

## THE ROLE OF TOURISM MANAGEMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN NATURE RESERVES IN HUNGARY

**Zsuzsanna IVANCSÓNÉ HORVÁTH** 

Széchenyi István University, Faculty of Business, Department of Tourism and Hospitality, Győr, Hungary, e-mail: ivancso.zsuzsa@sze.hu

**Marcell KUPI** 

Széchenyi István University, Faculty of Business, Department of Tourism and Hospitality, Győr, Hungary, e-mail: kupi.marcell@sze.hu

**Eva HAPP\*** 

Széchenyi István University, Faculty of Business, Department of Tourism and Hospitality, Győr, Hungary, e-mail: happ.eva@sze.hu

---

**Citation:** Ivancsóné Horváth, Z., Kupi, M., & Happ, E. (2023). THE ROLE OF TOURISM MANAGEMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN NATURE RESERVES IN HUNGARY. *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 49(3), 893–900. <https://doi.org/10.30892/gtg.49306-1090>

---

**Abstract:** The aim of the research is to reveal the opinion of regional professionals involved in the management of sustainable tourism and its three pillars. Through the results of 27 in-depth interviews with decision-makers and NGOs, we have explored the perceptions of the economic, environmental and social factors, both positive and negative, and the importance of each factor. The analysis of the results clearly shows a difference of opinion between decision-makers and NGOs. The negative impacts of tourism were highlighted by respondents, mainly in terms of the impact on the natural and economic environment, however, the positive impacts were more prominent. The research showed that the impacts on social environment were perceived more positively by respondents, and NGOs did not emphasise negative impacts in this category. The study shows that the role of tourism management in nature conservation areas is necessary and important for sustainable tourism development. The research clearly demonstrates that sustainability is an important issue in tourism. The results of the research also show that decision-makers are not familiar with the concept of sustainability, its precise content and their preparation and knowledge are insufficient to make the right decisions on the subject. The research shows that there is a shortage of professionals with expertise in tourism management, which makes it difficult to implement coordinated tourism development in the area under study.

**Key words:** sustainability, management, development, economic, social, environmental factors

\* \* \* \* \*

### INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the leading sectors of the world economy. It is very important for governments to enhance the economic, social and environmental benefits of tourism and to manage its negative impacts (Vargáné Csobán and Bauerné Gáthy, 2009). Strategic planning is also essential to meet the long-term requirements of sustainability. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly transformed tourism. After the general closures of the countries, a greater proportion of people chose domestic destinations for their travels, where they could relax in relative safety, avoiding mass tourism. Natural attractions and the types of tourism that can be linked to them - such as water tourism, cycle tourism, angling tourism, nature tourism and ecotourism - have been valorised during this period.

Although tourism can be an economic solution for local communities, it can also be an ecological threat to the environment (Filipiak et al., 2020). Thus, „proposals - using terms such as sustainable development, sustainable tourism, responsible tourism and ecotourism - to address these problems are being put forward in increasing numbers.” (Happ, 2014:90) The role of tourism can go well beyond travelling itself, helping to develop transport and other infrastructure and, overall, contributing to improving the quality of life of local people (Molnar and Stanciulescu, 2011). The Szigetköz is Hungary's largest island and Europe's largest inland delta, located between the Danube and the Moson-Danube.

Nowadays, the area is less explored by tourists and tourism is poorly organised. The development of tourism would be desirable for the people living there, but this can only be done in a sustainable way, bearing in mind the importance of nature conservation as well. In this study, we investigated the perception of the currently unorganised tourism and its sustainable development in the area by local decision-makers and NGOs, who are active in the nature reserve. The analysis was based on structured in-depth interviews with mayors and some of the key NGOs in the area. The questions were addressed in relation to the three pillars of sustainability - social, economic and environmental factors - keeping in mind the tourism potential of the municipalities and the organisation of tourism. The analysis of the questionnaire provided partly qualitative and partly quantitative results. Respondents also outlined specific problems and suggestions for solutions.

### 1. Literature review - Sustainable tourism

The idea of sustainable development first appeared in the 1970s. It was recognised that the three pillars of

---

\* Corresponding author

sustainable development (environment, society and economy) were interlinked and effective action can only be taken if considering them together (Happ, 2014:91). It was first attempted in the 1990s to define sustainable tourism. The first definition emphasises the optimal use of environmental resources, ensuring basic ecological processes and contributing to the preservation of natural heritage (WTO, 2004; Valánszki et al., 2017; Molnar and Stanciulescu, 2018). However, there is no single, universally accepted definition of sustainable tourism. According to Happ (2014:92), sustainable tourism comprehensively addresses the issue of sustainability in the economic, natural and cultural environment. However, the most important objective is economic sustainability, which can only be achieved if people pay attention to the sustainability of the other two pillars (nature, society) as well.

Sustainable tourism is a new approach to tourism development that focuses on the preservation of the ecological environment, the protection of cultural heritage, the promotion of community economies and social development (Chang et al., 2020). This model requires careful consideration of the impacts on ecology, culture and society in all aspects of tourism planning, management and operation to achieve a harmonious balance between tourism development, ecological conservation, cultural heritage preservation and community development (Sheller, 2021; Kim et al., 2019; Cheng et al., 2023).

Today, sustainability is becoming increasingly important in all areas of the economy. According to the European Tourism Indicator System (ETIS), published by the European Union in 2016, the competitiveness of the tourism sector is closely linked to its sustainability, as the quality of tourist destinations is strongly influenced by their natural and cultural environment and the attitudes of the local community.

In her paper, Happ (2014) has collected concepts that are often used synonymously with sustainability, but are quite different from it. One of these is ecotourism, which is very often identified with sustainable tourism or responsible tourism, but although these concepts are related, they are not entirely identical. Ecotourism is the type of environmentally friendly travel that is most concerned with reducing or even eliminating the negative impacts of tourism and maximising the positive environmental impacts (Dombay and Magyari-Sáska, 2008). Instead of sustainable tourism, sometimes the term soft/gentle tourism is used as well, which aims to protect the environment (which includes ecotourism), preserve social and cultural values and harmonise these with tourism. Responsible tourism is perhaps the least widely used concept (for the time being). It is rather an emerging concept of how tourism operators can play their part in taking responsibility for the environment. The most important difference between responsible tourism and the other two concepts is that it focuses on society as well, in addition to the economic and natural environment (Happ, 2014).

The sustainable nature of tourism has several components: responsible use of natural resources, consideration of the environmental impact of tourism activities (e.g. waste generation, negative impact on water, soil and biodiversity, etc.), use of renewable energy sources, protection of cultural heritage, preservation of the natural and cultural integrity of tourist destinations, quality and sustainability of jobs created in the sector, local economic impacts and, last but not least, the quality of hospitality. Territorial tourism development aims at the complex development of an important administrative or territorial area in territorial development terms. In addition to the direct and indirect economic benefits generated and induced by tourism, it aims to plan for, identify, measure, communicate and influence the direct and indirect impacts on society and the environment in the most favourable way possible.

In September 2015, the 193 member states of the United Nations adopted a new integrated sustainable development framework, the 2030 Agenda (officially known as Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development), which sets out a vision for ending poverty, tackling inequality and protecting the Earth's environment (The 2030 Agenda). One of the main features of the new framework is that it adopts a broader approach to sustainable development programmes, setting goals and targets for each country and regions, unlike previous development cooperation plans. At the heart of the Agenda, there are Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which apply to all nations and leave no-one behind.

The Agenda contains a total of 17 goals, 169 sub-goals and more than 230 indicators, which aim to measure and monitor several aspects of sustainable development until 2030 (Happ and Bolla, 2022). In order to ensure that sustainable tourism is not just an empty, generic term, it is necessary to measure and assess economic, social and natural changes in a specific area from time to time. Many organisations have tried to define a system of indicators for it (Hughes, 2002).

In 2004, the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) published a paper on the Indicators of Sustainable Development for Tourism Destinations (UNWTO, 2004). The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), established in 2010, aims to create and manage minimum sustainability standards that contribute to the objectives of the UN 2030 Agenda. The European Tourism Indicators System (ETIS), launched by the European Commission in 2016, is based on self-assessment through data collection, monitoring and analysis. Its aim is to provide a comparable method to help destinations to monitor the sustainable development of their tourism in a measurable way. The system consists of a set of basic and optional indicators. To date, the GSTC, which brings together representatives of specialised UN organisations, major tourism companies, national tourism organisations and the service sector, has developed two sets of criteria for hotels and tour operators on the one hand, and tourist destinations on the other. The latter defines priority areas along four axes, each of which is associated with measurable indicators (GSTC Destination Criteria, 2019).

- Effective, sustainable tourism management,
- Maximising economic benefits and minimising negative impacts on the host community,
- Maximising positive impacts and minimising negative impacts on the cultural values of the host community and visitors,
- Maximising positive impacts and minimising negative impacts on the environment

The acknowledgement and monitoring of these indicators is an essential task for decision-makers. Choosing the right indicators will draw attention to the problem in time (Sustainable, 2000). This is a particularly important task at a site that is largely consists of a nature conservation area and where tourism activities and opportunities are still only present scattered.

## 2. Szigetköz as a tourist destination

Szigetköz is the western gateway to Hungary for inbound tourism and could be a key area for active domestic tourism. However, it is currently under-explored in terms of tourism, which is very positive from a nature conservation point of view, but the development of tourism in a sustainable way would be necessary to improve the potentials of the people living in the area. Several studies have described tourism as a breakthrough for economically underdeveloped regions (Ryglová, 2007; Vargáné Csobán, 2010; Ivancsó-Horváth and Ercsey, 2016), especially in view of the fact that the 11 tourism areas defined in 2020 for Hungary, include the main settlements of the Győr-Pannonhalma region. The development of tourism in Szigetköz is desirable, as it is currently very poorly organised. However, development should only and exclusively move in the direction of sustainable tourism, which is only possible through conscious planning, as the positive impact of tourism on the economy can entail negative environmental and social impacts. A key issue for tourism development is to determine the carrying capacity of the area (i.e. the level of tourism that can be accepted) and to ensure sustainability. It is also important to inform and educate stakeholders, including tourists (Vargáné Csobán, 2010). In the case of Szigetköz, this is an indicator twice as important, because the area is a nature reserve.

Smart world can be the solution for a more sustainable tourism in the Szigetköz. In our opinion, sustainable ecotourism is the only way forward (Szabó et al., 2017; Raffay, 2017; Raffay and Márton, 2018). Szigetköz is becoming more and more popular among tourists - speaking about either cycling, water or other types of tourism. Active tourism has similar objectives to ecotourism, but while ecotourism is a site-specific tourism product (i.e. it is defined by the natural features of the area visited), active tourism is activity-specific (i.e. it is defined by the activities carried out by the tourist). Active tourism requires active physical and mental participation, regardless of the destination visited. Thus, while ecotourism can only be described in 'undisturbed natural environments', participation in active tourism is also possible in natural environments, just as in the middle of the 'urban jungle' (Happ, 2019).

The entire territory of the Szigetköz is protected, and in some places it even has strictly protected nature reserves, and therefore tourism development should place great emphasis on sustainability and its measurability, as tourism can pose risks to nature conservation. However, with appropriate regulations these risks can be minimised. The principles of sustainable tourism are summarised in the Handbook of Good Practice on Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas (2018):

1. Refers to travel to destinations with natural values.
2. Minimises interference: in general, tourism causes damage.
3. Develops environmental awareness: sustainable tourism is a learning experience for tourists and residents of the communities concerned.
4. Provides direct financial revenues for conservation: sustainable tourism should financially support environmental protection, research and education.
5. Provides income for local people: it involves stakeholders, including local and indigenous communities, ensuring their participation in tourism planning, development and operations.
6. Respects local culture: sustainable tourism respects local cultures and has minimal impact on both the natural environment and the population of the host country.

Ongoing monitoring ensures that sustainability issues are identified in a timely manner and appropriate interventions can be made. Sustainable tourism is a challenge for tourists, local communities, businesses and other stakeholders alike. However, if properly managed, it generates direct income for local citizens and supports conservation and environmental efforts.

Monitoring should define the purpose of the observation, the needed information, the location, timing, duration as well as the possible repetition of the monitoring (Figure 1). The survey of opinions and attitudes can be directed at tourists, local decision-makers, residents, businesses, or other organisations. The study of spatial distribution can be used to analyse the movement of tourists, to identify spatial preferences, recreational use of areas, trails. In addition to knowing the opinion of tourists and local communities, an important objective is to influence the behaviour of visitors and to expand the tourist space used. Once the trails and service needs have been identified, a unified Szigetköz-wide tourism application can be developed, which will also help to promote sustainability along all three pillars.

## RESEARCH METHODS

In our work, we first conducted a literature review and then primary research, during which we used qualitative research, structured interviews to analyse the opinions of local decision-makers and major NGOs on sustainable tourism, considering that the study focuses on a kind of baseline, since - as previously described - tourism is currently still on a very low level in the area and only organised scattered.

The survey was conducted in the summer of 2021. In the territorial delimitation of the Szigetköz, 26 municipalities were defined (the administrative area of the 26 municipalities is about 50 748 hectares, with a population of almost 40 000 inhabitants). 17 mayors responded to our structured interview. This is equivalent to a 65% response rate.

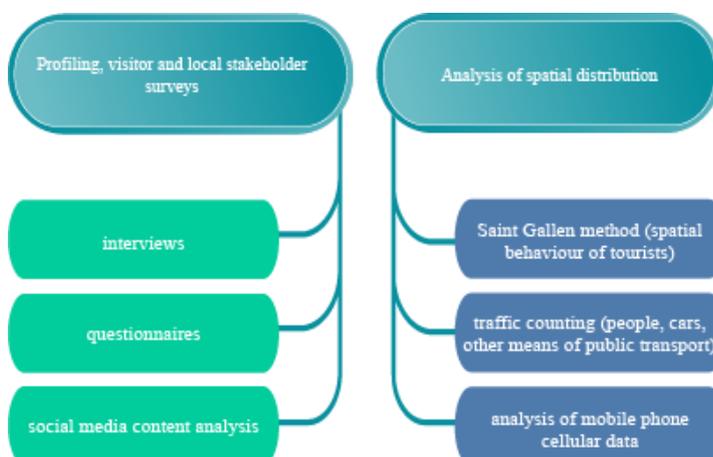


Figure 1. Possible monitoring methods (Source: Authors illustration)

Table 1. In-depth interview questions by topic (Source: Authors illustration)

Research of the settlement	Pontetial development of tourism types	Health tourism, ecotourism, rural tourism, equestrian tourism
	Presence of a tourism professional/expertise	Employment, tourism development plan, tenders, development concepts
Identifying problems	Territorial delimitation	Economic, social, environmental
Sustainability	Interpretation presence	Projects implemented, working groups, infrastructure
Economy	Infrastructure, income situation, black economy, traditional economy	
Social	Seasonality of employment, living standards, services	
Environmental	Natural and built environment, flora and fauna, infrastructure	
Cooperation	Relations between NGOs and local authorities	

In addition to the mayors, 10 representatives of major NGOs, who are active in the area (nature conservation, water sports, fishing, tourism, education), responded to our request. The analysis was based on 27 structured in-depth interviews with mayors and NGO leaders. In part of the questions, there were stern differences in the answers of the two groups of respondents, so the answers are presented in a split format. The questions were formulated in relation to the three pillars of sustainability - social, economic and environmental factors - and the tourism potential of the municipalities and the organisation of tourism (Table 1).The analysis of the questionnaire provided partly qualitative and partly quantitative results. Respondents also outlined specific problems and suggestions for solutions. The questions were asked separately to assess opinions on economic, environmental and social factors, both positive and negative, and the importance of each factor. We used 7 point scales for the measurement. Descriptive statistics were used for analysis (Figure 2).

**RESULTS**

The analysis of in-depth interviews shows that, although all respondents consider tourism and tourism development to be really important at the moment, and that the development plans of the municipalities include plans for tourism development and sustainability, none of the municipalities specifically employs a tourism professional and 60% do not even plan to employ a professional in the future. The employment of a tourism professional would be justified by the fact that all but one of the responding municipalities either currently have a tourism tender running or have participated in one lately. The respondents would like to see developments in tourism and other areas, which are in line with the expectations of local residents and the natural environment; which are not damaging to the environment; and which can be economically sustainable.

Sustainability of tourism is considered important, but most respondents only associated sustainability with renewable energy and selective waste collection.

Respondents were also asked to assess the economic, social and environmental dimensions of their own municipality and its immediate surroundings, and to say what problems they see. On the economic dimension, most respondents mentioned the lack of accommodation, restaurants and joint programmes with other municipalities. Lack of cell service in economic areas is a serious economic handicap as well. Several people mentioned the need for a unified image design and a unified tourism application presenting the area. In the social dimension, difficulties with medical care was mentioned, as well as either the lack of tourists or too many tourists in certain areas. In the environmental dimension, waste disposal

and management, and the poor state of cycle paths were mentioned by almost all mayors. In some places, water pollution from industrial sites is also a problem. All of the mayors have tried to solve these problems, but with one or two exceptions, they have not succeeded in making a difference, only small steps have been taken. Some of these are infrastructure improvements: solar panels, green space maintenance, selective waste collection, community garbage collection, tree planting, or e-bike charging stations. All of the responding municipalities have a wastewater network, municipal and selective waste collection, but waste treatment is only provided in two of them. Waste collection is organised at the excursion sites, but littering was described as a very serious problem, which they are currently unable to deal with. However, all but one of the public buildings are equipped with solar panels. Our questions focused on the positive and negative economic, environmental and socio-cultural impact of tourism as well. These factors were examined not only in the case of mayors, but also in the case of local NGOs, which provided an opportunity to compare opinions. We calculated the means and variances of the factors measured on a scale of 1-7. In the ranking of averages, the different dimensions were treated separately in order to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the specificities of each area.

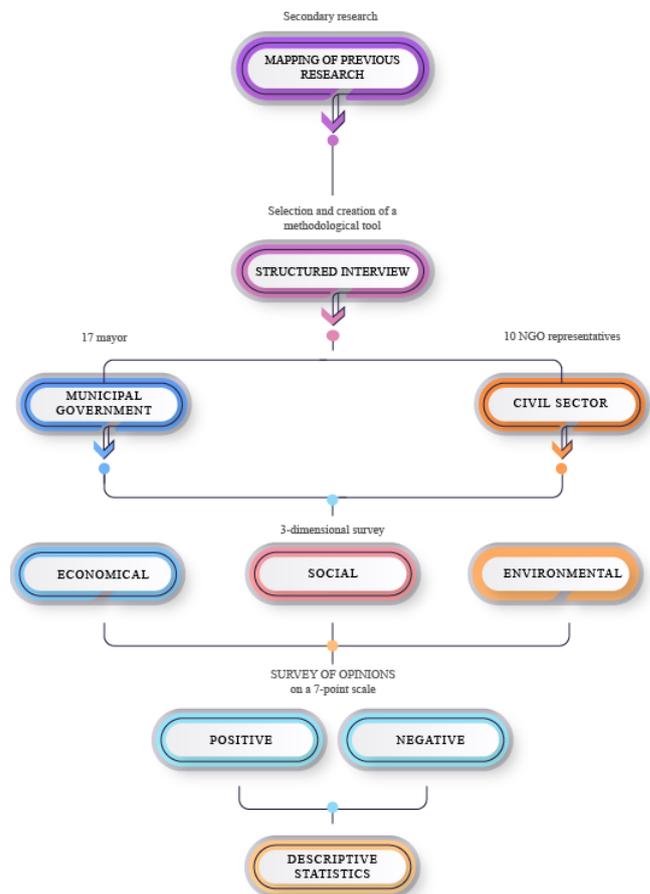


Figure 2. Flowchart of our research (Source: Authors illustration)

**Results of the analysis of the economic dimension**

First, we looked at the positive economic dimensions of tourism. The mean value of the responses given by the representatives of the municipalities shows that the municipalities' leadership focuses primarily on reducing the disparities in territorial development ( $\bar{x} = 5,21$ ;  $\delta = 0,91$ ) and on economic restructuring ( $\bar{x} = 4,00$ ;  $\delta = 1,69$ ). The strength of the response to reducing the disparities in territorial development is so consistent that the variance is the lowest. For NGOs, other factors have more priority. For them, job creation ( $\bar{x} = 5,89$ ;  $\delta = 1,05$ ) and income generation ( $\bar{x} = 5,67$ ;  $\delta = 1,22$ ) are the most important factors. This is understandable, as they approach the economic dimension from a different angle, prioritising the problems of the ordinary people more, while local authorities focus on problems at a regional level.

As regards to the potential negative economic impacts of tourism (Figure 3), we can also see a diversity of approaches between the different stakeholders. The responses from local authorities show that they prioritise the impact of inflation ( $\bar{x} = 4,29$ ;  $\delta = 1,98$ ), the cost of remedying the negative effects ( $\bar{x} = 4,36$ ;  $\delta = 2,21$ ) and the disappearance of traditional economic activities ( $\bar{x} = 4,21$ ;  $\delta = 2,04$ ). In contrast, the civil sector expressed a dominant concern about the emergence of seasonal employment ( $\bar{x} = 5,22$ ;  $\delta = 1,72$ ) and the cost of removing harmful impacts ( $\bar{x} = 4,88$ ;  $\delta = 2,10$ ).

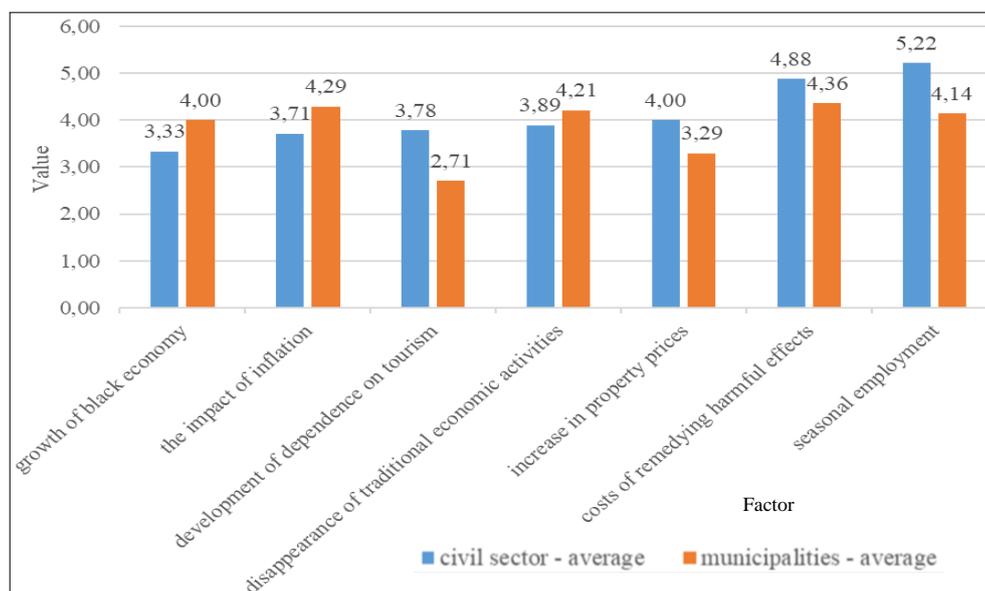


Figure 3. Perception of each negative economic factor (Source: Authors illustration)

**Results of the analysis of the environmental dimension**

Taking into account the positive environmental impacts that tourism may create or enhance (Figure 4), there is greater agreement between the two parties. The averages closely tied to each other, with minimal differences, highlighting important factors such as preserving the values of the built environment, building and developing infrastructure, or improving the quality of the natural environment. However, there is less emphasis (also with a consensus) on the designation of natural areas as protected areas, which scores below 5.00 for all stakeholders. Even more striking is the one factor that breaks the understanding: on the local government side, the sample saw a strong potential for change in land use patterns ( $\bar{x} = 5,06$ ;  $\delta = 1,76$ ), while the sample of NGOs and businesses rated it much lower ( $\bar{x} = 3,33$ ;  $\delta = 1,22$ ).

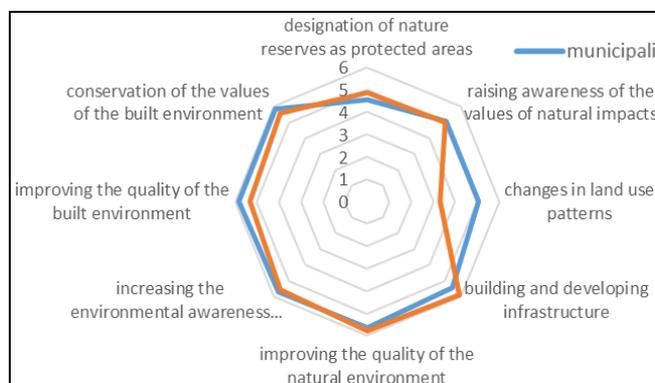


Figure 4. Perception of each positive environmental factor

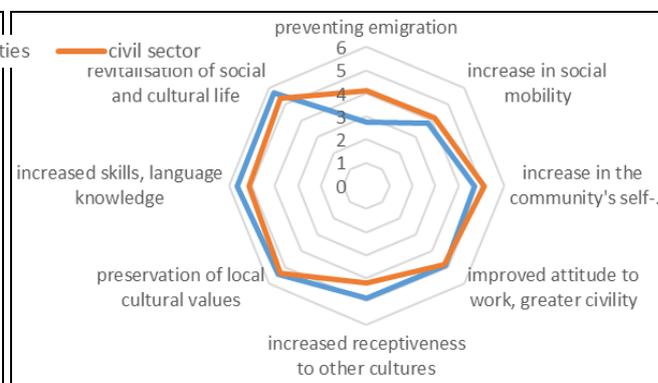


Figure 5. Perception of each positive social factor (Source: Authors)

However, the perception of negative potential is less similar. On some issues, civilians are more concerned. These factors include increased waste production and littering ( $\bar{x} = 6,00$ ;  $\delta = 0,86$ ), and damage to flora and fauna ( $\bar{x} = 5,44$ ;  $\delta =$

1,13). Municipalities also think that it would be worthwhile to monitor the potentially increased waste problem ( $\bar{x} = 5,31$ ;  $\delta = 1,70$ ), but visual pollution was identified as the second most serious among potential problems ( $\bar{x} = 4,88$ ;  $\delta = 1,63$ ).

Also measured on the dimension of environmental factors, we investigated the importance that respondents attach to the creation of tourism brands that guarantee high quality and environmentally friendly services in order to achieve sustainable tourism. Municipalities seem to be more keen to introduce these labels. The responses show a difference of about one and a half mean values: on the municipal side, the difference is  $\bar{x} = 6,06$ ;  $\delta = 1,88$ , while on the civilian side it is  $\bar{x} = 4,63$ ;  $\delta = 1,68$ .

There is also a large difference in the extent to which respondents believe that sustainable tourism requires the influence of formal regulations, ordinances and standards on tourists. The representatives of local authorities gave an average score of 5.75 ( $\delta = 1.80$ ), despite the fact that the additional work for this solution would be primarily carried out by them. The civil sector rated the importance of the issue lower ( $\bar{x} = 4,55$ ;  $\delta = 1,74$ ).

**Results of the analysis of the social dimension**

The results of the average analysis of the positive social impacts of tourism show that respondents are optimistic about these factors and would like to count on almost all positive benefits, such as preventing emigration and increasing social mobility, an increase in the community's self-esteem in relation to their place of residence, an improvement in attitudes to work, a strengthening of civility, the preservation of local cultural values, the upgrading of skills and language knowledge, and a revitalisation of social and cultural life. In the case of social issues, NGOs are more optimistic about the potential positive effects. This is demonstrated by the fact that the average score for each factor is higher than 4.00 and that there is not much variation between their responses. On the other hand, local governments assigned significantly lower values to factors like increasing social mobility ( $\bar{x} = 3,80$ ;  $\delta = 2,21$ ) and preventing emigration ( $\bar{x} = 2,75$ ;  $\delta = 2,40$ ).

The responses are the most unanimous in the case of preserving local cultural values and improving attitudes to work. Although these do not represent the highest averages, the difference between the two is markedly low. As can be seen on Figure 5, the upgrading of skills and language knowledge is an expectation from tourism development that is important for both municipalities and civilians. Speaking of the negative factors, the differences were significantly lower (Figure 6). It is reassuring to note that in the case of tourism development, operators assigned particularly low averages to the negative factors (below 3.80). This alone shows that they have positive expectations for tourism.

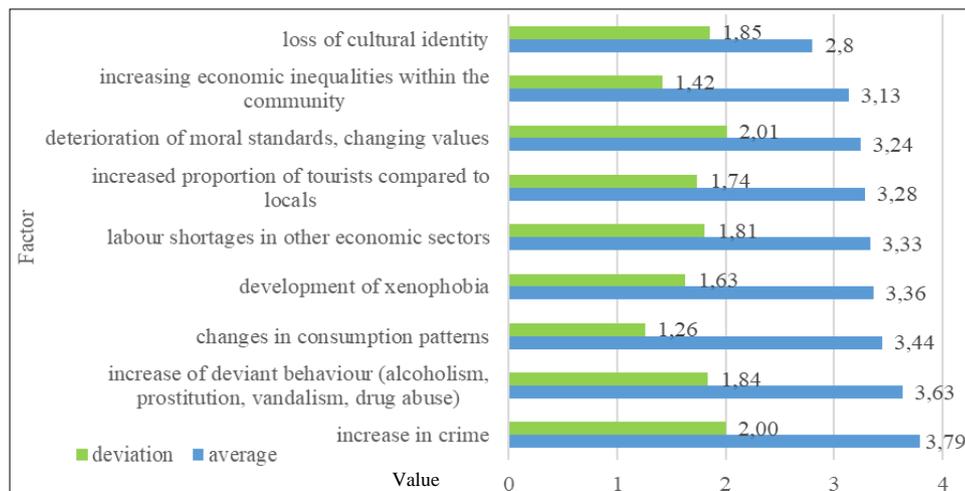


Figure 6. Perception of each negative social factor (Source: Authors illustration)

The social question - on the importance of consultation with local stakeholders and NGOs for the development of sustainable tourism - was answered with a mean value of 6.38 ( $\delta = 1.05$ ) by the local government, while NGOs rated it at 5.00 ( $\delta = 1.80$ ). A slight difference was found in the answers on the importance of cooperation between tourism businesses, local residents and municipalities at local level for the development of sustainable tourism. In this case, an overall mean of 6.88 (and  $\delta = 0.35$ ) was obtained from municipal leaders, while an overall mean of 6.33 (and  $\delta = 0.87$ ) from civil leaders.

Respondents had the unanimous opinion that tourism development, despite its negative effects, is important.

**Issues raised by respondents**

After the scaling questions, we also asked an open-ended question from respondents, to describe any problems, which had not been mentioned before, but they considered important and needed to be improved. Here, more specific information emerged that stakeholders would investigate and develop to take tourism to a higher level, but some people mentioned elements that had been investigated previously.

These were: lack of a coherent image design; tackling the problem of littering; water pollution; poor quality of the cycle paths; lack of cell service; lack of restaurants and accommodations; lack of marinas, slipways; construction and marking of hiking trails; lack of a visitor centre; lack of a uniform tourist app for Szigetköz; drastic increase in prices; many foreign settlers; definition of territorial 'carrying capacity' for different modes of transport; lack of medical practices

## DISCUSSION

Sustainability has become a central issue in all sectors, including tourism, in recent years. Based on current trends in tourism, it is clear that the demand for sustainable tourism, linked to protected natural values, has increased dramatically (Borzán and Szekeres, 2021). The issue of sustainability is particularly important in an area where tourism can be a breakthrough for the population, but development can only be achieved in harmony with nature. In our work, we investigated the opinions on sustainable tourism development in the Szigetköz, an unexplored area with great potential for ecotourism, by interviewing the mayors of the municipalities and the leaders of major NGOs (in the fields of nature conservation, water sports, fishing, tourism, education). The sustainable development of tourism is a vital issue in the region, as nowadays, in addition to tourism, commuting to the two major cities of Győr and Mosonmagyaróvár and the proximity of the border to Austria provide jobs for a large part of the local population. Our research reveals that municipalities lack the professional staff and specific knowledge to manage tourism development in an effective, professional and coordinated way.

The results of the in-depth interviews show how respondents from municipalities and NGOs, who are involved in tourism, perceive each of these issues. The positive and negative aspects of the economic, environmental and social factors are summarised in a graph (Figure 7), which also shows the differences of opinion between decision-makers and NGOs. For social factors, the negative factors scored so low that it was only worth mentioning two factors by decision-makers.



Figure 7. Highlighting and comparing the main positive and negative elements for the different respondents Source: Authors illustration based on interviews

Respondents were unanimous in their opinion that tourism, despite its negative effects, is important to develop.

Our secondary and primary research results clearly show that the role of tourism management is necessary and important for sustainable tourism development in nature conservation areas such as the Szigetköz.

## CONCLUSION

Our work clearly shows that, although sustainability is an important issue in all industries, including tourism, decision-makers are not sufficiently prepared and knowledgeable to make decisions related to sustainability, and most of them do not even know the exact meaning of sustainability. It was also found that, although there is a great potential for tourism development in the Szigetköz, there are no professionals trained in tourism management in the municipalities, making it difficult to develop tourism in a coordinated and professional way in the 26 municipalities of the Szigetköz. The limitation of the research is that the mayors are less informed about tourism and sustainability based on the in-depth interviews. This may be a limitation not only for the research, but also for sustainable tourism development. In terms of future research directions, it is important to also examine the public's opinion on tourism development directions with a focus on sustainability.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, ZS.I.H. and E.H.; methodology, ZS.I.H. and E.H.; software, ZS.I.H. and M.K.; validation, ZS.I.H. and M.K.; formal analysis, ZS.I.H. and M.K.; investigation, ZS.I.H., M.K. and E.H.; data curation, ZS.I.H. and M.K.; writing - original draft preparation, ZS.I.H. and E.H.; writing - review and editing, Zs.I.H. and E.H.; visualization, M.K.; supervision, E.H. project administration, E.H. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** Not applicable.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:** The data presented in this study may be obtained on request from the corresponding author.

**Acknowledgments:** The research undertaken was made possible by the equal scientific involvement of all the authors concerned.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## REFERENCES

- Borzán, A., & Szekeres. (2021). A hazai fenntartható turizmus támogatási formái [Forms of support for sustainable tourism in Hungary]. *Polgári Szemle*, 17. évf. 1–3. 78–94. <https://doi.org/10.24307/psz.2021.0707>
- Chang, C.L., McAleer, M., & Ramos, V. (2020). A Charter for Sustainable Tourism after COVID-19. *Sustainability*, 12, 3671. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12093671>
- Cheng, Y., Zhu, K., & Zhou, Q., El Archi, Y., Kabil, M., Remenyik, B., & Dávid, L.D. (2023). Tourism Ecological Efficiency and Sustainable Development in the Hanjiang River Basin: A Super-Efficiency Slacks-Based Measure Model Study. *Sustainability*, 15, 6159. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15076159>
- Dombay, I., Magyar-Sáska, Z.S., & László, P.S. (2008). *Ökoturizmus. Elmélet és gyakorlat [Ecotourism. Theory and practice]* Kolozsvári Egyetemi Kiadó, Kolozsvár.
- Filipiak, B.Z., Dylewski, M., & Kalinowski, M. (2020). Economic development trends in the EU tourism industry. Towards the digitalization process and sustainability. *Qual Quant*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-020-01056-9>
- GSTC (2019). Destination Criteria. <https://www.gstcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/GSTC-Destination-Criteria-v2.0.pdf>
- Happ, É. (2014). Fenntartható turizmus és felelősségvállalás [Sustainable tourism and responsibility]. *Gazdaság És Társadalom*, 1, 90–101., <https://doi.org/10.21637/gt.2014.1.07>
- Happ, É. (2019). Középpontban az aktív és az ökoturizmus: Elméleti összefoglaló [Focus on active and ecotourism: a theoretical summary]. *Lépések: A Fenntarthatóság Felé*, 24(2), 14–15.
- Happ, É., & Bolla, V. (2022). A Theoretical Model for the Implementation of Social Sustainability in the Synthesis of Tourism, Disability Studies, and Special-Needs Education. *Sustainability* 14(3), 1700. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14031700>
- Hughes, G. (2002). Environmental indicators. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 29(2), 457–477. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0160-7383\(01\)00071-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0160-7383(01)00071-8)
- Ivancsó-Horváth, Z., & Ercsey, I. (2016). A regional-based analysis of angling tourism. *International Leisure Review*, 71–98.
- Kézikönyv a fenntartható turizmus jó gyakorlatáról védett területeken, [Handbook on good practices in sustainable tourism in protected areas] (2018). <https://programme2014-20.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/Handook-Sustainable-Tourism-HU-CEETO-Interreg.pdf>
- Kim, S., Whitford, M., & Arcodia, C. (2019). Development of intangible cultural heritage as a sustainable tourism resource: the intangible cultural heritage practitioners' perspectives. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 14(5–6), 422–435. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1743873x.2018.1561703>
- Molnar, E., & Stanculescu, G.C. (2011). What Future for Tourism in the Cold Region Environments? *Annals of Faculty of Economics*, University of Oradea, Faculty of Economics, 1(1), 268–275.
- Molnar, E., & Stanculescu, G.C. (2018). *European Implication In the Development of Sustainable Tourism in the Black Sea Basin*. 5th International Multidisciplinary Scientific Conference on Social Sciences and Arts SGEM 2018, 26 August - 01 September, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.5593/sgemsocial2018/1.4/S04.035>
- Raffay, Z. (2017). *Lehet-e az ökoturizmus a magyar vidék dinamizálásának eszköze? [Can ecotourism be a tool for the dynamism of the Hungarian countryside?]* In: Erdős, Katalin; Komlósi, Éva (szerk.) Tanítványaimban élek tovább. Emlékkötet Buday-Sántha Attila tiszteletére Pécs, Magyarország: PTE KTK Regionális Politika és Gazdaságtan Doktori Iskola (2016), 207–221.
- Raffay, Z., & Marton, G. (2018). *Fenntarthatóság a magyar turizmusban - hozzáállás vagy marketingfogás? [Sustainability in Hungarian tourism - dynamism or marketing?]* In: Józsa, László; Korcsmáros, Enikő; Seres, Huszárik Erika (szerk.) A hatékony marketing: EMOK (2018) Nemzetközi Tudományos Konferencia konferenciakötete Komárno, Szlovákia: Selye János Egyetem, 667–677.
- Ryglóvá, K. (2007). Limiting factors in the field of business activities in rural tourism. *Agricultural Economics (Zemědělská Ekonomika)*, 53(9), 421–431. <https://doi.org/10.17221/628-agriceon>
- Sheller, M. (2020). Reconstructing tourism in the Caribbean: connecting pandemic recovery, climate resilience and sustainable tourism through mobility justice. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 29(9), 1436–1449. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2020.1791141>
- Sustainable Measures (2000). Characteristics of effective indicators. <http://www.sustainablemeasures.com/Indicators/Characteristics.html>
- Szabó, G., Csapó, J., & Marton, G. (2017). Zöldutak a turizmusban - innováció és jó gyakorlat a szelíd turizmusban, [Greenways in tourism - innovation and good practices in gentle tourism]. *Földrajzi Közlemények*, 141(2), 152–163.
- The European Tourism Indicator System ETIS toolkit for sustainable destination management, European Union, (2016). [https://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/tourism/offer/sustainable/indicators\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/tourism/offer/sustainable/indicators_en)
- Transforming Our World. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, United Nations. [https://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E](https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E)
- UNWTO (2004). Indicators of Sustainable Development for Tourism Destinations A Guidebook. <https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284407262>
- Valánszki, I., Dancsókné Főris, E., Jombach, S., & Filepné Kovács, K. (2017). Szinergiák A Zöld Infrastruktúrában És A Turizmus Fejlesztésében [Synergies In Green Infrastructure And Tourism Development]. *Turisztikai és Vidékfejlesztési Tanulmányok*, március, II. évfolyam 1, szám.
- Vargáné Csobán, K. (2010). *A fenntartható turizmus vidékfejlesztési összefüggései az Észak-alföldi régió példáján, (The rural development context of sustainable tourism in the Észak-Alföld region)*, Doktori értekezés, Debrecen.
- Vargáné Csobán, K., & Bauerné Gáthy, A. (2009). Long-term government responses to sustainable tourism development: principles and strategies. *Applied Studies in Agribusiness and Commerce*, 3(3–4), 89–92. <https://doi.org/10.19041/apstract/2009/3-4/19>
- WTO (2004). Sustainable Development of Tourism, Conceptual Definition. [http://world-tourism.org/frameset/frame\\_sustainable.html](http://world-tourism.org/frameset/frame_sustainable.html)