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THE IMPACT OF GREEN TRANSPORT ON SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE STUDY OF RUGOVA, KOSOVO

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Abstract: This study aims to examine the impact of green transport on sustainable tourism development, focusing on the tourist destination of Rugova. Tourism is an important sector for economic development and environmental protection, and the use of sustainable transport has an important role in minimizing negative impacts on the environment and improving the quality of life for residents. This study will analyze the green transport practices that have been implemented in Rugova and will assess the impact of these practices on preserving natural resources, promoting eco-tourism, and improving the image of the destination as a sustainable place for tourists. The methodology used in this study will include analysis of primary and secondary data, including interviews with tourism industry stakeholders and representatives of transport institutions. Local policies and strategies that support the use of sustainable transport will also be examined. This study has shown that, although there is great support and significant potential for the development of green transport in Rugova, there are still major challenges that need to be addressed. The expected results will help identify opportunities and challenges related to the integration of green transport in the development of sustainable tourism in Rugova, providing recommendations for improving transport infrastructure and policies that support sustainable tourism development in the region. This study will contribute to the field of tourism and environmental management by providing an in-depth analysis of the impacts that green transport can have on sustainable tourism development, with a special focus on an important destination like Rugova.

Keywords: green transport, sustainable development, ecological tourism, Rugova, environmental management, sustainable infrastructure

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism has taken on particular importance in recent decades as one of the sectors with a major impact on the economic and social development of developing countries, including Kosovo. With the significant increase in the number of visitors and the intensification of tourist activities, it has become increasingly necessary for the development of this sector to be oriented towards the principles of sustainability. This approach includes not only protecting natural and cultural resources, but also ensuring long-term benefits for local communities, and future generations.

In this context, the concept of sustainable tourism has gained particular importance, being considered the most appropriate way to maintain the balance between economic development and environmental protection. One of the most important components that directly affects the sustainability of a tourist destination is transportation. Many of the negative impacts attributed to tourism, such as air pollution, noise, energy consumption, and damage to nature, are closely related to the way visitors move around. In this regard, green transportation represents a necessary and promising alternative, as it aims to reduce polluting emissions, and promote cleaner and more efficient forms of transportation. The use of electric vehicles, walking, bicycles, ecological public transport and infrastructure adapted to these forms represent strong foundations for the development of tourism that respects the environment and contributes to improving the quality of life in tourist areas. In Kosovo, the Rugova region is one of the most visited destinations due to its untouched nature, natural resources, and potential for various tourist activities such as hiking, climbing, skiing, and adventure tourism. However, the growing influx of tourists and the lack of adequate infrastructure for sustainable transport have brought a number of challenges that threaten the very ecological character of the area.

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The excessive use of private vehicles, the lack of alternative routes for bicycles or pedestrians, and the limited infrastructure for public transport are some of the main obstacles that make it necessary to explore opportunities for the development of a green transport system in this destination. This study aims to examine the impact that the implementation of green transportation can have on the preservation and long-term development of tourism in Rugova.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Theories on Tourism Development and the Role of Transport

Tourism development is a complex process influenced by a number of economic, social, technological and environmental factors. One of the most defining elements of this development is transport, which directly affects the accessibility of tourist destinations, the ease of movement of tourists and the experience they have during their visits.

Theories on tourism development have emphasized the importance of transport infrastructure in stimulating tourism growth and shaping the regional and global tourism map. Sustainable development theories have also included transport as an essential component in balancing economic growth with the conservation of natural resources and the interests of local communities. Within this framework, green transport – including the use of electric vehicles, bicycles, walking and low-emission public transport – is seen as an important strategy for reducing the negative impact of tourism on the environment and for promoting sustainable development. In line with this approach, the promotion of alternative forms of transport aims not only to limit pollution and preserve the natural landscape, but also to increase tourists' awareness of the way they travel and the impact they have on the environment they visit (Rohini & Meenakshi, 2024).

One of the greatest challenges that cities face today is reducing car use. An increasing amount of literature reports the damages that automobility is causing on planetary and human well-being. Automobility is a complex system that is difficult to disrupt due to economic, political, and cultural implications. However, the level of car use and its associated impacts largely differ from city to city, providing indications that there is there is at least the potential for reducing car use through overall strategies and targeted interventions (Mouratidis, 2025). Also, the concept of accessibility, as a key indicator in tourism development, is closely related to the state of transport infrastructure.

Accessibility refers to tourists' ability to reach a given destination, whereas connectedness relates to the network of links that allow people to travel between locations (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2020). Finally, the aforementioned theories demonstrate a broad consensus regarding the vital role that transport plays in shaping and advancing tourism. In the era of climate challenges and the transition to a greener economy, transport needs to be reconceptualized not only as a means of physical connectivity, but also as an instrument for promoting sustainable and responsible tourism. The transportation sector has played a significant role in the world's economy since the Industrial Revolution. It employs over eleven million people, making possible international trade (Maparu & Mazumder, 2017).

1.1. The Impact of Transport Infrastructure on Tourist Satisfaction

Tourist satisfaction is one of the most important indicators in the management and development of tourist destinations, as it directly affects the probability of visitors returning, the creation of the destination's reputation and the spread of good advertising through interpersonal communication or social media. One of the main factors that affects this satisfaction is the quality and functionality of the transport infrastructure. Accessibility, comfort, safety and duration of the trip are elements that shape the overall experience of tourists and determine how satisfied they feel with the trip and the destination.

Contemporary studies have shown that transport infrastructure, including roads, public transport services, stations, signage and information, has a direct impact on the perception that tourists form of a place. A modern and efficient infrastructure significantly improves the experience of movement and creates a sense of safety and comfort.

For example, in a study conducted in the European context, it was found that tourists traveling to countries with good infrastructure feel more satisfied, more oriented and less stressed during their stay (Cvelbar et al., 2021). One of the most prominent problems is the lack of integration between tourism planning and transport management. While regional development strategies emphasize tourism as a priority, coordination between tourism agencies and transport authorities remains weak, resulting in fragmented service delivery and inconsistent infrastructure development. Moreover, transport facilities often fail to meet the expectations of international and domestic tourists. Many local transport operators use outdated vehicles, offer irregular services, and lack multilingual support, which affects both safety and user experience. These deficiencies are particularly noticeable in rural areas where some of the region's most attractive tourist destinations are located but are poorly connected to the main transportation hubs (Tuychiyev, 2025). In contrast, the lack of adequate infrastructure – such as narrow and damaged roads, lack of well-maintained stations or unclear public transport schedules – creates delays, confusion and sometimes feelings of insecurity. These experiences negatively affect visitors' evaluation of the destination and may discourage them from returning or recommending the place to others. As Gokovali & Ozen (2019) point out, the quality of transport is a critical factor that influences tourists' overall experience and the image they form of the place they visit.

Infrastructure and management challenges in developing countries often lead to poor governance and environmental management, making it extremely difficult for them to pursue sustainable transport. Poor infrastructure contributes to a high number of accidents and higher mortality rates, indicating the need for better transport planning and better infrastructure management (Pallonetto, 2023). In addition, the lack of necessary transport infrastructure and planning leads to high traffic congestion, making it difficult to design infra-structure that can meet current needs (Kyriacou et al., 2019).

1.2. International Practices for Sustainable Transport in Tourism

Sustainable transport has become an essential component in the development of contemporary tourism, in response to the challenges of climate change, environmental pollution and infrastructure congestion in tourist destinations. To achieve

sustainable development goals, many tourist countries and cities around the world have begun to implement innovative policies and effective practices aimed at reducing the negative impact of transport on the environment and enhancing the tourist experience. One of the most widespread practices at the international level is the development of ecological public transport systems, which include the use of electric buses, renewable energy trams and low-carbon trains. For example, the city of Ljubljana in Slovenia has implemented a public transport model that uses electric vehicles and a system that prohibits private vehicles in the historic city center. This has led to a reduction in air pollution and increased the quality of the visitor experience in urban spaces (Rogelj & Knez, 2020). Walking has a wide range of benefits, resulting in happier communities, a greener environment and an improved economy. Some of its reported positive impacts on society are that it is good for health, reducing the risk of obesity and even reducing all-cause mortality, with just an 11-minute daily walk lowering it by 25% (Brownrigg-Gleeson et al., 2023). These international practices demonstrate that sustainable transport is not only an environmental necessity, but also an instrument to enhance the quality of the tourist experience. The integration of green technologies, good urban planning, visitor education and cooperation between the public and private sectors are the pillars that enable the successful implementation of these practices in any destination, including areas like Rugova in Kosovo. Sustainable transportation can only be strengthened and im-plemented through research, innovation, and investment in modern transportation systems. (Further-more, improvement of public transportation system and digital transportation services under the umbrella of sustainability are key to implementing sustainable mobility (Hoxha & Brahush, 2023).

2. Strategies for Ecological Transportation and Pollution Reduction

At a time when tourism is one of the most important economic sectors, it is essential that its development is carried out in a sustainable manner, minimizing the negative impact on the environment. Transport, as one of the main components of tourism, has a significant impact on air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, which contribute to climate change and the degradation of natural ecosystems. For this reason, many cities and countries have begun to develop strategies for ecological transport, with the aim of reducing pollution and protecting the one of the most popular and effective strategies is to integrate public transport with renewable energy. This includes the use of electric buses and trams that do not emit CO_2 emissions and can operate on renewable energy sources such as solar and wind. For example, Copenhagen is a model city for the use of electric buses, offering an extensive public transport network with clean energy that has helped reduce pollution and improved the quality of life for citizens and tourists. This has been achieved by investing in charging infrastructure and signing agreements with transport operators to ensure that the bus fleet is environmentally friendly (Gatersleben & Uzzell, 2019).

Another strategy to reduce pollution and promote green transportation is to use new technologies for traffic management and route optimization. With the help of artificial intelligence and traffic management technologies, some cities are able to monitor and manage the flow of vehicles and tourists in real time, ensuring that transportation runs efficiently and sustainably. This also helps reduce waiting times and pollution associated with heavy traffic (Gatersleben & Uzzell, 2019).

In conclusion, strategies for ecological transport and pollution reduction are necessary to ensure that tourism is developed in a sustainable manner and protected from negative impacts on the environment. Policies that promote the use of clean energy public transport, the development of infrastructure for charging electric vehicles, and the use of ecological vehicles are necessary to create a sustainable transport system in tourist destinations.

3. Green Transportation in Rugova: Challenge and Potential

Rugova, one of the most popular natural destinations in Kosovo, is known for its stunning landscapes and numerous opportunities for nature tourism. With a large number of visitors visiting this region to enjoy its natural beauties, the development of sustainable and ecological transport is essential for preserving the environment and maintaining clean air and water quality. However, the development of green transport in Rugova faces some obvious challenges, as well as having great potential to contribute to the sustainable development of tourism in this region.

One of the main challenges affecting the development of green transport in Rugova is the lack of suitable infrastructure for ecological transport. Currently, the transport infrastructure in Rugova is mainly based on traditional vehicles, which contribute to air pollution and are not suitable to support ecological transport, such as electric buses, electric bicycles and clean energy public transport (Kovaçi et al., 2023). Furthermore, Rugova has a great potential for the development of sustainable tourism and green transport through the use of natural resources and integrating them in a sustainable manner. The region has many opportunities to develop bicycle transport systems for tourists, connecting the main tourist destinations with dedicated bicycle routes. This could promote greater tourist mobility and contribute to the preservation of natural landscapes, as well as improving air quality (Tahiri et al., 2020). Another important challenge is the lack of funding and support from state and local institutions for the development of sustainable transport. To develop a green transport system, it is necessary to include clear policies and financial support from local and international institutions.

Therefore, green infrastructure needs to be integrated into streetscapes as cities move towards sustainability and resilience. Buildings should also be designed in a way that caters to all types of people who may want to access them via different modes of transport, including those that have not yet been invented (Jia et al., 2025). Ultimately, Rugova has tremendous potential to develop a sustainable transport model, which will enable tourism to develop sustainably, without harming nature and the environment for the future. This model could contribute to promoting Rugova as an ecological and sustainable tourist destination, and could offer great opportunities for economic development and nature protection.

4. Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Transport in Rugova

Rugova is a region rich in cultural and natural heritage, including historical monuments, natural landscapes and rich traditions that attract visitors from all over the world. Managing this cultural heritage is one of the main challenges for the development of sustainable tourism, considering the increasing number of tourists and the impact that this development can

have on the environment and the preservation of cultural assets. While sustainable transport is one of the best ways to minimize negative impacts on the environment and preserve cultural heritage, its development in Rugova is still in its early stages. Another important step is the cooperation between local and cultural authorities to create opportunities for ecological transport, which can serve to transport tourists through protected and cultural heritage areas.

In conclusion, Rugova has an extraordinary opportunity to develop a sustainable tourism model that will preserve the region's cultural and natural heritage, while promoting the use of clean and ecological transportation. This model could serve as an example for other regions of Kosovo and the Western Balkans, showing that tourism development and heritage preservation can go hand in hand, without endangering natural and cultural assets.

METHODOLOGY

1. Research Methodology

The research methodology of this study is designed to provide a comprehensive and reliable analysis of the impact of green transport on the sustainable development of tourism in Rugova, Kosovo. The primary objective is to examine how sustainable transportation contributes to environmental preservation and the enhancement of tourism development in the region. The study also considers the economic, social, and ecological dimensions of sustainability. To achieve these aims, a mixed-methods approach is applied, integrating both qualitative and quantitative research methods for data collection and analysis.

2. Sample selection

The target group for this study includes various stakeholders from the tourism, transport, and visitor sectors of the Rugova destination. The aim is to include individuals who can provide valuable information on perceptions and practices of green transport, as well as its impact on sustainable tourism development. The number of respondents included in the study is 95, who are divided into several specific groups representing the main stakeholders in the field. These groups include: local authorities (dealing with tourism and transport management), representatives of tourist agencies and transport companies, as well as visitors to the Rugova destination. This number of respondents was chosen to ensure sufficient representation and to enable the analysis of possible differences between different stakeholder groups.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Respondent Demographic Statistics

A total of 95 respondents were included in this research, who were purposefully selected to represent different visitors to the tourist destination of Rugova, with the aim of analyzing the impact of green transport on sustainable tourism development. Demographic data were collected through a questionnaire and include important variables such as gender, age, level of education, employment status, and place of residence of the respondents.

Regarding gender, of all respondents, 52 were male (54.7%) and 43 were female (45.3%). This distribution shows a relatively balanced gender representation, reflecting different attitudes towards the use of green transport, as presented in Figure 1. In terms of age groups, the majority of respondents were aged 21–30 (38%), followed by the 31–40 age group (27.3%), as shown in Figure 2. The 41–50 and over 50 age groups accounted for 18.9% and 15.8% of respondents, respectively. This indicates that the majority of participants are young and of working age, which may influence their perception of alternative transport use and environmental sustainability.

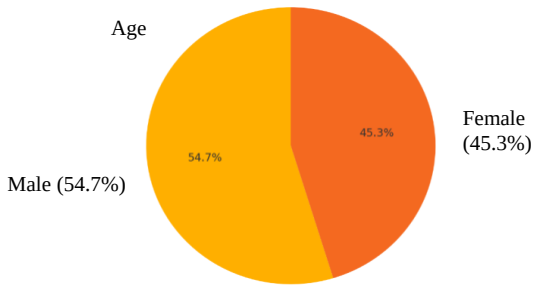

Figure 1. Demographic data of respondents by gender

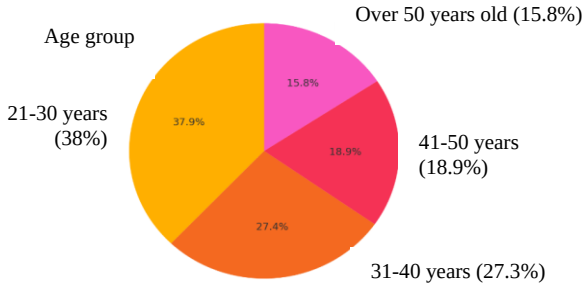

Figure 2. Demographic data of respondents by age group

(Source: According to research conducted by the author)

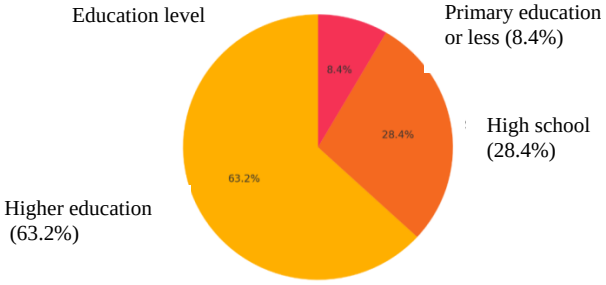

Figure 3. Demographic data of respondents by level of education

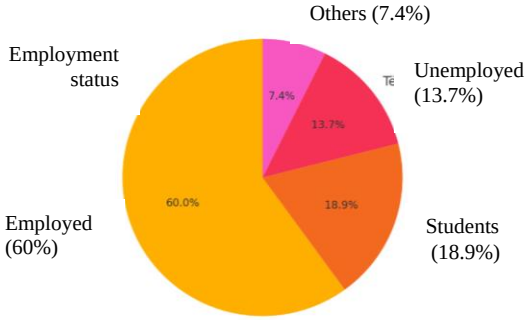

Figure 4. Demographic data of respondents by employment status

(Source: According to research conducted by the author)

Regarding educational level, 63.2% of respondents had completed higher education (bachelor or master's), while 28.4% had completed high school. Only 8.4% had primary education or less. This indicator is important as it is related to awareness of environmental and ecological issues, as illustrated in Figure 3. Regarding employment status, 57 respondents (60%) were employed, 18 (18.9%) were students, 13 (13.7%) were unemployed, while 7 (7.4%) were retired or had other status, providing a diverse mix of professional backgrounds. This diversity in professional status provides a variety of perceptions and attitudes regarding the opportunities and difficulties of using green transport in tourism, as shown in Figure 4. Geographically, 61% of respondents came from different municipalities in Kosovo, while 39% were tourists from abroad, mainly from Albania, North Macedonia, and Germany, as illustrated in Figure 5.

This distribution highlights the regional and international importance of Rugova as a tourist destination, as well as the potential impact of transport infrastructure on the tourist experience. The above demographic data help analyze respondents' perceptions and attitudes towards green transport alternatives and reinforce the importance of developing targeted strategies for different population groups visiting the Rugova tourist area.

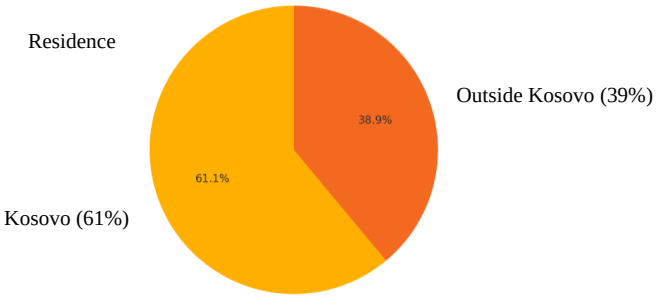

Figure 5. Geographic Affiliation (Source: According to research conducted by the Author)

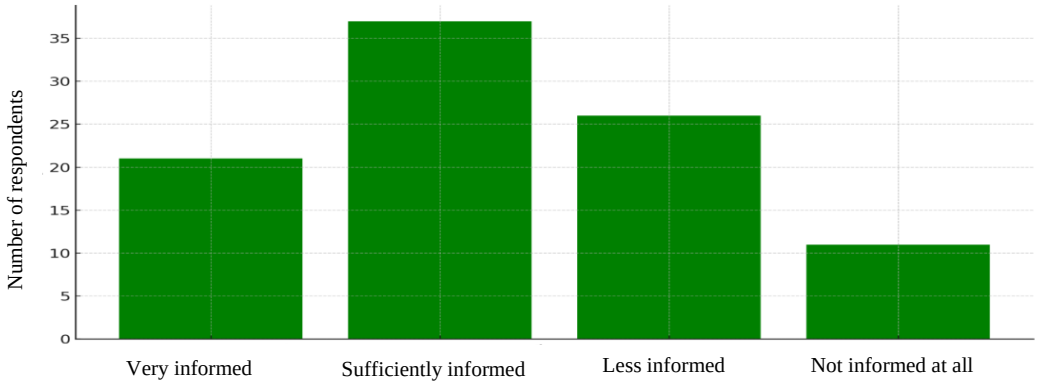

Figure 6. Information on green transportation (Source: According to research conducted by the author)

2. Results from Research Questions

The level of respondents' information about green transport is presented in Figure 6 below. As shown in Figure 6, the majority of respondents (61%) are informed or sufficiently informed about green transport, indicating increased awareness of environmental issues in tourism. This suggests that there is a solid foundation for promoting green transport initiatives and sustainable tourism practices in the Rugova region. The preferred forms of transportation among respondents are presented in Figure 7. As shown in Figure 7, 89.6% of participants would choose sustainable forms of transport if offered as a realistic option. This highlights the need to develop infrastructure for ecological transport in tourist areas such as Rugova.

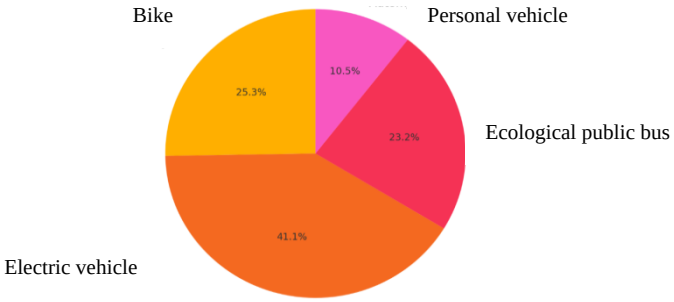

Figure 7. Preferred form of transportation (Source: According to research conducted by the author)

The perceived impact of transportation on the tourist experience is presented in Figure 8. As shown in Figure 8, a large proportion of respondents consider transportation to have a significant or very significant impact on their overall tourist experience. This indicates that transportation plays a key role in shaping visitors' satisfaction and perception of the destination.

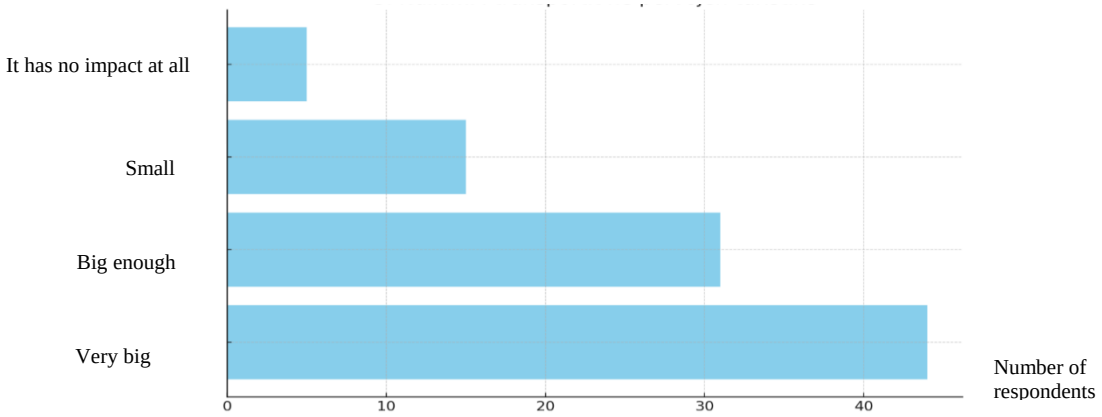

Figure 8. The impact of transportation on the tourist experience (Source: According to research conducted by the author)

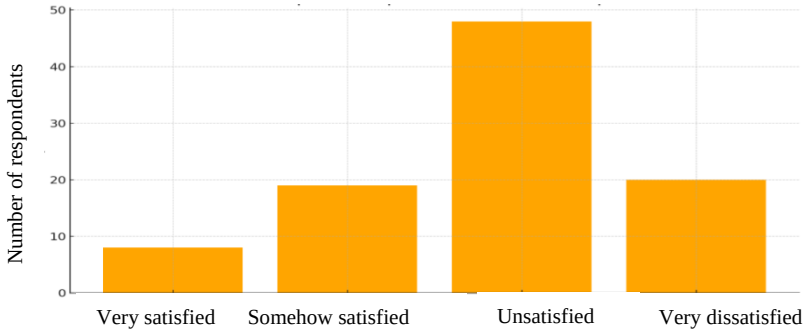

Figure 9. Satisfaction with current transportation options (Source: According to research conducted by the author)

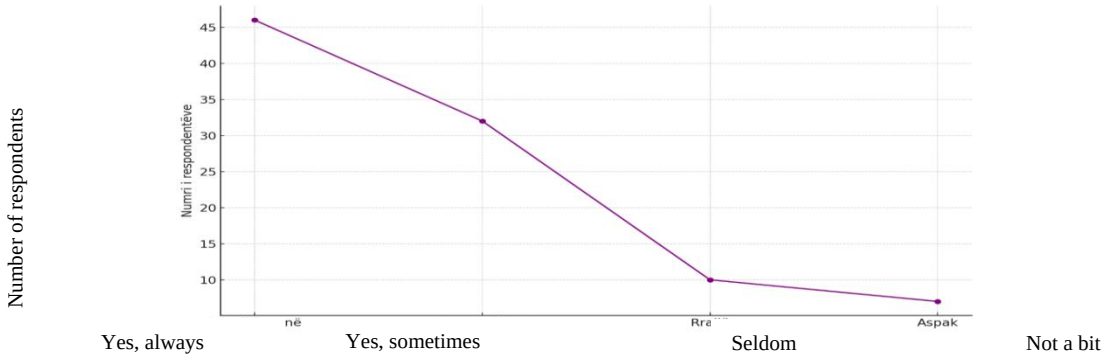

Figure 10. Use of ecological buses (Source: According to research conducted by the author)

The level of satisfaction with current transportation options is illustrated in Figure 9. As illustrated in Figure 9, a considerable number of respondents are dissatisfied or only somewhat satisfied with the current transportation options. This suggests that improvements in transport infrastructure are necessary to enhance the overall tourist experience in Rugova. The use of ecological buses among respondents is presented in Figure 10. As shown in Figure 10, the majority of respondents report that they use ecological buses either always or sometimes, while a smaller proportion rarely or never use them.

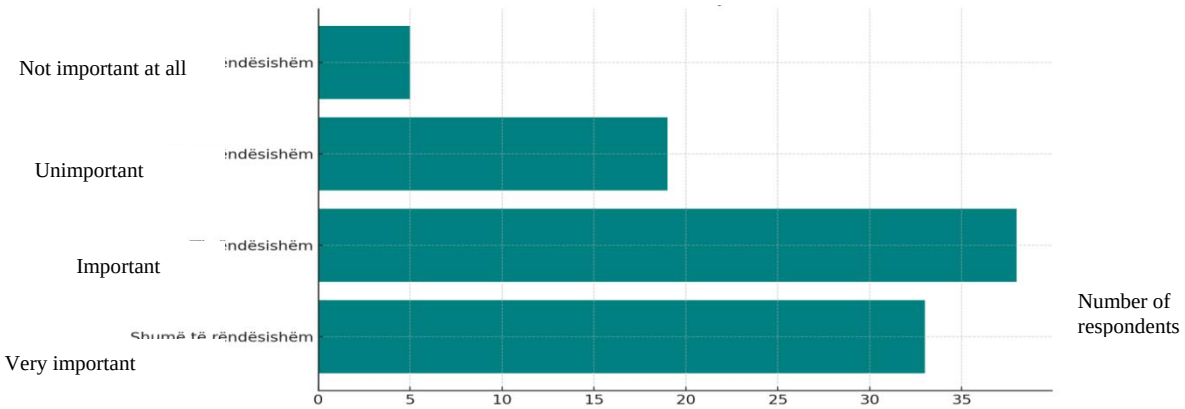

Figure 11. The importance of environmental factors in travel (Source: According to research conducted by the author)

This indicates a moderate level of adoption of environmentally friendly transport options, but also highlights the need for further promotion and accessibility of such services. The importance of environmental factors in travel decisions is illustrated in Figure 11. As illustrated in Figure 11, most respondents consider environmental factors to be important or very important when making travel decisions. This suggests a growing awareness of sustainability issues and supports the integration of environmentally friendly practices in tourism development.

The main factors influencing respondents' choice of transportation are presented in Figure 12, which shows the relative importance of cost, comfort, speed, and environmental impact.

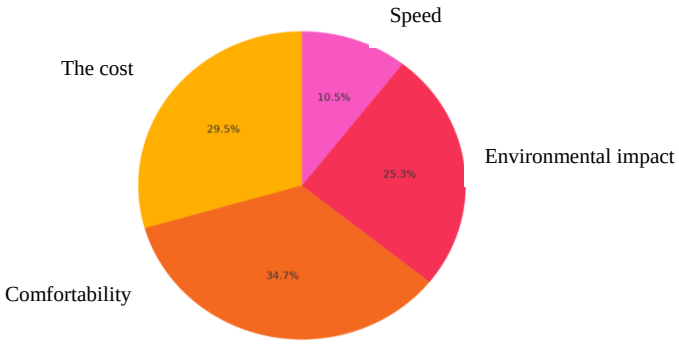

Figure 12. Main factor in choosing transportation (Source: According to research conducted by the author)

As shown in Figure 12, 82.1% of participants would use eco-friendly public transport lines if they existed. This supports the need for regular, comfortable and sustainable alternatives to private car use. A majority (74.7%) consider environmental aspects important when choosing transportation, reflecting increased awareness of the environmental impact of travel and supporting the promotion of ecological means. Although convenience and cost remain important factors in transportation choices, 25.3% of respondents still cite environmental impact as the main criterion, indicating that green transportation can gain more ground with institutional and infrastructural support. The results of the closed questions indicate a generally positive perception of the opportunities that tourism offers for the preservation of cultural heritage and sustainable development in Rugova. However, there are still some concerns regarding infrastructure, government policies, and balancing development with the preservation of traditions and the environment.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the impact of green transport on the sustainable development of tourism in Rugova, focusing on the potential ecological, economic, and social benefits that the implementation of sustainable transport can bring. Based on the research conducted and the analysis of the results, several key conclusions can be drawn.

First, the findings indicate strong support from both local residents and tourists for the development of green transport and the improvement of air quality in Rugova. The use of electric vehicles and environmentally friendly public transport is perceived as an opportunity to reduce pollution and create a cleaner environment for both visitors and the local community. However, the implementation of such transport systems requires stronger institutional commitment and more effective policy support, which currently remain limited.

Second, green transport has the potential to enhance the attractiveness of Rugova as a tourist destination, particularly for visitors who are increasingly interested in sustainable and ecological tourism. By promoting environmentally friendly transport solutions, Rugova can strengthen its position as an ecological destination and contribute to the broader development of sustainable tourism.

Third, despite the positive attitudes toward green transport, the study reveals that the existing infrastructure remains insufficient. The lack of appropriate facilities, such as charging stations for electric vehicles and dedicated bicycle paths, limits the widespread use of sustainable transport options. Therefore, infrastructure development is essential to fully realize the benefits of green transport.

Fourth, the level of awareness among both residents and tourists regarding the benefits of green transport remains relatively low. This represents a significant barrier to its wider adoption. Increasing awareness through educational campaigns and targeted information initiatives can play a key role in promoting the use of environmentally friendly transport.

In conclusion, while there is strong support and considerable potential for the development of green transport in Rugova, several challenges still need to be addressed. Improving infrastructure, strengthening policy frameworks, and raising public awareness are essential steps to fully unlock the potential of green transport and support the sustainable development of tourism in the region.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results achieved by this study, several recommendations can be offered for improving the implementation of green transport and sustainable tourism development in Rugova. First, it is essential that local and central authorities focus on creating a more sustainable and suitable infrastructure for the use of ecological means. Another important recommendation is to develop sustainable policies and strategies that support the use of green transport. This can be achieved by stimulating investments in ecological public transport and opportunities for the use of ecological personal

means, such as bicycles and electric vehicles. Finally, it is important to establish mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the impacts of implementing green transport in Rugova. This will help ensure that future strategies and policies are effective and enable the achievement of sustainable tourism development objectives.

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