

# Explaining sustainable-based tourism destination attractiveness through tourists changing travel behaviours and sustainable in-destination information

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** The exponential development of the tourism industry had the merit of significantly encouraging economic growth while at the same time contributing to the degradation of the ecological environment of many tourism locations. The tourism industry has an enormous opportunity cost in terms of the intensive use of natural resources and the squandering of the planet in its various aspects. Sustainable tourism development has aroused practitioners, policymakers, and academic communities' wide interest. Since it is not intended to dispense with tourism, it is necessary to operationalize it in line with respect for the environment. According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO, 2013) sustainable tourism fully considers its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities. The importance of sustainable tourism is highlighted in the 2030 United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development in its eighth, twelfth and fourteenth sustainable development goals.

Currently, there seems to be a change in societies' mindset towards environmental issues. People seem more aware of the consequences of planetary depletion in terms of climate change and health, and sustainability has become part of the dominant lexicon.

In this context, the sustainable development of a territory can be closely related to its tourist attractiveness. Although, the concept of destination attractiveness has been widely investigated (Formica & Uysal, 2006; Gu et al., 2022) it remains to explore the determinants of sustainable-based tourism destination attractiveness. A behavioural perspective of the interplay between demand and supply indicates that people travel because they are either "pushed" by tourism motivations (internal

and/or psychological forces) or “pulled” by external forces of the destination attributes (Uysal & Jurowski, 1994).

The purpose of the present research is to explore whether two internal factors – the availability to change travelling behaviours, in general, and the availability to engage in sustainable travels, in particular along with an exogenous factor – the availability of information about in-destination sustainable practices, would explain the sustainable-based tourism destination attractiveness.

**Methodology:** Data from 25711 participants from the 27 European Member States were used. The data were collected in October 2012 through the Flash Eurobarometer 499 – ‘Attitudes of Europeans towards Tourism’ (GESIS, 2022). The answers of four questions were used. The first question (question 1 of the survey) collected information about respondent’s availability to change their travelling behaviours through six items. The second question (question 5 of the survey) collected information concerning participant’s availability to engage in sustainable behaviours through nine items. The third question (question 7 of the survey) gathered respondent’s perception of available information concerning sustainable in-destination practices through six items. Finally, the last question (question 4 of the survey) collected participants’ interest in a destination through five items. The association between the first three variables (independent) and the fourth question (dependent) was explored through the application of the Partial Least Square method.

**Results:** In general, respondents from the European Union were not available to change their travelling behaviours, and regarding sustainable travels they revealed only some availability to consume local products, reduce waste and take holidays outside the high season. Respondents found it easy to obtain information concerning sustainable practices in the destination except for the footprint of transport options. Moreover, we find evidence that respondents’ availability to engage in sustainable travel ( $\beta = 0.179$ ;  $p \leq 0.001$ ), the availability of information ( $\beta = 0.07$ ;  $p \leq 0.001$ ), and their willingness to change travelling behaviours ( $\beta = 0.062$ ;  $p \leq 0.001$ ), were statistically significant in explaining the sustainable-based destination attractiveness.

**Originality:** This study reports the first evidence, using a large sample, of the relation of pushed factors, translated into respondents’ motivations to change travelling behaviours, in general, and to engage in sustainable travels, particularly, and information sources as determinants of sustainable-based destination attractiveness.

**Keywords:** *Sustainable Tourism; Sustainable development; Destination attractiveness; Travelling behaviours; Sustainable travels; Sustainable in-destination practices Information.*

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