

TRANSPORT ACCESSIBILITY AND TOURIST EXPERIENCE AS DRIVERS OF SUSTAINABLE DESTINATION: A CASE STUDY OF KOSOVO

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Abstract: Transport infrastructure represents a fundamental spatial component shaping tourist mobility patterns and the sustainability of destinations. Despite extensive research on tourism development, limited attention has been given to the relationship between transport accessibility and tourist experience in emerging destinations. This study analyzes how transport infrastructure influences visitor satisfaction and sustainable tourism development, with a case study focusing on Kosovo. The research applies a quantitative approach based on a structured questionnaire administered to 97 tourists visiting different destinations. Descriptive and comparative statistical analyses were used to evaluate perceptions of road infrastructure, public transport accessibility, alternative mobility options and information availability. The methodological approach follows similar quantitative designs applied in recent tourism studies in Kosovo. The findings indicate that transport quality significantly affects tourist satisfaction, particularly road conditions and travel comfort, accessibility, safety, and overall travel convenience. While limited public transport accessibility and insufficient information reduce destination attractiveness. The results also show moderate interest in sustainable mobility, suggesting that improving alternative transport infrastructure can enhance both visitor experience and environmental sustainability. The study highlights that accessibility is not only a logistical factor but also a strategic component of destination competitiveness. Furthermore, the findings emphasize that better integration of transport planning with tourism policies, improved multimodal connectivity, and greater investment in sustainable mobility solutions can strengthen destination accessibility, enhance visitor satisfaction, increase tourism competitiveness, and contribute to the long-term sustainable development of tourism in Kosovo and other emerging destinations. Integrating transport planning with tourism policies is essential for balancing tourism growth and environmental protection in emerging destinations.

Keywords: transport accessibility, tourist experience, sustainable tourism, mobility, destination competitiveness, Kosovo

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism development is strongly dependent on spatial accessibility, which determines the ability of visitors to reach, explore and experience destinations. Among the different components of destination competitiveness, transport infrastructure represents a critical factor influencing tourist mobility patterns, travel comfort and overall satisfaction. Accessibility conditions not only shape the attractiveness of destinations but also influence the distribution of tourist flows and the intensity of tourism activities. Recent tourism research increasingly links mobility systems with sustainable development, emphasizing that transport affects environmental pressure, spatial concentration of visitors and the socio-economic benefits generated for local communities. Efficient and integrated transport networks facilitate movement between attractions, reduce travel uncertainty and improve the perceived quality of the tourism product, while inadequate infrastructure may limit visitation and negatively affect destination image. Although the relationship between transport and tourism has been widely discussed, limited empirical research has examined how accessibility conditions influence tourist experience in emerging destinations, particularly in Southeast European transition economies.

In these contexts, rapid tourism growth is often not accompanied by coordinated transport planning, creating imbalances between development and environmental sustainability. To address this gap, this study investigates the influence of transport infrastructure on tourist experience and sustainable destination development using a quantitative approach based on visitor perceptions. The research evaluates road infrastructure quality, public transport accessibility, alternative mobility

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options and information availability as determinants of satisfaction and destination competitiveness. The findings aim to support integrated planning strategies linking transport policy and tourism development in order to achieve sustainable territorial growth. Based on the identified research gap, this study aims to evaluate the relationship between transport accessibility and tourist satisfaction, identify the main accessibility barriers affecting tourist mobility within destinations, and assess the contribution of sustainable mobility options to destination competitiveness and sustainability.

Accordingly, the study addresses the following research questions: **(RQ1)** How does transport accessibility influence tourist satisfaction and the overall travel experience? **(RQ2)** What accessibility barriers limit tourist mobility within destinations? **(RQ3)** Do sustainable mobility options contribute to perceived destination sustainability? Based on these research questions, three hypotheses were formulated: **H1:** Higher perceived quality of transport infrastructure is positively associated with tourist satisfaction. **H2:** Limited transport accessibility negatively affects tourists' perceived ease of movement within the destination. **H3:** The availability of sustainable mobility options, including public transport and alternative transport modes, positively influences perceived destination sustainability.

Transport constitutes a fundamental component of the tourism system because it determines the physical accessibility of destinations and the possibility of experiencing tourism products. Accessibility connects tourist-generating regions with destination areas and enables participation in tourism activities (Page, 2009). Consequently, the quality of transport infrastructure influences not only visitation levels but also visitors' perceptions of destination attractiveness and their intention to revisit. Transport functions as an interface between tourists and destinations, shaping first impressions through travel time, comfort, safety, and cost (Prideaux, 2000). Therefore, the travel phase should be considered an integral part of the tourism experience rather than merely a logistical stage preceding the visit. Recent studies emphasize that the tourist experience begins before arrival at the destination, during the planning and travel stages. Difficult, unsafe, or uncomfortable transport conditions may generate negative perceptions even when the destination itself offers high-quality attractions (Dileep & Kurien, 2021). As a result, mobility conditions influence tourist satisfaction and post-visit behavioural intentions (Thompson & Schofield, 2007). Empirical evidence from emerging tourism destinations indicates that visitor perceptions and destination competitiveness are strongly shaped by infrastructure quality and supporting development strategies (Tahiri et al., 2025). These findings highlight the importance of accessibility conditions in forming the overall tourism experience. Furthermore, digitalisation has expanded the role of mobility systems in tourism.

Access to online booking systems, real-time transport information, and navigation applications reduces travel uncertainty and improves destination usability. Mobility convenience has therefore become an increasingly important competitive factor in destination choice, particularly for younger generations of tourists (UNWTO, 2022). Overall, the literature demonstrates that perceived transport quality directly affects tourist satisfaction and behavioural intentions, supporting the assumption that accessibility constitutes a key determinant of the tourist experience.

Transport infrastructure and sustainable tourism development

Sustainable tourism development requires balancing economic growth with environmental protection and social well-being. Within this framework, transport infrastructure plays a strategic role because it simultaneously enables tourism activity and generates environmental pressures. Accessibility improvements increase visitation and economic benefits, while intensive motorised mobility contributes to emissions, congestion and spatial pressure on destinations (Dickinson & Robbins, 2008). Consequently, transport planning has become a central component of sustainability-oriented destination management. Public transport is widely recognised as a mechanism for improving both sustainability and social equity in tourism. Reliable and affordable services therefore contribute not only to mobility efficiency but also to the attractiveness and quality of the tourist experience (Parahoo et al., 2014). Unlike private car dependency, collective transport systems facilitate broader access to attractions, support spatial distribution of visitors and reduce environmental impact. Regular, reliable and affordable services therefore contribute not only to mobility efficiency but also to the equitable distribution of tourism benefits among different social groups (Beirão & Cabral, 2007).

Recent tourism strategies increasingly incorporate alternative and low-carbon mobility solutions, including walking infrastructure, cycling routes and shared mobility services. These approaches reduce environmental externalities while simultaneously enhancing the experiential quality of destinations by supporting slower and place-based forms of tourism. Technological innovations such as smart mobility systems, real-time information platforms and renewable energy transport solutions further reinforce the transition toward sustainable travel behaviour (UNEP, 2022).

In emerging destinations, the effectiveness of sustainable mobility depends on coordinated governance and policy implementation. Empirical research in Kosovo highlights the importance of integrated development strategies and institutional engagement in supporting sustainable tourism outcomes (Tahiri et al., 2025).

Overall, the literature indicates that sustainable destination development depends not only on transport infrastructure quality but also on the availability of alternative mobility options and policy coordination, supporting the assumption that sustainable transport contributes to perceived destination sustainability.

Public policies and investments in transport for sustainable tourism

The development of transport infrastructure in tourism destinations depends largely on public policy frameworks and long-term strategic investments. Governments play a central role in coordinating land-use planning, transport networks and environmental protection measures in order to support sustainable destination development (Hall, 2008). Integrated policies align mobility systems with tourism growth, preventing uncontrolled spatial expansion and environmental degradation. Effective transport planning also requires continuous monitoring and evaluation. Infrastructure should not be considered a

completed intervention after construction but a dynamic process requiring performance assessment over time (Li et al., 2021). Indicators such as emission reduction, accessibility improvement, visitor satisfaction and local economic impact are essential for evaluating the sustainability of transport investments (Kovaçi et al., 2023). Contemporary policy approaches increasingly incorporate digitalisation and smart mobility solutions (Myrovali et al., 2025). Real-time transport information, shared mobility services and integrated payment systems improve operational efficiency while reducing congestion and environmental pressure (UNEP, 2022). These measures demonstrate that governance quality and institutional coordination are critical determinants of sustainable tourism outcomes, particularly in developing destinations.

Overall, the literature indicates that transport sustainability depends not only on infrastructure provision but also on policy effectiveness and institutional capacity to manage mobility systems. The development of transport infrastructure in tourism destinations depends largely on public policy frameworks and long-term strategic investments (Khadaroo & Seetanah, 2007). Sustainable tourism development requires balancing economic growth with environmental protection and social well-being. Within this framework, transport infrastructure plays a strategic role because it simultaneously enables tourism activity and generates environmental pressures. Improvements in accessibility increase visitation and economic benefits, while intensive motorised mobility contributes to emissions, congestion, and spatial pressure on destinations (Dickinson & Robbins, 2008). Consequently, transport planning has become a central component of sustainability-oriented destination management. Public transport is widely recognised as a mechanism for improving both sustainability and social equity in tourism. Reliable and affordable services contribute not only to mobility efficiency but also to the attractiveness and quality of the tourist experience (Parahoo et al., 2014). Unlike private car dependency, collective transport systems facilitate broader access to attractions, support the spatial distribution of visitors, and reduce environmental impacts.

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Overall, the literature indicates that sustainable destination development depends not only on transport infrastructure quality but also on the availability of alternative mobility options and effective policy coordination, supporting the assumption that sustainable transport contributes to perceived destination sustainability. The development of transport infrastructure in tourism destinations depends largely on public policy frameworks and long-term strategic investments. Governments play a central role in coordinating land-use planning, transport networks, and environmental protection measures to support sustainable destination development (Hall, 2008). Integrated policies align mobility systems with tourism growth, preventing uncontrolled spatial expansion and environmental degradation. Effective transport planning also requires continuous monitoring and evaluation. Infrastructure should not be considered a completed intervention after construction but rather a dynamic process requiring regular performance assessment over time (Li et al., 2021).

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Transport infrastructure also represents a structural component of the tourism product because it shapes the visitor experience throughout all travel stages, from trip planning to on-site mobility (Page, 2009). Accessibility conditions influence perceived convenience, travel effort, and the ability to participate in tourism activities within the destination (Chen et al., 2025). Visitor satisfaction is strongly associated with transport attributes such as travel time, comfort, safety, reliability, and service frequency (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2006). When these conditions are favourable, tourists tend to engage in more activities and develop positive perceptions of the destination.

Recent studies show that tourists increasingly value environmentally friendly mobility systems (Kim et al., 2024). The availability of sustainable transport options, including cycling infrastructure, shared mobility, and clean vehicles, enhances destination image and aligns with visitors' environmental attitudes (ETC, 2018). Consequently, transport quality contributes both to experiential value and to perceived destination responsibility. Moreover, the rapid digital transformation of the tourism sector has created new opportunities to enrich tourist experiences through technologies such as Virtual Reality (VR) and Artificial Intelligence (AI). For example, research from Vietnam demonstrates that digital innovations, including virtual destination previews and AI-powered travel assistants, are transforming the way tourists plan, experience, and evaluate their journeys (Dang & Duong, 2025). These developments indicate that modern transport systems are increasingly integrated with digital technologies to improve accessibility, convenience, and visitor satisfaction. Building upon this body of literature, the present study examines the role of transport infrastructure and mobility conditions in shaping tourists' experiences, satisfaction, and perceptions of destination accessibility and sustainability in Kosovo.

METHODOLOGY

Research design and data collection

This study applies a quantitative research design to examine the relationship between transport infrastructure and tourist experience. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to tourists visiting several destinations in Kosovo. The survey approach was selected because visitor perception represents a key indicator for evaluating accessibility conditions and experiential quality in tourism research. The questionnaire included items measuring perceived transport infrastructure quality, accessibility, travel comfort, travel time and the use of sustainable mobility options. Responses were recorded using a five-point Likert scale, allowing the measurement of attitudes and satisfaction levels related to mobility conditions within destinations. Collected data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics were used to evaluate general perception patterns, while association analysis was applied to examine relationships between transport accessibility and tourist satisfaction.

This methodological approach enables empirical testing of the proposed hypotheses regarding the influence of transport infrastructure on visitor experience and perceived sustainability.

Sample and measurement variables

The study is based on a field survey conducted among tourists visiting multiple destinations in Kosovo. A total of 97 valid questionnaires were collected and used for analysis. Respondents were selected using a random intercept approach in tourism areas in order to capture diverse visitor profiles and travel behaviours.

The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = very low to 5 = very high). The instrument included three groups of variables:

- Transport infrastructure quality (road conditions, safety, travel time, comfort)
- Accessibility and mobility (ease of movement, public transport availability, information availability)
- Sustainable mobility perception (use of alternative transport modes and environmental awareness)

Data were processed using SPSS statistical software. Descriptive statistics were used to examine overall perception patterns, while association analysis was applied to evaluate the relationship between transport accessibility and tourist satisfaction and to test the proposed hypotheses.

Ethical considerations

Participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any time. No personally identifiable information was collected, ensuring confidentiality and compliance with standard research ethics guidelines.

RESULTS

Sample characteristics

The study included 97 respondents. In order to improve the visibility of the demographic data, the sample characteristics are presented separately according to gender, age group, origin and education level. As shown in Figure 1, the gender distribution of the sample was relatively balanced. Female respondents represented 53.6% of the sample, while male respondents represented 46.4%. This balance provides a more inclusive overview of tourist perceptions across both gender groups. Figure 2 shows that the largest age group was 26–35 years, representing 36.1% of respondents. This was followed by the 18–25 age group, which accounted for 28.9%.

Respondents aged 36–50 represented 21.6%, while those over 50 formed the smallest share, with 13.4%. Overall, the sample is mainly composed of young and middle-aged tourists.

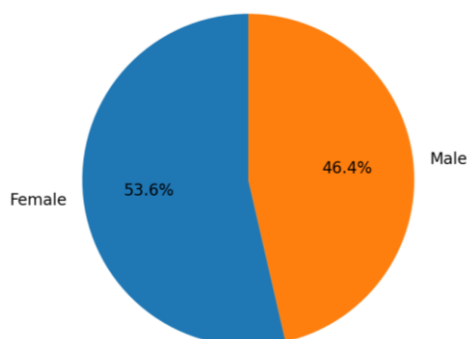


Figure 1. Gender distribution of respondents (n= 97) (Source: Author's own survey data)

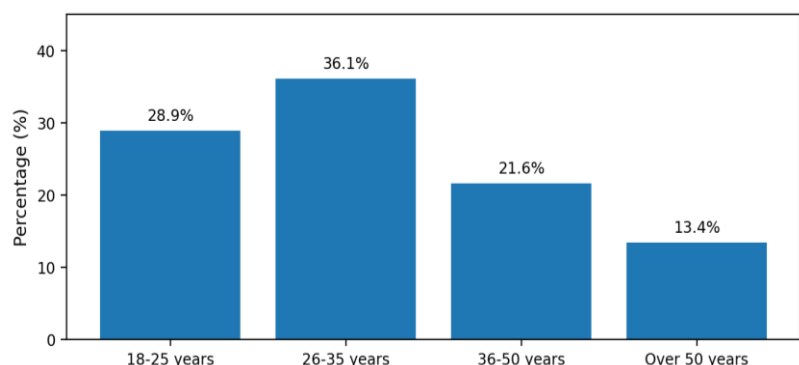


Figure 2. Age distribution of respondents (n= 97) (Source: Author's own survey data)

As presented in Figure 3, international visitors made up 56.7% of the sample, while domestic tourists represented 43.3%. This indicates that the study includes perspectives from both foreign and local tourists, which is important for understanding how transport infrastructure and accessibility are perceived by different types of visitors. Figure 4 shows that most respondents had a higher education background. Nearly half of the sample held a Bachelor's degree, while 32.0% had

a Master's degree or higher. The remaining 18.5% belonged to other education levels. This suggests that the sample is relatively well educated and likely able to provide informed evaluations of transport quality, accessibility and sustainable mobility conditions. Overall, the sample reflects a diverse group of respondents in terms of gender, age, origin and education. These characteristics are relevant for the study because tourists' demographic profiles may influence how they perceive transport infrastructure, mobility conditions and destination accessibility in Kosovo.

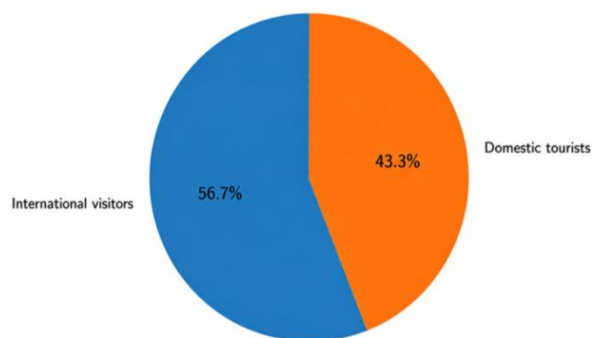


Figure 3. Origin of respondents (n= 97)
(Source: Author's own survey data)

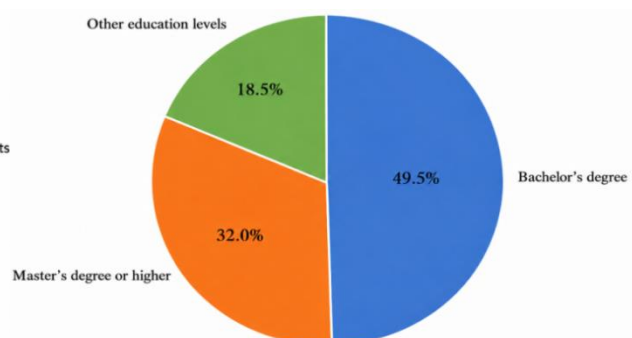


Figure 4. Education level of respondents (n= 97)
(Source: Author's own survey data)

Transport infrastructure perception

Tourists reported a moderately positive perception of road infrastructure, with a mean value of 3.7/5 and 62% of respondents expressing satisfaction. These findings indicate an acceptable basic level of accessibility, although infrastructure quality still leaves room for improvement in terms of destination competitiveness.

Public transport accessibility received lower evaluations, with a mean value of 3.4/5 and only 57% of respondents considering it easily accessible. The results suggest the existence of mobility barriers within destinations, particularly related to information availability, service frequency and connectivity between tourist attractions.

Overall, the results indicate that while primary access to destinations is relatively satisfactory, internal mobility remains a limiting factor for the tourist experience and may reduce the potential for sustainable travel behaviour.

Transport quality and sustainable mobility perception

Respondents strongly confirmed the importance of transport quality for the tourism experience. In order to improve the visibility of the results, the main findings related to transport quality and sustainable mobility are presented in Figure 5.

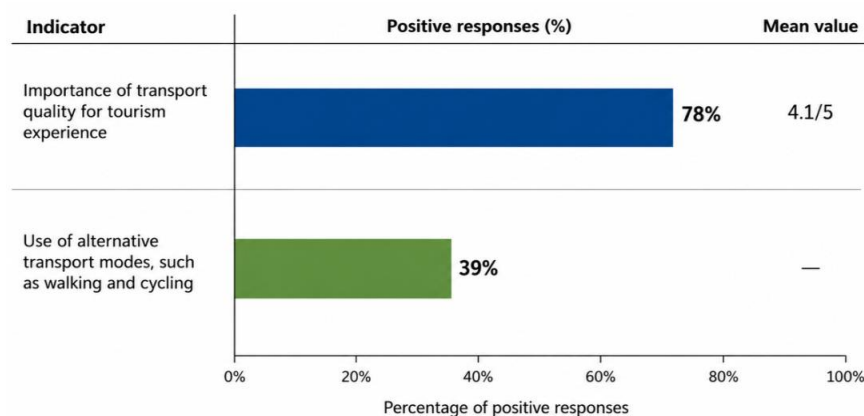


Figure 5. Perceptions of transport quality and sustainable mobility (Source: Author's own survey data)

As shown in Figure 5, transport quality was evaluated as an important factor in shaping the tourism experience, with a mean value of 4.1/5 and 78% positive responses. This indicates that mobility conditions represent one of the main determinants of visitor satisfaction and directly influence the perceived attractiveness of destinations.

Regarding sustainable mobility, 39% of tourists reported using alternative transport modes such as walking and cycling. Although this shows a noticeable interest in low-impact travel behaviour, the relatively moderate share suggests that limitations in infrastructure may still restrict the wider use of sustainable mobility options.

Overall, the findings suggest that improving transport service quality may increase visitor satisfaction, while expanding alternative mobility infrastructure could enhance both tourist experience and environmental sustainability.

Policy awareness and information accessibility

Tourists demonstrated relatively low awareness of sustainable tourism policies. To make the results clearer for readers, the main findings related to policy awareness and information accessibility are presented in Figure 6.

As shown in Figure 6, awareness of sustainable tourism policies received a mean evaluation of 3.0/5, with only 45% of respondents perceiving the existence of such measures. This suggests that sustainability initiatives may either be limited or insufficiently communicated to visitors, reducing their potential influence on tourist behaviour and destination image.

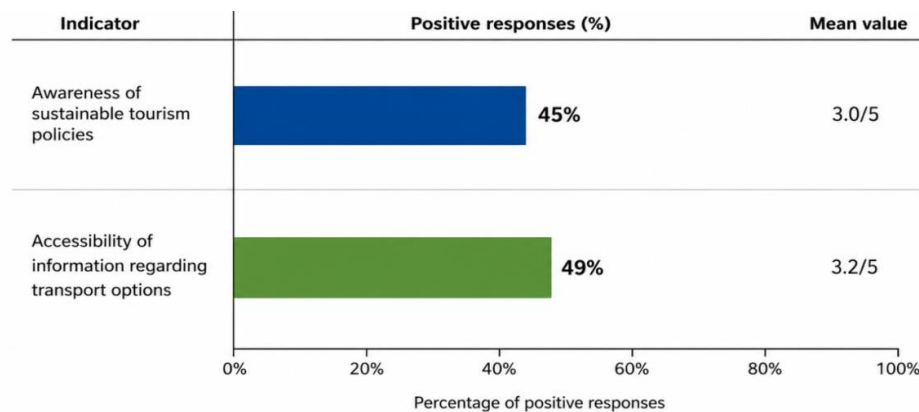


Figure 6. Policy awareness and information accessibility (Source: Author's own survey data)

Similarly, information accessibility regarding transport options received modest evaluations, with a mean value of 3.2/5 and 49% positive responses. These results indicate that visitors may face difficulties in obtaining clear mobility information, including routes, schedules and available transport modes.

Overall, the findings reveal that beyond physical infrastructure, informational and institutional aspects of mobility also affect tourist experience and the perceived sustainability of destinations.

DISCUSSION

The findings confirm that transport accessibility constitutes a central component of the tourist experience. The positive relationship between perceived transport quality and visitor satisfaction supports previous research emphasizing accessibility as a determinant of destination attractiveness (Page, 2009; Prideaux, 2000). The strong influence of mobility conditions on overall experience indicates that tourists evaluate destinations not only through attractions but through the entire travel process. This reinforces the argument that transport infrastructure should be considered part of the tourism product rather than a supporting service.

At the same time, the results reveal the presence of internal mobility constraints. Limited accessibility between attractions and insufficient transport information reduce tourists' ability to explore destinations effectively. These findings align with accessibility-based destination development theories, which emphasize that poor connectivity restricts tourism participation and spatial distribution of visitors (Hall, 2008). Therefore, even when primary access to destinations is acceptable, weak internal mobility may limit tourism competitiveness.

The study also highlights the role of sustainable mobility and policy visibility. Moderate use of alternative transport modes combined with low awareness of sustainability policies suggests that environmental strategies are not fully integrated into visitor experience. Similar observations have been reported in emerging destinations where institutional implementation lags behind infrastructure development (Tahiri et al., 2025). This indicates that sustainability depends not only on physical infrastructure but also on communication and governance mechanisms.

Overall, the results demonstrate that transport influences tourism through three interconnected dimensions: accessibility, experience quality and perceived sustainability. The contribution of this study lies in showing that improving infrastructure alone is insufficient without integrated mobility management and policy communication. This means that transport development should be understood as part of a wider tourism governance system, where physical infrastructure, public transport services, visitor information and sustainability policies work together. The findings suggest that tourists' experiences are shaped not only by the possibility of reaching a destination, but also by the quality, clarity and convenience of mobility within the destination. In the case of Kosovo, this highlights the need to combine infrastructure investment with improved public transport accessibility, better information about routes and schedules, and stronger visibility of sustainable mobility options. Therefore, a more coordinated approach to transport and tourism policy could contribute to higher visitor satisfaction, a stronger destination image and more sustainable tourism development.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the relationship between transport infrastructure, tourist experience and sustainable destination development using visitor perception data. The results confirm that accessibility conditions significantly influence tourist satisfaction and perceived destination attractiveness. Transport quality affects not only mobility convenience but also behavioural outcomes such as destination evaluation and revisit intention.

The findings further indicate that internal mobility represents a critical limitation. While primary access to destinations is relatively acceptable, insufficient public transport accessibility and limited information availability restrict visitor movement within destinations. This demonstrates that tourism competitiveness depends on the efficiency of local mobility systems rather than solely on external accessibility. The research also shows that sustainable mobility remains

underutilised. Moderate use of alternative transport modes and low awareness of sustainability policies suggest that environmental strategies are not fully integrated into the tourism experience. Therefore, sustainable destination development requires coordinated infrastructure, policy implementation and communication measures.

From a practical perspective, improving destination competitiveness requires integrated mobility planning focused on internal connectivity, reliable public transport services and accessible visitor information systems. Supporting low-impact mobility solutions may simultaneously enhance tourist experience and environmental sustainability.

Limitations of the study

This study has some limitations. First, it is based on a sample of 97 respondents, which limits the possibility of generalising the findings to all tourists visiting Kosovo. Second, the research relies on self-reported survey data, meaning that the results reflect tourists' perceptions rather than direct measurements of transport infrastructure or service quality. Third, the study focuses on selected destinations and does not establish direct causality between transport conditions and tourist satisfaction. Future research could include a larger sample, cover more destinations and combine survey data with interviews or official transport data. Despite these limitations, the study provides useful evidence that transport infrastructure, mobility management and policy communication are important for improving tourist satisfaction and supporting sustainable tourism development in Kosovo.

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Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to completing the anonymous questionnaire.

Data Availability Statement: The data are not publicly available due to privacy considerations concerning the study participants

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Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest

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