point of reference Chernev's model, aiming

to create a complete frame for marketing management of the tourism industry in Albania. Being alert to new developments and trends is crucial.

Profit and innovation are better guiding keywords than focused protection of existing markets. Creativity and building new capabilities in strategic innovation mean a new dimension in marketing development and marketing success. The five forces framework, suggested by Chernev (2019b) defines the environment in which the tourism industry works.

In this research, the market value map is presented, trying to make necessary adaptations, and aiming to integrate the elements of the market value map with each other.

Table 15: Market Value Map: Tactics

	THE TACTICS
MARKET OFFERING	
Product and Service	What are the key features of the service?
Brand	What are the key features of the brand?
Price	What is the offering price?
Incentives	What incentives does the offering provide?
Communication	How will customers become aware of the offering?
Distribution	How will the offering be delivered to customers and collaborators?

Source: Chernev, A. (2019b)

The journey starts with identification of the target market, and the last part defines the tactics to offer the desired service to the customer.

2.3.2 The Albanian Marketing reality: Steps of a new strategy

1. The target customers

Target customers may sometimes be confused with the target market. The target customers have the leading role in the framework, but collaborators, competitors, industry, and context constitute the complete framework of the target market. Target customers stand for the force for which the tourism industry in Albania should create superior value. The tourism industry in Albania aims to fulfil the needs of individuals who look to travel outside their usual environment to visit places for pleasure or business.

Several factors may influence a traveller's choice, including social, personal, cultural as well as psychological factors. Researchers agree that cultural factors exert the broadest and deepest influence on people's beliefs and desires on how they go about fulfilling their needs and wants (Kotler et al., 2022b).

The Mediterranean region has unique natural ecosystems and offers an amazing diversity of cultural and historical heritage. It benefits from mild climatic conditions and populated and well-connected locations that make it a sought-after travel spot. In 2019, the Mediterranean region welcomed over 400 million international tourist arrivals, being one of the leading destinations in the world. The tourism sector accounted for up to 15% of regional GDP, with a 75% growth since 1995, expected to reach 626 million international tourist arrivals by 2025 according to the UN World Tourism Organization (Fosse, et al 2021). The *market demand* is high and industry sales and market share of tourism in the Mediterranean are in a leading position.

After the two-year devastating pandemic period the recovery looks fast and strong. In the first half of the year 2022, Albania ranked second worldwide among destinations reporting data on tourist arrivals. Although it is not ranked among the first places in the region for income generation, this positioning seems promising for the future.

According to (Kotler et al., 2022b), to be successful in a targeting strategy, the following factors are essential:

a. Access to scarce resources/ Unique natural resources

Three major lakes of the Balkan, seven main rivers from East to West, the last wild river of Europe, the largest amphitheatre ever built in the Balkan, which dates to the second century B.C, and emerald, rock, and sandy beaches are all to be found within 28.000 square metres in Albania.

b. Infrastructure

In Albania, there are some principal factors like accessibility of the country, public transport including train transport, informality, lodging and other tourism facilities that need improvement.

From this point of view and from the survey of this research (please refer to chapter 4), a common destination of the Western Balkans would increase the possibility for more investments. From Table 16, a lack of data regarding the exact number of accommodations in Albania is noted. Meanwhile, Table 17 provides a summary of the fast increase in the building

industry. The year 2019 seems to have seen a boom in construction permits.

Table 16: Number of accommodating structures in Albania

Years	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Accommodation Structures (units)	905	1,242	N/A	1,326	1,405	1,469	1,457
Number of rooms	12,986	17,692	N/A	34,520	38,034	39,530	41,019
Number of beds	29,903	41,376	N/A	79,558	88,947	95,242	98,367

Source: Ministry of Tourism in Albania (2023) Institute of Statistics Albania (2022)

Regarding the activities offered, during interviews with tour operators, it was pointed out that there are a lot of nature activities organised by tourist agencies. Daily trips are quite common to all parts of the country, mountains, lakes, or beaches. Activities like rafting in canyons, climbing, eco-tours, sky sports like paragliding, water sports, biking, scuba diving and more are part of tourist activities.

Table 17: Number of permits for new constructions related to tourism from 2014 -2021

Years	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Value / in million ALL	811	162	1246	2909	3771	13784	2916	5172
Number (units)	5	3	11	53	75	67	23	33
Surface-000/m2	26	6	15	89	122	419	77	144

Source: Ministry of Tourism in Albania (2023)

c. Skilled employees

The Tourism sector is labour intensive, contributing an average of 11.5% of total employment in Mediterranean countries, according to the WTTC. It employs a high volume of both low-skilled and higher-skilled workers, with a heavy turnover from seasonal, part-time, and temporary jobs, while providing employment opportunities for people usually disserved by the labour market: migrants, women, students, older workers, people in rural and coastal areas, sometimes in remote locations, that depend on these jobs to maintain their livelihoods (Team C, 2021). Because tourism itself is a recently developing industry in Albania, there is a lack of professional employees in the field. Investments in education, in professional schools or university programs, as well as in training are an urgent matter. In a previous study directed to

stakeholders of the tourism industry in Albania, staff training was considered a main step and 60% of them were willing to invest to have better qualified employees, with increased knowledge on sustainability (Kadiu, 2021).

d. Strong brands

A strong brand may ease the road toward sustainable development. Brand strategy is discussed further in the following subchapter of marketing tactics.

From an interview with tourism expert Prof. Dr. K. Gorica, Professor of Tourism and Marketing at the University of Tirana, UNESCO Chair on Threats to Cultural Heritage, it is perceived that the interest from Eastern countries is remarkably high. More tourists are expected in the future, from the East, especially from China. The question is whether Albania is prepared to respond to this increasing demand. New strategies are crucial for the future. Mr. Haxhia, President of A.S. G Group, and founder of eleven companies in Albania, among which Landways International, a destination Management Company, shares the same opinion. “Tourists are going to come, and we must prepare for the future. We must plan strategically ahead of time.”

Additionally, data from the Ministry of Tourism (2023) reveals that the largest potential of tourists comes from Europe, especially from South Europe. The main group of travellers come from Southern Europe and are certainly represented by Albania’s neighbouring country, Kosovo.

Through interviews conducted with travel operators and business managers (for more details, please read results of qualitative analysis in chapter 4) an understanding was sought of who the potential customers may be and how their needs could be best fulfilled.

A summary of the target customers of the tourism industry in Albania may be found in Table 16. Based on observational research, the qualitative analysis, and international survey, this research names the following potential **categories of travellers** (Table 18) that may be targeted in each of the markets to promote each of the specific products.

Travellers visiting Albania have diverse expectations from the country. Some of them like the coast, some are curious about history and culture, and others like to explore natural places. Through strategic targeting, the industry makes sure that its offering is customised according to its target customer needs, while tactical targeting identifies the ways to reach these customers (Kotler et al., 2022b). The aim for Albania is to develop offerings that meet customers’ needs and work to surpass competitors.

Besides the target groups in Table 18, special attention should be given to four categories of tourism that are either not existent or are at the initial stages of these initiatives but with potential to develop further.

Table 18: Target Customers of tourism industry in Albania

Target customers	Characteristics
Free Spirits	13% of the global market: Free Spirits are highly sociable and open-minded. Their enthusiasm for life extends to their outlook on travel
Cultural Explorers	12% of the global market. Cultural Explorers are defined by their love of constant travel and continuous opportunities to embrace, discover, and immerse themselves in the culture, people, and settings of the places they visit.
Authentic Experiencers	9% of the global market. Authentic Experiencers are typically understated travellers looking for authentic, tangible engagement with destinations they seek, with a particular interest in understanding the history of the places they visit.
Personal History Explorers	As travellers, Personal History Explorers are primarily defined by their desire to connect to their own cultural roots—and do so by travelling in comfort, style, and security.
No- Hassle Travellers	No-Hassle Travellers are cautious, dutiful, and reserved people who seek secure group travel that allows them to escape from the duties and obligations of everyday life.
Rejuvenators	Rejuvenators are family-oriented people who travel with others to escape from the stresses of everyday life, to get pampered and indulge themselves.
Gentle Explorers	Gentle Explorers are primarily defined by their reluctance to venture far beyond the comfort of home and travel “on condition,” demanding the absolute best and most comfortable environments for themselves when they must do so.

Source: Own research and analysis, 2023

a. Wellness-fitness or SPA Resorts

Wellness-fitness is an all-year product. An Albanian wellness strategy is anything but a novelty by European standards. There is an urgent need to catch up with the products offered by competitor destinations.

b. MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Events)

MICE is the acronym for the subsector of business tourism concerned with organising and implementing agendas for meetings, incentives, conferences, and events.

MICE is seen as a growth market. Most MICE events are held in the home country, however, for reasons of time and cost, foreign countries are chosen if this affords a substantial advantage. These can be tangible or intangible benefits connected with the location, including its scenic beauty, its name, and prestige. Tirana, as the capital, together with Durrës, is suitable for the development of congress tourism.

c. Agricultural tourism

Agricultural tourism is seen as a development vehicle for rural areas. The term includes the combination of board, lodging, and agriculture in farming enterprises.

The main target group of this branch of tourism is the city family with children from a market with the same language. This product is unsuitable for international markets if there are language barriers.

d. Dental Tourism

In recent years, the role of health tourism has become more significant worldwide due to growing health awareness in Western societies. The estimated number of North American and Western European citizens trying to find solutions for their health problems abroad at a low price grows by 30-35 percent every year. Consequently, medical tourism can be considered one of the fastest developing and most innovative business sectors of the current time.

Health tourism is a vital part of the Albanian tourism industry. Albania offers excellent plastic surgery and ophthalmological and dental services as well. The number of visitors coming to Albania to have dental treatments grows by 10 percent every year. High-level services at a reasonable price characterise Albanian medical tourism.

These are target customer groups whose needs the country of Albania has the potential to fulfil and, thereby, create value. However, customer value needs to be monitored over time and this is important to keep the level of satisfaction high. Thanks to technology, this is not an exceedingly perplexing task anymore. Through complaint systems, customer satisfaction programs, and different customer surveys, satisfaction may be monitored, and this will help understand preferences and reduce service variability. The *value created* usually refers to the functional, monetary as well as psychological fulfilment of the customer's needs. But, at the

same time, it is especially important to have the ability to use these resources in the right way and create a superior double-sided value for both customers and the country.

From the outset, the value that customers create for the industry must be taken into consideration when designing a strategy. Both these issues, creating superior value for the customer and the industry will contribute to the sustainable development of tourism in Albania.

Revenues generated by tourism, according to the Ministry of Tourism in Albania, from year 2013 to 2021 have doubled. More specifically, the total contribution from travel and tourism has increased from 27,340,000 ALL to 58,043,000 ALL in 2021 (Ministry of Tourism Statistics, 2023). The economic development of the country is fundamental for its citizens' quality of life. But tourism development is not just about monetary value. In addition to monetary value, target customers create strategic value for the industry, which is expressed through social value, scale value, and information value. It is much more difficult to assess strategic value as it can be difficult to quantify (Kotler et al., 2022b).

Studies conducted by Galinsky et al (2008), a professor at Columbia University, have shown that executives who have lived in several foreign countries and thus gained plenty of exposure to other cultures and are more creative and encouraged in their approach to their work (Crane, 2015). Travelling may have a positive effect on people, travellers, and the host country as well. Therefore, this activity is creating value in both ways and needs to be protected, enriched, and developed.

2. Stakeholders of the tourism industry in Albania

Referring to Albania and its tourism development, the stakeholders may be divided into two main groups -national stakeholders and international stakeholders. Both groups are discussed in the collaborator's section in the following paragraphs.

Collaborators, as a force of the framework, are stakeholders of the industry who aim to create value for the specific target market. They offer complementary resources and support the country to fulfil customers' needs. The stakeholders of the tourism industry in Albania are presented in Table 19. The government is not the sole stakeholder in the industry. The government's aims are the national interest, improved quality of life, and overall governance. It manages establishing 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 responsible for delivering a value-for-money tourism offer to guests.

Table 19: National stakeholders of the Tourism Industry in Albania

Stakeholders
Government represented through all ministries and entities
Local government
The opposition
The private sector
Constituted bodies including non-governmental organisations, particularly those relating to tourism
The residents of Albania.

Source: EU Commission (2014)

It ensures that its operations are managed appropriately through further investment in innovative and effective marketing of the offer, investment in the physical product that it owns, and investment in training the current and potential workforce.

The private sector's corporate social responsibility can be achieved through investment in public spaces, infrastructure, and culture. Collaborative efforts among the tourism service providers can be made through coordination conducted by the constituted bodies. For Albania to remain competitive, all stakeholders must partake in the implementation of a new tourism policy and ensure that all decisions, actions, and projects are based on the principle of sustainability, do not harm the industry, and are operationally profitable in terms of tourism.

The creation of an Institutional Organization of the National Tourism Board is a good opportunity for tourism in Albania. The aim is to offer its citizens a very tangible perspective of good governance where power is dispersed, and real deliverables are offered.

If the network of this industry is strong enough, every stakeholder can interact directly with customers, not only the marketing institutions. This way customers see a single face and hear a single voice when they interact with the industry (Kotler et al., 2022b).

3. Industry and Competition

As one of the framework forces, they have a strong influence on value creation. They also work

hard to fulfil the same needs of the same customers. Situated in Southern Mediterranean Europe, among the world's strongest touristic countries, Albania and the other five Balkan countries have great opportunities but great challenges as well.

Today 21 countries, with surface areas from 2 square km to 2.4 million square km, have coastlines on the Mediterranean Sea. They are Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, Slovenia, Spain, Syria, Tunisia, and Turkey (UN Environment, 2017). Albania's neighbouring country Greece has been ranked the third top country in the world by readers of Conde Nast Travelers (Greek City Times, 2023). Croatia ranked in the top fifteen of world's best countries to travel to, in 2022 (Croatia Week, 2022).

The region and Albania's geographical location are great, but competition is tough as well. It lies next to top world destinations. There are some key factors that define the strength of the competition from alternatives. First, is the price that the alternative offers for a similar product or service. In fact, price is a main influencing factor for most customers. Furthermore, if competitors offer better quality and features this poses a risk for Albania. Additionally, if competitors make it easier to switch to them for more than one reason this will also be a strength for them and a weakness for Albanian tourism. Creating a sustainable competitive advantage and giving customers a reason to choose Albania is the main duty of tourism stakeholders.

The belief that the country may differentiate itself is reinforced from the survey responses from the primary research. Citizens are confident that the country has unique resources. The three core strategies to design a value proposition that makes an offering stand out from the competition are to differentiate based on an existing attribute, introduce a new attribute, or build a strong brand (Chernev, 2019c).

Differentiation based on an attribute is rarely sustainable because competitors will lose no time to copy something that is valued by customers, diminishing the competitive advantage of the country that started it first. Therefore, it is crucial to rely on and nurture unique resources and especially the customs and history of a country, which can hardly be imitated. Additionally, the cost of experiencing such a beautiful coastal holiday in Albania is lower than that offered by the competitors. Furthermore, other experiences can be found within a close range of the coast of Albania. Less than two hours away tourists may spend a wonderful day on the last wild river of Europe and have a unique experience rafting in the canyons of this river.

Competing is one side of the coin, but collaborating is the other side of it. Although Albania may be a beautiful country, walking alone the country may not go far away. Introducing the integrated region of Western Balkans gives travellers the possibility to experience more. A tour combining some of the WB countries may be remarkably interesting for them. They may relax at the beach, but also visit some of the UNESCO sites in Serbia or go for a sports adventure in Europe's biggest canyon in Montenegro. A similar package may be difficult to imitate or offer somewhere else. The great advantage is that the countries are small and close to each other, and this makes them easy to reach. Competitors are not considered only as a negative force hindering development. On the contrary, countries may be inspired by what they may offer additional or differently to their competitors. This requires innovation and creativity, which leads to success. However, being sure that the global environment's future requires collaboration, people should find ways to respect, connect and collaborate with each other. A beautiful initiative that both countries of Greece and Albania do is organising day trips or excursions for tourists from Greece to Saranda or the other way around. Considering the future collaboration of Western Balkans as a common destination, many similar initiatives are necessary and will probably result in remarkably interesting and attractive results for travellers.

4. The regulatory context

This factor is a delicate one. The regulatory context includes product specifications, pricing, communication regulations, intellectual property laws, taxes, import tariffs and embargoes as well, while the economic context encompasses growth, money supply, inflation, and interest rates (Kotler et al., 2022b). A new, improved tourism policy for Albania and planning implementation will be a great contribution to this context and to the overall tourism performance. Tourism success and performance is about developing tourism resources, infrastructure, products, and attractions, but it is also about society, polity, and economy meeting the challenges of globalisation, the new millennium, and nation-building. The Ministry of Tourism and Environment of Albania is initiating the creation of the Albanian Tourism Board, which will enable power to be devolved among the major stakeholders of the travel industry in the country through the process of activation of all actors. This public-private partnership will aim to create and promote sustainable products which are customer-centric.

The Western Balkans comprises six countries as regional collaborators. A common, larger,

diverse destination may attract the interest of more investors. Through trade and legislative agreements further facilities will come. The road toward environmental protection in line with the EU will be easier as a compact destination. Increased engagement of all countries will be reflected in better tourism performance in the region. A better performance in all areas is beneficial to all parties.

Additionally, there is a lack of community participation. Tourism organisers in developing countries must encourage participation by decreasing bureaucracy and providing access to information for local communities to participate. They also need to involve NGOs as bridges for the community with other stakeholders, ensuring destination ownership for local communities, providing budgetary support, and campaigning for awareness of sustainable tourism for the local community (Reindrawati, 2023).

2.3.3 The Albanian Marketing reality: Tactics of a new strategy

In the sections before the target and value proposition of the tourism industry in Albania was discussed. Those define the strategy of tourism development. Along with the strategy, the tactics of marketing management are an important part of the whole marketing management of the industry.

While engaging all the stakeholders of the tourism industry in Albania, the feel permeating all the initiatives and actions is businesslike; designing sustainable products that meet and exceed the needs and expectations of the consumer, while being different and unique. Adopting consumer-centric thinking helps to make product design easier and to engineer choices that shape outstanding products.

A new philosophy and approach is necessary for tourism development in Albania. Given the challenges the world is facing, one would be forgiven for thinking that the future is not what it used to be. Unforeseen scenarios are part of people's lives. Still, introspection will reveal reasons to be cheerful, stories worth sharing, and bright ideas waiting to be seized upon. Sometimes the solutions are simple and personal: to run, dive into a lake, enjoy a UNESCO sight, and have a homemade meal with hospitable people who are proud of their products. Or it could be building spaces in cities that respect older residents and value younger ones. That is *the philosophy of a marketing strategy; of showing what Albania has to offer so that tourists can slow down, reconnect, make good things happen and do something that they care about and*

discover nice places and extraordinary people along the way. The future is not what it used to be. It is what we make it.

The country forges a new future not only regionally but rather globally. The aim is for tourism to affect the local economy and to consider the effects on the social structures, culture, and lifestyle of the country. Therefore, 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.

1. The Product

To be a successful competitor in the market, the product and service should be outstanding. An excellent product is the core of an excellent brand. To achieve this, it is particularly important to focus relentlessly on innovation and the performance of the product or service offered. Products that do not allow too many variations, but the more variation the better. The differentiation can be made through attributes like, core functionality, features, performance quality, conformance quality, durability, reliability, form, style, and customization (Garvin, 1987). Design is currently a strong and increasingly important differentiator.

It is difficult to define the tourism industry as, unlike in other industries, there is not one clear product. It incorporates many industries, including lodging, transport, attractions, travel companies, and more. In its broadest sense, tourism is defined as when people travel and stay in places outside of their usual environment for less than one consecutive year for leisure, business, health, or other reasons (Das et al., 2017). Tourism can also be considered one of the frontrunners of globalisation. Globalisation is an interconnected complex web of social processes that intensify and expand worldwide economic, cultural, political, and technological exchanges and connections (Westcott, 2020).

a. Product Development

Tourism products are the basis for the operation of the tourist sector of a destination. The marketing of a tourist destination begins with the research and development of the product that it intends to sell. To make the most of the destination from a profitability and sustainability standpoint it is necessary to plan and develop the right tourism products. Thus, it is strongly believed that forging close partnerships and cooperation with outspoken companies or organisations with longstanding and tangible results with the ever-changing traveller in mind is crucial in the vision to deliver “agile, bold, and creative destination marketing that inspires and

delivers results.” Tourism product development means bringing new and innovative products, experiences, and services to the market for tourists to buy.

Gaps have been found and changes should be made to the products and experiences that are already being offered in Albania. These changes are required by the post-pandemic and geopolitical reality. For every destination, it is important to continuously expand the existing tourism offer or to include other services, experiences, or tangible products such as souvenirs.

Developing products that are tailored to visitors’ needs will improve the visibility and profitability of Albania. Making more products available to tourists will increase the length of their stay in the country, increase expenditures, and encourage new and repeat visitors.

Mostly, product development involves creating a new experience and expanding or enhancing existing ones. The expansion of products should mostly focus on new tourist markets, improved product lines, or seasonal experiences. Some of the areas where the offer of tourism products may be expanded are presented in Table 20.

Table 20: Product offer of tourism industry in Albania

Types of tourism Product
Sun and Sea
Cultural
Health
MICE
Bicycle
Wine and Gastro
Rural and Mountain
Adventure and Sports
Ecotourism

Source: Own research and analysis, 2023

It is important to keep up with repositioning by strengthening all the value chain links and extending the season for sun and sea tourism. Regarding cultural tourism, keeping up with adding tourism appeals to cultural events, interpretation centres and events is particularly important as well.

b. Product positioning

The new products are ready for the market, and strategic partnerships will help expand their reach. For the ministry of Tourism, it is important to forge strategic partnerships that include tourism products and elements to create one seamless travel package for visitors.

While aiming to design value, referring to (Kotler et al., 2022b), the following points have been identified at this stage to bear in mind:

- a. Core functionality: The core benefit to customers is especially important. The destination of Albania offers relaxation, culture, sports, and hikes through nature.
- b. Performance and conformance quality: Outstanding customer service is necessary to succeed in the tourism industry. To have good returns and market share performance quality needs to improve constantly.

Training and programs that help sharpen marketing skills and create a standard and service consistency should be initiated in many areas related to tourism. This would help to have a stable performance and not too much variability, which is risky for the industry.

Meeting the promised service and product features is necessary to create loyal customers and sustainable development. Albania seems to be, however, most of the time in the “zone of tolerance.” This means it lies between the two ends of the continuum-the minimum level of service acceptable and the best possible service to be offered. To improve this area, the practice of customer-centricity may be an immense help.

- c. Maintaining product standards: A marketing strategy should include the measurement of several key performance indicators, to guarantee the protection of the product and its quality. In the case of tourism these would be how they protect the tourism offer, how they nurture all resources, and how they make it possible to clean and keep a high standard of product and service year after year.

This reflects responsibility and contributes to continuous, sustainable development. It also gains tourists’ trust and builds loyalty over the years.

- d. Reliability lies at the heart of long-term customer value creation. Albania has a variety of products to offer that differentiate it from competitors but at the same time, performing a service accurately and as promised and aiming for further improvement will contribute significantly to long-term value creation.

- e. Product features, like in the case of tourism, specialised personnel (language translators), or exclusive and unique opportunities are essential. The feasibility of such offers should be assessed by calculating customer value versus the cost for the potential service.

Customers have shown a tendency to dislike having to deal with different service providers. They would rather choose one provider that offers many services. With this customer need in mind, it is important to invite agencies or travel agents to offer a variety of services, like flight arrangements, transport, accommodation, and tours. Lodgings and companies that offer services to tourists must include tangible things like attractive facilities or innovative equipment, for example wi-fi card payments, and similar services.

- f. Form and flexibility: Tourism offers in Albania can differentiate themselves through customised packages that offer a bit of everything in one holiday trip.
- g. Style: The strategy must use the Albanian style, its unique culture, and language as an advantage to create its own style to present the country.
- h. Customization: Gathering data about customers' needs and specifications and customising product features is a helpful technique. Personalised experiences may be organised through tour operators and agencies in the best way.

The benefits of tourism services start with search benefits, experience benefits, and credence benefits. Therefore, it is important to promote tourist destinations in a way that people find them easily, but also gain a clear and complete idea of what they may expect.

2. The brand

Strategic brand management is a combination of the design and implementation of marketing activities and the programs to build, measure and manage brands to maximise their value (Kotler et al., 2022d). A brand is first created by equipping products and services with the power of a brand. But it is a marketer's duty and skill to keep up the brand and enhance and protect it continuously. It does not matter whether the brand is new or already established. This process must be ongoing for an established brand and a new brand. Elements to create a brand may be names, attributes, benefits, or meaningful characteristics that distinguish the product or service from competitors. Successful brands are seen as genuine and authentic in what they sell and who they are (Shepherd et.al, 2015).

Today travel is not merely for recreation. Defining travel in purely geographical terms is

insufficient. Travel then is *not geographical, but psychological*, “*travel is the experience of Otherness*” (Thomas, 2020). Thus, when projecting the image of a destination and what it stands for, it is meaningful to envision all the remarkable stories it narrates, all its colourful characters, romance, adventure, and rich mental imagery. A destination should communicate the single-minded idea that sets it apart from the others and makes it a one-of-a-kind experience. It is strongly believed that when branding a destination, people are creating desire with the raw materials of the storyteller’s art – powerful words, compelling ideas, and lush pictures. Furthermore, creating vivid mental imagery helps the broad audience envision what it will be like to experience the country. The philosophy of rebranding Albania as a destination means making friends with the locals of that country who instantly invite you to be a part of their world. All the great benefits of Albania as a country can be highlighted through an examination of what it has to offer. The aim is that products and services spark a sense of anticipation, filling the traveller with a sense of wonder while celebrating Albania. It means having nowhere to be. Yes, people still have concerns, but they are not here at this present moment. This philosophy asks the tourist to savour the joy and happiness that life in Albania constantly gives and to recognize that they have everything they need right now.

The degree to which the Albanian brand will affect the way consumers think or act towards the brand will define the power of the brand. It is the way that consumers respond that increases brand power. A strong brand will bring greater profits.

When people feel comfortable presenting their authentic, imperfect selves it is said that true belonging happens. A moment and place, according to Brown (2012), where *the sense of belonging can never be greater than the level of self-acceptance*. It is a feeling of security and support when there is a sense of acceptance, inclusion, and identity for a member of a certain group (Dobson-Smith, 2022).

“Belonging in Authentic, Mediterranean Albania.”

The brand itself speaks also about **brand personality**. People like to choose brands with personalities that match their own. The brand of Albania has three main traits: authenticity, empathy, and free spirit, which is represented through the eagle in the Albanian flag.

Co-branding may be a good opportunity, if the collaboration between the Western Balkan countries is embraced by all countries and becomes a reality.

3. Price and incentives

While the other elements of marketing tactics usually produce a cost, price is the element that produces income. A product that is well-designed and that is well-marketed can justify a higher price and earn bigger profits. However, deciding about the price is a complex process that needs to take into consideration many factors, including company, competition, customers, and the marketing environment (Kotler et al., 2022d).

The price is an element that has a major influence on a buyer's choice. In tourism, for example, coastal tourism prices tend to increase during the summer season or high season for holidays at the beach. Because demand is higher during summer, "surge pricing" is a method used by many tourist destinations. The private sector is a primary price-setter in the industry of tourism. Albania must consider price very carefully as this may be a significant tool to attract customers. If prices are too high, travellers may prefer neighbouring, well-established brands. If the country keeps prices lower, it may attract more travellers. There are a few factors to consider when pricing tourism products to increase interest among travellers.

a. Seasonality

Referring to coastal tourism there is a peak of the season and during this peak price may get a little higher. However, the country has a great climate, and the summer season often is extended from the end of May to the end of October. Therefore, it could offer exceptionally competitive prices around the peak time, which can become remarkably busy.

b. Competitor's prices

Albania may try the strategy to offer lower prices because it is not easy to compete with long experienced and developed Mediterranean region and its countries like Spain, Italy, and Greece. European standard facilities and investment in exceptional service combined with natural richness may be an aim of the government, business, and citizens of Albania.

c. Costs and investments in the industry of tourism

As the country is in this first phase of tourism development, costs may be high, and investments are needed to attract tourists. Some of the necessary investments for development are listed in Table 21. The Western Balkans initiative may be a great solution for the future. A stable and real collaboration between countries may incite international investments in the region.

Table 21: Investments that will help grow sustainability

Government related	Business related
Infrastructure	Facilities
Creation of a national board of tourism with professionals	Social responsibility reflected in eco-friendly business making or employees' better work conditions
Protection of the environment	Employee training
Improvement of the regulatory context	The adaptation of innovative technology

Source: Own research, 2023

Incentive travel packages, focused on creating an unforgettable experience are also part of Marketing tactics. Not only a great destination, but accommodation, activities, hospitality of the host community, the whole experience may be highlighted.

4. Managing Communications

Communicating all the attributes of the product and service at the right time to the right people is key to success. In this process, it is especially important to find the appeal that works best with the chosen target market. According to Kotler et al., (2022d), to develop an effective communication process, the following steps are crucial:

identifying the target audience, determining the communication objectives, designing the message, choosing the channels of communication, selecting the message source, and collecting feedback.

Since the potential and the conditions improve every day, promoting an all-year-round touristic country is necessary for complete and sustainable tourism development in Albania. Informative programs like the one transmitted in January 2023 by the BBC World News (2023) are important means to deliver the message, presenting in detail different regions and customs of the country. The communication mix, if effectively used, would bring many benefits to tourism development. The types presented in Table 22 are part of the communication mix that are important for marketing sustainable tourism development (Kotler et al., 2022d).

An integrated marketing campaign comprising the elements presented in Table 23, may be an option for Albania. The appeal may be informational as well as transformational when real travellers reveal their experiences in Albania.

Both approaches are valuable to present Albanian tourism, and both should be used. The

American Marketing Association defines IMC (Integrated Marketing Communications) as “a planning process designed to assure that all brand contacts received by a customer or prospect for a product, service, or organisation are relevant to that person and consistent over time” (AMA, 2023).

Table 22: Marketing communication elements for tourism in Albania

Communication channels
Advertising
Online communication through social media
Mobile communication
Direct Marketing through the mail
Online messaging or tourism fairs
Events and other activities or experiences
Word of mouth
Publicity and Public Relations

Source: Based on (Kotler et al., 2022d)

An integrated marketing campaign on four levels, horizontal, vertical, internal, and external, representing a creative, innovative summary of the product and service, may as well include and highlight the country's engagement for sustainable development as part of a common space of the Western Balkans.

Table 23: Integrated marketing campaigns

Campaigns
National campaigns every year
Collaboration with prestigious international channels
Informational and transformational appeal
Integrated campaign in four levels
Include gradually the Western Balkan countries in the promotion

Source: based on (Kotler et al., 2022d)

Sustainability must be on focus of communication when conducting marketing campaigns for Albanian tourism.

5. Managing Distribution Channels

The travel and tourism distribution chain and channels represent the link between travel service providers and the consumers. Digital platforms and travel technology have transformed the travel industry. New distribution channels are impacting traditional travel agencies and tourism boards worldwide. Distribution channels are being created that add value to the travel ecosystem. Travel service providers can use innovative technologies to make personalised offers to their clients.

Among the distribution channels are travel agencies, tour operators, consolidators, tour operators, wholesalers, online travel agencies (OTAs), global distribution systems (GDSs), travel technology providers, and search engines (Rajraji, 2022). In the case of the tourism industry businesses represent a main channel that offers products and services to tourists. They play a key role in the development of the industry. Therefore, the government should consider them as a main partner, ask more for their opinion and involve them as much as possible.

According to Rajraji (2022), there are four key elements within the typical chain of distribution that are commonly noted.

Principals – A range of products like accommodation, transport, and tickets for different activities, as well as ancillary services are offered to travellers usually in leisure travel packages.

Wholesalers - In the wholesale sector of the distribution chain, a product or service is sold to travel agents, tour operators or other accommodation or travel sellers first and later they sell it to travellers, providing a business to consumer service (Rajraji, 2022).

Retailers – Retailers sell directly to consumers. Travel agents are representatives of the retailers' group. They offer tour activities like culture and history, adventure, landscapes and nature, beach, getaways, and relaxation. It is important that specialised, and certified guides become a standard and offer the best service to travellers.

Consumers - Purchase a product or service related to travel.

A multi-channel distribution would be beneficial for the development of tourism in Albania. In Table 24 are summarised potential travel and distribution channels for tourism industry in Albania. Sometimes the wholesaler and retailer may be the same. In this case a vertical integration takes place, which is the situation when two or more elements at various stages of the supply chain merge with each other. It is common for tour operators and travel agents to buy from each other (Kenton, 2019).

A multichannel distribution offers three main benefits: increased market coverage, lower channel cost and customised selling, which influences customer loyalty.

Table 24: Travel & Tourism Distribution Channels

Online Channels	Strategic Partnerships with	Offline Channels
Ministry of Tourism Website	Neighbour countries of WB	Hotels
Social media like Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and others	International Alliances for sustainable tourism development	Restaurants
Review networks	UNWTO/ Green Destinations/ World Heritage Journeys/ CED and others	Trade events
	Partner travel agencies	Visitor Information Centres
	Partner tour operators	
	Associations and trade bodies	
	Destination Marketing Organizations	

Source: Own research and analysis, 2023

In Figure 12 is presented a summary of the main steps of a marketing plan for sustainable Albania. The steps of the marketing plan are designed keeping in mind the Albanian reality and tourism development. This model is adopted according to necessities related to the Albanian sustainable development. The opportunity of the common space of a Western Balkans is also integrated in several steps of the marketing plan.

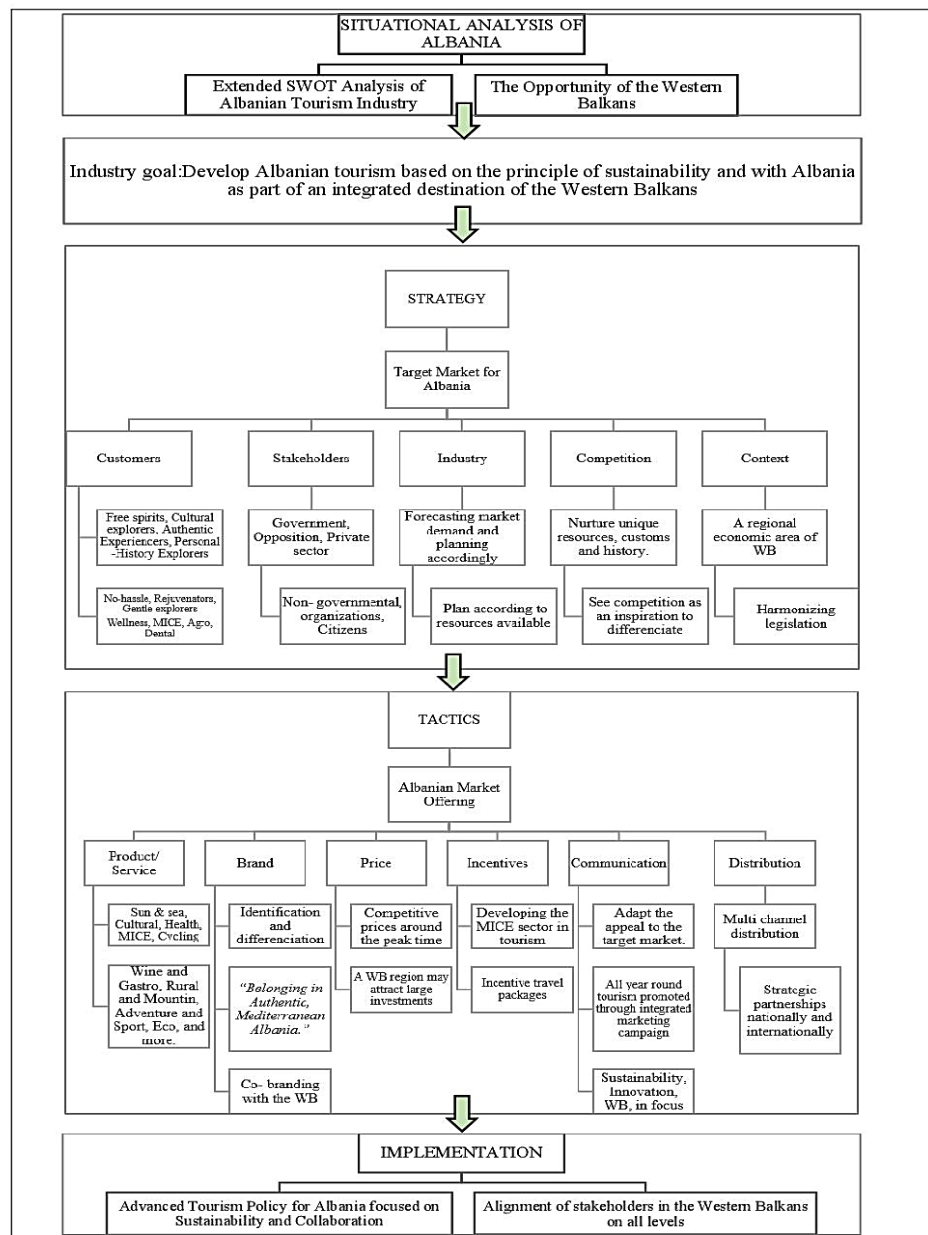


Figure 12: A marketing plan for sustainable tourism development in Albania

Source: own research and analysis, based on Chernev (2019), Kotler et al., (2022)

Summary: Highlights for a marketing strategy for sustainable tourism development

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 travelling.*

A summary of a marketing plan for sustainable tourism development is suggested from this research in the above Figure 12. The figure presents the detailed steps of a plan adopted to the Albanian reality and developments in tourism. This plan is created keeping in focus the necessity and benefits that may come from a common destination of Western Balkans and Albania as part of it. This point of view is supported from primary research and findings (presented in chapter 4) and its purpose is to highlight the importance of sustainable development.

For Albania to remain competitive, all stakeholders must partake in the implementation of a new tourism policy and ensure that all decisions, actions, and projects are based on the principle of sustainability, do not harm the industry, and are operationally profitable in terms of tourism. Protecting the tourism offer, nurturing all resources, and making it possible every year to maintain a high standard of product and service is important for continuous development. The region has products that differentiate it but at the same time, performing a service accurately and as promised and aiming for further improvement will contribute a lot to long-term value creation. The aim is to incite a sense of wonder while celebrating Albania.

“Belonging in Authentic, Mediterranean Albania.”

3. METHODOLOGY

This thesis employs a multilevel research design. In the introductory chapter, the research Table 1, presents the phases of the research process. Those phases from S2-S6, the objectives, and the analysed results will be presented in this chapter and in the findings chapter.

3.1 QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS

As a first step of primary research, interviews with experts were conducted to explore the research field. This methodological approach was chosen because individual interviews offer the advantage over group methods (e.g., focus groups) of being able to deal intensively with the opinion of one person without the influence of other group members coming into play (Ritschl, et al., 2016).

According to Berger-Grabner (2016b), qualitative survey methods serve, among other things, to present social circumstances in a describable way. From this, hypotheses can be derived, which can subsequently build theory (Mayring, 2015, pp. 22–23).

An interview also offers the possibility to compare the results of different interviews and allow a certain degree of discussion. Guiding questions and further sub-questions are formed in advance, defining the interview framework (Bortz & Döring, 2006). The expert interview tries to reconstruct the experiences and knowledge of the interviewed persons concerning the research field (Doeringer, 2020). Attention is paid to the selection of interview partners. Depending on the research design, emphasis can be placed on the heterogeneity or homogeneity of the interviewees. This usually arises either in the research process or is determined in advance to represent corresponding characteristic features (Berger-Grabner, 2016c).

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. Among them there are Professors and experts of Marketing. Their opinions were particularly important for the questionnaire's design.

According to Berger-Grabner (2016d) the application of qualitative content analysis is a means to evaluate expert interviews. This form of data evaluation through text analysis is suitable for in-depth analysis of trends, phenomena, symptom complexes, written materials, or processes, among other things (Ritschl & Stamm, 2016).

Compared to other qualitative analysis methods, qualitative content analyses offer the advantage that they do not remain attached to the text itself but consider and evaluate the information obtained in the research context (Gläser & Laudel, 2010). While for quantitative research, quality criteria in qualitative research need special attention. Especially important is the conduct of an open conversation, which is oriented without prejudice to questions that are predominantly formulated openly (Lamnek, 2008). Lumsden (2022) highlights the following points as adequate quality criteria: (1) authenticity, (2) credibility, (3) replicability, (4) transferability, and (5) reliability.

In conclusion, it can be said that qualitative research results, although not indicative of representative populations, must also be guided by the basic principles of validity and reliability (Bortz & Döring, 2015; Mayring, 2015).

The interviews were structured based on the research questions of the dissertation and from a theoretical analysis during the preliminary research. Indicator themes, which are related to sustainable development form the basis for the interview structure (Table 25). They are related to economic, ecological, and social sustainability elements that influence the overall sustainable tourism development. A section related to the initiative of the Western Balkans is included as well to gather experts' opinions about the region's future.

Table 25: Indicators of sustainable development

Economic Sustainability	Ecological Sustainability	Social Sustainability	The Western Balkans
accommodation structures	planning policy	networks and clusters	a common destination
foreign investments	environmental management	social responsibility	advantages and issues
use of land/resources	eco certification	public-private partnership	resources of Albania
time and spatial distribution of tourism demand	carrying capacity concept implementation	citizens participation in the planning process	contribution to sustainability

Source: based on Petric. L. (2012). Croatian Tourism Development Model – Anatomy of an Un/Sustainability. In C. Ghenai (2012), *Tourism, Life Science, Management and Environment*

In addition, sub-questions on the respective topics are prepared to be able to maintain the flow of the conversation if necessary (Froschauer & Lueger, 2003).

These are main indicators that may be assessed to study progress towards sustainable tourism, while simultaneously recognizing that specific measurement metrics may vary given that they are site, context, and enterprise specific (Agyeiwaah, 2017). Table 25 served as a reference while conducting interviews with experts. The methodology of qualitative content analysis according to Mayring was used to evaluate the results (Mayring, 2015), because it meets the requirements of this research. Figure 13 represents the model of inductive category formation. In-text analysis, the “summary “, is used as a basic form of qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2015, pp. 69–90). In doing so, we try to reduce the text material as much as possible to obtain a “manageable corpus “(Mayring, 2016) and derive the evaluation categories inductively.

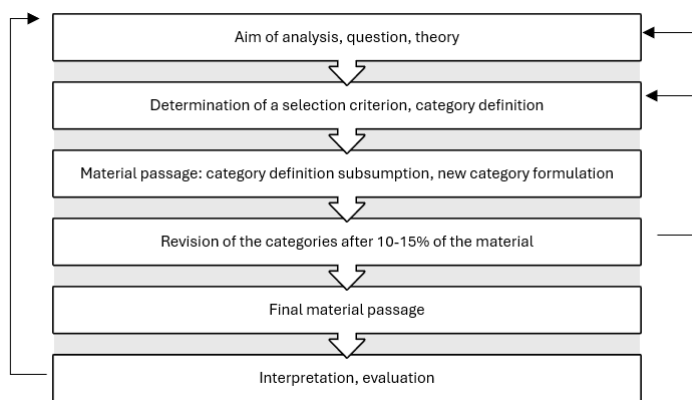


Figure 13: Model of inductive category formation

Source: Based on Mayring (2015)

Based on the categories obtained, sub-areas are then formed that lead to the hypothesis formation of the dissertation.

3.2 QUANTITATIVE SURVEYS

Two quantitative surveys are used to address the research goal O2 and answer *sub question 1 and 2*: What may be the benefits of working as an integrated destination of the Western Balkans? Can engagement and bond as an integrated destination of the Western Balkans facilitate the development of sustainable tourism?

What are the main reasons that drive interest among tourists? Are travellers interested in visiting a diverse destination, the Western Balkans?

This dissertation aims to analyse its citizens' approach toward sustainable tourism and to find out factors that contribute to this development. Various authors have defined quantitative studies as studies that use variables or variables related to each other by analysing them through statistical tests. According to W Lawrence (2011), the scientific researcher must first analyse the validity and reliability of the instruments used, then describe the main concepts, and then predict or verify the empirical relationships between the variables. The steps for assessing the quality of primary data were suggested by Stewart and Kamins (1993) and were followed by the author to ensure that the data collected were valid for use in addressing the study's research questions.

3.2.1 Data collection method and timelines

The data was collected by the researcher (primary data) and the time of their collection was several months which offered sufficient time for the first sending and resending of the notification on social media for completing the online questionnaire, with the main purpose of increasing the response rate.

A standardised questionnaire was created using “QuestionPro Survey “. The reason for this choice was to achieve a larger sample size within a shorter time and, additionally, the distribution was made easier by the access to the questionnaire via an individually created link provided through digital technologies (e.g., e-mail, social media, messenger systems) (Bortz & Döring, 2006b). The questionnaire was distributed using the snowball method (Ritschl & Stamm, 2016b). The resulting ad hoc sample (Berger-Grabner, 2016) does not allow any conclusions to be drawn about a specific population. The sample does not claim representativeness as well. Nevertheless, similarities for further research can be derived from the sample. For this research, a pilot test was sent to a few people to gain feedback on the questions and time of completion. The feedback received was incorporated into the questionnaire.

The instrument used to collect the data was designed using several questionnaires evaluated for their validity and reliability and used by most researchers in the field. Questionnaires were completed online by individuals, ensuring confidentiality.

Internal data integrity and comparison with existing studies in the field

The collected data were processed and subjected to internal integrity control through factor

analysis, and for each of the instruments used in the questionnaire, the results were compared with the empirical results found in contemporary literature.

1. Study population

There are several criteria that should be taken into consideration which are related to the selection of the sample. These criteria are summarised in table 26. Other elements that must be kept in mind regarding the determination of the sample include: the population units that will participate in the study, the time span, the country/locality, and the elements of the sample.

Table 26: Criteria used for the sample selection

as representative as possible
selected in such a way that the error in the result is as small as possible
suitable for the type of study
appropriate in relation to the analysis that will be conducted
its results can be used for other studies with the same level of confidence

Source: National Audit Office, (2016)

The technique used in this study is that of a non-probabilistic, purposeful sample focusing only on the selection of individuals who belong to the age group over 18 years old to make the right selection for obtaining accurate, complete, and reliable information.

2. Survey basis

According to Cohen et.al (2018), a researcher must manage the complexity of the study as best as possible by building a survey strategy that passes four main stages: defining the purpose of the study, selecting the methodology, planning, and conducting the survey. Cohen et al. (2007) points out that the quality of the study is determined by the appropriateness of the methodology, the instrument used and the survey strategy. Additionally, Gorard (2003) suggests that if the phenomenon to be studied is affected by the number of responses, the researcher should consider that the number of people to be interviewed is as large as possible. Regarding the size of the target group there is no clear answer as the exact size depends on the purpose of the study and the nature of the population under consideration. As a rule, the greater the number of people

surveyed, the more accurate the data analysis, and therefore the greater the generalizability. However, some studies suggest that a sample of 600 people may be sufficient to verify the associations of variables in any type of study (National Audit Office, 2017).

While referring to Cochran (1977), the desired precision is the level of tolerable error regarding the sample estimates. The difference between the sample and population statistics in the study variables is called the study error. Carl-Eric et al (2003), mention the following factors as important to determine the sample size.

According to Cohen et al (2007) the study determines whether to select a sample or to survey the entire population under study, taking into consideration the size of the population and the level of tolerable error. Table 27 gathers the factors that are used to determine the sample size.

Table 27: Factors that are used to determine sample size

The purpose of the study for which it is considered to build the probability sample.
the size of the population under study or the focus persons.
sampling error (accuracy level).
level of reliability
the degree of variability or variance for the main variables that are the focus of the study.

Source: Carl-Eric et al (2003)

The level of confidence is found by the normal distribution according to the Central Limit Theorem which explains that if probabilistic samples of size (n) are selected from the population under study to calculate the mean of this population, the mean would be equal to the mean of the sample considering the standard error. Usually, 95% or 99% probability are taken as two degrees of confidence known for deciding the interval within which the existence of the population parameter can be ascertained (Dell, et al 2002).

Considering the size of the sample needed to reach the level of accuracy of the collected and analysed data at 99%, the author decided not to conduct a probabilistic sampling and to distribute the questionnaire on social networks.

3. Study instruments

In the drafting of the "Questionnaire on future sustainable tourism development in Albania, as part of an integrated destination of the Western Balkans", several different authors were taken as reference for designing the questions that aim to measure the possibilities and conditions for sustainable tourism development. This questionnaire also has six questions created by the researcher to obtain information on demographic data.

Each of the instruments described is accompanied by an analysis of the reliability of the instruments (see Appendix). The test that will be used to measure the reliability and internal consistency of the instruments is the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient. The values of this coefficient go from zero to 1, whereby $r = 0.7$ or greater is considered sufficiently reliable (Agresti, 2018). Before performing the reliability analysis of the instruments used, factorial analysis was performed which is used to analyse the variance between dependent variables, related to a smaller number of unobserved variables (latent variables). The main reason for selecting this method was to find out if the number of dimensions or variables could be reduced for any of the instruments used. The KMO value (Kaiser Meyer-Olkin) and Bartlett's test were used to check the level of significance and the variables of an instrument are not correlated in pairs. The value of the KMO statistic ranges from 0 to 1, whereby zero indicates that the correlation patterns are not compact and, therefore, that the factor analysis does not yield distinct and reliable factors. A value close to 1 indicates that the correlation patterns are relatively compact and, therefore, factor analysis is expected to yield distinct and reliable factors (Malhotra, 2010).

4. Construction of study instruments

The questionnaire is composed of statements that aim to measure the perception of individuals regarding sustainable tourism development, and uses a Linkert scale with six values from 1 to 6, (strongly disagree-1 /disagree -2 /somewhat disagree -3 /somewhat agree - 4 /agree – 5/ strongly agree -6) for statements such as "Natural resources in Albania are rare and have attracted the attention of many international tourists lately.", where 6 refers to the highest possible frequency of the statement and 0 to the complete absence of the presence of this resource.

The KMO and Bartlett values, and the factorial loadings of each statement are presented, which aim to measure the stability for each section of the questionnaire. Factor loadings range from

.799 to .885 (please, refer to Tables in section 1 in Appendix). The KMO value for M well-being was 0.844, which is particularly good, from which it can be concluded that it is appropriate to analyse the factors/variables in the study. The test showed that the variables for the Natural Resources in Albania section had a significant correlation between them, so they could be grouped (p-value was 0.00 which is less than the target significance level of 0.05). The above results confirmed that the sample size (N=685) and the data of this instrument were suitable for factorial analysis.

a. Economic Challenges

In the tables in the Appendix, the KMO and Bartlett values are presented, as well as the factorial loadings of each statement, which aim to measure the level of Economic Challenges in Albania. Factor loadings range from .608 to .714 (please, refer to tables in section 1 in the Appendix) The KMO value for the scale for Economic Challenges is 0.737, which is particularly good. From this it can be concluded that it is possible to analyse the factors/variables in the study. The test showed that the variables for this section had a significant correlation between them, so they could be grouped (p-value was 0.00 which is less than the target significance level of 0.05). The above results showed that the study size (N=685) and the data of this instrument were suitable for factorial analysis.

b. Region of the Balkans

There is an increasing interest from Eastern countries to visit Albania and for this increase the next part of the questionnaire focuses on the region of the Balkans. The following tables present the KMO and Bartlett values, as well as the factor loadings of each statement, which aim to measure the impact of the region of the Balkans and its influence on increased engagement toward sustainable practices related to tourism. Factor loadings range from .580 to .798 (see table 3, in Appendix).

The KMO value for the Balkans is 0.837, which is good and, thus it is appropriate to analyse the factors/variables in the study. Bartlett's test showed that the variables for this section had a significant correlation between them, so they could be grouped (p-value was 0.00 which is less than the target significance level of 0.05). The above results indicated that the study size (N=685) and the data of this instrument were suitable for factorial analysis.

c. Integrated destination of Western Balkans

The KMO and Bartlett values, as well as the factorial loadings of each statement aim to measure

the level of Integrated Destination of WB (Albania, Montenegro, Kosovo, Serbia, Macedonia, Bosnia, and Herzegovina) in tourism. Factor loadings range from .664 to .817 (please refer to tables in the Appendix). The KMO value for the Integrated Destination of WB is 0.900, which is particularly good. From this it can be concluded that it is appropriate to analyse the factors/variables in the study.

Bartlett's test showed that the variables for this section had a significant correlation between them, so they could be grouped (the p-value was 0.00 which is less than the target significance level of 0.05). The above results indicated that the study size (N=685) and the data of this instrument were suitable for factorial analysis.

d. Sustainability

The section on Sustainability comprises six statements that aim to identify the impact of the Western Balkans on sustainability. The following tables present the KMO and Bartlett values, as well as the factor loadings of each statement which aim to measure the level of sustainability in Albania. Factor loadings range from .550 to .817 (see table 5, in Appendix).

The KMO value on Sustainability is 0.762, which is very good, and it can be concluded that it is appropriate to analyse the factors/variables in the study. Bartlett's test showed that the variables for this section had a significant correlation between them, so they could be grouped (p-value was 0.00 which is less than the target significance level of 0.05). The above results indicated that the study size (N=685) and the data of this instrument were suitable for factorial analysis.

5. Reliability of the scales used in the study instruments

Each section described above was analysed for reliability and internal consistency through the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient. The values of this coefficient range from zero to 1, where $r = 0.7$ or greater is considered sufficiently reliable. (Agresti, 2018). The structure of the instruments is structured in such a way as to receive answers for the terms that form a variable. Table 28 shows the reliability coefficients based on the data of this study. The smallest value of Cronbach's alpha coefficient in relation to the dimensions of this study is for the " Region of the Balkans " section, which is 0.727, i.e., higher than the recommended level of .70.

In principle, the higher this value, the more statements within the scale measure the same thing and the more reliable the scale as an instrument. The highest value of the Cronbach's alpha

coefficient in relation to the dimensions of this study is in the section "Integrated Destination of the Western Balkans (Albania, Montenegro, Kosovo, Serbia, Macedonia, Bosnia, and Herzegovina)" with 0.950.

At the end of this analysis, it can be said that Cronbach's alpha coefficient values for all dimensions are greater than 0.70, thus guaranteeing the validity of the study findings.

Table 28: Reliability coefficients for the sections of the survey

Instruments	Number of variables (N)	Cronbach's alpha coefficient
Natural resources in Albania	4	0.897
Economic Challenges	4	0.764
The Region of the Balkans	4	0.727
The integrated destination of Western Balkans (Albania, Montenegro, Kosovo, Serbia, Macedonia, Bosnia, and Herzegovina)	6	0.950
Sustainability Section	6	0.760
Total Study Questionnaire	24	0.8196

Source: Own research and analysis

3.2.2 Questionnaire distribution and data collection procedure

The application "Online surveys" was used to prepare and upload the questionnaires. The application is a tool that enables the creation, distribution, and completion of questionnaires, from all computer devices or smartphones that use the internet, simplifying the process of data collection and analysis. The configuration settings of the QuestionPro system prior to the release of the questionnaire allowed a person to respond only once, but still be able to return to the questionnaire multiple times (due to time constraints or technological difficulties), until such time as to make the final submission through the button at the end of the questionnaire. Also, the preliminary settings allowed the anonymity of the respondents to be kept, guaranteeing the researcher's inability to connect the collected data with the concrete participants.

During the loading process, particular care was taken to ensure that the questions did not have mandatory fields, so that respondents were given the choice of not answering questions they did not want to. The questions were divided into several pages to ensure better readability, grouping as much as possible the questions of the same nature (demographic data, or the questionnaires

used by the researcher) on the same pages. Upon completion of each page, respondents assessed progress made and remaining pages through a horizontal line showing how much had been done and how much remained until completion. On the last page of the questionnaire, the respondents were offered the opportunity to leave their suggestions, comments, or more information related to the study's subject. This was the only space left for the respondents to use writing, to make it easier for them to complete the questionnaire. The other parts were a choice of pre-set options. The questionnaire for national respondents became active in March 2022. It was online for several months to gather the necessary number of responses. The questionnaire was distributed to individuals through social networks on the same day. A few weeks after the first invitation, a reminder message was sent, inviting respondents to complete the questionnaire. After completion, each respondent who completed the questionnaire received an automatic thank you message with text written by the researcher. The questionnaire for international respondents became active in March 2023. It was distributed to international travellers currently in Albania, those who have visited Albania, and travellers who would like to visit Albania. A reminder was sent after the first invitation and although participation was more than 300, the fully completed questions of the second questionnaire were fewer.

3.3 DATA ANALYSIS AND FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT

Various and proper statistical analysis techniques were used to analyse the primary data obtained from the completed questionnaires. The methodology used in this paper for data analysis followed these steps:

Descriptive analysis was used to describe the data's basic features in a study. They provided simple summaries about the elements under study. Together with graphical analysis they formed the basis of almost any quantitative data analysis.

One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) helped to find out whether there are statistically significant differences between variables that have three or more sets of categories that are independent of each other (unrelated). For this purpose, the zero hypothesis and the alternative hypothesis are established. If the significance value (statistical significance/significance) is less than 0.05 or 5% then we have evidence to reject the null hypotheses of no correlation between our variables of interest. If it is greater than 0.05 or 5%, we fail to reject the null hypothesis.

Correlational analysis was used to analyse the relationship that exists between the variables. The Pearson Chi Square Coefficient test was used to determine if there is a relationship (correlation) between variables and, if so, to indicate the strength of the relationship between them. The values of this coefficient fall in the range from -1 to +1, whereby -1 means a complete negative correlation, +1 means a complete positive correlation, and 0 signifies there is no correlation.

Multivariable linear regression analysis was used to determine the predictive power of independent variables in relation to tourism sustainability. Based on existing models and theories in topics related to tourism development and marketing, which have previously aimed to connect and make evident complex facts, a model was created, which represents an entire process (Berger-Grabner, 2016a). It was further expanded with research results from quantitative surveys of the dissertation.

Cluster analysis

A two-way cluster analysis was run with the data from surveys. This analysis did not provide many insights into the segmentation of the opinions from the national and international sample. There was overall not good quality of the cluster groups. Further features of the clustering groups as can be seen in the graphs (Appendix C) do not provide much intuitive interpretation given overlaps in opinions. Richer data on attributes would have provided finer separation and segments in opinions of respondents.

Limitations of the study

This study, like every other, has its own limitations. The followings are some of them.

- a. While the study is related to tourism in Albania, there is a risk that responses of individuals may tend to be more subjective.
- b. The period and duration of data collection may have an impact and could be influenced by personal factors and events that occurred during this period.
- c. Finally, the absence of several studies related to sustainable tourism development in Albania or to the approach of Western Balkan countries toward a common region, causes a lack of comparison of the results of this study with other similar studies conducted in this field.

4. QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Findings from the qualitative and quantitative analysis are presented in this chapter. The multi-phase structure of the dissertation begins with the conduction of qualitative research. From the results of the qualitative interviews derived the hypothesis of this study. They were verified by statistical test procedures from the quantitative survey results as well as the analysis of the formed data set.

4.1 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

The interviewed experts were selected according to professional criteria. Before selecting the experts, the author asked herself the following questions, according to Gläser & Laudel (2006):

Who has relevant information?

Who is most likely to be able to provide accurate information?

Who is most willing to provide information?

Who among the informants is available?

Based on the research questions it was decided to make ten interviews (Table 29). Experts represent the tourism field and the marketing field, as well as experts of economy and law policies. The experts represent the public and private sector. Gender-specific characteristics are random and in no way arbitrary.

Before recording the interviews, consent to record was obtained from the participants (Berger-Grabner, 2016d). Interviews were conducted and recorded with Microsoft Teams. After transcription, the recordings were deleted from servers and storage, to ensure data protection. The following steps, based on (Froschauer & Lueger, 2003b). According to Mayring (2015) were conducted before and during the interviews:

Interview planning, contact establishment, interview initiation, narrative and inquiry phase, interview conclusion, documentation.

After paraphrasing the texts, to reach a consistent language, they were freed from repetitive assumptions and opinions and finally summarised.

An overview of the interviewed experts and their research field is provided in Table 29. The focus of the interviews was on fields related to tourism development, sustainable development, marketing of Albanian tourism and especially the integrated destination of the Western Balkans

and its future. The opinions of the interviewed experts are later summarised explaining highlighting the most important statements that would contribute to sustainable tourism development of Albania.

Table 29: Experts participating in interviews

Prof. Dr Dhimiter DOKA	Professor at the University of Tirana, Department of Geography. Scientific research field: Geography of Albania (Population and Economy), and Geography of Tourism. Since 2000- Albanian leader in many projects related to tourism, urban development, migrations, and more.
Prof. Dr. Klodiana GORICA	Professor at the University of Tirana, F. Economics, Department of Tourism. Part of various projects as an Expert and/or Coordinator in the field of tourism, marketing, and environment Research field: Marketing, Tourism, Entrepreneurship, Sustainable Development, E-marketing
Mr. Gazmend HAXHIA	Entrepreneur, President of A.S.G Group. Advisor of the Minister of Tourism. Young Global Leader of the Davos World Economic Summit
Prof. Ass. Dr. Albana DEMI	Member of CIPFA London, United Kingdom. Lecturer in A. Moisiu University of Durres, Head of Centre of Innovation for Research and Development, Faculty of Economy, CIT (2014-2017) Advisor of General Director General Tax Department of Albania (2010-2012)
Prof. Dr. Eralda M. CANI	Professor at Tirana Law University. Ex-Minister of integration. Advisor of the Prime Minister 2016-2017
Mrs. Ledina Beqiraj AGALLIU	Secretary General, Ministry of Tourism and Environment
Prof. Ass. Dr. Elton NOTI	Tourism Expert, Associate Professor in the Marketing Department, Faculty of Business, University " Aleksander Moisiu", Head of Regional Tourism Office, 2003-2006.
Mrs. Blerina AGO	Entrepreneur and Tourism Consultant. Nature conservation and adventure travel activist. Pioneer of destination promotion for the Balkans. Founder and CEO of activealbania.com
Mrs. Luli BASHO	Entrepreneur, Founder and Director of the Albtours D travel Agency, since 1994
Mrs. Rudina KUCI	Founder and Manager of Bruvis Travel Agency since 2010

Source: Own research, 2023

4.1.1 Limitations of qualitative research

Bogner et al. (2009) provide detailed evidence that expert interviews raise issues primarily by the experts' own selection and identification. This may be considered as the most significant limitation. Besides experts' selection, another element that may influence responses may be the

current global or local situation. The number of experts and their research field focus can also impact the research results.

In this dissertation the choice of interviewees was made to include experts from the fields of marketing, tourism, policy development and environment. The chosen experts represent the private and the public sector as well. In addition, travel agents have given valuable opinions on regional collaboration and promotion of the Western Balkans. The number of experts interviewed may also impact the research results. For this reason, despite their status, it is important to point out this fact when interpreting the results. Nevertheless, qualitative surveys have proven helpful in exploring research fields and developing hypotheses, therefore the survey form is retained (Lamnek & Krell, 2016).

This dissertation researches the opportunity of a common region that may incite engagement toward sustainable development, opinions of experts from the region may have been an added value for the analysis. This would have required a lot of time and more resources. However, this may form the basis for future research related to this collaboration.

4.1.2 Results of the qualitative research

This section of the thesis summarises the results of the qualitative interviews which contributed further to hypotheses formulation.

Focus: Development challenges and sustainability

The following questions were used to select with research-relevant sub-questions depending on the interview were directed to experts:

- What potentials and challenges do you see for sustainable tourism development in Albania?
- Has tourism development contributed to employment? Is the length of employment limited (seasonal) and are there efforts being made for an all-year-round tourism development?

The experts agree that Albania must embrace sustainable tourism development, although the challenges are tough. Economic challenges should not hinder the road toward sustainability. On the contrary, with a mindset to adapt to new strategies of sustainable development, the country may as well improve its weaknesses. Tourism has obviously improved employment

possibilities, but although there are small initiatives toward other kinds of tourism that would lengthen the longevity of tourism throughout the year, there is still a lot to do in this direction. Local governments may have a greater role to attract investments and initiate collaboration after the decentralisation reform. Another question, in addition to the above, related to the economic dimension is about business viability. Although arrival numbers are high and Albania ranked among the first places in 2022, experts agree that expenditures and profitability are not among the best. Referring to tourist satisfaction, it is an element not only business, but all stakeholders must engage in.

There is an agreement among experts that the central and local level lack the necessary knowledge of sustainable tourism development and that capacity building in this direction is a necessity.

Focus: Environmental management and protection. Tourism influence on the socio- cultural life in Albania

The environmental dimension is a key indicator about which expert's hopes seem to be more limited since water and waste management are in a problematic situation. Energy conservation is not a strength either. There is no significant engagement toward this dimension. Furthermore, there are practices that should be avoided as soon as possible, like hydropower building or excessive, unplanned construction especially in touristic locations.

Focusing on the socio- cultural dimension of sustainable development, the following questions were directed to the interviewed experts:

- How has tourism affected the quality of life of Albanian host communities?
- Is the integrity of local communities protected?

Experts' thoughts about this question are quite different from each other. They certainly agree that this is a mutual relationship, beneficial for both parties. However, there are risks, especially related to the preservation of local cultures and traditions.

During the high season, congestion and crowding is present in touristic zones and this directly affects the quality of life of the residents. However, they agree that Albanian community attitudes toward visitors tend to be incredibly good. This statement is reinforced even by tourists' opinions presented in the following chapters. Tourists agree that hospitality is certainly a characteristic of the community.

Focus: A common tourist destination of the Western Balkans. Promotion of the Western Balkans and regional collaboration

Two further delicate questions were directed at experts. The first relates to their approach toward a common space of the Western Balkans. They mostly agree, however they have their level of scepticism about how fast this may happen. Experts are confident about many beneficial sides of this collaboration. It will ease trade and exchange between these countries and will create a better and more secure basis for the attraction of foreign investment. Some of the interviewees believe that Albania is very precious and has advantages in terms of resources, however they also are convinced that a peaceful and prosperous future will lie only in collaboration.

The experts found the idea of including the Western Balkans in a future strategy for sustainable tourism development very interesting.

Focus: Public -private partnership.

The public-private partnership in Albania does not represent a perfect relationship. While aiming to update strategies regarding tourism development, especially thinking about project strategies on sustainable tourism development, the engagement of the private sector is very important. This stakeholder will contribute very much, because it is near the traveller and understands their wishes and desires better. This sector also has potential to invest but it will need public sector collaboration as well for policies to be created to support national investments and satisfy visitors at the same time. On the other hand, inclusion of the business sector and the community in planning is incredibly low. Some of the interviewees, who represent the public and private sector, strongly believe and are more willing to engage in green practices if Albania is part of a common destination of the Western Balkans. According to their opinion, travellers that visit Albania are interested in the whole region of the Balkans and are curious to explore this destination.

Focus: Carrying capacity concept implementation and a marketing strategy for sustainable tourism development

The other issue refers to the significant flow of visitors that is directed toward Europe, especially from the East. Experts say that it is not easy to prevent mass seaside tourism, therefore specialists, tourism experts and marketers may contribute to the design of strategies promoting a common destination of the Western Balkans, which, among other things, may contribute to avoiding the overcrowding of tourists in one place. At the same time, a diverse destination, a

part of Europe where religions coexist in peace would be an interesting choice for travellers for East and West. European aspects, Mediterranean influences, a rich history, a diverse population, and the unique religious symbiosis are all highlights that will certainly attract the attention of many visitors. The country has a strategy for tourism development, comprising future steps by 2030. What is still missing and very critical is the strategy for sustainable development. All stakeholders' energy should be directed towards planning for a sustainable future.

Summary of the Qualitative Research

Table 30 summarises the most important statements from the interviews with experts. From the main results of the qualitative survey, derived the hypotheses, which are presented in the following chapter of the quantitative research.

Table 30: Expert Interviews main results

Tourism development in Albania	<p>Tourism must be given priority as a sector with a 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: Experts interviewed, own analysis, 2023

4.2 QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

To find answers to sub-questions 1, 2 and 3 two quantitative surveys 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 innovative marketing model for sustainable tourism development in Albania. Hypotheses were developed based on the results of qualitative research.

The literature review, as well as experts' opinions, revealed that collaboration between countries and a common, integrated destination may contribute to the road toward sustainability. There are important indicators that should be analysed and may help have a better understanding of stakeholders' commitment to embrace sustainable tourism development. The following hypotheses 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.

4.2.1 RESULTS OF THE QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS: Nationals sample survey

The analysis and results of both surveys directed to Albanian citizens and foreigners visiting Albania are presented in the following section.

a. Descriptive statistics and analysis

The answers were collected from "QuestionPro Survey" and analysed with "SPSS Statistics" software. The participation in the questionnaire is presented in Table 31. Overall, 685 respondents from the Albanian sample participated in the survey on sustainable tourism development as integrated part of the Western Balkan countries.

The majority were from Albania (97.2%) and the rest were other Albanian citizens living in

other countries (Kosovo, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States).

Table 31: 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 72% of the respondents. Age distribution and education level are presented as follows:

Table 31a: Age distribution

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

Table 31b: Education level

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

Source: own research and analysis, 2023

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.

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.

b. One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

The hypothesis assessed 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 then there is no evidence to confirm the hypothesis as there is no association between the variables of interest.

Results in Table 32 show that there is a statistically significant association between the two main variables of interest.

Table 32: Anova analysis: nationals' sample

Anova ^{a b1}						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	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

The perception of an integrated Western Balkan enhancing engagements toward sustainability and perception of investing in innovative technologies and education related to green development (for a comprehensive overview of all the results see the tables in Appendix B). 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 33 are presented the Chi-Square Tests.

Table 33: 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

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

This tests the hypothesis of an association between the perception of the respondents of investing in innovative technologies and education related to green development *and* their belief that an integrated Western Balkan enhances engagements toward sustainability². Both perceptions go in the same direction and the relationship is statistically significant (for a comprehensive overview of all the results see the tables in Appendix B).

d. Multivariable linear regression

Multivariable linear regression shows a statistically significant relationship between the variables of interest.

Table 34: Multivariable linear regression: 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

When there is a 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 34). Therefore, there is evidence to reject the null hypothesis, and there is a relationship between the variables of interest (for a comprehensive overview of all the results see the tables in Appendix B).

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

4.2.2 RESULTS OF THE QUANTITATIVE ANALYSES: Internationals sample survey

The answers were collected from “QuestionPro Survey” and analysed with “SPSS Statistics” software.

a. Descriptive statistics and analysis

Overall, 249 respondents from the international sample participated in the internationals survey (Table 35). The majority were visitors currently in Albania (71.5%) and the rest were citizens from other countries (Austria (1.2%), Belgium (0.4%), California (1.6%), Switzerland (1.6%), Germany (9.2%), Spain (0.4%), France (0.4%), United Kingdom (0.8%), Hungary (1.2%), Italy (3.6%), Romania (0.8%), Serbia (3.6%), United States (3.2%) and Kosovo (0.4%)).

Table 35. Basic data questionnaire: internationals 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 as follows:

Table 35a: Age distribution

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

Table 35b: Education level

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

Source: own research and analysis, 2023

Out of 213 responses, most of the respondents have a yearly income of 20,000 Euros (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.

The main relevant variables of interest for the research question of an integrated Western Balkan being of importance for a sustainable tourism development, stemming from the international sample are “Do you believe that a tour combining different destinations in Western Balkan would be a good option for you?” and “When visiting Albania did you (would you) buy more local or global products?”

Most of the respondents agree with the option of visiting different countries of the Western

Balkans. Of the respondents, 36.1% answered “why not” to a combined tour and 30.9% said that they absolutely believe that a tour combining different destinations in the Western Balkan would be a good option for them. A lesser share (18.1%) believed so and only 1.6% and 0.8% thought probably not and not really, respectively. The majority stated that despite the belief for an integrated Western Balkan which would combine different destinations of tourism, they would continue to buy local products (71.5%) when visiting Albania compared to only 16.1% stating they would buy global products, meaning that the economy would be stimulated and not affected by such integration, leading to sustainable development of the economy as well as tourism. Most people claimed they were attracted by coastal vacations and nature and eco-tours in Albania (139 and 119 respondents, respectively). Most respondents claimed that public transport and infrastructure were the main challenges (89 and 86 respectively).

b. One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

The hypothesis assessed 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 Western Balkans would be a good option for travellers (Table 36).

Table 36: Anova analysis: internationals sample

Anova ^{a b4}						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	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

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 interest: the perception of a satisfying trip to Albania enhances the desire to take a tour that combines different

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

destinations in the Western Balkans (for a comprehensive overview of all the results see the tables in Appendix B). 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 37 are presented the Chi-Square Tests.

They assess the hypothesis of an association between the perception of the overall satisfaction with a trip to Albania and their belief that a tour combining different destinations in Western Balkan would be a good option for travellers⁵.

Table 37: 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

Both perceptions go in the same direction and the relationship is statistically significant (for a comprehensive overview of all the results see the tables in Appendix B).

d. Multivariable Linear Regression Analysis

To assess 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 38).

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 is assessed.

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

The hypothesis is that people finding an integrated Western Balkan destination a good option for them also tend to think their trip to 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 desirable choice for them is associated with a 0.135 increase in satisfaction of their trip to Albania (Table 38).

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 precision⁶. (for a comprehensive overview of all the results see the tables in Appendix B).

Table 38. Multivariable linear regression: 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

4.2.3 Conclusion

Findings from both samples Albanian and international respondents, 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

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

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 destinations in the Western Balkan countries a good option for them, also tended to find their touristic trip to Albania satisfactory. More 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.

Table 39: Summary of hypotheses assessed

Hypotheses	Relationship	Results
H1	The belief of investing in green development in Albania is associated with the belief that an integrated Western Balkan enhances engagements toward sustainability.	Supported
H2	The perception that a tour combining different destinations in the Western Balkan countries is a good option for the respondents is associated with the preference to buy local rather than global products.	Not supported
H3	The perception that a tour combining different destinations in the Western Balkan countries is a good option for the respondents is associated with the perception that their touristic trip to Albania is satisfactory.	Supported

Source: own research and analysis, 2023

Based on the quantitative survey and the correlation analyses, three hypotheses were assessed (Table 39). As discussed in the empirical part and in the diagram, hypothesis one and three tested statistically significant, whereas hypothesis two tested statistically insignificant, with evidence to confirm the null hypothesis.

Referring to the first hypothesis, it may be pointed out that stakeholders of the tourism industry in Albania believe that collaboration with WB countries will motivate them to invest in sustainable practices like technologies related to green development as well as education and training related to green development.

For international travellers, the idea of a trip to Albania incites the idea of a tour combining the destinations of the Western Balkans. This is a good encouragement toward collaboration.

Taking these 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 on building and improving collaboration and partnerships between countries to achieve goals and foster sustainable development.

A scheme representing the associations between variables of interest is presented in Figure 14.

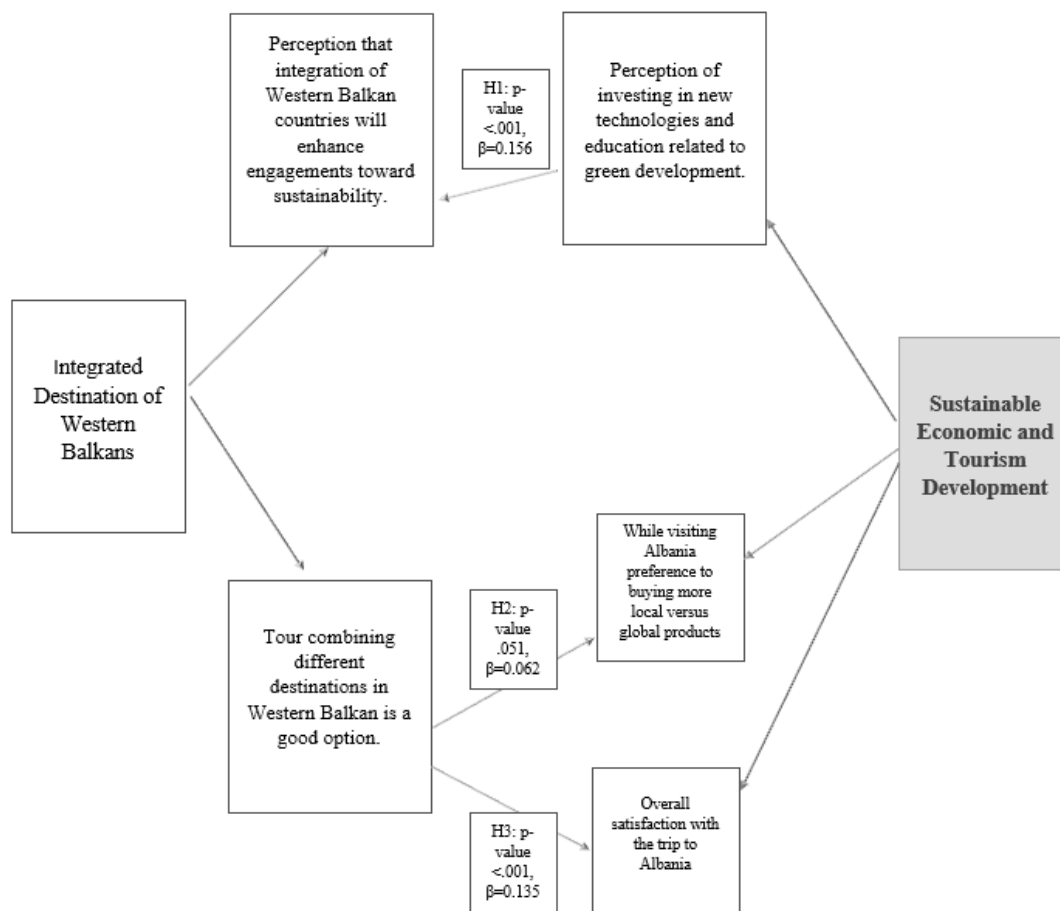


Figure 14: Association between variables of interest analysed through empirical research

Source: Own research and analysis, 2023

4.3 THE BALANCED MARKETING STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

The opportunity of a common region, if accepted and embraced, will give the countries of the region advantages in terms of sustainable tourism development and sustainable overall development. Previous research has also revealed that citizens believe that with Albania being part of an integrated destination of WB, they would feel more motivated and engaged to initiate green growth in the country, a balanced development between economic growth and environmental protection (Kadiu, 2022).

From the analysis of data gathered during this research Albanian citizens express a very positive approach towards collaboration. Referring to primary research, both qualitative and quantitative, the study concludes that Albanian citizens are more motivated to invest and engage in sustainable practices with Albania as part of a broader initiative of Western Balkans.

Higher belief of investing in green development in Albania leads to increased belief that an integrated Western Balkan 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 destinations in the Western Balkan countries a good option for them also tended to find their touristic trip to Albania satisfactory. More specifically, one unit increase in 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 from their touristic trip to Albania.

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 relates to 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 on building and improving collaboration and partnerships between countries to achieve goals and foster sustainable development.

The following Marketing Model was created based on the results of the literature review (R1), and on the results of the empirical survey (R2, R3, R4), 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?*

This answer is provided by developing a model and the associated descriptions. In Figure 14, is

presented the developed model. Reference models, and theories are analysed which served as a basis for developing the model of the research. This approach achieves the result R5 of the research process, A Marketing Model for sustainable tourism development in Albania.

A complete Marketing model that will contribute to Albanian tourism development should include the steps and the tactics of the marketing strategy: the target market, value proposition and market offering.

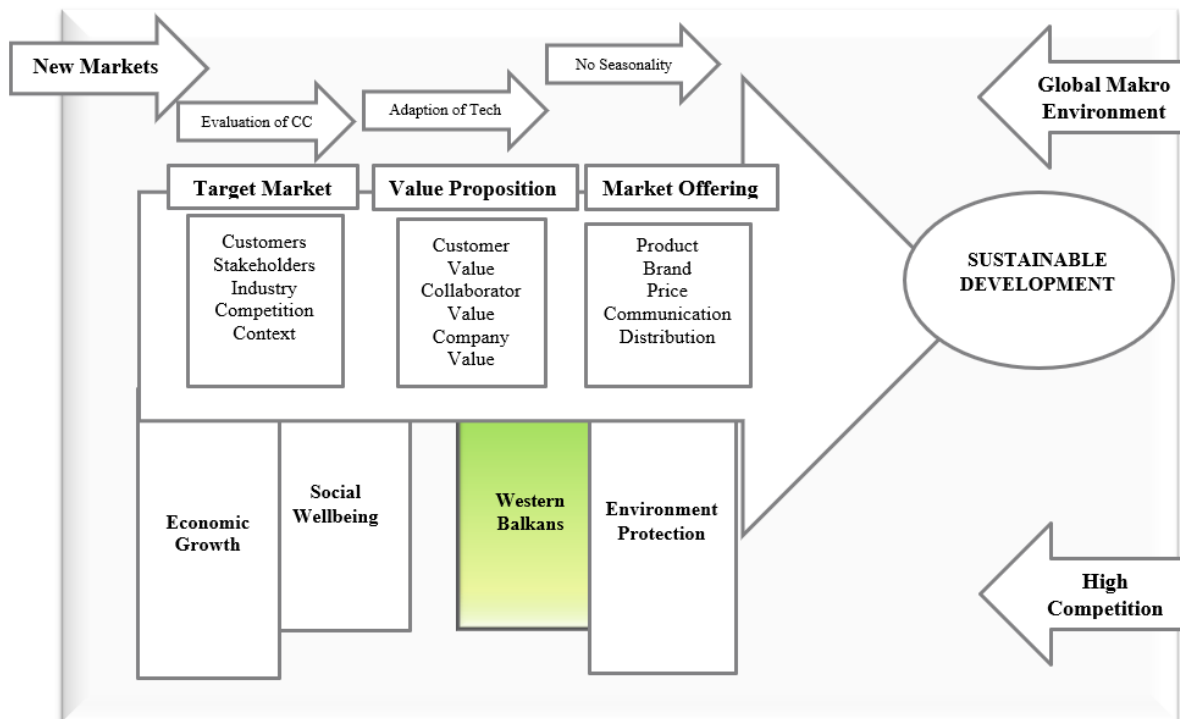


Figure 15: The balanced marketing model for sustainable tourism development in Albania

Source: Own research and analysis (2023) and editing based on: Kotler et al., (2022a), UNWTO (2019) Tourism Definitions, WTO (2019a, b), WTO (2022), Williams. S (2015), WTTC, Albania (2022).

The model presumes that all tourism stakeholders partake and collaborate in the development process; the market offering, and all its elements should increase performance, to create value not only for customers but also industry value and collaborators value.

All these elements stand firm and on four equilibrated pillars. These pillars represent a basis where development should stand. 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 be in

balance during the development process. There are arrows outside the borders of the main arrow, which represent forces that may contribute or hinder this development that aims toward sustainability.

The three small arrows above, “evaluation of carrying capacity,” “no seasonality” and adaptation of technology are crucial contributions for further development.

While the arrow that presents new markets is a positive outside factor that contributes to development, the two other forces, the global macro environment and high competition represent negative forces, which may slow the overall sustainable tourism development in Albania. Of course, the positive and negative forces are not limited to the above. There are further forces that have their influence. However, the model may carry a limited number of elements, therefore in Figure 15 are included some of them. In the future this may be explored further.

Figure 16 gives a further explanation of the four main pillars on which a marketing strategy is based. Some of the most essential elements related to the economic, social, and environmental dimensions as well as the initiative of Western Balkans are explained.

If the balance between the pillars can be kept, human well-being will be improved and nurtured in a beneficial way.

The four pillars on which the Marketing strategy stands are presented in more detail in Figure 16. They aim to explain in a more specific way how they influence the visitors and the community at the same time. Success is not based only on happy travellers, but on overall social wellbeing. The quality of life of the host community is part of the whole picture and should be protected while aiming for sustainability. A development that considers both sides of a touristic destination is steps ahead toward sustainability.

The particularity about the scheme is that among the three global pillars of economic growth, social wellbeing, and environmental protection there is a fourth important pillar for Albania, the cooperation between the Western Balkan countries.

Aiming for economic development of the six countries, the focus will move from other political or historical disagreements and will potentially enhance trust and stability in the region. This will attract more visitors and the diverse destinations will aim to achieve a better management of tourism flow. Additionally, as a broader and stronger region, WB will move easier toward the achievement of global sustainable development goals.

The value creation among visitors, as a very important part of the Marketing strategy, will happen not only focusing on economic elements that include better prices or travel facilities. It will focus on social wellbeing, through a harmonic environment, where all religions coexist in peace and where friendly people with a great attitude are happy to exchange their experiences and culture. The country will also aim to create value for visitors, preserving their environment, offering more eco lodges and enhancing sports tourism.

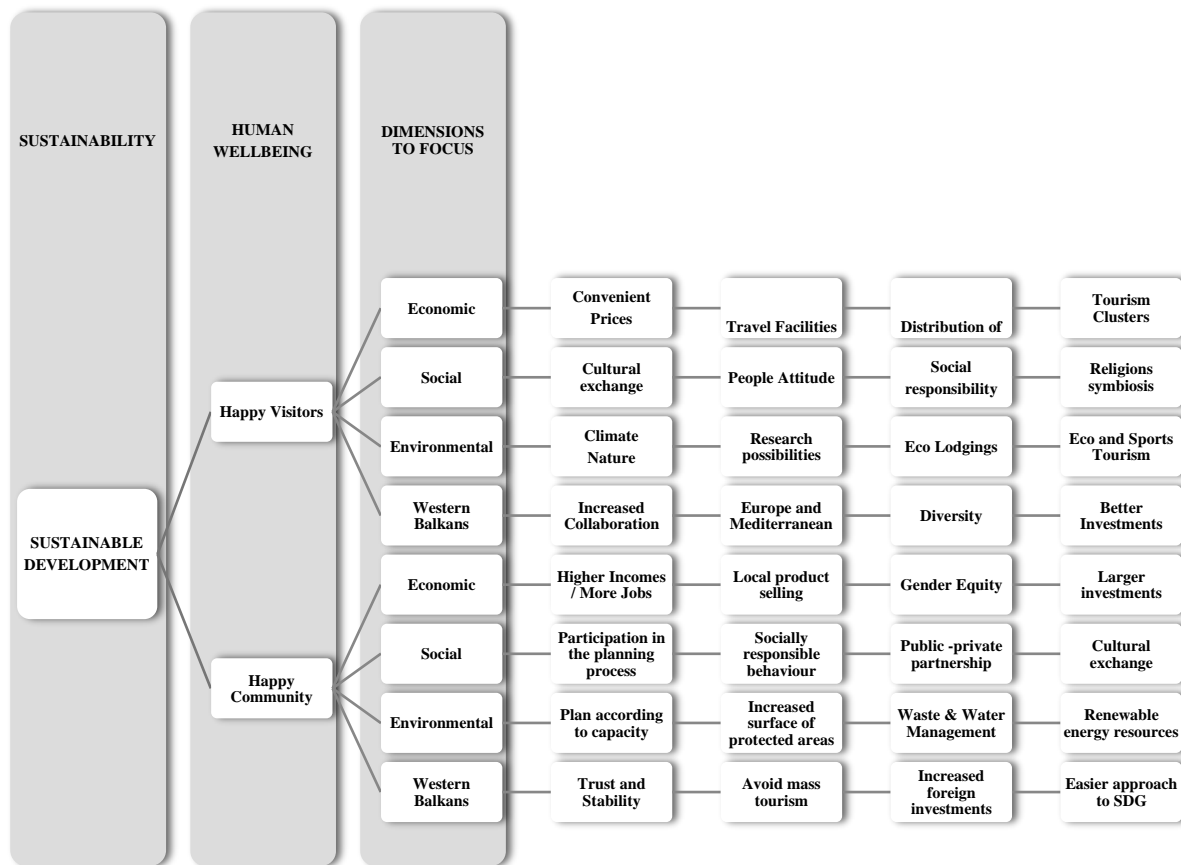


Figure 16: A balanced development of economic processes, environment protection and human well-being

Source: Own analysis and editing, 2023

Finally, the initiative of a common region of Western Balkans will contribute to value creation among visitors by offering a very diverse destination to explore Europe and the Mediterranean at the same time and at a better price. While focusing on these four dimensions, value among travellers and host communities will be created and the region will move easier forward to sustainable tourism development.

4.4 HIGHLIGHTS FOR AN ADVANCED TOURISM POLICY FOCUSING ON SUSTAINABILITY

Policies in different fields need special attention of a country. Albanian economic policies over the previous decade have tried to maintain macroeconomic stability, enable poverty-reduction and non-inflationary economic growth policies, and achieve fiscal consolidation through the reduction of the budget deficit and public debt (Puci, Demi, Kadiu, 2023). They also need to develop in line with further policies in other fields of development.

A new policy comprising sustainable development in the tourism industry should be the result of a process of internal and external consultations. It must be based on Albania's overall economic and social strategic framework as specified in key government documents and framed within the context of international, Mediterranean, Western Balkans and national developments and trends. To achieve goals a lean organisational structure needs to be established.

The aim of the tourism policy should include presenting the guiding principles upon which decisions, actions, and other matters relating to tourism in Albania, are to be based and the framework within which Albania's tourism activity is to be formulated in the coming years. A similar policy recognizes the issues and challenges facing the country as a destination, which operates and competes within the international and local scenario. It presents policy responses together with goals and tasks which the government is committed to delivering within the next few years. Albania's tourism policy responses must relate to four key areas, namely:

- Governance
- Competitiveness
- Sustainability and
- Macroeconomic matters.

a. Managing Albanian tourism based on the principles of sustainable development

A tourism policy that focuses on sustainability is still missing for Albania. The following groups of policies derived from discussions and consultations with the interviewed experts and stakeholders of the tourism industry in Albania. Although they may be further developed and enriched, they may suggest a basis for a complete tourism policy for sustainable future development in Albania.

Table 40: Policies related to tourism offer

Policies related to Tourism offer and products
Create the right image of Albania and deliver the promise of an enriching stay
Conserve environmental and socio-cultural resources
Increase Albania's competitive advantage, delivering unique tourism products
Highlight Albania's geographical & strategic location at the crossroads of three continents Europe, Asia, and Africa
Encourage creative thinking to increase tourism added value through the provision of innovative and authentic products and services
Create a year- around rich tourism offer
Market "the Accursed Mountains" as a unique rural destination

Source: own research and analysis, 2023

Table 40 summarises policies related to what Albania has to offer in the field of tourism and suggestions how to offer these products. Policies related to economic and technological development should be reviewed and improved. A summary of recommended policies in these fields is presented in Table 41.

Table 41: Policies related to economic and technological development

Policies related to economic and technological development
Increase tourism earnings and tourism added value simultaneously
Sustain existing jobs and creation of more and better jobs even in the non-traditional segments of the industry
Achieve a fair distribution of income
Continuously monitor Albania's overall price competitiveness and curb practices of overcharging through increased enforcement and consumer protection measures
Balance economic, social, and environmental impacts seeking national interest, preserving environmental and sociocultural resources
Favour construction for tourism purposes that respects Albania's cultural and natural heritage
Increase accessibility to and from Albania
Incorporate e-business in tourism
Improve the quality and depth of information available through tourism statistics and work on the formulation of tourism satellite accounts
Increase of visibility on the web and initiatives aimed at direct online booking and further use of information technology for marketing and information provision

Source: own research and analysis, 2023

Additionally, Table 42 summarises suggested policies related to collaboration and education. The tourism policy must be implemented and closely monitored if it is to achieve its desired

objectives. The tourism policy together with the national tourism plan can only be implemented successfully if all the stakeholders partake in the process.

Table 42: Policies related to collaboration and education

Policies related to collaboration and education
Incitement of public-private partnerships and monitoring the effectiveness of major initiatives
Showing an open-minded approach toward implementation of better regulation initiatives and reflecting responsibility and ability to manage tourism development
Development of synergies between tourism and other development sectors to ensure an integration of tourism policies within the other development sectors' policies and plans and vice versa
Support of tour operator business and improvement of relationships with tour operators also at a strategic level
Encouraging and embracing common policies with the countries of Western Balkans, related to sustainable development
Addressment of the structural reforms required in tourism
Investment in education and lifelong learning
Trainings for employees in the industry

Source: own research and analysis, 2023

Albania does not have a large surface area; however, it is very diverse, and various kinds of tourism allow it to be developed. It may be an easier strategy to manage the country focusing on tourism clusters. Suggested policies for this kind of approach are presented in Table 43.

A new tourism policy, guided by principles of sustainable development will create more customer value.

Table 43: Management of tourism clusters

Manage tourism clusters by:
ensuring that basic facilities are available, well preserved, and maintained
identifying the most important niches in the different zones and directing investment accordingly
developing a tourism zone management plan
encouraging tourism service providers to provide a proper service which makes Albania more competitive and offers fair value for money
ensuring adherence to set standards by the tourism service providers and clamp down on practices that harm tourism (e.g., littering, and illegal dumping, illegal hunting, vandalism, lack of maintenance)

Source: own research and analysis, 2023

Using fewer public resources than the existing traditional organisational structure in place is a necessity. The aim is to strategically align all organisational units from top to bottom and make

the policy plan work faster and offer deliverables within a shorter time.

b. The importance of the creation of a National Tourism Board (NTB)

The creation of a national tourism board may offer a great advantage for tourism development. The Albanian Tourism Board may operate as a Destination Management Organization (DMO) that continuously innovates its brand with a strategy that focuses on local people, their stories, and passions, delivering these powerful messages through effective digital strategies. The ministry recognizes the fact that the brand and consumer is never static, and this is fundamental when it comes to developing a strategy to drive sustainable growth.

Table 44: The most significant tasks of the National Tourism Board

A regulator for the whole tourist offer, at the national level
Structure and conduct operational market research for the promotion of tourism at the national level
Design programs and promotion plan for tourist products at the national level
Organise, conduct, and implement all business operations concerning the promotion of the tourist product of the country
Analyse and appraise of the purposefulness and efficacy of implemented promotional activities
Establish a national tourist information system
Perform global and tourist information activities
Provide and coordinate the incentives of all the local Tourist Boards, as well as all economic and other tourism subjects which operate either directly or indirectly, to improve and promote tourism in the country
Establish tourist representative offices and branch offices in foreign countries, and the organisation and supervision of their work
Cooperate with national tourist boards in foreign countries and with specialised international regional tourism organisations
According to reports received from county tourist boards, analyse, and evaluate activities by plans and programs of the established tasks and the roles of the tourist boards' system
Take necessary measures and planning activities for the development and promotion of tourism in the less developed areas of the country.

Source: own research and analysis, 2023. Based on discussions with tourism stakeholders in Albania

The vision is to outsource the service of delivering agile, bold, and creative destination marketing that inspires and delivers results to an outspoken company or organisation with longstanding and tangible results with the ever-changing traveller in mind.

The designing of this marketing strategy for Albanian tourism may inspire travellers before and after their arrival at the destination, with a focus on three main elements:

- a) Telling a remarkable story
- b) Targeting the right fans
- c) Enhancing delivery

To achieve such results, the creation of the NTB is of vital importance for the future of tourism. Its mission may include the planning and implementation of future strategies and the conception of their promotion, proposal, and performance of promotional activities of mutual interest for all subjects in tourism in the country and abroad, as well as raising the overall quality of the entire range of tourist services on offer in the country. Table 44 represents a summary of the most significant tasks that the National Tourism Board may achieve.

The National Tourism Board should foster a new breed of entrepreneurs. It will serve as a catalyst that will allow employees and participants to act like entrepreneurs within this organisation. The aim of the NTB should include hiring and approaching entrepreneurs who are initiative-taking, and action-oriented and who take the initiative to pursue innovative products and services within a bureaucratic structure.

Typically, the management bodies involved within a National Tourist Board are the parliament, the Tourist Board, the auditing committee, and the president. The duties of the president of the National Tourist Board are executed by the Minister for Tourism. Activities are based upon an annual work program and the financial plan, passed by the assembly. The organisation's revenues come from the following sources: tourist taxes, membership fees, allocations from the state budget, and other sources. The head of the National Tourism Board should be considered also the "Minister for the Future," someone who will be planning for the long term, challenge the Ministry of Tourism and Environment, and consider what impact policies will have on the next generations.

To raise accountability and measure the performance of this new institution, key indicators like the tourism performance and impacts, the ability of a destination to deliver quality and competitive tourism services, attractiveness of a destination and indicators describing policy responses and economic opportunities will help to address the usual challenges in the analysis of competitiveness in tourism.

5. DISCUSSIONS OF THE RESEARCH RESULTS

Although located between East and West of Europe, the region of the Western Balkans is still vulnerable, and its countries continue to face persistent economic, environmental, and social challenges.

A detailed study of the region and each of its countries is the essential step to move toward collaboration. In the view of international researchers, the Western Balkans looks as too narrow a region to study. Sometimes it becomes difficult for researchers to find the necessary infrastructure and resources for the research, especially for lines of study that are prone to politicisation (Dzankic, 2023). However, this resource rich and very diverse region aims to have effortless national as well as international researchers, who work and collaborate and find ways that help their countries to develop successfully.

In this study, it was aimed to determine a connection between the development as a common region of Western Balkans and a better approach to sustainable tourism development. This collaboration would not only enhance the economy but would contribute to sustainability. The results of positive connection are in line with previous studies that agree that tourism, food, energy, and financial markets are vital areas which require a higher degree of association between the countries of the region. The integrated promotion of regional tourism would have direct added value for the individual economies (The Balkan Forum, 2017).

WB countries have grown at a fast pace lately. They are growing faster than Western Europe and the EU average. Economically, the Western Balkans are passing through the most prosperous and longest period of economic growth since the times the individual countries gained sovereignty. The path to prosperity for the WB was opened in 2001 by the unilateral EU trade liberalisation (from which they gained five times increase of the exports to the Union and better integration of their own economies), and politically, the countries seem less risky than the members of the Eurasian Economic Union (Polijak-Grujic & Domaratzki, 2022).

Like most world countries, the WB countries are relying on the tourism industry for their economic growth and are investing in tourism and considering it as a key-sector for their development (Porfido, 2020). Additionally, sustainable tourism development has become a global imperative and an industry standard practice (Kutschera, 2018). It has become imperative for tourism policymakers to ensure tourism's long term and sustainable development on the macro level of destinations, as well as at the micro level of each company that operates within

the industry (Kennelland, et al.2021). Although fast, the development stage of each WB country alone is still vulnerable, especially in terms of sustainable development. Therefore, a common approach in a common space may be the solution to a more stable growth.

According to the strategic foresight report for 2030, of the Visegrad Insight (Polijak-Grujic & Domaratzki, 2022) five possible scenarios have been identified that evolve around the future of the Western Balkans. Ranging from “a forced hand” scenario, which would speed up the rise of Western Balkans, as a wall that may thwart advancements from the East to the continuation of a potentially explosive “status quo”, related to prolonged regional disintegration and the declining of EU membership, and furthermore to “elusive Europeanisation”, “defragmentation” and lastly “banding together”, all scenarios point to the same direction: *The future is build based on cooperation.*

Even a worst-case scenario of the status -quo, which is the least possible to happen, will somehow, in a further stage, initiate more movement inside the region and potentially higher engagement toward regional cooperation.

The scenario of “banding together,” if embraced and understood by all six countries, may speed up the development of the region and have a significant impact.

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.

The growing number of global challenges impacts the Western Balkans countries as well. Being united against various environmental, financial, or social challenges, such as depopulation, could help prevent them. 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 are focusing their minds and energy on the economy, issues may be overcome; directing the political thinking towards the future and defragmenting political attitudes, as well as helping resolve other important problems.

This research alongside the above studies and their points of view, highlights the importance of looking forward as a common space of WB and it reveals a very important approach of Albanian

stakeholders regarding sustainable tourism development in their country.

The participants share the same vision that collaborative action of the six countries of the WB will ease economic and political difficulties and contribute to the overall future development. They feel that they will be more engaged in sustainable practices, invest in new technologies, education and training related to sustainable development, if Albania is part of a broader region, with neighbouring countries that support each other. They strongly believe that tourism, as a main branch of the Albanian economy, will develop stronger and more stable if the country becomes part of a region that shares common development policies and agreements.

Stakeholders of the tourism industry claim to be aware of the touristic potential of their own territory, however, they are also conscious of the low level of awareness of sustainability in society and its real meaning and importance. To overcome similar challenges a synergetic knowledge exchange about the Western Balkans and the benefit of cooperation is very important. Participation of local and international researchers, as well as decision makers, is required to achieve the best results.

Referring to the qualitative and quantitative research of this dissertation, the main question and sub questions of this thesis could be answered.

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.*

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. People need one another to develop and look after a shared environment for their well-being and that of future generations. From respondents' perceptions, the main benefits derived from this collaboration may be regional stability, increased attention that may incite interest for large investments and enhanced engagement in sustainability.

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

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 very attractive and translates to diversity of products offered at a special price and in a friendly host community.

This outcome aligns with the research of the Balkan forum according to which, The Balkan region can offer different experiences from gastronomy to natural and cultural heritage, traditions, hospitality, historical sites, impressive coastlines and so much more (The Balkan Forum, 2017)

Sub-question 3: *What can a Marketing Strategy for sustainable tourism development look like?*

This question is answered with the model, which is presented in Figure 15.

Main question of the research: *Can an integrated destination of the Western Balkans raise awareness and engagement and facilitate the development of sustainable tourism? What is the right marketing strategy frame to achieve tourism goals?*

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. If all tourism stakeholders move in this direction, this will contribute to a more sustainable approach. Joint action is essential for further development and growth of the region (European Commission, 2018).

The best marketing strategy to achieve sustainable goals is to include, among economic, social, and cultural elements of influence another important aspect for Albania -the element of regional collaboration, which will potentially enhance sustainable development.

Recommendations:

Based on the literature review as well as the findings of the analysis of the situation in the country of Albania there are further recommendations that will contribute to a sustainable development and may be further explored by researchers.

- Dynamic destination management would help keep the situation under control and contribute to planning according to the carrying capacity. Continued examination of the carrying capacity will ease the calculation of the best expected number of travellers visiting at the same time and will help to better preserve local resources. An indicator framework for monitoring capacity and acting accordingly may be planned to ensure growth.
- Continued monitoring of visitors' impacts will ensure environmental protection, a quality visitor experience and well-being of locals.
- Gathering data on different conditions like on amounts of waste and waste management

capacities and the number of accommodations during different periods throughout the year may contribute to analysing how various levels of tourism growth may influence the overall situation and if these may turn to issues like damaged infrastructure or locals' dissatisfaction.

- Further steps that would support a sustainable tourism development would be primarily waste management systems that do not work over capacity, the ban on single-use plastic, the use of more renewable sources of energy, visitor experience enriched with cultural elements, local, authentic products, culinary experience to increase tourists' expenditures.
- Careful management of accommodation construction and careful management of mass tourism.
- Increasing knowledge on all levels regarding the importance of sustainable development and its benefits incite a positive approach as well toward collaboration and trust with each other and with our neighbours.

6. NEW SCIENTIFIC RESULTS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Many are the opportunities for Albania as a new touristic country and as part of an integrated region of WB. Among the benefits pointed out in this dissertation, there may be challenges as well. However, embracing opportunities will ease the road toward challenges. This dissertation concluded with the following scientific result (R6), contributions outlined (R7) and provides the basis for further research (R8).

6.1. NEW SCIENTIFIC RESULTS

Researching the challenges of a developing country toward sustainable development and elements that contribute to it is a broad domain. This thesis points out that there are multiple aspects to study and analyse that contribute to overall research. The main findings are presented in the following paragraphs. The scientific contribution is addressed first.

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, 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 15) 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 study, 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 the 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.

6.1.1 Professional implications

The reality of today's world is different compared to decades ago. Innovative approaches are possible, especially after society overcame a tough pandemic period. Referring to the tourism industry, managers, and marketers design strategies with a new point of view, focusing on the unique product and creating customer value but also being flexible and caring about the environment.

From this long research process, among other things, it is revealed that there are new, additional indicators necessary to measure tourism performance today. These indicators relate to current developments and changes. There are new elements as well to include in the marketing strategy and tourism policy, product offering or further steps of the marketing strategy.

These indicators are to be further explored and discussed. The UNWTO frame and the SDG should be the reference of future strategies. However, when analysing elements and indicators, the overall situation of the specific destination is to be considered and research should be adapted to the destination's rules and development. In Table 45 are presented indicators that may be further researched and that may contribute to a successful performance of tourism development.

6.2 FURTHER RESEARCH

Referring to the research findings and further ideas created during the long research process and deep diving into rich studies and analysis related to sustainable tourism development and sustainable marketing strategies, other research topic ideas emerged, achieving result number eight of the methodological approach frame of this dissertation.

A recommendation for further research is to collect perceptions from the other five countries of the Western Balkans and their attitude toward a single space and collaboration. Kosovo is not only Albania's neighbouring country, but it also used to be part of Albania and the countries are very related. Therefore, research in Kosovo first would be a promising idea to have a broader

picture of the Western Balkans. A similar survey may be conducted in the other destinations of the WB, and they may be compared with each other, and conclusions may be drawn that contribute to better marketing and management of tourism.

Regarding the developed marketing strategy, there are opportunities to discuss, research and analyse. Sustainability is a new concept for Albania. Therefore, it must be further explained and integrated into other sectors related to tourism. The strategy presented in this research may be an initial point and other research may further explore and discuss the steps of sustainable marketing strategies for Albanian tourism.

Table 45: Indicators that help to design better Marketing and Management

Indicators that measure:	
Tourist value	Extension of seasonality
	Prices of eco lodgings
	Length of stay
	Getting involved in culture and lifestyle
Host -community value	Satisfaction of citizens from tourism
	Participation of citizens
	Escalation of local products and services
	Cultural pride
	Environment nurturing
Economic Value	Noise pollution
	Jobs created throughout the year, not only on summer season
	Selling of local products
	Women employed in tourism
	Capacity building and exchange
Sustainability	Carrying capacity monitoring
	Use of renewable energy sources
	Engagement in protection of national natural and cultural treasures

Source: Own research, 2023

Other possible correlations concerning effects related to a single space of Western Balkans may be explored. A tourist's point of view and their desire to explore a compact destination is particularly important to determine further strategies of development. What are the real

indicators that ascertain added value among tourists? Some of the main indicators are presented in Table 45.

And very importantly, researchers may further engage and analyse possible indicators that attract specific target groups, to plan and prepare better for an increase in visitors' numbers. Travellers' numbers are potentially going to increase every year, and every country must plan strategically to attract the target market they can satisfy best and does not put its resources at risk. This task is not easy, because sometimes the flow is difficult to stop. However, monitoring and planning will help to manage the situation better.

7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Sustainability has become a key word to future global development. Citizens, be they usual consumers or managers and leaders, have become more cautious regarding the impact humans may have on the environment, society, and overall development.

This issue of sustainability impacts the world at large, not just countries which have been harsh to their environment in the past and are trying to heal the wounds. Governments, industries, investors, and common citizens are all affected by this matter. For a long time, people have been careless about the consequences of their actions and have been focusing only on economic growth. Global leaders and all citizens can no longer ignore reality and must act to change the situation. To respond to the damage in the right way, greater knowledge and awareness of current issues is required.

The country of Albania is relatively new in developing tourism. However, the industry is growing at a very fast pace and represents a wonderful opportunity for resilient growth. While living in a world where sustainability has become a keyword, Albania, like all world countries, must protect its own development, meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

For tourism to develop successfully and sustainably in Albania, a balanced development is necessary. The management of economic growth should happen within acknowledged resource conservation limits. Values associated with traditional practices and costumes must be protected and a well -designed environmental management plan should be developed simultaneously.

It was the main aim of this research to develop an adequate marketing strategy for Albanian tourism based on the principle of sustainability and with Albania as part of an integrated destination of the Western Balkans. The idea of including the Western Balkan in the main strategy of sustainable tourism development was taken into consideration and analysed because an integrated, collaborative destination may ease the path toward sustainable development of tourism. This idea represents the main line of the analysis of this thesis.

The region has increased collaboration during the last decades and international stakeholders, especially the EU, have played a vital role in integrating the six countries and elevating the social relations between them. A path toward sustainable tourism development and overall development is not easy to face alone, keeping in mind the tackling economic challenges Albania and the other developing countries of the WB face.

Embracing the opportunity of the WB would mean trade agreements which will facilitate economic transactions. Having a large economy, with a harmonised tourism policy would attract major investments in tourism. The region would become a remarkably diverse and interesting tourist attraction. All of these would also contribute to improving regional stability, and this would lead to a better approach to reaching global stability goals.

One main objective that was analysed during the research process was the approach of main stakeholders in Albania regarding the initiative of a common region and how it may contribute to easier embrace sustainable practices in the field of tourism. The question was whether an integrated destination of the Western Balkans would raise awareness and engagement and facilitate the development of sustainable tourism. This has been a great indication for the design of a marketing strategy frame to achieve sustainable tourism goals for Albania (a main conclusion of this dissertation).

Another main objective was to understand whether travellers and visitors in Albania would be eager and interested in visiting the region and experience the beautiful natural diversity and cultural richness.

To evaluate these ideas and understand better the influence a region of Western Balkans may have on both Albanians and visitors to Albania (potential visitors of the region) a multilevel research design was applied. Starting from secondary research and fundamental sources of information and explanation regarding sustainability development, developing countries, the ongoing collaboration of a promising region, and the steps of a sustainable tourism marketing strategy, the dissertation proceeds with the analysis, with the country of Albania at the centre of the attention, conducting primary qualitative and quantitative research. Important experts in the field of tourism and marketing give valuable recommendations regarding sustainable tourism development as part of an integrated destination.

Results from interviews are summarised in three main ideas related to tourism development, sustainable development and a common destination of Western Balkans and the tourism marketing strategy for Albania.

The experts share the same strong conclusion that tourism is a terrific opportunity for resilient growth. Despite economic challenges Albania should embrace sustainable tourism development. To facilitate the adaptation of new sustainable strategies it is crucial that all stakeholders of the tourism industry engage. During economic development it is very important

to carefully manage negative practices like extensive building, especially in touristic clusters of the country or hydropower building.

Experts share the same viewpoint that regional collaboration creates added value. A common region, with a larger surface may create the opportunity to plan better and manage excessive tourism in one country alone. Carrying capacity studies and analyses are a major step that will contribute to better planning and efficient strategies.

Referring to the tourism marketing strategy for Albania the interviewed experts support the idea that an innovative marketing strategy that includes sustainability is necessary as soon as possible. They embrace the possibility to integrate the initiative of a common region of Western Balkans in the strategy for sustainable tourism development.

The association between variables of interest analysed through empirical research revealed the belief to invest in green development goes hand in hand with the belief that an integrated WB enhances engagements toward sustainability. The perception that a tour combining different destinations in the Western Balkan countries is a desirable choice for the respondents correlates with the belief that their touristic trip to Albania is satisfactory.

These two important results contribute to answering the main questions of the dissertation and achieving the aim of creating the final suggested marketing model for tourism development in Albania. It includes the Western Balkans as a pillar, among pillars of economic growth, environment protection and social well-being, to form the basis for a sustainable marketing strategy. (Figure 15)

The research also comprises very important highlights regarding the marketing strategy of Albanian tourism, including *a new philosophy* of tourism development, an innovative approach signifying that tourism should make a bold statement by *proposing a country that looks beyond its borders and forges a new future not only regionally but rather globally. The aim is for tourism to affect the local economy and to consider the effects on the social structures, culture, and lifestyle of the country. Therefore, 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 aim of the offer is long-term customer value. A customer-oriented mentality will certainly incite sustainable development. Among main highlights of a new sustainable tourism marketing strategy are the target markets of the tourism industry in Albania, including:

The free spirits, culture explorers, authentic experiencers, personal history explorers, no- hustle travellers, rejuvenators, and gentle explorers (explained in detail in Table 16).

and the focus on new categories of tourism that are either not existent or are at the initial stages of development but with potential to develop further, like

- a. Wellness-fitness or SPA Resorts
- b. MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Events)
- c. Agricultural tourism
- d. Dental Tourism

The product offer of the tourism industry includes the following types of products:

Sun and sea, culture, health, MICE, cycling, wine, and gastro, rural and mountain, adventure, sport, and ecotourism.

A new tourism policy and its main objectives and duties are a major step in the overall strategy. Its aim is to strategically align all organisational units from top to bottom and make the policy plan work faster and offer deliverables within a shorter period. The tourism policy must be implemented and closely monitored if it is to achieve its desired objectives. The tourism policy and the national tourism plan can only be implemented successfully if all the stakeholders partake in the process.

The importance of the creation of a national tourism board which should foster a new breed of intrapreneurs is undeniable. It will serve as a catalyst that will allow employees and participants to act like entrepreneurs within this organisation. The aim of the NTB should include hiring and approaching entrepreneurs who are initiative-taking, and action-oriented and who take the initiative to pursue innovative products and services within a bureaucratic structure.

Lastly, the aim of this dissertation is achieved by presenting the steps for a sustainable marketing strategy for tourism while looking toward the future as a common region of Western Balkans. Albania and its stakeholders evidence readiness to embrace this initiative and agree that a common approach would contribute to engagement in sustainable practices and development and will be beneficial for all the countries. The collaboration of the Western Balkans is an attempt to create mutual advantage among partner countries and, at the same time, deliver added value for international tourists visiting the region. A sustainable marketing strategy for Albanian tourism development is necessary for the country to achieve long-term overall development.

Reaching the aim of this dissertation means suggesting tourism development, which is very important for the prosperity of Albania and, at the same time and of the same importance, the protection of a beautiful land and society.

“Tourism must prosper in harmony with nature.”

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9. APPENDIXES

9.1 APPENDIX A

Questionnaires

Questionnaire 1⁷

Thank you for participating in this survey! It aims to collect opinions about future sustainable tourism development in Albania, as part of an integrated destination of Western Balkans. Please answer all questions spontaneously. The questionnaire consists of 5 Sections and 6 demographic questions. It will take a maximum of 10 minutes to complete. All collected data will be used only for this survey. At no time will data be shared with third parties. If you have any questions about this survey, please contact Arjana Kadiu at arjanakadiu@yahoo.com. *I appreciate your time and support very much!*

For this statement think of Albania and choose the appropriate box

NATURAL RESOURCES IN ALBANIA	strongly disagree	disagree	somewh at disagree	somewh at agree	agree	strongly agree
Natural resources in Albania are rare and have attracted the attention of many international tourists lately.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Engagement in protecting these resources has not been sufficient during these 30 years of tourism development.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Main stakeholders are acting indifferent regarding nature protection.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mass tourism is threatening our national identity.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

For this statement think of Albania and choose the appropriate box

ECONOMIC CHALLENGES	strongly disagree	disagree	somewh at disagree	somewh at agree	agree	strongly agree
Tourism potential in Albania is huge and it may become the main future generator of the economy.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tourism infrastructure is still a barrier, and large investments are needed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

⁷ This questionnaire was directed to Albanian citizens. It was sent in Albanian and translated in English for this dissertation.

Other important economic challenges rather than environmental protection are still to be faced and require most of the budget.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Economic challenges are the reason for this high negligence toward climate change.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Considering the above, which of the following statements would you rather choose.

1. The government does not have sufficient financial resources to make investments in waste management systems or energy infrastructure. Poverty, informality, limited linkages with external markets, need primary attention.
2. Protecting the environment is a matter of the same importance because the future of tourism depends on it, as well as the future of the economy. At the same time, human well-being is at stake.

There is an increasing interest from Eastern countries to visit Albania. What is your reflection regarding the following statements?

THE REGION OF THE BALKANS	strongly disagree	disagree	somewh at disagree	somewh at agree	agree	strongly agree
Do you believe tourists from the east may be attracted to the culture of Balkan countries?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you think the traditions and history of Balkan countries are especially interesting to tourists from the East?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
May eastern tourists be attracted by the idea of visiting a part of Europe that is in a way different from Europe.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you believe eastern tourists feel more "like home" in this part of Europe?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If the answer to your last question in the above section was yes, can you name a reason for that? Just with one word.

For this statement think about the 6 countries of the Western Balkans (Albania, Montenegro, Kosovo, Serbia, Macedonia, Bosnia, and Herzegovina)

INTEGRATED DESTINATION OF WB	strongly disagree	disagree	somewh at disagree	somewh at agree	agree	strongly agree
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

A single investment space of WB, with harmonising legislation would be beneficial for the future economy of all WB countries.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A regional economic area would be beneficial to tourism in all countries of WB.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Regional stability will increase the attention and interest of huge investments.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Integration of Western Balkan countries will enhance engagements toward sustainability.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A six-country journey would be much more attractive and interesting than a one-country visit.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There is a potential risk that the more stable touristic country (ex. Montenegro) may attract more tourist attention compared to others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

As part of an integrated destination of WB, would you feel more confident and ready to:

SUSTAINABILITY SECTION	strongly disagree	disagree	somewh at disagree	somewh at agree	agree	strongly agree
Adapt to green growth and collaborate, to overcome the sustainability transition more easily.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Invest in modern technologies and education related to green development.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Engage to protect natural heritage and require the approval of global standard laws?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do businesses and institutions employ social responsibility?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Promote the region as an integrated unique destination.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Promote eco-tours, combining destinations in WB and help dispersal and overcrowding.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please provide some information about yourself in this section.

Age group:

1. Younger than 25
2. 26-41

3. 42- 57

4. 58 and over

Gender:

1. female

2. male

What is your highest completed education grade?

1. high school

2. bachelor's degree

3. master studies

4. Ph.D.

5. other

6. no answer

What is your sector of occupation?

1. Accountancy, banking, and Finance

2. Business, Consulting, and Management

3. Charity and Voluntary work

4. Creative Arts and Design

5. Education

5. Energy and Utilities

6. Engineering and Manufacturing

7. Environment and Agriculture

8. Healthcare

9. Information technology

10. Law

11. Leisure, Sport, and Tourism

12. Marketing, Advertising and PR

13. Media and Internet

14. Property and Construction

15. Public services and Administration

16. Social care

17. Transport and Logistics

18. Other

In which sector are you working?

1. Private
2. Public
3. the Third sector
- Ex. Voluntary organisations, social enterprises, Charities, or similar)

Which of the following best describes your personal income of the last year?

1. Less than 5.000 Euro
2. 5.000 – 12.000 Euro
3. 12.000- 20.000 Euro
4. 20.000 and above

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!

32 QUESTIONS (demographic questions included)

Questionnaire 2⁸**01. Have you visited Albania during the last 10 years? If not, would you like to?**

- Yes
- No
- Very much
- Maybe

02. Do you think Albania has rare, beautiful resources?

- Yes
- No

03. What attracts you most in Albania? You may choose more than one answer

- Coastal vacancies
- Nature and eco-tours

⁸ This questionnaire was directed to foreign travellers. It was sent in the English language.

- Sport and adventure
- Culture and history
- Medical tourism
- I also work in Albania

04. What are the things that you experienced as problematic or that you do not want to face if deciding to visit this destination? You may choose more than one answer.

- Infrastructure
- Quality of service
- Price-quality relationship
- Public transport
- Safety

If it was none of the above, please write your concern in the next question.

05. What were the things that disappointed you during your journey in Albania?

06. When visiting Albania did you (would you) buy more:

- Local Products
- Global Products

07. Overall, how satisfied were you with your trip to Albania?

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Very dissatisfied | not satisfied | neutral | satisfied | very satisfied. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

08. Do you believe that a tour combining different destinations in Western Balkan would be a good option for you?

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Not really | probably not | maybe | why not | yes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

09. Please mention two characteristics of Albania that attract your attention very much. If no negative attributes come to your mind, you are free to mention two positives.

10. Please enter your nationality:

11. Age:

12. Educational level:**13. Which of the following best describes your personal income of the last year?**

- Less than 5000 Euro
- 5.000- 12.000
- 12.000- 20.000
- Above 20.000

9.2 APPENDIX B

Quantitative Analysis: Results of the surveys

1. Sample from “Sustainable Tourism development as integrated part of WB” survey

1.1. One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: ID_ Integration of Western Balkan countries will enhance engagements toward sustainability.

Tukey HSD		95% Confidence Interval
(I) SC_ Invest in innovative technologies and education related to green development.	(J) SC_ Invest in innovative technologies and education related to green development.	Upper Bound
disagree	somewhat disagree	.43
	somewhat agree	.26
	agree	.08
	strongly agree	-.12
somewhat disagree	disagree	1.04
	somewhat agree	.65
	agree	.46
	strongly agree	.26
somewhat agree	disagree	.78
	somewhat disagree	.56
	agree	.12
	strongly agree	-.06
agree	disagree	.93
	somewhat disagree	.71
	somewhat agree	.45
	strongly agree	.08
strongly agree	disagree	1.18
	somewhat disagree	.95
	somewhat agree	.71
	agree	.51

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

- **Descriptives**

ID_ Integration of Western Balkan countries will enhance engagements toward sustainability.								
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
disagree	39	4.41	1.251	.200	4.00	4.82	1	6
somewhat disagree	28	4.71	1.329	.251	4.20	5.23	1	6
somewhat agree	173	4.67	1.063	.081	4.51	4.83	2	6
agree	286	4.84	1.024	.061	4.72	4.96	1	6
strongly agree	159	5.06	1.115	.088	4.88	5.23	1	6
Total	685	4.82	1.092	.042	4.74	4.90	1	6

ANOVA

ID_ Integration of Western Balkan countries will enhance engagements toward sustainability.					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	19.728	4	4.932	4.211	.002
Within Groups	796.462	680	1.171		
Total	816.190	684			

ANOVA Effect Sizes^{a,b}

		Point Estimate	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower	Upper
ID_ Integration of Western Balkan countries will enhance engagements toward sustainability.	Eta-squared	.024	.003	.046
	Epsilon-squared	.018	-.002	.041
	Omega-squared Fixed-effect	.018	-.002	.041
	Omega-squared Random-effect	.005	-.001	.010

a. Eta-squared and Epsilon-squared are estimated based on the fixed-effect model.

b. Negative but less biased estimates are retained, not rounded to zero.

Post Hoc Tests

Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: ID_Integration of Western Balkan countries will enhance engagements toward sustainability.					
Tukey HSD					
(I) SC_Invest in innovative technologies and education related to green development.	(J) SC_Invest in innovative technologies and education related to green development.	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval Lower Bound
disagree	somewhat disagree	-.304	.268	.788	-1.04
	somewhat agree	-.260	.192	.656	-.78
	agree	-.429	.185	.139	-.93
	strongly agree	-.646*	.193	.008	-1.18
somewhat disagree	disagree	.304	.268	.788	-.43
	somewhat agree	.044	.220	1.000	-.56
	agree	-.125	.214	.978	-.71
	strongly agree	-.342	.222	.535	-.95
somewhat agree	disagree	.260	.192	.656	-.26
	somewhat disagree	-.044	.220	1.000	-.65
	agree	-.169	.104	.486	-.45
	strongly agree	-.386*	.119	.011	-.71
agree	disagree	.429	.185	.139	-.08
	somewhat disagree	.125	.214	.978	-.46
	somewhat agree	.169	.104	.486	-.12
	strongly agree	-.217	.107	.252	-.51
strongly agree	disagree	.646*	.193	.008	.12
	somewhat disagree	.342	.222	.535	-.26
	somewhat agree	.386*	.119	.011	.06
	agree	.217	.107	.252	-.08

1.2. Correlational analysis / Pearson Chi Square Coefficient

SC _ Invest in innovative technologies and education related to green development. * ID_Integration of Western Balkan countries will enhance engagements toward sustainability. Cross Tabulation			
SC Invest in innovative technologies and education related to green development.	disagree	Count	39
		Expected Count	39.0
		% within SC Invest in innovative technologies and education related to green development.	100.0%
		% within ID_Integration of Western Balkan countries will enhance engagements toward sustainability.	5.7%
		% of Total	5.7%
	somewhat disagree	Count	28
		Expected Count	28.0
		% within SC Invest in innovative technologies and education related to green development.	100.0%
		% within ID_Integration of Western Balkan countries will enhance engagements toward sustainability.	4.1%
		% of Total	4.1%
	somewhat agree	Count	173
		Expected Count	173.0
		% within SC Invest in innovative technologies and education related to green development.	100.0%
		% within ID_Integration of Western Balkan countries will enhance engagements toward sustainability.	25.3%
		% of Total	25.3%
	agree	Count	286
	Expected Count	286.0	
	% within SC Invest in innovative technologies and education related to green development.	100.0%	
	% within ID_Integration of Western Balkan countries will enhance engagements toward sustainability.	41.8%	
	% of Total	41.8%	
strongly agree	Count	159	
	Expected Count	159.0	

	% within SC_Invest in innovative technologies and education related to green development.	100.0%
	% within ID_Integration of Western Balkan countries will enhance engagements toward sustainability.	23.2%
	% of Total	23.2%
Total	Count	685
	Expected Count	685.0
	% within SC_Invest in innovative technologies and education related to green development.	100.0%
	% within ID_Integration of Western Balkan countries will enhance engagements toward sustainability.	100.0%
	% of Total	100.0%

1.3. Multivariable linear regression

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.161 ^a	.026	.020	1.081

a. Predictors: (Constant), What is your highest completed education grade, SC_Invest in innovative technologies and education related to green development., Gender, Age group

ANOVA^a

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

a. Dependent Variable: ID_Integration of Western Balkan countries will enhance engagements toward sustainability.

b. Predictors: (Constant), What is your highest completed education grade, SC_Invest in innovative technologies and education related to green development., Gender, Age group

Homogeneous Subsets

ID_Integration of Western Balkan countries will enhance engagements toward sustainability.

Tukey HSD^{a,b}

SC_Invest in innovative technologies and education related to green development.	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
disagree	39	4.41	
somewhat agree	173	4.67	4.67
somewhat disagree	28	4.71	4.71
agree	286	4.84	4.84
strongly agree	159		5.06
Sig.		.160	.251

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

a. Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 65.001.

b. The group sizes are unequal. The harmonic mean of the group sizes is used. Type I error levels are not guaranteed.

1.4. Frequency Tables

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
P1. Natural resources in Albania are rare and have attracted the attention of many international tourists lately.	685	1	6	5.23	.892
P1. Engagement in protecting these resources has not been sufficient during these 30 years of tourism development.	685	1	6	5.14	1.041
P1. Main stakeholders are acting indifferent regarding nature protection.	685	1	6	4.32	1.425
P1. Mass tourism is threatening our national identity.	685	1	6	4.15	1.608
P2. Tourism potential in Albania is huge and it may become the main future generator of the economy.	685	1	6	5.33	.859

P2. Tourism infrastructure is still a barrier, and large investments are needed.	685	1	6	5.31	.924
P2. Other important economic challenges rather than environmental protection are still to be faced and require a lot of budgets.	685	1	6	4.39	1.329
P2. Economic challenges are the reason for this high negligence toward climate change.	685	1	6	4.53	1.424
Considering the above, which of the following statements would you rather choose;	685	2	2	2.00	.000
P3. Do you believe tourists from the east may be attracted to the culture of Balkan countries?	685	1	6	4.53	1.093
P3. Do you think the traditions and history of Balkan countries are especially interesting to tourists from the East?	685	1	6	4.56	1.139
P3. May eastern tourists be attracted by the idea of visiting a part of Europe that is in a way different from Europe?	685	2	6	4.60	1.026
P3. Do you believe eastern tourists feel more “like home” in this part of Europe?	685	1	6	4.18	1.209
If the answer to your last question in the above section was yes, can you name a reason for that? Just with one word.	0				
ID_A single investment space of WB, with harmonising legislation would be beneficial for the future economy of all WB countries.	685	2	6	4.51	.956

ID_A regional economic area would be beneficial to tourism in all countries of WB.	685	1	6	4.48	1.044
ID_Regional stability will increase the attention and interest of huge investments.	685	1	6	4.75	1.039
ID_Integration of Western Balkan countries will enhance engagements toward sustainability.	685	1	6	4.82	1.092
ID_A six-country journey would be much more attractive and interesting than one country visit.	685	1	6	4.65	1.288
ID_There is a potential risk that the more stable touristic country (ex. Montenegro) may attract more tourist attention compared to others.	685	1	6	4.35	1.297
SC_Adapt to green growth and collaborate, to overcome the sustainability transition more easily.	685	2	6	4.70	1.050
SC_Invest in modern technologies and education related to green development.	685	2	6	4.73	1.043
SC_Engage to protect natural heritage and require the approval of global standard laws?	685	1	6	4.89	1.031
SC_Require that businesses and institutions employ social responsibility?	685	2	6	4.88	1.011
SC_Promote the region as an integrated unique destination.	685	2	6	4.91	.998
SC_Promote eco-tours, combining destinations in WB and help dispersal and overcrowding?	685	2	6	4.76	1.013
Age group	685	1	4	1.79	.865
Gender	685	1	2	1.28	.449

What is your highest completed education grade	685	1	5	2.57	.786
Valid N (listwise)	0				

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	AL	666	97.2	97.2	97.2
	CA	1	.1	.1	97.4
	CH	4	.6	.6	98.0
	DE	4	.6	.6	98.5
	GB	2	.3	.3	98.8
	IT	1	.1	.1	99.0
	US	1	.1	.1	99.1
	XK	6	.9	.9	100.0
	Total	685	100.0	100.0	

Region					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	BE	1	.1	.1	.1
	BR	15	2.2	2.2	2.3
	BS	1	.1	.1	2.5
	BW	1	.1	.1	2.6
	BY	1	.1	.1	2.8
	DR	69	10.1	10.1	12.8
	EL	26	3.8	3.8	16.6
	KA	1	.1	.1	16.8
	KO	32	4.7	4.7	21.5
	LE	42	6.1	6.1	27.6
	MAN	1	.1	.1	27.7
	MO	1	.1	.1	27.9
	ON	1	.1	.1	28.0
	PG	1	.1	.1	28.2

PR	6	.9	.9	29.1
SH	1	.1	.1	29.2
SHO	35	5.1	5.1	34.3
ST	1	.1	.1	34.5
TI	2	.3	.3	34.7
TR	444	64.8	64.8	99.6
WBK	1	.1	.1	99.7
ZH	2	.3	.3	100.0
Total	685	100.0	100.0	

Age group					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Younger than 25	327	47.7	47.7	47.7
	26-41	186	27.2	27.2	74.9
	42- 57	158	23.1	23.1	98.0
	58 and over	14	2.0	2.0	100.0
	Total	685	100.0	100.0	

Gender					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	493	72.0	72.0	72.0
	Male	192	28.0	28.0	100.0
	Total	685	100.0	100.0	

What is your highest completed education grade					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	high school	56	8.2	8.2	8.2

bachelor's degree	247	36.1	36.1	44.2
master studies	327	47.7	47.7	92.0
Ph.D.	47	6.9	6.9	98.8
other	8	1.2	1.2	100.0
Total	685	100.0	100.0	

In which sector are you working?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Private	289	42.2	42.2	42.2
	Public	265	38.7	38.7	80.9
	the Third sector	23	3.4	3.4	84.2
	Without Job	108	15.8	15.8	100.0
	Total	685	100.0	100.0	

Which of the following best describes your personal income of the last year?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	12.000- 20.000	29	4.2	4.2	4.2
	20.000 and above	48	7.0	7.0	11.2
	5.000- 12.000	206	30.1	30.1	41.3
	Less than 5.000 Euro	402	58.7	58.7	100.0
	Total	685	100.0	100.0	

In which sector are you working?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid		674	98.4	98.4	98.4
	N/a	1	.1	.1	98.5
	NGO	1	.1	.1	98.7
	ojf	1	.1	.1	98.8
	OJF	2	.3	.3	99.1

Organizata vullnetare	1	.1	.1	99.3
Pa pune	1	.1	.1	99.4
Publik	1	.1	.1	99.6
student	1	.1	.1	99.7
Studente	2	.3	.3	100.0
Total	685	100.0	100.0	

P1. Natural resources in Albania are rare and have attracted the attention of many international tourists lately.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	2	.3	.3	.3
	disagree	9	1.3	1.3	1.6
	somewhat disagree	8	1.2	1.2	2.8
	somewhat agree	113	16.5	16.5	19.3
	agree	229	33.4	33.4	52.7
	strongly agree	324	47.3	47.3	100.0
	Total	685	100.0	100.0	

P1. Engagement in protecting these resources has not been sufficient during these 30 years of tourism development.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	5	.7	.7	.7
	disagree	10	1.5	1.5	2.2
	somewhat disagree	28	4.1	4.1	6.3
	somewhat agree	135	19.7	19.7	26.0
	agree	170	24.8	24.8	50.8
	strongly agree	337	49.2	49.2	100.0
	Total	685	100.0	100.0	

P1. Main stakeholders are acting indifferent regarding nature protection.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	31	4.5	4.5	4.5
	disagree	78	11.4	11.4	15.9
	somewhat disagree	43	6.3	6.3	22.2
	somewhat agree	177	25.8	25.8	48.0
	agree	199	29.1	29.1	77.1
	strongly agree	157	22.9	22.9	100.0
	Total	685	100.0	100.0	

P1. Mass tourism is threatening our national identity.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	38	5.5	5.5	5.5
	disagree	123	18.0	18.0	23.5
	somewhat disagree	63	9.2	9.2	32.7
	somewhat agree	115	16.8	16.8	49.5
	agree	166	24.2	24.2	73.7
	strongly agree	180	26.3	26.3	100.0
	Total	685	100.0	100.0	

P2. Tourism potential in Albania is huge and it may become the main future generator of the economy.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	2	.3	.3	.3
	disagree	6	.9	.9	1.2
	somewhat disagree	7	1.0	1.0	2.2
	somewhat agree	99	14.5	14.5	16.6
	agree	203	29.6	29.6	46.3
	strongly agree	368	53.7	53.7	100.0
	Total	685	100.0	100.0	

P2. Tourism infrastructure is still a barrier, and large investments are needed.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	4	.6	.6	.6
	disagree	4	.6	.6	1.2
	somewhat disagree	17	2.5	2.5	3.6
	somewhat agree	104	15.2	15.2	18.8
	agree	180	26.3	26.3	45.1
	strongly agree	376	54.9	54.9	100.0
	Total	685	100.0	100.0	

P2. Other important economic challenges rather than environmental protection are still to be faced and require a lot of budgets.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	24	3.5	3.5	3.5
	disagree	70	10.2	10.2	13.7
	somewhat disagree	35	5.1	5.1	18.8
	somewhat agree	177	25.8	25.8	44.7
	agree	245	35.8	35.8	80.4
	strongly agree	134	19.6	19.6	100.0
	Total	685	100.0	100.0	

P2. Economic challenges are the reason for this high negligence toward climate change.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	26	3.8	3.8	3.8
	disagree	70	10.2	10.2	14.0
	somewhat disagree	38	5.5	5.5	19.6
	somewhat agree	134	19.6	19.6	39.1
	agree	213	31.1	31.1	70.2
	strongly agree	204	29.8	29.8	100.0
	Total	685	100.0	100.0	

2. Sample from the internationals sample

2.1 Multivariable Linear Regression Analysis

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.409 ^a	.167	.155	.293

a. Predictors: (Constant), Age, do you believe that a tour combining different destinations in Western Balkan would be a good option for you? Which of the following best describes your personal income of the last year?

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

a. Dependent Variable: In overall, how satisfied you with your trip to Albania were?

b. Predictors: (Constant), Age, do you believe that a tour combining different destinations in Western Balkan would be a good option for you? Which of the following best describes your personal income of the last year?

1.1. Frequency Tables

Have you visited Albania during the last 10-15 years? If no, would you like to:					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	215	86.3	99.1	99.1
	Very much	2	.8	.9	100.0
	Total	217	87.1	100.0	
Missing	System	32	12.9		

Total		249	100.0		
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Do you think Albania has rare and beautiful natural resources?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	214	85.9	99.5	99.5
	No	1	.4	.5	100.0
	Total	215	86.3	100.0	
Missing	System	34	13.7		
Total		249	100.0		

What attracts you most in Albania? You may choose more than one answer					
Coastal vacances					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	139	55.8	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	110	44.2		
Total		249	100.0		

Nature and eco-tours					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	119	47.8	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	130	52.2		
Total		249	100.0		

Sport and adventure					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	45	18.1	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	204	81.9		

Total		249	100.0		
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Culture and history					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	99	39.8	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	150	60.2		
Total		249	100.0		

Medical tourism					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	11	4.4	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	238	95.6		
Total		249	100.0		

I also work in Albania					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	14	5.6	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	235	94.4		
Total		249	100.0		

What are the things that you experienced as problematic or that you do not want to face if deciding to visit this destination? You may choose more than one answer					
Infrastructure					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	86	34.5	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	163	65.5		
Total		249	100.0		

Quality of service					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	52	20.9	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	197	79.1		
Total		249	100.0		

Price quality relationship					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	17	6.8	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	232	93.2		
Total		249	100.0		

Public transport					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	89	35.7	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	160	64.3		
Total		249	100.0		

Safety					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	12	4.8	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	237	95.2		
Total		249	100.0		

If it was none of the above, please write your concern in the next question					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	33	13.3	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	216	86.7		

Total	249	100.0		
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When visiting Albania did you (would you) buy more:					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Local Products	178	71.5	81.7	81.7
	Global Products	40	16.1	18.3	100.0
	Total	218	87.6	100.0	
Missing	System	31	12.4		
Total		249	100.0		

Overall, how satisfied were you with your trip to Albania?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very dissatisfied	4	1.6	1.9	1.9
	Not satisfied	1	.4	.5	2.3
	Neutral	19	7.6	8.8	11.2
	Satisfied	88	35.3	40.9	52.1
	Very satisfied	103	41.4	47.9	100.0
	Total	215	86.3	100.0	
Missing	System	34	13.7		
Total		249	100.0		

Do you believe that a tour combining different destinations in Western Balkan would be a good option for you?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not really	2	.8	.9	.9

	Probably not	4	1.6	1.8	2.8
	Maybe	45	18.1	20.6	23.4
	Why not	90	36.1	41.3	64.7
	Absolutely yes	77	30.9	35.3	100.0
	Total	218	87.6	100.0	
Missing	System	31	12.4		
Total		249	100.0		

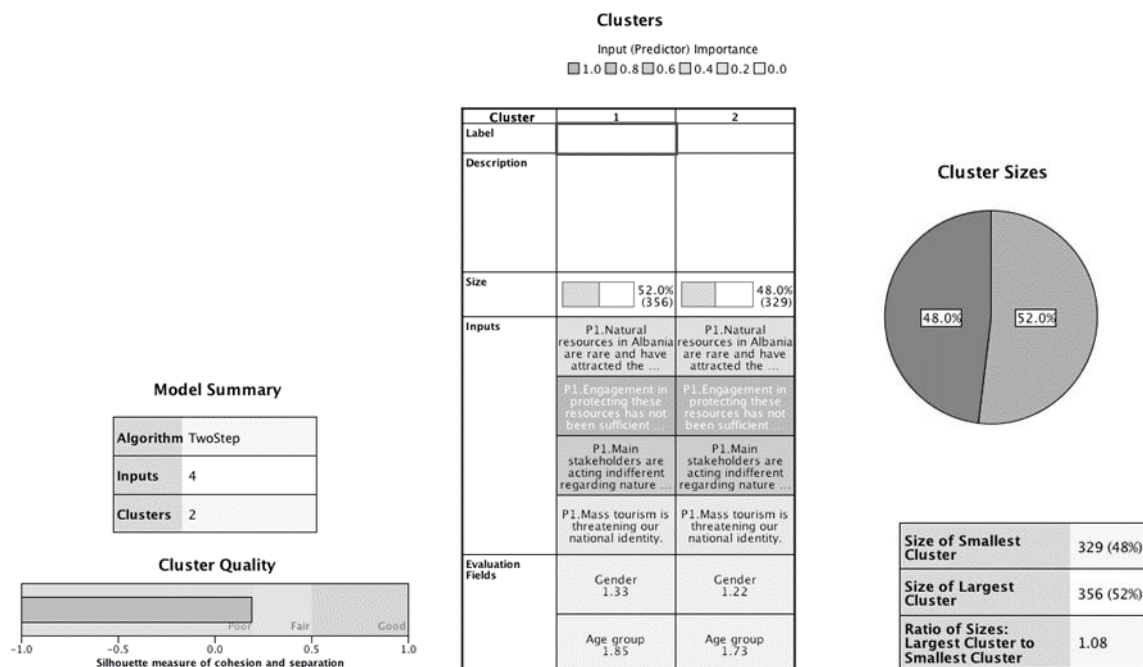
9.3 APPENDIX C

Two-Step Cluster Analysis

Derived from the factorial analysis of the national sample, we have cluster analysis for these segments of the national sample survey: Natural Resources in Albania, Economic Challenges, The region of the Balkans, Integrated destination of Western Balkans, and Sustainability. A K-means cluster analysis was not appropriate given the small sample size. The most appropriate way of clustering considering the sample size was a two-step clustering. Indeed, as can be seen by the results below, clustering by age-group and gender was done in the evaluation field which are not used to create the cluster model but to give further insights to the clusters created.

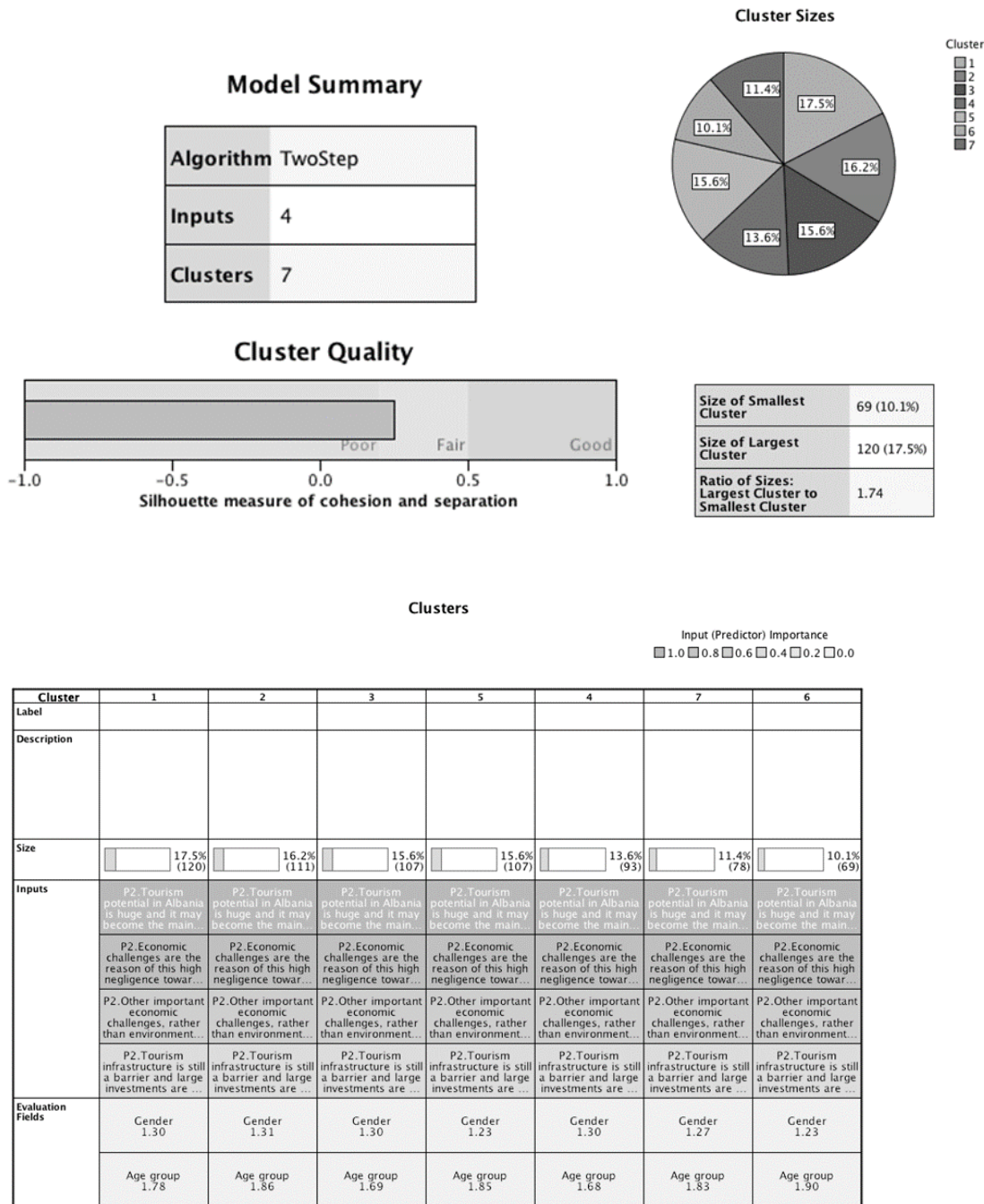
Two-Step Cluster Analysis

Derived from the factorial analysis of the national sample, we have cluster analysis for these segments of the national sample survey: Natural Resources in Albania, Economic Challenges, The region of the Balkans, Integrated destination of Western Balkans, and Sustainability. A K-means cluster analysis was not appropriate given the small sample size. The most appropriate way of clustering considering the sample size was a two-step clustering. Indeed, as can be seen by the results below, clustering by age-group and gender was done in the evaluation field which are not used to create the cluster model but to give further insights to the clusters created.



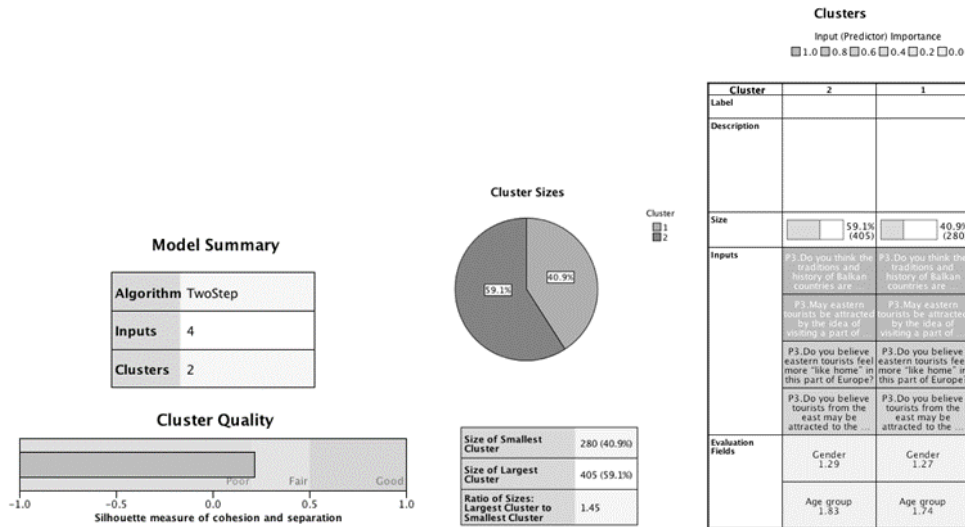
The main clustering analysis for the part of the survey on Natural Resources in Albania reports a poor cluster quality as can be seen in the model summary above. As a good rule of thumb the ratio of sizes is under three, more specifically 1.08, meaning that no cluster in the cluster set is more than 1.08 times as large as any other cluster. The cluster sizes shows the frequency of each cluster (48% and 52%).

Segmentation based on opinions on P2: Economic Challenges:



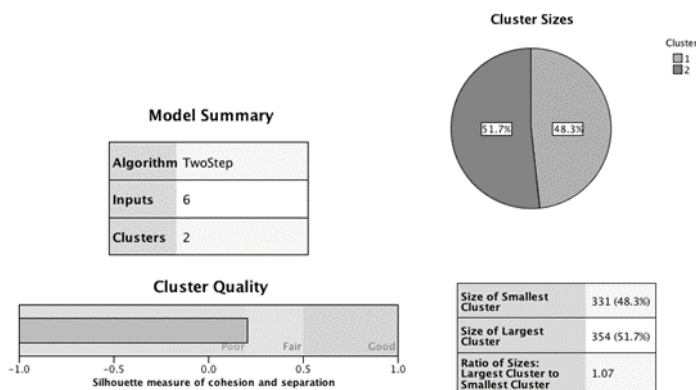
The main clustering analysis for the part of the survey on Economic Challenges reports a slightly fair cluster quality as can be seen in the model summary above. As a good rule of thumb the ratio of sizes is under three, more specifically 1.74, meaning that no cluster in the cluster set is more than 1.74 times as large as any other cluster. The cluster sizes shows the frequency of each cluster.

Segmentation based on opinions on P3: The region of the Balkans:



The main clustering analysis for the part of the survey on The Region of the Balkans reports a slightly fair cluster quality as can be seen in the model summary above. As a good rule of thumb the ratio of sizes is under three, more specifically 1.45, meaning that no cluster in the cluster set is more than 1.45 times as large as any other cluster. The cluster sizes shows the frequency of each cluster (40.9% and 59.1%).

Segmentation based on opinions on P4: Integrated destination of Western Balkans:



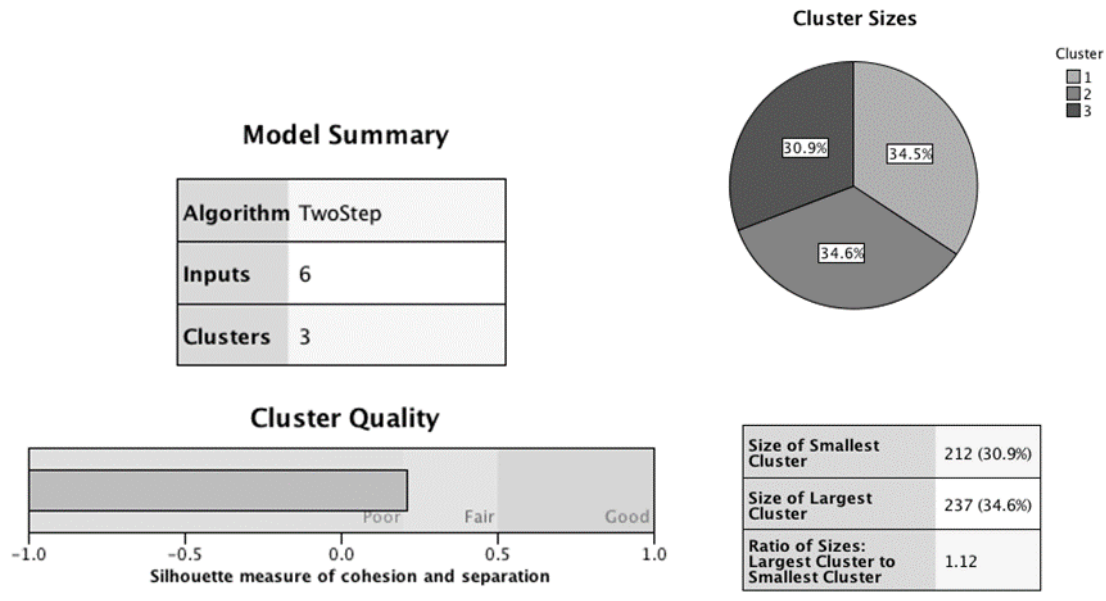
Clusters

Input (Predictor) Importance
 ■ 1.0 ■ 0.8 ■ 0.6 ■ 0.4 ■ 0.2 ■ 0.0

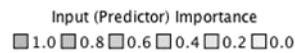
Cluster	2	1
Label		
Description		
Size	51.7% (354)	48.3% (331)
Inputs	ID_A regional economic area would be beneficial to tourism in all ...	ID_A regional economic area would be beneficial to tourism in all ...
	ID_A single investment space of WB, with harmonizing ...	ID_A single investment space of WB, with harmonizing ...
	ID_Regional stability will increase the attention and interest of huge ...	ID_Regional stability will increase the attention and interest of huge ...
	ID_Integration of Western Balkan countries will enhance ...	ID_Integration of Western Balkan countries will enhance ...
	ID_A six-country journey would be much more attractive and ...	ID_A six-country journey would be much more attractive and ...
	ID_There is a potential risk that the more stable touristic country (...)	ID_There is a potential risk that the more stable touristic country (...)
Evaluation Fields	Gender 1.30	Gender 1.26
	Age group 1.77	Age group 1.82

The main clustering analysis for the part of the survey on Integrated destination of Western Balkans reports a slightly fair cluster quality as can be seen in the model summary above. As a good rule of thumb the ratio of sizes is under three, more specifically 1.07, meaning that no cluster in the cluster set is more than 1.07 times as large as any other cluster. The cluster sizes shows the frequency of each cluster (48.3% and 51.7%).

Segmentation based on opinions on P6: Sustainability:



Clusters



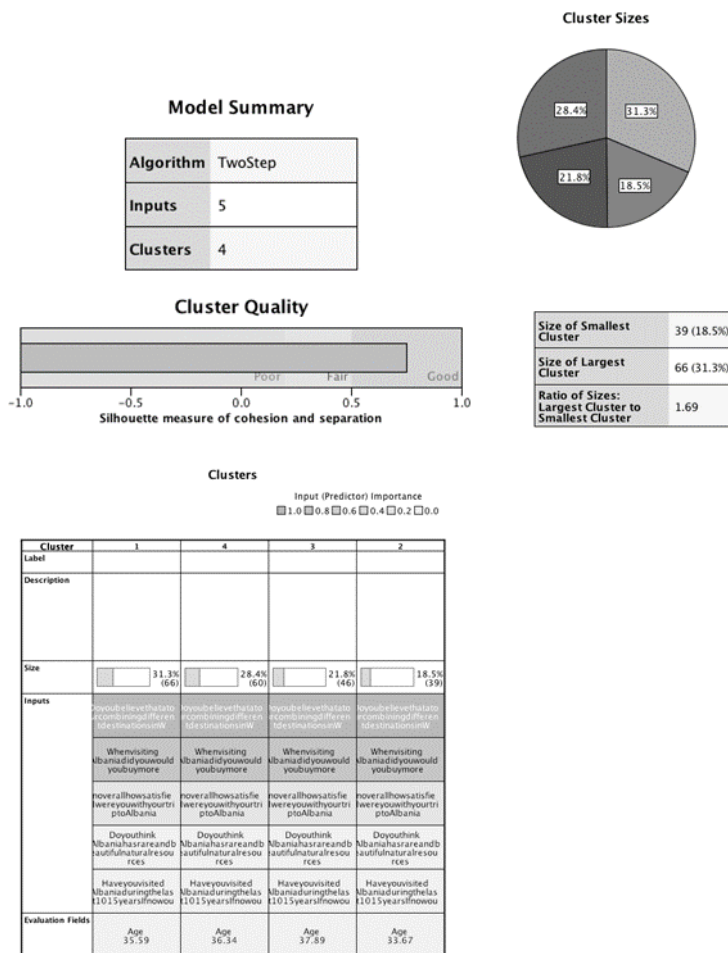
Cluster	2	1	3
Label			
Description			
Size	34.6% (237)	34.5% (236)	30.9% (212)
Inputs	SC_Invest in new technologies and education related to green development.	SC_Invest in new technologies and education related to green development.	SC_Invest in new technologies and education related to green development.
	SC_Engage to protect natural heritage and require the ...	SC_Engage to protect natural heritage and require the ...	SC_Engage to protect natural heritage and require the ...
	SC_Adapt to green growth and collaborate, in order to overcom...	SC_Adapt to green growth and collaborate, in order to overcom...	SC_Adapt to green growth and collaborate, in order to overcom...
	SC_Require that businesses and institutions employ social responsibility?	SC_Require that businesses and institutions employ social responsibility?	SC_Require that businesses and institutions employ social responsibility?
	SC_Promote the region as an integrated unique destination.	SC_Promote the region as an integrated unique destination.	SC_Promote the region as an integrated unique destination.
	SC_Promote eco-tours, combining destinations in WB and help dispers...	SC_Promote eco-tours, combining destinations in WB and help dispers...	SC_Promote eco-tours, combining destinations in WB and help dispers...
Evaluation Fields	Gender 1.26	Gender 1.29	Gender 1.29
	Age group 1.79	Age group 1.74	Age group 1.86

The main clustering analysis for the part of the survey on Sustainability reports a slightly fair cluster quality as can be seen in the model summary above. As a good rule of thumb the ratio of sizes is under three, more specifically

1.12, meaning that no cluster in the cluster set is more than 1.12 times as large as any other cluster. The cluster sizes shows the frequency of each cluster (30.9%, 34.5%, and 34.6%).

Internationals' sample

The international sample reports a good cluster quality as can be seen in the model summary below. As a good rule of thumb the ratio of sizes is under three, more specifically 1.69, meaning that no cluster in the cluster set is more than 1.69 times as large as any other cluster. The cluster sizes shows the frequency of each cluster (28.4%, 31.3%, 21.8%, and 18.5%).



Summary

The two-way cluster analysis did not provide much insights into the segmentation of the opinions from the national and international sample. There was overall no-good quality of the cluster groups. Further features of the clustering groups as can be seen in the graphs do not provide much intuitive interpretation given overlaps in opinions. Richer data on attributes would have provided finer separation and segments in opinions of respondents.

Biography of the Author

Arjana Kadiu was born in Albania in 1981. In 2003 she graduated from Tirana University, Faculty of Foreign Languages as an interpreter, and translator of German language. Later in 2010 she graduated with a Master of Science in Public Administration, from the Faculty of Economics in the University of Tirana. From that year on she has worked as a Lecturer in the Department of Public Administration in the University of Durres, “Aleksander Moisiu.” In the year 2019 Arjana obtained the degree of Master of Science in Marketing in Webster University in St. Louis, United States. Her field of expertise is Marketing, Sustainable Tourism development and Decision Making.

The author speaks three foreign languages, English, German, and Italian. She has worked on projects related to Tourism and its development in the country of Albania. She is a mother of three children and among many other things likes travelling and tourism.

The Author has contributed during the last years with the following publications and participation in International Conferences.

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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.

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Corporate and Business Strategy Review, 4(1), 22–30. <https://doi.org/10.22495/cbsrv4i1art2>

Declaration of Academic Honesty

I hereby declare on my word of honour that I created the thesis at hand independently, that I did not use any material other than the cited resources and that I marked all results created by somebody else, be they overtaken into my thesis word for word or by a matter of meaning, accordingly. I further declare that the thesis at hand was not submitted to any other institution (university, university of applied sciences, university of education, or other comparable institution) to obtain an academic degree.

Durres, 2024

Signature Ph.D. Candidate