



# **INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE** **CHANGES AND PERSPECTIVES** **OF TOURISM** **IN A RESHAPED WORLD**

## **CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS**

Vilnius, May 25-26, 2023

**LITHUANIAN CENTRE FOR SOCIAL SCIENCES**

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**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE**

**CHANGES AND PERSPECTIVES  
OF TOURISM  
IN A RESHAPED WORLD**

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### **Editors**

Darius Liutikas and Gintarė Pociūtė-Sereikienė

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# 1. EDITORIAL. INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE “CHANGES AND PERSPECTIVES OF TOURISM IN A RESHAPED WORLD” IN VILNIUS

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The international conference **“Changes and Perspectives of Tourism in a Reshaped World”** was organised by the Institute of Sociology at the Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences (Vilnius, Lithuania) on 25-26 May, 2023 in Vilnius, Lithuania. The COVID-19 pandemic had an irreversible impact on the tourism sector. The pandemic was a period of transformations for all tourism sector, including tourism business enterprises, state tourism institutions and tourists themselves. In this conference the attention was paid to the changes of tourism and perspectives of tourism in a reshaped world. The goal of this conference was to evaluate the lessons of the COVID-19 and to reveal the new reality of tourism sector. The papers presented in the conference offered both empirical and analytical personal insights into the evolving nature of tourism in society, fostering a robust discussion for policymakers and academics to consider the emerging challenges in the future development of the tourism sector.



**Fig. 1.1.** Screenshot of the conference

The conference sought to address pertinent inquiries, such as whether the shifts in tourism signify a return to normalcy or a regression to the past. It also delved into the introduction of fresh technological and non-technological innovations by the tourism sector during the pandemic. The question of whether the pandemic expedited the adoption of sustainable and responsible tourism practices was also examined. Moreover, the post-COVID-19 era necessitates the analysis of social, environmental, and technological factors. The conference further deliberated on the correlation between this transformed world and the emergence of new prospects for tourism, which encompass sustainable business development, the integration of eco-friendly innovations, and the digitization of services.

The keynote speech was delivered by Dr. Razaq Raj from Leeds Beckett University (UK). He presented on the transformational changes of the tourism industry and the tourism experience after COVID-19, emphasizing its resilience in the future. Dr. Darius Liutikas from the Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences presented a plenary presentation on the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism sector in Lithuania. The research was conducted within the framework of the project 'Transformations and Perspectives of the Tourism Sector after the COVID-19 pandemic' by a team of researchers from the Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences. In total, 18 papers were presented during the conference. The participants tackled different topics in tourism sector such topics as the tourist motivation to behave differently, the speed of adaptation to the changing conditions and the innovative changes that appeared in the tourism and leisure management. Some photos of the conference is presented in the **Fig. 1.1, Fig. 1.2 and Fig. 1.3.**

The participants of the conference also raised the question of what kind of new tourism models can ensure a rapid response to unforeseen events in the future. New technological innovations and new business models let to develop new attractiveness criteria for the local tourism destinations. However, various new challenges may threaten the social, economic, or environmental sustainability of tourism businesses (e.g., the ongoing war in Ukraine shouldn't be forgotten at the analysis of the tourism trends), as well as challenges to the health or security of the different world regions or the entire world. It is also crucial to address the question of whether we are witnessing the processes of a reshaped mindset and changes in tourists' preferences. Is the future of tourism linked to sustainable, technologically advanced, and community-based tourism development?

The paper of Darius Liutikas, Donatas Burneika, Edis Kriaučiūnas, Viktorija Baranauskienė and Gintarė Pociūtė-Sereikienė presents the research on the Lithuanian tourism sector during the COVID-19 period. In response to the pandemic, the tourism industry swiftly embraced innovative strategies, educational initiatives, and progressive business and management tactics. This comprehensive framework emphasizes the importance of fostering sustainable practices, integrating advanced technology, and prioritizing community-centric growth within the realm of tourism. The transformation of tourism particularly concerning the integration of novel technological and non-technological innovations, alongside the introduction of fresh products and services. Furthermore, the paper highlights the willingness of tourists to embrace new offerings in the tourism domain despite the challenging circumstances imposed by the pandemic. Additionally, the research sheds light on certain regional implications stemming from the unprecedented effects of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Donatella Privitera investigates the pandemic's impact on tourists' travel preferences and the resulting challenges for the tourism industry. She emphasizes the necessity for a sustainable tourism paradigm, spotlighting cycling tourism as a conduit for local development and a nature-immersed recreational experience. The growing popularity of cycling as a therapeutic tool is noted, with data reflecting a significant surge in this domain, fuelled by interests in nature, sports, gastronomy, culture, and local

landscapes. Using an Italian case study, the qualitative analysis identifies the key drivers behind the successful establishment of Sicily, as a sought-after cycling tourism destination. While acknowledging its potential benefits, the chapter also underscores the need for further research to maximize the potential of this emerging tourism product amidst the evolving landscape.

Oliver Chikuta, Siao Fui Wong, Yubing Lin and Ren Wang explore the challenges posed by lockdown and the controversial Zero-COVID policy in China. Throughout the pandemic, China's hotels confronted diverse obstacles, adopting a range of measures, including the stringent Zero-COVID policy, which was perceived by some as overly strict and confining. The findings demonstrate that after the removal of the Zero-COVID policy most hotels have relaxed mandatory requirements, except for routine disinfection and staff mask-wearing. The study concludes that the Zero-COVID policy significantly impacted hotel operations, leading to various adaptations such as increased use of artificial intelligence, staff adjustments, and enhanced health protocols.

Examining the historical context of Chinese wines and their interaction with Europe, Liao Wei Wang and Dolores Sánchez Aguilera shed light on this relationship. As we navigate the post-epidemic era, there is a noticeable resurgence in China's wine import volume. The paper's objective is to inquire whether Chinese tourists express interest in embarking on journeys to European wine-growing regions to partake in an exclusive experience encompassing wine, food, and the vinicultural landscape.



**Fig. 1.2.** Organizers and some participants of the conference

Edita Baranskaitė and Daiva Labanauskaitė highlighted that the current transformation in the tourism market is being predominantly shaped by the millennial demographic, known for their substantial economic influence and their distinct approach to decision-making influenced by their exposure to modern technologies, the internet, and social media. This growing innovativeness in the tourism sector, facilitated by the rapid advancement of technology, allows for enhanced consumer engagement and personalized experiences. Consequently, the economic impact of these innovations is evident across various domains, including investment, job creation, national product, and the country's balance of payments. Authors conclude that analysing research from diverse global perspectives, it becomes apparent that the most significant economic impact stems from innovative advancements in the pre-travel phase, influencing the decision-making process.

Chigozie Jude Odum provides an overview of the potential of Virtual Reality (VR) as a marketing tool for tourism and its alignment with the principles of ecotourism. The need for exploring the relationship between VR and ecotourism especially relevant in a global south, where technology adoption has been limited. The paper utilizes literature research as the primary source of data, selecting 30% of 492 relevant articles for analysis. Potential solutions may involve hybrid approaches and other innovative strategies. Overall, the study seeks to bridge the gap in understanding the dynamics between VR and ecotourism in the global south, particularly in Africa, to foster sustainable tourism practices and environmental conservation.



**Fig. 1.3.** During the conference



Tariq Elhadary explores the impact of language translation on boosting sports tourism with special reference to World Cup 2022 in Qatar. The concept of sports tourism involves traveling for the purpose of participating in or observing sports events and activities, ranging from major global sporting events like the FIFA World Cup to adventure sports such as skiing and mountain biking. Language translation plays a vital role in facilitating sports tourism by overcoming communication barriers between diverse cultures and countries. Effective translation services enable the dissemination of event information and promotional materials in multiple languages, broadening the event's appeal to a global audience. The study presents a content analysis of literature and the official websites related to the FIFA World Cup 2022 in Qatar, demonstrating that providing multilingual content positively influences the success of major sports events, contributing to the growth of sports tourism and tourism in general. The diverse group of volunteers with proficiency in various languages further underscores the significance of linguistic accessibility in fostering successful sports tourism experiences.

Nga Thi Thanh Nguyen's study investigates the link between responsible tourism practices and behavioural intentions, focusing on the impact of economic, socio-cultural, and environmental responsibilities on tourists' inclination towards responsible tourism. Using SPSS 22.0 for descriptive statistics and SmartPLS 3.0 for path-analysis-structural modelling, the quantitative study explored Vietnamese tourists' engagement in responsible tourism in Thua Thien Hue, Vietnam. The findings underscore the positive influence of responsible tourist practices, particularly environmental responsibility, on their intention to participate in responsible tourism. Practical implications suggest the need for tourism stakeholders to promote responsible tourism through social advertisement, educational programs, responsible tourism tours, and environmental conservation efforts.

## 2. THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON TOURISM SECTOR IN LITHUANIA: CHALLENGES AND TRANSFORMATIONS

**Darius Liutikas, Donatas Burneika, Edis Kriaučiūnas, Viktorija Baranauskienė and Gintarė Pociūtė-Sereikienė**

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**Abstract.** The paper presents the research on the Lithuanian tourism sector during the COVID-19 period. This research encompasses an examination of in-depth questionnaires, as well as discussions held within focus groups using qualitative analysis techniques. These interactions involve state-run tourism entities, specifically Tourist Information Centers in various regions (TICs), as well as enterprises operating within the tourism industry. The profound impact of the pandemic on both societal and economic aspects of our lives is undeniable. The *RegTour model*, focuses on evaluating domestic tourist destinations while emphasizing sustainability and environmental friendliness. The tourism sector's response to the COVID-19 pandemic entailed swift implementation of innovations, education, and novel business and management approaches. This framework advocates for sustainable, technologically advanced, and community-centered progress in tourism. The transformation of tourism is intimately connected with synergies between academia, commerce, and the public sector, particularly concerning the integration of novel technological and non-technological innovations, alongside fresh products and services. Integral to this model is the incorporation of societal and technological shifts, elements of resilience for future crises, flexibility, and transformation, alongside key components such as sustainability, adaptability, education, and innovation. The landscape of post-COVID-19 ranging from digitalization and advancements in transportation to shifts in urbanization, lifestyles, global health, and climate patterns. Research findings suggest that tourists exhibited a propensity for adopting new tourism-related services and products amid the pandemic. The need of actions to mitigate the climate change effects in the field of tourism is quite clear, but the Lithuanian experience showed that COVID-19 pandemic slowed down these actions. The implementation of eco-friendly tools and services, as well as substantial investments in climate-mitigation endeavors, encountered delays. Some regional impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic were revealed as well.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, tourism in Lithuania, *RegTour* model, tourism perspectives, innovations, tourism and climate change.

## Introduction

In 2020, global tourism suffered a severe setback owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, witnessing a staggering 74 percent drop in international tourist numbers compared to the preceding year (UNWTO, 2021a). The repercussions were far-reaching, affecting approximately 120 million jobs worldwide by early 2021 (UNWTO, 2021b). To curb the spread of the virus, governments globally resorted to implementing stringent measures including travel bans, event cancellations, and business closures, impacting both domestic and international tourism.

For instance, on March 16, 2020, the Lithuanian Government enforced a quarantine within its borders, prohibiting travel to and from regions afflicted by the pandemic. Additionally, restrictions on travel among municipalities within Lithuania were also imposed.

Despite the daunting challenges, the pandemic stimulated the adoption of inventive approaches and fostered a re-evaluation of novel tourism models. Shifts in attitudes, lifestyles, mobility patterns, health priorities, climate consciousness, and demographic dynamics are poised to redefine the trajectory of the tourism industry, complemented by technological innovations (Liutikas, 2023). A reimaged tourism landscape could integrate innovations, foster meaningful engagement with local communities, and establish distinctive connections with tourist destinations.

The COVID-19 pandemic encouraged the transformation of tourism strategies and tourism models. The objective of this paper is to research what was the main adaptation strategies of the tourism in Lithuania during COVID-19 pandemic and to explore the prospective tourism structure that could act as a catalyst for transformation in the post-pandemic era. This paper focuses on the entities involved in regional tourism destinations in Lithuania, encompassing destination managers and tourism businesses. This article and research help to emphasize important elements of the tourism transformation such as innovation, education, and sustainable business development, and steps to achieve new added value in tourism. The discussion also incorporates various insights gleaned from the COVID-19 experience.

## Methodology

The article is based on the assessment of primary research data that was collected during the in-depth questionnaires and the focus group discussion of tourism experts located in different Lithuanian cities and regions. The research was carried out in the first half of 2022. The questionnaire survey involved destination managers – state tourism institutions (Tourist Information Centres in regions–TICs (hereinafter)) and different types of tourism business enterprises (tour operators, specialized guides, walking / bike-riding / boating tours organizers, etc.), working in the field of inbound and local tourism.

The questioners and the focus group discussion were based on the same question groups to collect the widest possible range of views and opinions from different tourism experts on similar issues. The questions were structured into five main groups: general evaluation of the situation, state (governmental) aid, innovations, local tourism and regions, sustainability, and climate change. In total 95 (sample size) questionnaires were sent to eligible tourism enterprises and 57 (sample size) questionnaires were sent to state tourism institutions, located in different Lithuanian cities and

regions. As a final sample, 50 TICs and 52 tourism business enterprises' completed questionnaires were received, compiled in SPSS spreadsheets, and analysed. Additionally, two focus discussions – one of 30 TICs specialists and another of 10 tourism business experts – were organized, and the received participants' statements were examined.

The purpose of this survey was to collect information from the representatives of Tourist Information Centres', asking them to assess the situation of local and inbound tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic and after the pandemic. Those people who work with tourists in the different regions had to assess the situation of the tourism sector. Tourism Information Centres in Lithuania are located in different regions. Their main functions are to promote tourism in the territory of a specific city or municipality, to inform visiting tourists about the tourism objects to be visited, and to carry out various tourism promotion and development projects.

The questionnaire consisted of 38 questions. Respondents were asked to evaluate the tourism situation compared to the pre-pandemic period, the effectiveness of state support, the level of the implementation of innovations, the assessment of local tourism in the regions, and the situation regarding such issues as tourism and sustainability and tourism and adaptation to climate change. 10 questions were devoted to the section dedicated to local tourism and regional situation. Questions were related to the evaluation of the vitality of the tourism in regions, assessment of the new opportunities for local tourism and rural tourism homesteads, and new services (educations, tastings, rural work experiences, celebrations) provided by business representatives working in the local tourism sector, and new local tourism products (objects, routes, services). The questionnaire opened up discussions about the long-term rental service in rural areas (possibility of combining work and vacation), the concept of slow tourism in the regions, and the contribution of local communities to the development of tourism. In analysing the answers to the open-ended questions, it is possible to draw the necessary conclusions for the preparation of the future crisis.

## **Adaptation to the situation. Use of new business and management models**

One of the important aspects of the reaction to the crisis was governmental support. The aim of this support was to manage the crisis and mitigate its impact on the tourism sector, to promote the tourism sector after the quarantine, to transform the tourism system and to develop innovative, digital and adaptable tourism services. 78.8 per cent of analysed local and inbound tourism companies used the support provided by government institutions in Lithuania. Among the recipients of governmental support, the most common were those who received support for halt time and compensation for part (or all) of the salaries. Part of enterprises has managed to use pandemic and available support for the innovative decisions. The alternative ways to survive the COVID-19 pandemic were to change the trajectory of the tourism business fundamentally (Pociūtė-Sereikienė, et al., 2022).

Some tourism business actors reacted to the crisis creatively and directed their work towards innovative tourism business models and activities. These models include sustainability, green and circular economy, also, digitization. Nielsen and Lund (2014) noticed that sustainable development is the ability of the company to create revenue in the long-term perspective, considering to the external

stakeholders' interests. In general, such changes might have a significant impact on the tourism business and the economic value generated by tourism.

The pandemic has led to a variety of social changes, both at the individual and group level. One of the first steps was transferring the workplaces towards home and adapting them to remote work. As life moved to the virtual internet space, the tourism services also had to adapt to the changed circumstances. Therefore, tourism business companies and destination managers have tried to expand online services. The respondents (9,6% of tourism business enterprises and 44% of TICs) emphasized the transformation from direct to online work organization as the new management model.

New forms of travel such as co-working and co-living became popular, and tourists increasingly began to emphasize changing social values as sustainability, social responsibility, participation to the shared economy and attention to the quality of services (Liutikas, 2003). Remote training, new virtual offers for events and conferences, virtual trips, travel packages adapted for mobile phones, online reservations (tickets, hotels, transportation, etc.), online consultations, self-service terminals, interactive information boards, digitalization of information were the new products and services offered for the tourists as a consequence of isolation conditions.

Although the pandemic period became a challenge that required changes in work management, some respondents found this turbulent period as an opportunity to offer new activities that became successful and complemented the company's activity:

*"During the pandemic, so that we don't have to close companies to save our business, we used our competencies and opened a remote learning guide training school. Also, we organized remote education for schoolchildren, a summer camp for children. Now we have two activities: remote education, seminars, and selling tourism services. [...] we did not retrain, but we introduced new services." (R 78, the survey of tourism businesses).*

Another essential trend in the tourism business was associated with environmentally friendly activities and services. The companies that changed their business model towards the more environmentally friendly had several intentions: to mitigate climate change and to attract tourists while offering an alternative "cleaner" way to explore the region. And as the research results showed, such transformation was successful.

Overall, the pandemic can be regarded as a period of transformation in the tourism sector, underscoring the significance of the capacity to swiftly adapt, acquire new skills, and effectively introduce and assimilate innovations. The pandemic period allowed us to understand that those companies and destination managers that were open-minded for innovative solutions emerged as the "winners" and the focal points of attraction.

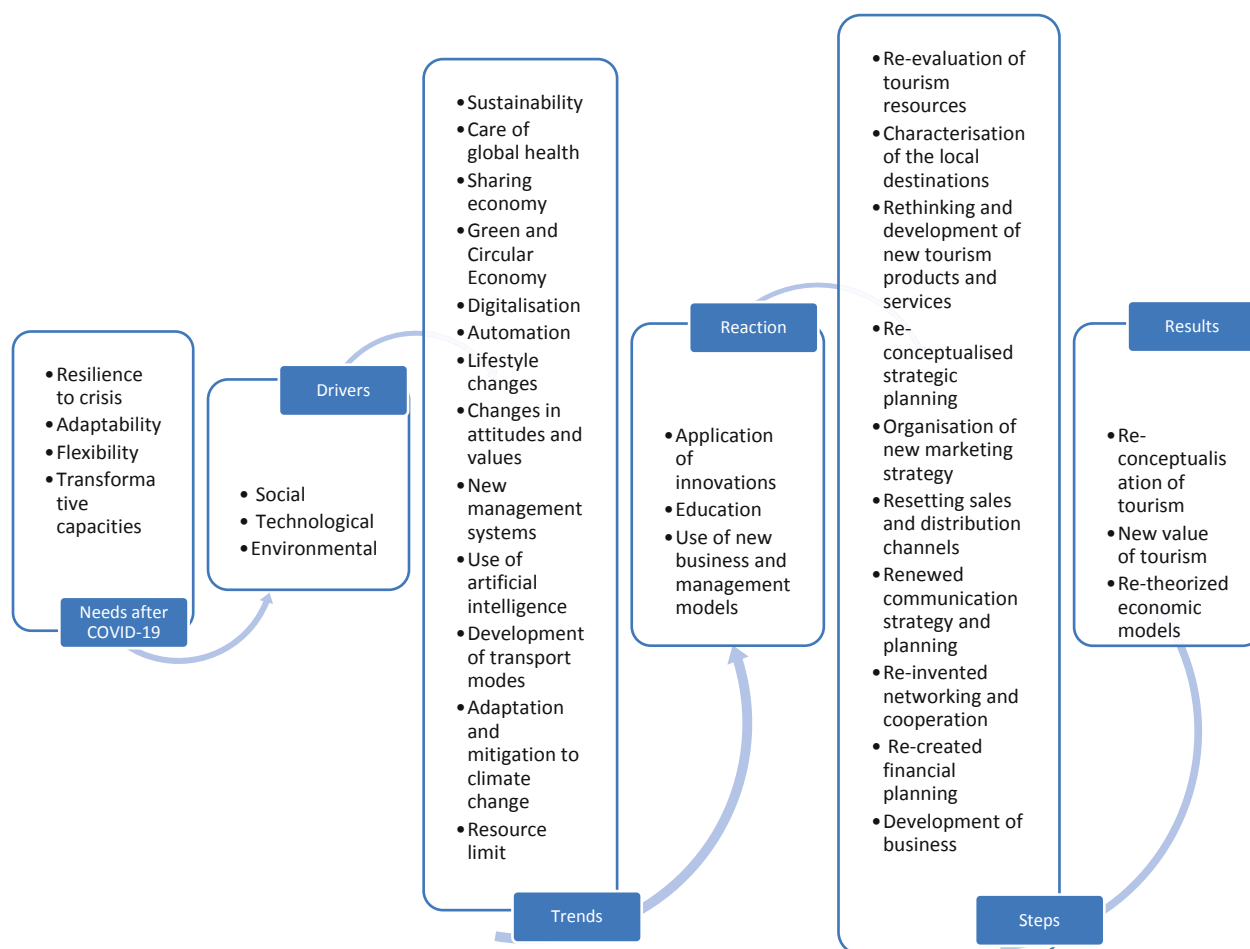
## New tourism perspective – *RegTour* model

The pandemic period determined the destination managers and tourism service providers to review their tourism strategies, products, and services. The key reaction elements to the tourism development during and after the COVID-19 pandemic were the rapid application of innovations, strengthening the element of education, and the use of new business and management models. The implemented research revealed that to survive and move further in pandemic conditions, these three major reaction points were introduced by tourism enterprises and destination managers – state tourism institutions. The particular steps for the reaction coming up with new regional solutions and ideas.

Liutikas (2023) has introduced the notion of “re-tourism,” propelled by shifts in society and technology, and rooted in enhanced knowledge and the application of innovations. This concept involves adapting to and mitigating negative impacts, demonstrating flexibility and dynamism, and embracing change and transformation.

The subsequently developed *RegTour* model encompasses the evaluation of domestic tourist destinations and the integration of innovations and investments in a manner that is both sustainable and environmentally friendly (**Fig. 2.1**). Reaction of the tourism sector to the COVID-19 pandemic included the fastest application of innovations, education and use of new business and management models. The key steps of the renewed tourism development encompass various factors, including re-evaluation of destination branding and image building, rethinking tourism products, and development of services, re-conceptualizing strategic and financial planning, rethinking marketing and communication strategy, and re-invented networking and cooperation.

The main aspect of this model is that it includes societal and technological changes, elements of resilience for the future crisis, flexibility and transformation, and such elements as sustainability, adaptability, education and innovations. The authors based on research believe that the *RegTour* model is an undeniable reality of “new normal”. The recovering tourism will no longer be the same as it was before the COVID-19 pandemic, but at the same time new opportunities for tourism business development are opening up.



**Fig. 2.1.** *RegTour* model of tourism development. Source: Authors' own work based on research

## Domestic tourism and local communities

During the pandemic, in the great majority of countries international tourism was replaced by domestic tourism (Knezevic, et al., 2021), which led to the expansion of the domestic tourism market. Domestic tourism as the drive of recovery has been emphasized by UNWTO's (UNWTO, 2020). The tourism businesses that focused on nature-based tourism within the country became the winners because they did not need to reorient their activities.

The share of domestic trips compared to the total number of trips in Europe increased from 55 percent up to 69 percent (Knezevic, et al. 2021). The share of local tourists increased up to 76 percent in 2020 and 79 percent in 2021 in Lithuania from 52 percent in 2019 (Lithuania Travel, 2022). Domestic tourism somewhat compensated for the losses of international tourism, but still did not replace the total number of tourists in urban and rural areas. The number of nights spent by tourists in accommodation establishments increased by 13 percent in 2021 (Eurostat, 2022). This increase was primarily driven by domestic tourism, which had different spatial characteristics along urban – rural axis. The results of the survey showed that new products were in demand and boosted domestic tourism.

Tourists preferred to travel in small, intimate groups, often comprising families, groups of friends, or a blend of both. They tend to immerse themselves in the chosen destinations, taking their time to explore at a relaxed and unhurried pace. Their quest is for unique attractions, novel experiences, and novel culinary delights. Notably, in 2020, it was observed that local tourists primarily engaged in one-day excursions, leading to a limited benefit for the accommodation sector. The intricacies specific to various regions emerged distinctly in the feedback, particularly as tourism experts were interviewed across the diverse landscapes of Lithuania. The impact of the tourism downturn was notably more pronounced in specific resort areas, where international tourists traditionally constituted a significant portion of the customer base for local accommodation providers.

Kriaučiūnas, et al. (2023) noticed that sustainable and resilient rural tourism could become an attractive alternative to mass tourism. The innovative business models related to tourism in rural areas include the approaches of sustainability, green and circular economy, and digitalisation. In general, recreation and tourism activities in the rural areas become active and significant agents of environmental, economic and social change, it can revitalise and reorganise local economies, to supplement income of farming, craft and service sectors, and to provide opportunities to re-evaluate natural and cultural resources of landscape (Hall et al., 2016).

Some local tourism representatives in Lithuania noticed new possibilities for local communities: *"Opportunities. They open up every time as soon as you take a closer look... New services are created practically every day"* (Respondent A10, Focus group with actors from TICs). Other TIC representatives, as well as tourism business representatives, confirm that some local communities are actively involved in tourism organization and cooperation processes: *"Communities can also create services and products for tourists. We also have such an example"* (R14, survey of TIC); or *"They (communities) have been contributing for a long time: in organisation of events, education, producing local crafts, producing and sale of local products, implementation of tourism improvement projects on infrastructure, and showing uniqueness in their place"* (R15, survey of TIC). Some representatives of TIC claim that it is local communities that are important actor in the development of tourism: *"Their decision to accept guests or not - is fundamental in shaping development"* (R8, survey of TIC). It is important that the research participants noticed the importance of cooperation that became evident during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Application of innovations

The COVID-19 pandemic became an impulse for technological development and change. Our research revealed what kind of technological innovations were implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic and what of them tourism experts in Lithuania consider necessary for future. The results of our research revealed that those business companies and state tourism institutions that looked at their activity in a new and original way, that were able to offer new products, survived the pandemic with less loss or even benefited from it.

Introduction of technological innovations became the priority task for the majority of companies and state tourism institutions in Lithuania. Therefore, the state aid program "Tourism Innovations", specially issued for the tourism sector, was one of the most attractive, effective and positively evaluated by beneficiaries (Pociūtė-Sereikienė, et al., 2022). The use of new technologies is a way to improve the



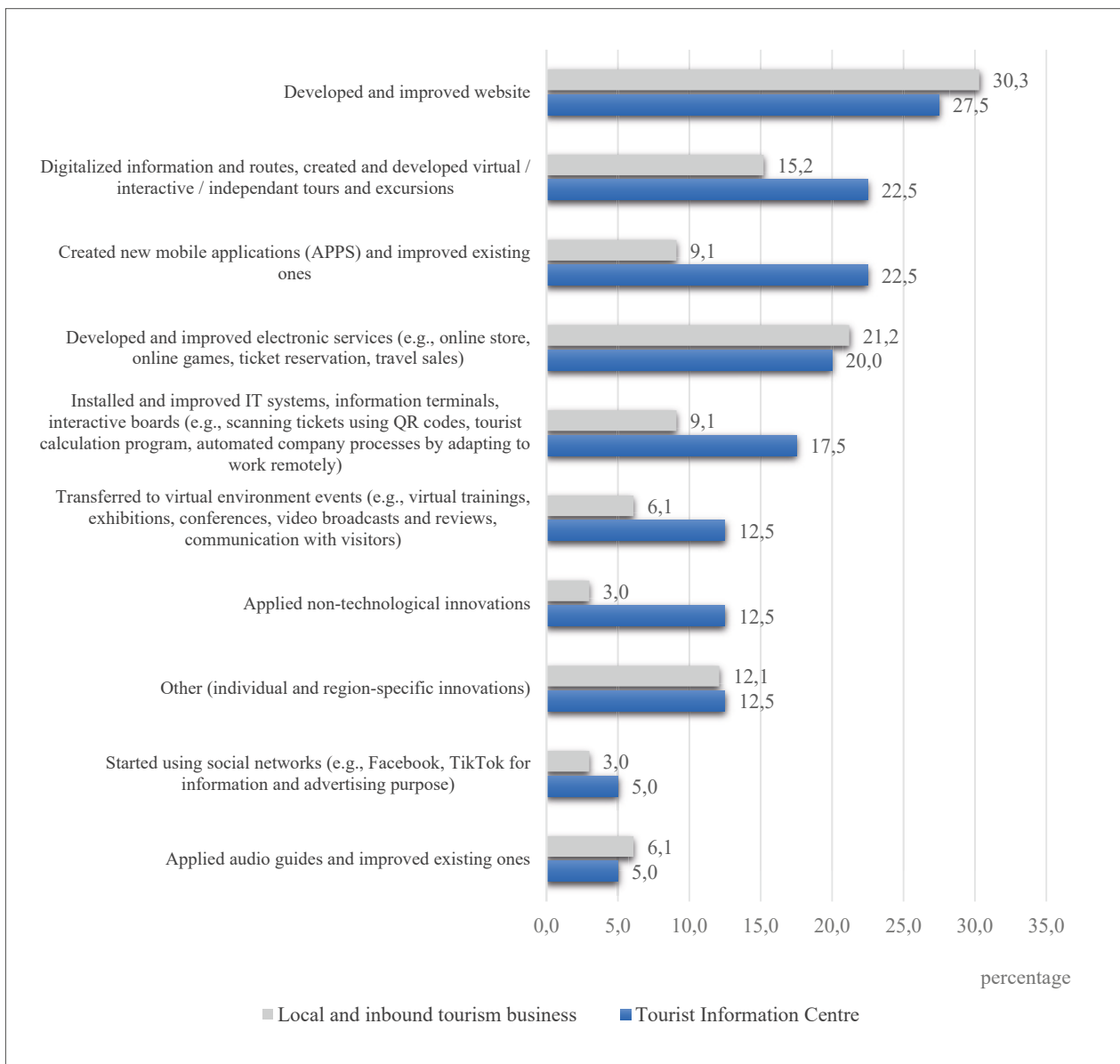
competitiveness and to provide new opportunities for tourists. Digital technologies change the way of tourist behaviour and tourism experience in general.

The greatest attention during the pandemic was paid to the innovative solutions, which did not conflict with restrictions imposed by the state, and at the same time provided new experiences for trips. The results of the research indicated the innovations of different formats and levels (**Fig. 2.2**). Especially in demand were those innovations that allowed to implementation activities remotely or contactless:

*"[...] due to the pandemic [...] remote check-ins, all kinds of robotic check-ins, terminals have become important... that the entire check-in would be contactless. [...] remote doctor's consultation, in cases where it is possible to do so. Now everything is done by phone, apparently shortly there will be Zoom, Teams, or some other solution. [...] people are naturally more sensitive to all distance observances, disinfections." (Respondent R5, Focus group with actors from the Tourism business).*

Among the most mentioned technologies that emerged and were introduced during the pandemic, some might not be included: mobile applications and audio guides, interactive information boards, virtual tours, and excursions (Liutikas, et al., 2023). Also, for the institutions and business companies it was important to develop and improve their internet websites: provide a user-friendly interface, introduce the chat box, and apply the possibility of pre-experience the destination using virtual reality. Because that the lockdown period influenced the change in communication and information sharing practices, the institutions transferred or expanded the activities in virtual events and online exhibitions. A variety of virtual training, video broadcasts, and reviews were offered. Social networks became the arena to share information and advertise.

According to the survey 72% (73 of 102) of institutions that participated in the survey have adopted innovations during the pandemic time. 80% of TICs mentioned the application of innovations in their work, meanwhile, only 66% of private business enterprises implemented innovations. One of the reasons for such a difference might be linked to the form of management: the first group is state-run institutions, whereas others are private business companies. In any case, the TICs expenses were covered by the state, whereas the private business had mainly to survive on their own. Therefore, a part of the privately run companies postponed their activities or went bankrupt, others changed their activity focus, and another part of the companies introduced various innovations as the stimulus to continue working the tourism sector.



**Fig. 2.2.** Applied technological and non-technological innovations (since 16 March 2020, the beginning of the pandemic). Calculated from positive answers (total 40 TIC 40 and 33 tourism business enterprises). Source: authors' own calculations based on a survey of state tourism institutions and local and inbound tourism business

The pandemic time was just the kick off period that showed the importance of innovations in the tourism sector. The pandemic period allowed to understand that those companies that are open-minded for innovative solutions become the centre of attraction. Therefore, in our research we included the questions that placed attention on future plans. The results of the study revealed that both tourism business companies and state tourism institutions were cautious about future innovations. About two-thirds (64%) of TICs and half (50%) of privately run companies thought about innovations in future.

The survey indicated the variety of technological innovations that are planned to be introduced in the tourism companies and state tourism institutions. The answers revealed that it is essential to work on the development of webpages further. Also, to create and develop virtual and interactive tours, excursions, supplement them with interesting audio guides, redistribute more information into the electronic format. State tourism institutions are going to place the major attitude on installation of interactive terminals and boards, also, to introduce addition facilities such as 3D glasses. Meanwhile, the private business companies are expecting to introduce into their work ecological transport and various smart technologies.

## Education

Another reaction to the crisis was education and learning, including both – tourists and employees of the tourism sector. Employees had to learn new skills, meanwhile, education and an increase in public awareness were important elements of environmentally responsible behaviour in tourist places. The research results indicated that part of tourism specialists (mainly in state tourism institutions) had the challenge to switch from “live” communication with tourists to remote work conditions. Therefore, to fill the gap in needed skills, several special courses to educate the personnel and prepare them for the changed form of work organization were organized.

Education of visitors to increase their responsibility was another essential issue for the destination managers and information centres. Educational initiatives focused on narratives detailing the negative effects of human activities on nature. These efforts also highlighted the adverse outcomes of plastic usage and littering in natural environments, underscored the importance of recycling, and promoted environmentally friendly modes of transportation for tourists, including bicycles, boats, kayaks, electric scooters, and walking.

*“It is important population education and awareness raising, promotion of walking, waste management” (A45, survey of TIC).*

*“We encourage tourists to travel on foot and we always pick up litter during the hikes and educate to do so our tourists” (A12, survey of TIC).*

In general, the pandemic period was estimated as the education period, where tourists, tourism providers, national and local authorities, and destination managers had to learn new skills that helped to adapt to unexpected circumstances:

*“I think Covid brought us things that we all learned from... maybe get out of the comfort zone, taught us how to find solutions quickly. We learned how to create new products and now those new products, I think, will prove themselves and become popular [...]” (Respondent R7, Focus group with actors from Tourism business)*

Even though the importance of education and the development of new skills is beyond doubt, some respondents underlined that the desired goal was not fully achieved:

*"[...] there were many trainings organized by the Department of Tourism. Well, we studied a lot, we hoped that the time would come and we would be able to demonstrate all our newly acquired competencies, but unfortunately that time did not come, the number of tourists did not increase [...]"* (Respondent R7, Focus group with actors from Tourism business)

The survey analysis indicated that there was a notable inclination to acquire new skills in response to the crisis. However, it was also evident that certain decisions made in some instances were rushed and lacked comprehensive consideration.

## Environmental and Climate Change

The climate change is an important topic in tourism research, placing attention on general change of environment and tourists' behaviour, and also emphasizing on more detailed research on manifestation of sustainability in tourism conditioned by the COVID-19 pandemic (Assaf, et al., 2022; Gössling and Schweiggart, 2022). Despite the fact that discussions on the relation of climate change and tourism are ongoing, the results of our research revealed that only around half (48%, 49 of 102 questionnaires) of respondents implemented at least minimal activities or introduced the measures contributing to the mitigation of the effects of climate change<sup>1</sup>.

According to the analysed questionnaires, around half (54.0 %) of the TICs that participated in a survey took minor or major actions to reduce the impact of climate change. Meanwhile, the share of business companies which started to apply climate-friendly actions in their activities was smaller (42.3%).

The major group of answers of TICs was concentrated on *ecological transportation*. The respondents mentioned that they actively promoted visitors to ride scooters and bicycles in their regions, even established bicycle rental services or organized bicycle orienteering competitions. Also, great efforts were made to motivate do outdoor hiking activities. Therefore, a number of routes were adapted for hiking, pedestrian zones were established, excursions specially organized for hikers were organized, even employees were encouraged to come to work on foot.

Meanwhile, among business companies, the ecological transportation and hiking activities was slightly less popular and was in second place in terms of taken actions. Business companies more concentrated on bicycle tours, organized excursions not only by bicycle or on foot, but also by kayak. It was mentioned that during excursions companies tried to use smaller buses. Some companies renewed its vehicle fleet by purchasing more environmentally friendly transport. However, the companies and municipalities that introduced electric busses, electric water bikes and other ecologic vehicles powered by renewable resources had an intention not only to mitigate the climate change, but also to attract tourists while offering the climate friendly way to explore the region.

Business companies have mainly contributed to the mitigation of climate change by reducing the usage of paper and moving their activities to virtual space, i.e., transferred from printed paper publications and documents to electronic documents. The similar paper reduction measures were used by TICs.

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<sup>1</sup> In part of received questionnaires the block of questions on climate change were even skipped. We can consider empty answer boxes as a negative answer.

Also, the representatives of TICs mentioned that a great majority of maps and routes were digitalized and included into mobile applications (APPS) and websites.

One of the most popular actions that was orientated towards reducing the impact of climate change was related to waste sorting and the use of recycled materials. The respondents mentioned such novelties as the print of publications on 100% recycled paper, the usage of ecological and reusable products (e.g., rejection of disposable dishes). Few TICs and one business company pointed out that they started saving resources, specifically by reducing electricity and fuel consumptions. For this reason, they purchased higher quality electronic equipment. Other TICs mentioned that they have started the green procurement, reduced or completely refused the plastic (e.g., offered to drink clean water from the tap without using plastic bottles), introduced high requirements for product packaging.

Also, the respondents declared that they educated visitors in order to increase their responsibility. The educational activities emphasized on stories about the damage caused by human activity to nature. There were individual and region-specific answers emphasizing on short circuit economy and promotion of local production. Also, others contributed to reducing the impact of climate change by installing the charging points for electric cars, optimizing travel routes or by regulating the tourist flows in general. Even some companies have initiated forest planting.

On the other hand, among the received answers there were a number of comments underlying that due to the climate change, the warm season is getting longer and local businesses noticed this fact as positive because they can offer their services for a longer period of time.

The summarised results allow us to presume that the climate protection trend in the field of tourism is quite clear, but the COVID-19 pandemic slowed down its greater expression. Pandemic was the "survival" time for the companies, therefore, the implementation of environment-friendly instruments and services, major investments in activities that mitigate the climate change had been postponed.

## Discussion and Conclusions

The pandemic wrought widespread changes across various spheres of social and economic life, significantly altering our daily routines. The tourism sector, in particular, bore the brunt of the crisis, grappling with an unprecedented decline in travel activities. In response to this challenging landscape, the imperative to adapt to the new reality manifested itself in diverse forms.

The research findings indicates that tourists were inclined to use new tourism services and products during the pandemic. The new products and services were essential for the tourism and leisure sector to survive, and the majority of them are continued to be used in the post-COVID reality and provides opportunities to be more resilient and less dependent on unexpected circumstances in the future. New technological innovations and new business models let to develop new attractiveness criteria for the local tourism destinations (Kriaučiūnas, et. al., 2023). Tourists were more engaged in the local destinations. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has hit the entire tourism sector very hard, rural tourism has been one of the least affected areas. Such advantages of the rural environment as ecological environment and the possibility of having more space and less physical contact due to the sparse population became apparent during the pandemic.

All newly developed products would undoubtedly accelerate the recovery and further development of the tourism sector after the end of the pandemic. Even before the pandemic, the role of innovation (especially the transfer of service advertising to the digital space) was important. Innovations increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, and electronic tools, which before the pandemic were mainly used for advertising, were also used for some services.

The pandemic highlighted various challenges for the tourism sector and provided an opportunity to rethink future tourism directions and possible models of sustainable tourism development. The *RegTour* model presented in this paper draws attention to the links between tourism and innovation, education, and business plan development. The reaction of the destination managers to the pandemic only confirms the main aspects of the analysed model. On the other hand, more extensive research and application of the model is needed, including further conceptualization, testing, and applications. Any tourism model must also be adapted to the changing forms of tourism, such as the development of solo travel.

The *RegTour* model could catalyse incubating fresh, knowledge-centered tourism enterprises. The viability of regions depends on innovative thinking and the application of new service management models. From our perspective, an innovative model should incorporate elements such as resilience, sustainability, adaptability, education, and innovation.

The tourism transformation is related to facilitate the implementation of innovative tourism concepts within the country's regions. This is achieved through the adaptation of regional infrastructure to meet tourism requirements and the introduction of novel products and services. The involvement of local communities stands as a critical endeavour within the tourism value chain. It is suggested, that the introduction of new services, innovative tourism products, and novel business structures will contribute to sustaining the appeal for both domestic and international tourists in the future.

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### 3. REVITALIZING JOURNEYS: CYCLING TOURISM SURGES IN POST-PANDEMIC ITALY

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**Abstract.** The chapter delves into the impact of the pandemic on tourists' travel preferences and the subsequent challenges faced by the tourism industry. It highlights the need for a new era of sustainable tourism, with a special focus on cycling tourism, as a means to promote local development, provide a leisurely experience in harmony with nature. The bicycle has emerged as a therapeutic and mindfulness tool, gaining significant popularity post-pandemic. Data reveals exponential growth in cycling tourism, making it a preferred activity that stimulates interests in nature, sports, gastronomy, culture, and local landscapes. This qualitative study examines a case study in Italy, to identify the factors and conditions that have led to its successful development as a cycling tourism destination. Analyzing the attractiveness of a territory as a tourist destination in this context is of utmost relevance. However, despite its potential benefits, this emerging tourism product requires further research.

**Keywords:** Sicily, slow travel, nature-based experiences, active sustainable tourism, territorial regeneration

## Introduction

The chapter explores how the pandemic has influenced tourists' travel preferences. It discusses the challenges to improve and develop a new era of tourism, with a focus on cycling tourism as a sustainable form of tourism that promotes local development, slow leisure in contact with nature, and environmental protection to combat the climate and energy crisis.

The Covid-19 infection has produced an emergency that has changed the rules and habits of many peoples in different countries, undoubtedly the most influential crisis of the 21st century. Many governments have reacted by applying behavioural dictates aimed at ensuring safety and protecting public health. At present, the pandemic seems to have been overcome, and many research studies have highlighted the pre- and post-pandemic impacts on tourism and tourist behaviour (Gössling, et al., 2020). At the same time, 2023 is a crucial moment to transform into more sustainable and resilient societies and economies. The desire to travel has not changed, as evidenced by recent data starting from the summer of 2022. Domestic tourism and proximity trips, as well as outdoor activities, nature-based products, and rural tourism, were chosen by many in 2022, allowing them to break away from daily routines and escape city chaos in places where they can be in close contact with nature, following



travellers who have developed a greater green and eco-friendly awareness. The main travel trends that will continue to shape tourism in 2023.

This analysis aims to explore the effects generated by cycling tourism and the existing connection between this practice and its development within the Sicily tourism destination, in the south of Italy. Also, all this is in line with the European cycling infrastructure policy, based on the European Cycling Route Network (Eurovelo), developed since 1995 by the European Cyclists' Federation (ECF) with the aim of outlining a network of long-distance cycling routes (ECF, 2018). In Italy, according to the recent report by Isnart-Legambiente (2020; 2023), there are indications of a growing phenomenon where Italian and foreign cycle tourists who have chosen Italy specifically for a cycling vacation, represented over 9 million tourist stays. This is double the number in 2019 (4.4 million stays) before the pandemic. Although it is a niche tourism type, it is a segment with exponential potential than other types of tourism, and bicycle tourism has a special importance within the scope of sustainable tourism (Derman and Keles, 2023).

We examine Sicily, Italy, as a case study to understand the factors contributing to its emergence as a popular cycling destination. It is relevant to analyse the attractiveness of the tourist destination referred to. Specifically, Sicily has a very strong and established tourism and food identity.

The study conducted is of a qualitative nature (utilizing semi-structured interviews with key informants). Specifically, the aim is to attempt an analysis through a field investigation, marked by conducting interviews that encompass the testimonies of professionals (entrepreneurs, practitioners, enthusiasts and tourists). It is utilized to define and understand the interests of the various involved parties (ranging from associations, tourist entrepreneurs, local governance, and even enthusiasts) and represents valuable support in relation to stakeholders' expectations regarding the perception of the enhancement and development plan of this tourist and sports practice in connection with numerous organized events (Kamal, et al., 2011; Schmeer, 2000). Local actors are to be considered as stakeholders in front of any actual or potential change of public policies; as well as we can identify key-actors and understand their behaviour, intentions, interrelations, interests, and the resources they have brought to bear on decision-making processes. The information was examined by coding the interview transcripts. Due to the study's restricted scope and it being the initial attempt, the decision was made to manually analyse the data without relying on any software. This manual approach permits creative analysis, enabling the researcher to establish connections with existing knowledge (Saldaña, 2009).

## **Understanding of cycling to go to cycling tourism**

The bicycle has been around for years, but today more than ever, it has returned to the spotlight because of its ability to alleviate anxieties resulting from the pandemic, acting as both a therapeutic and mindfulness tool. Simultaneously, the circumstances brought about by the pandemic have led to a re-evaluation of the use of public transportation as the primary mode of travel in urban areas (Barbarossa, 2020). The paradigm of social distancing has driven commuters towards private, motorized means of transportation.

Promoting pedal-powered mobility, alongside increased investment in cycling infrastructure such as bike lanes, could be one of the sustainable solutions to this challenge. The role of policy makers is

crucial in not only encouraging this cultural shift but also promoting cycling as a form of leisure and recreation (Privitera, 2014, p. 109).

Cycling offers a wide range of benefits, not only for individuals but also for communities and the environment. Embracing cycling as a means of transportation and leisure can lead to a more sustainable, healthy, and vibrant society. Cycling is an excellent form of exercise that engages various muscle groups, promoting cardiovascular health, strength, and stamina and help physical health. Also, as more people choose cycling, communities may witness an overall improvement in public health, reduced healthcare costs, and enhanced productivity due to a healthier and more active population build a sense of community among cyclists (De Hartog, et al., 2010). In addition, cycling is a sustainable and eco-friendly mode of transportation. Unlike motorized vehicles, bicycles do not produce harmful emissions or contribute to air pollution, making them an environmentally conscious choice for reducing carbon footprints (Nello-Deakin, 2020). Especially, in congested urban areas where traffic can be a major issue, bicycle allows for easier navigation through narrow streets and crowded spaces, making it an ideal choice for short to medium-distance trips. This leads to smoother traffic flow and fewer delays, benefitting both cyclists and other road users, also with reduced cost-Effective (Mattingly and Morrissey, 2014). Cycling is known for its therapeutic effects on mental health. It reduces stress and anxiety, as the rhythmic pedalling and immersion in nature provide a sense of calm and relaxation, apprizing sustainable tourism activities (Navrátil, et al., 2015). Furthermore, cycle tourism is a form of sustainable and ecotourism (de Oliveira Neves and Esperança, 2011). It can bring benefits to the practitioners, such as better health or a personal valorisation through cultural and leisure visits (Cisani, 2021). Cycle tourism promotes local businesses that protect the environment and cultural heritage, hence, improving the wellbeing of the visited communities (Ciascai, et al., 2022). Cycle tourism as an experience connected to nature, and as personal improvement and social interaction as well, also associated with the possibility of holding visits and recreational activities outside of their habitual residence where relevant to provision of signage services, of safety and emergency services, and quality of bicycle routes (Cheng-Fei, 2014; Ching-Fu and Chia-Yi, 2021).

Cycle Tourism is a relatively small market, appears to become increasingly popular as a niche tourism segment, especially in some countries. Good examples are Germany and the United Kingdom, they are the largest source markets for cycling tourism, followed by the Netherlands. The demand for this niche market is increasing, partly accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as of cycling events (Derom and Van Wynsberghe, 2015). In 2020, during the pandemic, 51% of Germans enjoyed a cycling trip. This is many more compared to 2019, when 35% of Germans went on a cycling trip. Out of these cycling tourists, 90% travelled independently, while only 10% went on a mostly all-inclusive package holiday. Since 88% travelled domestically.

Most German travellers - young adults, adults and elderly people enjoy cycling equally – often used a touring or trekking bike (65%), followed by a mountain bike (15%) and an urban/city bike (5%). Out of all bikes, 32% used an e-bike. Most cycling tourists travelled a cycling route using different accommodations (65%).

The bicycle tourism sector in Italy has seen an expansion phase since a few years now (Belotti, 2022). According to data from the National Institute of Statistics, in 2022 the number of trips taken by Italians increased compared to 2021 (31.6%), but remained below pre-pandemic levels (-23% compared to 2019), with a preference for foreign destinations that had lifted mobility and access restrictions for foreign countries. In the summer of 2022, Italian tourists perceived a recovery in almost all types of

vacations, with a desire to be active participants in the tourism experience, preferring visits to natural beauty spots (54.9% of summer trips). Cultural activities also remained popular, with visits to cultural capitals and villages (88.2%), followed by visits to monuments and historical or archaeological sites (44.1%), typical local markets (29.7%), and museums and exhibitions (29.2%).

Cycling tourism in Italy, generated approximately 55 million overnight stays in 2019, which represent about 6% of those recorded nationally. In 2020, despite the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic losses recorded in the tourism sector. Almost 5 million Italians used bicycles during their holidays, corresponding to 17% of the overall tourists.

Post-pandemic data show an exponential growth in the development of cycling tourism. In fact, it has become a preferred activity and a stimulus for other experiences related to nature, sports, knowledge of food and wine products, culture, and the territory. 33 million people – 4.3% of the total tourists visiting Italy – chose to add cycling to their trips last year.

The number of ‘pure’ cycle tourists – the ones that specifically go on a cycling holiday, and spend more – has more than doubled compared to pre-pandemic levels: 9 million of them have produced a 1-billion-euro impact on the local economy (Isnart, 2023).

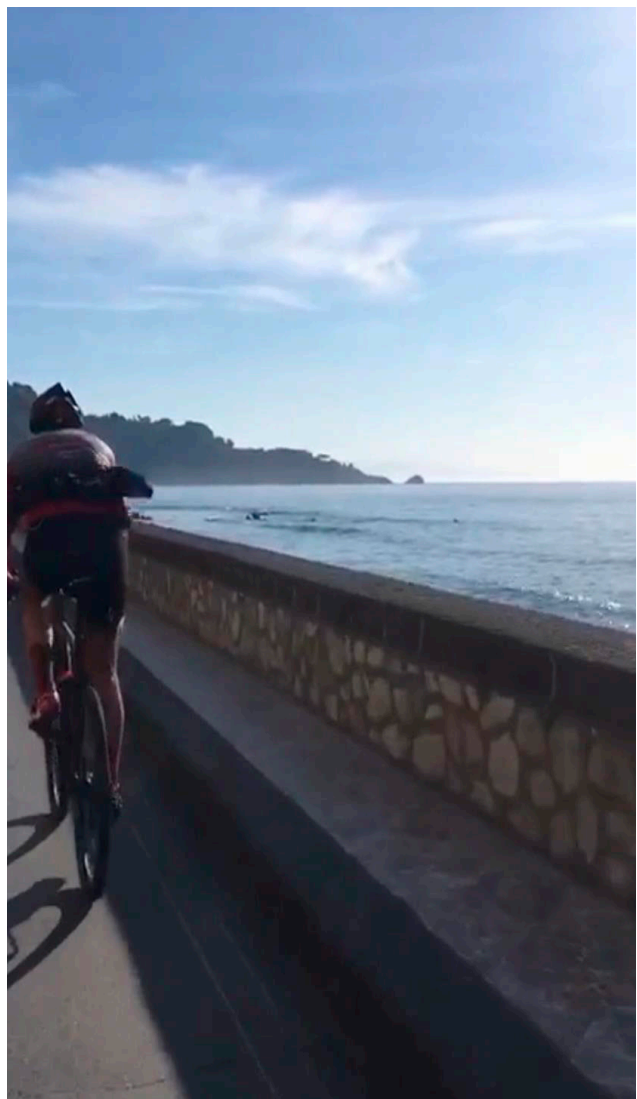
## Results: stakeholders and tourists’ engagement in cycling tourism

Sicily, in the South of Italy, is characterized of picturesque landscapes and rich cultural heritage, with a clear, azure Mediterranean sky, symbolizing the island’s pleasant weather and inviting atmosphere. In the foreground, depict a group of diverse cyclists, both locals and tourists, all donning colourful cycling gear and helmets. This represents the inclusivity and excitement of exploring the island on two wheels. The cycling route meanders through Sicily’s charming countryside, highlighting the varied terrain and captivating views. The path may include coastal roads, vineyard-covered hills, olive groves, citrus orchards, and rustic villages. This emphasizes the island’s natural beauty and agrarian traditions. From South to North, from West to East of the island there are elements of culture as well as local artisans crafting traditional pottery, vineyards offering wine tastings, or street markets with fresh produce and local delicacies. As the cycling route approaches the coastline, include a stretch of golden sandy beach and crystalline waters (**Fig. 3.1**).

The cycling tourism is seen as a way in which to promote the place, and an opportunity to develop the tourism economy. In fact, some tourism operators linked the cycling to the development of tourism products connected for example to food-wine tourism or to music events that could also help to reduce seasonality of tourism. Indeed, a tourism operator viewed the cycling route as an opportunity to upgrade hospitality structures and potential tourism-oriented development of inland and marginal area. In fact, there are an increasing number of bike-friendly hotels; food outlets with zero-mile products and energy meals; repair shops and shopping for the sale of specialized equipment; information on nature trails, excursions also cultural and others including medical and physiotherapeutic assistance. The aim is to combine physical like cycling activity with wellness: along the cycle routes there are resorts with spa centres for amateurs who are also looking for relaxation and thermal baths, the combination of sustainability with artistic, culture and eno-gastronomic beauty. However, it is necessary to mention

the critical elements in the island territory related to the infrastructure required for pedal mobility, such as cycling lanes, inadequate signage, or the organization of events that could serve as tourist attractions. It is necessary to report episodes of degradation related to the environment, which represents the other side of an ancient region, rich in unique architectural and natural beauties, but at the same time abandoned to degradation due to deep neglect and lack of education. And certainly, this cannot escape those who, above all, travel by bicycle, as they have an absolutely privileged "observatory". Tourism operators were mainly those who explicitly expressed the need to acquire knowledge on cycling tourism, while, on the other hand, hoteleries were not expressing a similar concern with regards to tourism-related skills. For example, a tourism operator who was talking about the kind of activities that the destinations should organize, argued: *"Besides marketing efforts, destinations should also consider hosting events. When visitors inquire about cycling information and event promotion, it's essential to have some advertising in place before actively promoting the product. In other words, while you don't necessarily need to be a promoter, initial advertising is crucial for successful promotion"*.

The Sicilian Region has created a map containing a series of itineraries to cross the island from north to south, from east to west, or to complete the entire circuit. Some of these itineraries are also well-known: the Sicily Divide ([www.sicilydivide.it](http://www.sicilydivide.it)), the Magna Via Francigena, the Ciclovia Parchi Sicilia ([www.cicloviaparchisicilia.it](http://www.cicloviaparchisicilia.it)), and the Baroque route. In particular, there are a total of 124 routes, including those without cycling paths ([www.piste-ciclabili.com](http://www.piste-ciclabili.com)). The bike itineraries cross some of the most beautiful villages and towns in Sicily, which are at risk of becoming ghost towns due to depopulation. By promoting cycle tourism in these inland areas, we can support the socio-economic fabric of these local communities. However, in the websites of cycling itineraries Sicily there are many facilities, such as B&Bs or affiliated bike-friendly apartments. In addition, on the website [www.luxurybikehotels.com](http://www.luxurybikehotels.com), we find 47 accommodation facilities in Italy offering excellent and exclusive stays, catering to bike enthusiasts and nature-loving tourists. In Sicily, there is only one Luxury Bike Hotel. Another platform is Italy Bike Hotels, a network of 70 hotels throughout Italy that have chosen



**Fig. 3.1.** A beautiful seascape landscape in the East of Sicily. Source: photo created by the author

to focus on cycling tourism to meet the needs of those who enjoy cycling ([www.italybikehotels.it](http://www.italybikehotels.it)). On this platform as well, there is only one affiliated structure.

Furthermore, on the website of the Italian Federation for the Environment and Bicycle (FIAB), there is a reference to the portal Albergabici ([www.albergabici.it](http://www.albergabici.it)), which lists certified establishments promoting cycling tourism in Italy.

In cycling tourism, especially in Sicily, the creation of cycle paths primarily for recreational and touristic purposes is a growing demand from administrations, as they are aware of the infrastructural deficit compared to other European countries (Barbarossa, et al., 2020). There are numerous associations (e.g., Etnaviva, Etna e dintorni, etc.), many of which aim to promote sustainable tourism, not only for bicycle excursions. Simultaneously, there has been an increase in social groups of cycling enthusiasts and athletes on Facebook or other social network (e.g., *cicloviaggiatrici*), where they exchange technical information, have fun, or engage in sports activities related to mountain biking. This trend has also seen the opening of bicycle-themed pubs and concept stores. Especially, for more than a decade, the tendency towards self-organization of trips relies heavily on the frequent use of digital media, so it is relevant the use of apps to find routes or touristic place to visit by bicycle.

The public sector and travel agencies in the Sicily area show great enthusiasm for the growth of cycling tourism. This interest stems from the belief that cycling tourism could serve as a valuable socioeconomic revitalization strategy, especially in regions impacted by the coronavirus emergency. By promoting cycling, it fosters the development of local economies along the routes and encourages the seasonal adjustment of tourism offerings. Additionally, cycling tourism aligns well with the concept of proximity tourism, such as staycations or holidays near home, as it embodies the key attributes of a low-touch economy, emphasizing safety, health, maintaining distance, and short-range travel (Petino, et al., 2021).

Why choose cycling tourism? When asked to international tourists about their motivation to opt for cycling tourism, they highlight several compelling reasons. *"Cycling tourism offers the unique opportunity to explore new destinations at one's own pace"*, tell a German tourist. Unlike conventional modes of transportation, cycling allows tourists to take in the scenic beauty and cultural richness of a place with a sense of freedom and flexibility. They can stop wherever they please, immerse themselves in the local surroundings, and truly experience the essence of the destination.

*"Cycling tourism enables a meaningful connection with nature and the environment"*, affirm a young 20-year-old Italian girl. In fact, traveling on two wheels allows to embrace the outdoors and engage with the natural landscape like Mount Etna in a way that fosters a deeper appreciation of our nature's beauty and fragility.

Another significant aspect is the chance to interact with locals on a more personal level, and also, to taste good food. As cyclists pass through picturesque villages and less-trodden paths, they often engage with residents, creating authentic cultural exchanges. These encounters provide a glimpse into the daily lives, traditions of the people, enhancing the overall travel experience. This is relevant to develop a road cycling destination (Mundet, et al., 2022).

Finally, cycling tourism promotes a healthier lifestyle. Riding a bike not only benefits physical fitness but also contributes to mental well-being. The sense of achievement and the release of endorphins during cycling bring joy and satisfaction, making the journey a rewarding and rejuvenating one. Etna

Bike Tours (a cycling tourist operator) presents an array of options for enthusiasts, catering to all skill levels. *"Whether you prefer a day excursion or a multi-day adventure, there's a tour perfectly tailored to your riding abilities"*, is written on its website. Discover a plethora of opportunities for cycle tourism on the island, with an extensive network of dirt roads, bike trails, and single tracks stretching for hundreds of kilometres. These paths lead to some of the most stunning and hidden destinations, accessible only by mountain bike.

Overall, the allure of cycling tourism lies in the blend of adventure, connection, and wellness it offers. It caters to those seeking a deeper connection with the places they visit, leaving a positive impact on both the traveller and the destinations they explore.

## Conclusions

Cycling tourism has emerged as a sustainable and preferred post-pandemic activity that satisfies tourists' desire for leisure, nature, and cultural experiences. Its potential for local development and environmental conservation is significant. Through the case study in Sicily, this article sheds light on the factors that contribute to the attractiveness of cycling tourism destinations. Further research in this area is essential to fully grasp the growth and potential benefits of this emerging tourism product. As the world seeks to rebuild the tourism industry, embracing sustainable alternatives like cycling tourism can lead us towards a more resilient and responsible future. All local stakeholders, policy makers and destination marketers having an interest in taking part in the sustainable, business initiative need to be properly informed and trained.

Considering after Covid-19 pandemic, there is need to rethink the tourism model outdoor with more services on cycling tourism. Especially, the result argues for greater cooperation between different levels of government operating in the touristic market to extend the benefits of return on investments. It is relevant the role of bicycle mobility infrastructure within the land-use and landscape planning process, also of national cycling strategies and policies of promoting healthy holidays, based on physical activities and, in particular, on the use of bicycles also e-bike.

In addition, the place where cycling tourism occurs is not only a destination, it is the local community's home, a place of value so cycling tourist is also looking for inspirational and personal experiences that include local culture and seeing local life.

Specifically, our study found lack of resources in involving a large number of diversely participants, thus resulting in a lack of facility to include and commit a sufficient number of regional stakeholders.

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# 4. BACK TO BUSINESS AS USUAL? AN ASSESSMENT OF NORMALCY IN HOTEL OPERATIONS POST ZERO-COVID POLICY ERA IN CHINA

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**Abstract.** The lockdown issues and the myth of Zero-COVID policy have accelerated the world continuous concern on how quickly China and its hotel industry return to normalcy. Being in the eye of the Covid-19 storm, China's hotel sector faced different challenges and applied various measures in their business operations at different stages of the pandemic. One of the strategies employed was the Zero-COVID policy, a package of measure that some perceived as too strict and restrictive. The question is; as the Covid-19 situation improves globally, have these measures and restrictions been eased and normalcy restored to its pre-covid state? To answer these questions, this paper assesses the changes in hotel operations before and post Zero-COVID policy era. In-depth interviews were conducted with 27 hotel operations managers from the eastern part of China and data was analysed using NVivo14. Findings revealed all hotels have cancelled all mandatory requirements (i.e., health code check) except daily disinfection and mask wearing for staff. Based on the findings of this study, the current state of hotel business operations in China and myths and misconceptions about the hotel industry post Zero-COVID policy era have been cleared.

**Keywords:** hotel operations, Zero-COVID policy, normalcy

## Introduction

On January 28, 2023, China ended its Zero-COVID policy. The end of China's stringent pandemic control policy was, perhaps, a relief to the world as it allowed the disrupted global hospitality industry and supply chain to resume with an economic boost. While the world is celebrating China's border reopening, how the country manages the pandemic has always been the focus of the world. What escalated this concern is not people's mental and psychological health but how the media depicts the cruelty of the policy. The misconception was further intensified when protesters in Shanghai demand for freedom a few days prior to the announcement of the end of the policy. A series of misconceptions and worries arose from how the media reports the lockdown issues and myth of the Zero-COVID policy (Nam, et al., 2022), including a continuous concern on how quickly can China return to normalcy (Gan, et al., 2023). Despite the removal of quarantine requirement in January 8, 2023, the world continued to perceive difficulties entering China (He, et al., 2023). In fact, the difficulties were caused by various factors including a shock of the sudden changes of policy and geopolitical tensions (Hong and Che,

2023). Still, “we tend to think China has a strict, top down COVID-19 policy”, said Ergenc (2023) in *The Diplomat*. Along with a growing concern about the post Zero-COVID policy (Nam, et al., 2022), the misconception has raised another concern – whether China’s hotel industry has returned to normalcy as is the case in other jurisdictions.

The pandemic created a new context for hospitality research. In the early stage of the pandemic, scholars focused on exploring the impacts of COVID-19 on hotel industry (Hao et al., 2020) and how the pandemic has changed hotel operations (Chan, et al., 2021). As the pandemic evolved, scholars concern moved towards the impact of COVID-19 on employees and the well-being of expatriates (Teng, et al., 2021; Nam, et al., 2022). Recently, the dynamic of the Zero-COVID policy raised scholars’ interest in understanding the role of different stakeholders on hotel recovery strategies and resilience (Gu, et al., 2023).

Although there is growing literature addressing the impact of COVID-19 on hotel industry, the assessment of normalcy in hotel operations in the post Zero-COVID policy era remains unexplored. Hotel operations refer to core activities performed to meet customer expectations (Chan, et al., 2021). In different stages of the pandemic, China’s hotel faced different challenges and applied various measures such as following local standard operation procedures and using technologies in their business operations (Chan, et al., 2021; Gu, et al., 2023). What is known is how COVID-19 changed the hotel operations, including required guests to wear mask, measure temperature and show health code when they enter the hotel (Chan, et al., 2021; Davras and Durgun, 2022).

After over 2 years of strict travel restrictions under the Zero-COVID policy, has the easing of policy resulted in a return to normalcy in the hotel sector? Can Chinese hotels accommodate guests without restrictions as was the case prior to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic? Is the hotel sector in China back to business as usual? To answer these questions, this paper assesses the changes in hotel operations before and post Zero-COVID policy era. The specific objective of the study were: (i) to establish the changes to hotel operations during the Zero-Covid policy in China; (ii) to expose the current state of affairs in hotel operations, post the Zero-Covid policy; and (iii) to make recommendations for the way forward. To this end, in-depth interviews with 27 hotel managers from the eastern part of China were conducted. The major contribution of this paper is to provide an understanding of the current state of hotel operations in China. To our best knowledge, this paper is the first to clear up myths and misconceptions about the hotel industry post Zero-COVID policy era.

## Literature Review

### The hotel sector in China

Hotel industry in China developed significantly since the reform and opening up in 1978 (Yang, et al., 2015; Ma, 2022). With over 330000 hotel rooms and a market size of about 671 billion yuan in 2019, China’s hotel sector is still considered to be in its prime growth stage (Ma, 2022; Daxue Consulting, 2022). Despite its contribution to the national and provincial economies, the industry faced unprecedented challenges in its development route. The immature nature of the hotel development model in China made it more prone to external challenges such as health crisis (SARS in 2003), global economic downturn and government thrift measures (Deng, et al., 2020).

To develop the industry, practitioners and researchers have explored critical success factors of hotel operations. For example, Zhang, et al. (2013) found six key success factors namely people, timing, strategic choices, managerial and operational efficiency, product performance, and organisational culture contributing to China budget hotels. Similarly, Wang and Hung (2015) identified seven critical success factors (atmosphere, room facilities, other facilities, service, cleanliness, location and value for money) for guest houses from customer perceptions. Likewise, Wu and Yang (2018) tested a luxury value framework and found Chinese luxury hotel consumers' purchase intention is influenced by hedonistic, financial, and utilitarian values. In 2021, Luo, et al. (2021) revealed location as the main success factor for economy hotels, followed by facilities, service, price, image, and booking experience. These critical success factors are hotel operational attributes which influence guest satisfaction.

## **COVID-19 and the hotel sector in China**

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, the impact of COVID-19 on hotel industry received great attention from practitioners and researchers, who have examined relevant research. For instance, the industry recovery practices (Jiang and Wen, 2020), post-pandemic agenda (Hao, et al., 2020), hotel segments and operational structures (Ozdemir, et al., 2021), changes in hotel operations (Chan, et al., 2021) and strategic response to the pandemic (Kim and Han, 2022). Most studies have attempted to provide insights and recovery strategies for hotel industry. For example, Jiang and Wen (2020) provided insights to enhance hotel management and marketing practices. Hao, et al. (2020) proposed a COVID-19 management framework for industry activation and revitalisation in the post-pandemic era. Kim and Han (2022) compared guests' choice of hotel before and after the pandemic. Gu, et al. (2023) analysed recovery strategies and provided suggestions to cope with enduring crisis. Some studies have analysed the impact of COVID-19 on the industry and proposed suggestions for hotel business resilience and recovery during- and post-pandemic era. Little has been published on the impact of Zero-COVID policy on hotel operations, except for Chan et al. (2021), who explored how the pandemic has changed hotel operations.

The Zero-COVID policy had great impact on the hotel industry. At different stages of the pandemic, hotels faced various challenges and struggled to sustain their business operations (Chan, et al., 2021). When the outbreak started, 74% of hotels were forced to close for 27 days from January to February 2020 (Aharon, et al., 2021). Hotel occupancy dropped from 70% to 8% and remained lower than 10% for the next 28 days (Aharon et al., 2021: 5). Despite being hit hardest, hotels provided free accommodation services to medical staff and quarantine places to visitors coming from affected areas (Chen, et al., 2020). The Zero-COVID policy was introduced on March 28, 2020 to prevent new infections from abroad. To support the policy, hotels had to comply with the regulatory requirements regarding prevention of the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Hotels had to invest in new technologies in order to reduce human interaction (Sharma, et al., 2021). Managers and employees were required to be trained to provide extra training in disinfection and hygiene while maintaining exceptional service. Many times, the hotel staff had to be quarantined after testing positive. These requirements caused severe stress on hotel staff (Teng, et al., 2021). While withstanding pressure of survival, hotels also faced the risk of reduced revisit intention from guests who perceived risk of COVID-19 when using hotels (Yu, et al., 2021).

Along with the introduction of the policy, 97% of luxury and upper-scale hotels reopened in April 2020 (Hao, et al., 2020). During the pandemic, hotels are required to adhere to both corporate and local government's health advice. Other than practicing common precautionary measures such as body temperature checks, they required guests to wear surgical masks, fill in health declaration form, and indicate past 14 days travel history, hotels also took extra measures such as increasing sanitisation protocols and providing extra in-room amenities (Chan, et al., 2021; Davras and Durgun, 2022). To prevent infections and safeguard their brand reputation, hotels implemented sustained and more restrictive measures than local government's guidelines (Chan, et al., 2021). Owing to the policy, hotels were able to satisfy new guest expectations such as need for safe services and social distancing (Song, et al. 2022). Although it may seem counter-intuitive, the policy had positive impacts on hotel operations. To understand the reason behind the positive impact, the next sections assess changes in hotel operations during COVID-19.

### **Effects of the Zero-Covid policy on hotel operations**

According to Chibili (2016), hotel operations are mainly concerned with providing food and accommodation to guests. Key operational departments include the front office, housekeeping, the kitchen and restaurant. These work closely with functional departments like human resource management, marketing, finance and facilities and engineering, among many others (Rutherford and O'Fallon, 2007). Zhou, et al. (2014) and Sun, et al. (2022) however argued that the six main operational attributes for a hotel are room facilities and amenities, hotel design and facilities, food, price, location and staff (Zhou, et al., 2014; Sun, et al., 2022). This study focuses mainly on the key operational departments as the researchers attempted to assess the effects of easing of the Zero-COVID policy on hotel operations in China.

In times of a crisis, guests paid more attention to hotel precautionary measures than basic services (Sun, et al., 2022). To meet guests' expectations and restore guest's confidence, hotels formulated more restrictive new operation standards based on the local government guidelines. Two main changes could be observed in hotel operations during the pandemic. First, hotels adopted new technologies to improve service quality and reduce physical employee-guest interaction (Lau, 2020). To reduce human contact, most hotels began to deploy robot services and those that already had robot services, intensified their use (Sharma, et al., 2021). These include the use of artificial intelligent for biometric check-in services and temperature checks, and mobile robots for room services and housekeeping deliveries (Lau, 2020). Secondly, hotels implemented various precautionary measures such as regular disinfection and hygiene, social distancing, regular temperature measurement, and face mask usage (Chan, et al., 2021; Davras and Durgun, 2022). Upon arrival at the hotel, guests were required to show their health code and travel history (Chan, et al., 2021). Other than new precautionary measures, hotels intensified already existing hygiene and safety measures. For example, hotels increased disinfection and hygiene in rooms, restaurants, facilities (pool and beaches), suitcases and high contact areas (Davras and Durgun, 2022). Guided by the local guidelines, new hotel operations are listed in **Table 4.1**.

**Table 4.1.** New hotel operations during COVID-19

Main attributes	Updated operational standards
<b>Room amenities and facilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sterilise and disinfect all amenities and facilities</li> <li>• Provide extra in-room amenities</li> </ul>
<b>Hotel design and facilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clean and disinfect pool, beaches, sunbeds and loungers on a daily basis</li> </ul>
<b>Food/restaurant</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff wear masks and gloves when serving meals</li> <li>• Separate meals served in open buffet by glass partitions</li> <li>• Constant hygienic care and disinfection in the restaurant, tables, and cutlery</li> <li>• Not allowing guests to enter restaurant without a mask</li> </ul>
<b>Price</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer affordable prices</li> </ul>
<b>Staff</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with masks and face shield</li> <li>• Maintain competency while obeying hygiene rules</li> <li>• Knowledge on and attentive to pandemic measures</li> </ul>
<b>Precautionary measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General cleanliness in high touch and common areas (toilets, lifts, staircases)</li> <li>• Mask usage (provide masks throughout the hotel)</li> <li>• Temperature check for staff and visitors (entrance, restaurant)</li> <li>• Check guest's health code</li> <li>• Track guest's travel history</li> <li>• Required guests to fill in the mandatory health form</li> <li>• Disinfect luggage at the entrance</li> <li>• Provide hand sanitizers throughout the hotel</li> <li>• Social distancing (public areas, restaurants, lifts)</li> <li>• Continuous announcement on complying to social distancing rules</li> <li>• Information boards and social distancing rules made available throughout the hotel</li> </ul>
<b>Artificial intelligence and robots</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New business operation model (live stream, social media, food delivery app)</li> <li>• Facial recognition software (check-in and check-out, temperature checks)</li> <li>• Robot services (room services, housekeeping deliveries, robot waiters, robot receptionists)</li> </ul>

Sources: Adapted from Lau (2020), Chan, et al. (2021), Davras and Durgun (2022), and Sun, et al. (2022)

All six attributes (room amenities and facilities, hotel design and facilities, food, price, location and staff) previously valued by hotel guests were upgraded with strict sanitation protocols while precautionary measures and artificial intelligence and robot services were new attributes added to assist hotel operations. The pandemic did not only increased hotel guests' health awareness (Chan, et al., 2021) and robot acceptance (Zhong et al., 2022), the precautionary measures also increased guest satisfaction (Song et al., 2022). More importantly, while these precautionary measures delayed hotel operation speed, positive guest feedback was received (Sun, et al., 2022), they also resulted in improved hotel image and reputation (Chen, et al., 2020; Kim and Han, 2022). Therefore, scholars recommended these precautionary measures and new technologies to be maintained in the post-pandemic era (Hao, et al., 2020; Chan, et al., 2021; Song, et al., 2022). But to what extent have these operations change in the

post Zero-COVID policy era? To answer this question, the next section presents the method used to collect data.

## Method

This study conducted in-depth interviews with hotel operation managers from eastern part (Nanjing, Shanghai, Beijing, Zhejiang, and Jinan) of China. Since most of the participants were Chinese, a semi-structured interview guide, originally created in English was translated into Chinese by a bilingual researcher. To ensure accuracy during translation, the Chinese interview guideline was translated back into English by two researchers who never saw the original English version. Then, the original English and translated-English versions were compared to ensure similarity of the guidelines. This study collected 27 sets of data between March and April 2023. The sample consists of responses from 22 hotel operation managers from Nanjing, two from Shanghai, one from Beijing, Zhejiang, and Jinan respectively (see **Table 4.2**). These hotels were opened between 1990 and 2022 and ranged from no star to five stars. The data was analysed using NVivo14.

**Table 4.2.** Hotel's information

Operation manager	Hotel Location	Star Rating	Year of establishment
M1	Nanjing	5	2019
M2	Nanjing	4	2019
M3	Nanjing	-	1990
M4	Nanjing	5	2021
M5	Nanjing	-	2007
M6	Nanjing	-	2019
M7	Nanjing	4	2019
M8	Nanjing	-	2018
M9	Nanjing	-	2019
M10	Nanjing	4	2014
M11	Nanjing	3	2003
M12	Nanjing	5	2019
M13	Nanjing	-	2019
M14	Nanjing	-	2021
M15	Nanjing	-	2022
M16	Nanjing	4	2019
M17	Nanjing	5	2021
M18	Nanjing	5	2021
M19	Nanjing	4	2021
M20	Beijing	-	2021

Operation manager	Hotel Location	Star Rating	Year of establishment
M21	Nanjing	5	2020
M22	Nanjing	5	2014
M23	Nanjing	-	2020
M24	Zhejiang	5	2018
M25	Shanghai	5	2018
M26	Jinan	-	2021
M27	Shanghai	5	2010

## Findings and discussions

The following section presents and discusses the findings of this study.

### Changes during the Zero-Covid-19 era

The analysis produced a list of themes coded for hotel operations during the pandemic and post Zero-COVID policy (**Table 4.3**). Generally, the pandemic, restrictions, and policy had a huge effect on the hotels' operations, performance and customer experience. During COVID-19, the occupancy for three hotels utilised as the quarantine hotel were not affected, two quarantine hotels experienced a slight drop in occupancy, while 21 hotels experienced a drastic dropped between 20% and 70%. Revenue for most hotels fell between 50% and 70%, one hotel (M11) experienced a significant loss in revenue due to low occupancy. This study findings are in line with those of Ncube, et al. (2021) who found out that hotel revenue decreased drastically (in some cases up to 100%) in Zimbabwe due to the effects of Covid-19. Ozdemir, et al (2021) also found out that on average, the hotel sector in the US experience a loss of about 86% in RevPar and a total of about \$30 billion in just three months. This shows the magnitude of the losses caused by Covid-19 to the hotel sector.

Human resources were also greatly affected. Three hotels chose to bear the cost of retaining their existing human resources; 10 hotels cut wages, arranged leave days for their staff, laid off some employees, and outsourced staff when required; six managers mentioned that the stress of long working hours and risk of being infected increase turnover rate; two had concerns over their employees' risk of being infected; and two mentioned high employee absenteeism since the policy required the employees to show a 24-hour or 48-hour negative swab test result before using any transportation and entering any places. Residential community area could also be closed without much notice if there was an infected person. On of the managers had this to say; *"We needed to arrange staff every day to enter the hotel and supervise guests to scan the place code"* (M26) but *"they would find their neighbourhood closed the next morning, so the managers need to adjust personnel in time to deal with it"* (M27).

The findings of the study are supported by studies by Teng, et al (2021) and Ncube, et al (2021) who which revealed that the pandemic caused untold stress on employees who were at a very high risk

of infection and re-infection. They also concur that many employees either lost their jobs for income during the Covid-19 pandemic due to either closure of their hotels or very low business.

The restrictions had serious implications on hotel operations. For example, long and complex check-in procedures caused customer dissatisfaction while strict quarantine and precautionary measures seriously affected the operations (M3, M12, M21). Despite the fact that the staff were devoted to improve the quarantine experience (M20), the precautionary measures negatively affected customer's experience (M19) because some customers could not afford the high price of quarantine hotel rooms (M16).

**Table 4.3.** Hotel operations during Zero-COVID policy

Hotel operation	Requirements during Zero-Covid policy era
<b>General</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check guest health code</li> <li>• Proof of recent (24hr) PCR negative test</li> <li>• Mandatory face masking</li> <li>• Regular disinfection</li> <li>• Disinfection upon entry, including luggage</li> <li>• Travel history check and completion of health form</li> <li>• Hand sanitisation regularly-guests provided with</li> <li>• Mandatory temperature checks</li> <li>• Regular announcements to keep social distance</li> <li>• Signages and markings all over-social distancing</li> </ul>
<b>Front office</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All reservations strictly online</li> <li>• Receptionists put on face masks/Robot reception</li> <li>• Social distancing, no handshakes</li> <li>• Transparent barriers installed</li> <li>• AI e.g., facial recognition for self-check-in/check out</li> </ul>
<b>Restaurant</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only provides for stay-in guests</li> <li>• No external diners allowed</li> <li>• Strict social distancing</li> <li>• Mandatory face masking before entering</li> <li>• Use of robots to take orders and deliver</li> <li>• Glass partitioning between different menu items</li> </ul>
<b>Room service</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Robot assisted room service</li> <li>• Provide extra in-room amenities</li> </ul>
<b>Food production</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highly monitored</li> <li>• No importation of ingredients</li> <li>• Food produced for in-house guests only</li> <li>• Daily or regular testing of staff</li> </ul>
<b>Housekeeping</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No laundry services for guests, self-laundry only.</li> <li>• Robot housekeeping deliveries</li> </ul>
<b>Bar services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only for inhouse guests, only to be delivered to the room.</li> <li>• Where in-bar service was provided, strict social distancing</li> </ul>



Customers were asked to show health code, wear mask, and wait for lengthy times to check-in time (M22). *Most of the guests understood the requirements while a small number of guests consider this a violation of human rights*” (M20). These complicated procedures such as strict social distancing in in-bar service and restaurant even discouraged customer’s desire to stay (M1). However, the ability by hotels to comply with the precautionary measures allowed them have gradually resumed operations to normalcy (M16) thereby improving on occupancy and revenue (M2, M3, M6, M20, M24).

## Hotel operations post Zero-COVID policy

The study also sought to establish the current state of affairs after the removal of the Zero-COVID policy. Generally, all the respondents felt that, to a very large extent, hotel operations have been restored to normalcy. While most hotels still require face masks for employees and continue daily disinfecting touch points and public areas, the rest of the Zero-COVID policy requirements are no longer required or practiced. Walk-in guests were now allowed, restaurants open to both in-house and external patrons, room service restored, food production back to normal, housekeeping and bar services fully restored. **Table 4.4** presents the hotel operations post Zero-COVID policy era.

**Table 4.4.** Hotel operations post Zero-COVID policy

Hotel operation	Situation after Zero-COVID policy era
<b>General</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Face masks for employees in certain hotels</li> <li>• Daily disinfection of touch points and public areas</li> <li>• The rest are no longer required neither are they practiced</li> </ul>
<b>Front office</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Walk ins now allowed</li> <li>• Robots still used to complement staff</li> <li>• Reception barriers removed</li> <li>• Self check-in optional</li> </ul>
<b>Restaurant</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open to all</li> <li>• Robots only used to complement staff</li> <li>• Partitioning removed</li> </ul>
<b>Room service</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full room service restored</li> <li>• Extra room amenities a plus</li> </ul>
<b>Food production</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Back to normal</li> <li>• Out-catering also back</li> </ul>
<b>Housekeeping</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full housekeeping services restored</li> </ul>
<b>Bar services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fully restored</li> </ul>

Following the end of the Zero-COVID policy, hotels no longer required customers to follow any precautionary measures but continue daily disinfection (including rooms and restaurant) and some still require staff to wear mask. All hotels resumed human contact and keep necessary measures and technologies to enhance customer experience. For example, some hotels kept new technologies like robots and contactless check-out (M3, M8, M12, M14, M19, M27). Generally, all the hotels under study returned their operations to pre-pandemic standards.

The study also revealed that, for many hotels, capacity utilisation was restored from an average of 60% to 100% of pre-pandemic level (M1, M3, M4, M9, M13, M16, M19, M24, M25, M27). Some hotels have already surpassed their pre-pandemic occupancy and revenue levels as *“some guests revenge on spending and consumption after the easing of policy”* (M23).

## Conclusion and Implications

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the Zero-COVID policy had a significant impact on the operations of hotels in China, particularly those in the southeastern part of the country. Business was no longer as usual and many hotels had to comply with the requirements of the policy. Major changes included artificial intelligence to reduce the degree of human contact with guests, laying off staff or giving them mandatory leave, daily disinfection, ensuring that both employees and guests comply with the health code and placing signages everywhere to remind people of the need for social distancing and sanitation.

It can also be concluded that after the removal of the Zero-COVID policy, hotels have restored their pre-covid state where almost all the Zero-COVID policy requirements have been set aside and both guests and employees enjoy face-to-face interactions and there is no need for the health code. In a few cases, hotel staff are still required to put on face masks and daily disinfection have been maintained as a good practice. Most of the artificial intelligence that was acquired and installed for the pandemic have remained in use only to complement the human element as well as to improve guest experiences. This therefore implies that hotels in China are prepared to receive both domestic and international guests as before.

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# 5. THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHINESE WINE TOURISM IN THE POST-EPIDEMIC ERA AND THE IN-DEPTH INTERACTION WITH EUROPE IN THE FUTURE

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**Abstract.** In the post-epidemic era, China's wine import volume has begun to recover. Although it has been slow or even declined during the epidemic period, both official data and industry insiders still feel that China's wine import market and even China's wine export market have a bright future. China is a big wine-producing country. There are already wine records and archaeological evidence from 7,000 years ago, with reliable historical evidence from 2100 years ago. As far as wine is concerned, China is currently the world's largest red wine importer and the world's sixth-largest wine consumer. Moreover, with a population of 1.4 billion in China, high-quality wine not only has huge consumption potential but also has room for growth. And China is also one of the largest wine-producing countries in the world, which means that wine is and will be increasingly accessible to all. China's largest wine importer is still Europe.

China and Europe have always been important regions in world history and civilization. These two regions also have a lot of communication with wine. Whether it is the origin of wine in the world or wine planting and wine consumption, these two regions have left a strong mark on the development of wine in the world. In the post-epidemic era, people are eager to go outdoors and start various outdoor travels to relieve the physical and psychological shadow of the new coronavirus pandemic. Therefore, paper aims to contribute to analyse the next chapter on the study of the current situation of Chinese wine in the post-epidemic era and to ask Chinese tourists whether they are interested in going to European wine-growing areas to start a "unique" wine, food, and wine experience. In this way, our proposal can promote the economic development of China and Europe.

**Keywords:** China, Europe, Wine tourism, Wine History, the Era

## Introduction

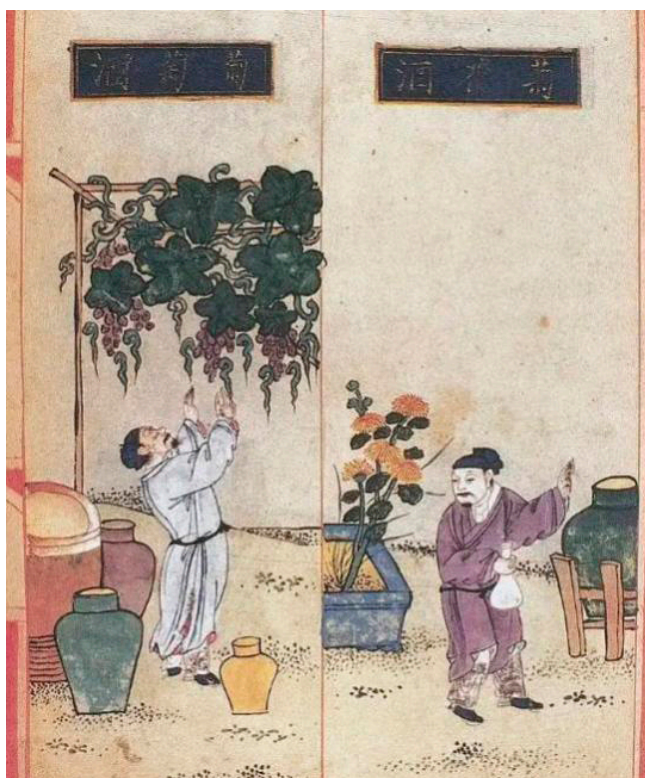
Chinese archaeologists discovered wines dating back 9,000 to 7,000 years at the Jiahu site in Maoyang County, Henan Province, China. According to the ancient Chinese medical book "Compendium of Materia Medica", the word "grape" appeared in China as early as 1500 BC. The origin of Chinese wine is best known, dating back to 206-220 BC, when Chinese general Zhang Qian travelled along the Silk Road to the Western Regions (where Uzbekistan meets China today), exchanging cultures and goods, and bringing wine back to China. Although wine was discovered more than a hundred years ago BC, and then disappeared without a trace more than a thousand years later, wine is mentioned many times in the historical works of the Tang Dynasty and Genghis Khan's Yuan Dynasty.

Many contemporary Chinese wines have been discovered in many production areas, such as Cabernet Sauvignon, which was introduced in 1900 by Mr. Changyu. This imitative led to the modernization of the entire Yantai region of Shandong Province and other regions: the current Ningxia region, a popular new production area in China that has won many blind tastings in international competitions and Xinjiang, which has always been a grape-producing area, known as the hometown of grapes in China, and there are various large wineries here.

The development of wine industry and trading and most recently, the tourism activities related to wine are the main focuses of this paper. Our study aims to review the historical evolution of Chinese wine, unknown in Europe, and its contemporary import and export developments. of the analysis of Chinese wine consumption and its relationship with European wine exportations, together with the cognition and expectations of the Chinese community on wine, gastronomy, and wine tourism. Moreover, the paper can provide the impetus for the recovery of Sino-European tourism and the perspective to realize a new pattern of Sino-European wine tourism in the post-epidemic era. This year after the epidemic, China began to open the door to tourism. This shocking news undoubtedly brought a great positive market forecast to the World Tourism Organization and the European tourism that we focus on in this article. European wine, food, and wine are undoubtedly tourist destinations that make tourists from all over the world salivate. Is there enough motivation to attract Chinese tourists? In the post-epidemic era, tourists are actively carrying out outdoor tourism.

## Literature review

### Wine culture in China historical background



The origin of Chinese wine can be traced back to 206-220 BC, the Chinese general Zhang Qian travelled to the Western Regions along the Silk Road to exchange culture and goods, and brought wine back to the homeland of China. The word "grape" existed in China as early as 1500 BC according to the ancient Chinese medicine book "Compendium of Materia Medica".

**Fig. 5.1.** Chinese wine cultivation in the yard at ancient time. Source: *Materia Dietetica (Shiwu Bencao 食物本草)*

The archaeological community discovered wine dating back 9,000 to 7,000 years at the Jiahu site in Maoyang County, Henan Province, China. Nevertheless, Chinese wine has disappeared without a trace for more than a thousand years (Fig. 5.1).

### Chinese main wine regions and grapes

The Eurasian vine was first introduced to China during the Han Dynasty, about 2,200 years ago. However, it wasn't until the 1980s that we saw China commit to modern winemaking. Wine culture is relatively new in China, but it has grown into the fifth-largest wine consumer in the world in a very short period. China has a vast territory, and winemaking terrains and climates vary. Shandong is close to the coast, with heavy rainfall and monsoons during the growing season, which have a great impact on wine quality. Further inland, you'll find Ningxia's wine region. The Helan Mountains straddle the Gobi Desert, creating arid growing conditions.

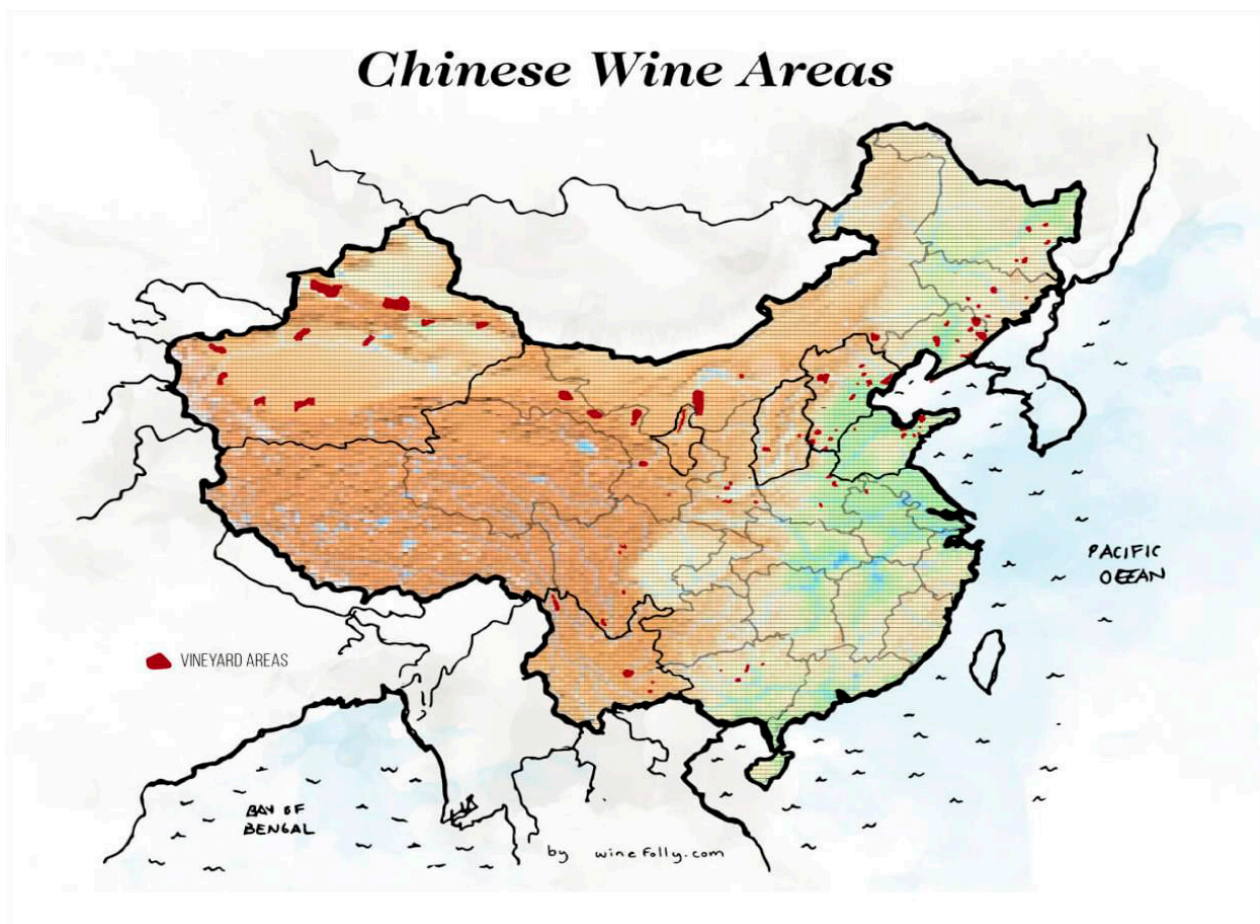


Fig. 5.2. Chinese Wine Areas. Source: Wine Folly

Contemporary Chinese wines are found in many regions: Yantai, Shandong, where Cabernet Sauvignon was introduced in 1900 and modernized the entire region. Ningxia is a hot new region in China and has won many blind tastings in international competitions. In Yunnan, the French aristocratic winery Lafite had taken a fancy to a piece of land in Shangri-La ten years ago and established Aoyun Winery at a minimum price of 150 euros. Xinjiang has always been a grape producing area. China has a vast territory, and the agricultural climate in different regions is suitable for wine production. The most prominent ones are: Shandong is close to the coast, with heavy rainfall and monsoons during the growing season, which have a great impact on wine quality. Further inland, you'll find Ningxia's wine region. The Helan Mountains straddle the Gobi Desert, creating arid growing conditions (Wine Folly: Chinese Wine Regions).

Cabernet Sauvignon, Gernischt (also known as Carmenera), Merlot and Marselan are the main grape varieties for wine production in China. In the early days of China's wine boom, Bordeaux was very influential. The varietal selection, winemaking techniques, and even the winery reflect the famous French wine regions. Gernischt has arrived in China in the 19th century. This grape is often blended with Cabernet Sauvignon. Another oddity in Chinese wine production is Marselan, a red grape variety native to southern France. It was first bred by P. Truel in 1961 as a cross between Cabernet Sauvignon and Grenache. Marselan shows good resistance to powdery mildew. Therefore, it performs well in humid regions such as Shandong. These wines are medium bodied, similar to Cabernet Sauvignon.

## **Chinese wineries**

Though China also opened its first major winery in the 1800s (Changyu, established in 1892), its wine industry was essentially dormant for a century thereafter. It was really the proliferation of two business models—the foreign luxury firm's highly capitalised, long-term investment and the (sometimes equally well-funded) family-owned boutique—that drove China's wine quality boom after the turn of the millennium. Excitingly, while Ningxia's famed Helan Mountain subregion—an arid, luminous spot on the edge of the Gobi Desert irrigated by the Yellow River—has become the epicentre of Chinese luxury wine, there are also ambitious wineries from Xinjiang to Shandong and Inner Mongolia to Yunnan. Big brands such as Great Wall and Changyu are flooding the market (Fig. 5.3.). The wines have won distribution and filled the shelves of the vast country. They offer affordable wines but sadly don't paint a positive picture of China's winemaking potential. Fortunately, we've seen smaller producers start to emerge. Mainly from Ningxia, Xinjiang, and Yunnan. These wineries make wines driven by terroir and lead the way through experimentation. In the vast area of 45°-25° north latitude in China, there are wine estates with different characteristics, which have become a hot spot for investors from home and abroad to invest in wine estates. The Chinese wine market is very powerful but is highly concentrated in a few brands (Jenster and Cheng, 2008).





**Fig. 5.3.** One of six Châteaux Changyu Winery. Source: [www.changyu.com.cn](http://www.changyu.com.cn)

### **Wine importations in China**

With the rapid development of China's economy, the significant increase in national consumption capacity, the opening of China's doors and the spread of Western learning to the east, more and more Western consumer goods and their culture have been introduced into the Chinese market and environment. Imported wine and Western wine culture is one of them, and it has also been one of the most active elements in the past two decades.

**Table 5.1.** Origin of the wine importation of wine for value in China. Source: ICEX, 2020.

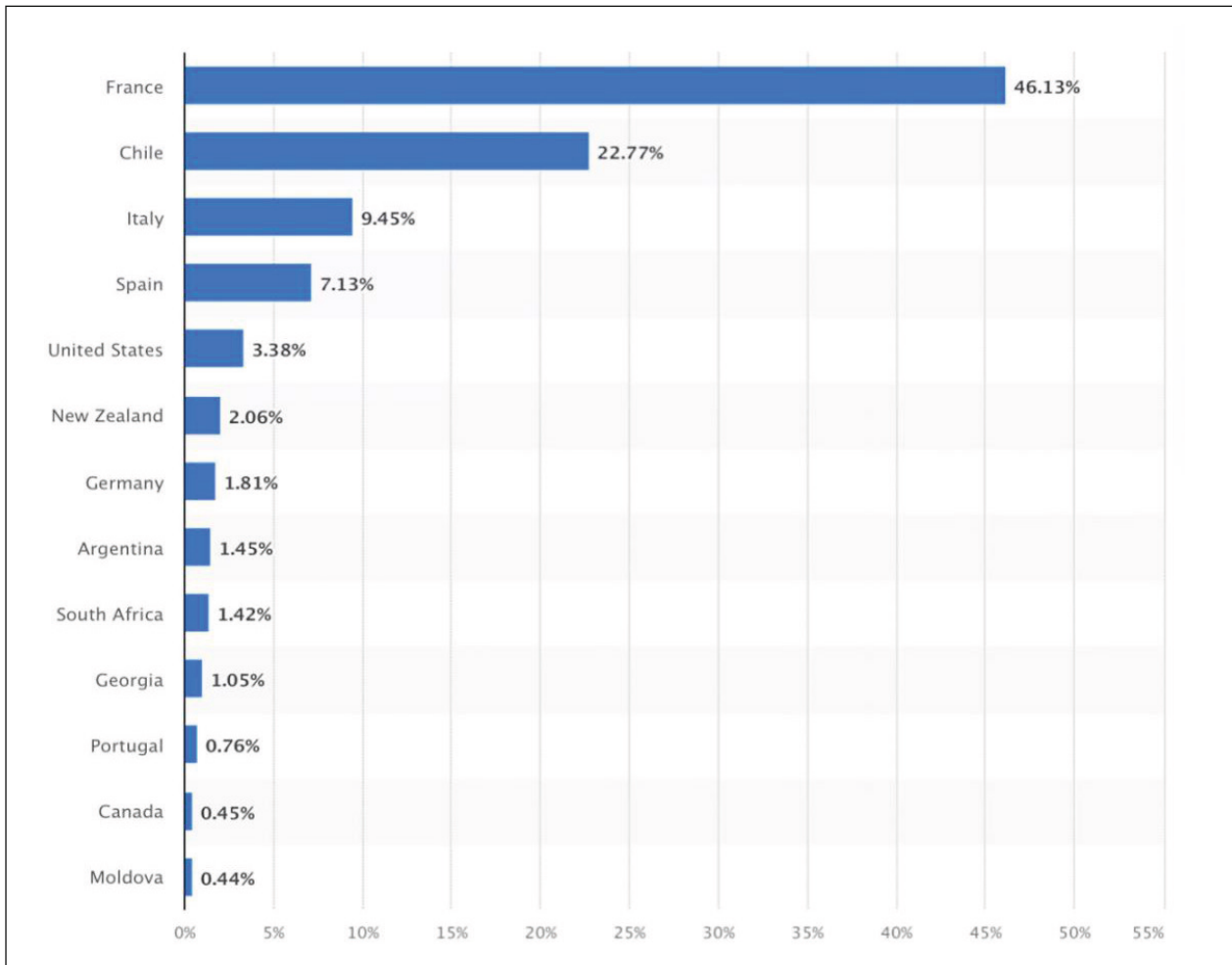
<b>ORIGEN DE LAS IMPORTACIONES DE VINO, (HS 2204) POR VALOR EN CHINA</b>					
<b>País</b>	<b>2020 (miles de EUR)</b>	<b>% del total (2020)</b>	<b>Variación anual (2019-2020)</b>	<b>2019 (miles de EUR)</b>	<b>% del total (2019)</b>
<b>Australia</b>	624.639	39,02%	-19,29%	773.943	35,44%
<b>Francia</b>	446.332	27,88%	-28,88%	627.582	28,74%
<b>Chile</b>	193.343	12,08%	-37,45%	309.084	14,15%
<b>Italia</b>	100.776	6,29%	-27,88%	139.736	6,40%
<b>España</b>	85.685	5,35%	-33,95%	129.723	5,94%
<b>Argentina</b>	24.658	1,54%	1,55%	24.282	1,11%
<b>Estados Unidos</b>	20.362	1,27%	-40,92%	34.466	1,58%
<b>Alemania</b>	18.219	1,14%	-8,67%	19.949	0,91%
<b>Nueva Zelanda</b>	16.003	1,00%	-14,23%	18.657	0,85%
<b>Portugal</b>	15.276	0,95%	-31,19%	22.200	1,02%
<b>Mundo</b>	1.600.939	100,00%	-26,69%	2.183.725	100,00%

The first wave of China's imported red wine occurred in the 1990s, and it was once hot and then cooled down. In the past 10-15 years, a new wave of imported wine has gradually reached its boiling point. Exploring the reasons for this phenomenon is closely related to the advantages of China's domestic market environment and the opportunities it brings. It can be summarized into six points:

1. Strong economic growth. This is an indisputable fact. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, China's economic growth has maintained a relatively high rate for a long time; in the 30 years of reform and opening up, the gross national product has increased by about 12 times, the per capita GDP has increased by about 9 times, and household consumption expenditure has increased by about 7 times. Even since the outbreak of the covid-19 epidemic, China has maintained a leading growth rate among the world's major economies. Over the past three years, China's economy has grown at an average annual rate of 4.5%, much higher than the world's average growth rate of 1.8%, and also higher than the 1.6%, 0.7%, and -0.3% of the United States, the Eurozone and Japan (xinhuanet, 2023).
2. Large population. In a large country with a population of 1.4 billion, there will be a certain potential consumption energy in terms of the intuitive number of consumer groups.

3. Policy incentives. Traditional Chinese liquor consumes food, and the country has restricted and controlled its production and development from a macroscopical policy, and tends to develop wine and other fruit wines. Fulfilling China's WTO commitments, starting in January 2004, the tariffs on imported wine were significantly reduced by 30%.
4. Wine-producing countries. Chinese commercial wine production began at the end of the 19th century. Although the development of the real wine industry has taken place in the past 20 years, there is still a certain consumption base, cognitive space, and natural resources for further understanding and understanding of wine.
5. Diversification of cultural needs. Economic growth not only improves the quality of life of the people, but also triggers the diversification of cultural needs.
6. Chinese characteristic culture. Chinese traditional culture is mainly manifested in two aspects of "health preservation" and "face" culture in promoting wine consumption. Chinese traditionally pay attention to health preservation and food therapy, and more and more Chinese people understand that wine is good for health. At the same time, they realize that traditional Chinese liquor may cause health problems if consumed in large quantities. Therefore, many Chinese people start to drink wine for health considerations. In addition, Chinese people pay attention to "face", and the characteristics of wine itself, especially the more healthy, fashionable and elegant elements given by Chinese people, can just meet the needs of multi-level consumption in this respect.

In 2021, China exported \$71.1M in wine, making it the 27th largest exporter of Wine in the world. At the same year, wine was the 902nd most exported product in China. The main destination of wine exports from China are: Hong Kong (\$39M), Singapore (\$20.8M), Denmark (\$3.96M), Australia (\$1.38M), and Macau (\$798k). The fastest growing export markets for Wine of China between 2020 and 2021 were Singapore (\$20.2M), Hong Kong (\$20.2M), and Denmark (\$3.95M). In 2021, China imported \$1.66B in wine, becoming the 6th largest importer of this product in the world. At the same year, wine was the 164th most imported product in China. China imports wine primarily from: France (\$664M), Chile (\$326M), Italy (\$150M), Spain (\$138M), and Hong Kong (\$68.6M). The fastest growing import markets in wine for China between 2020 and 2021 were France (\$186M), Chile (\$100M), and Hong Kong (\$62.6M) (oecworld, 2021). According to ICEX's 2021 report, European countries such as Portugal and Germany are also on the list of major exports. France, Italy, Spain, Germany, Portugal and Moldova adding up could share more than 60% of the importation market for China in the year of 2022.



**Fig. 5.4.** Share of wine import value in China in 2022, by leading exporting country. Source: Statista

## Tourism and wine: Cases of Study

*„Wine tourism has developed significantly in Europe. As another manifestation of cultural tourism, the relationship between wine and tourism has been consolidated in recent years, giving rise to an offer that is based on the cultural value of the vineyards (cultural landscape), the wineries (which often offer tours and tastings but also in some cases integrate resources of the tourist offer such as hotels and catering services) and routes that are articulated around wine as a central element of the tourist activity. Given the importance of cultural tourism in the context of Chinese outbound tourism, tourism and wine are becoming more and more closely linked” (Zhang, Yuan, Haobin and Hung, 2013, pp. 1115-1134).*

## 1. Bordeaux of Francia

Bordeaux is located in the lower reaches of the Garonne River, about 500 kilometres away from the capital Paris. It is a city of art and history in France. It has become the political centre of this region since the Roman period. Bordeaux has gained a lot of wealth in modern black slaves and wine trade, and has become one of the typical industrial and commercial bourgeois cities in France. In 2007, Port of the Moon in Bordeaux was included in the World Cultural Heritage List. Bordeaux is famous for its wine and is known as the “Wine Capital of the World”. There are 9 wine-producing regions around Bordeaux, among which the Chateau Saint-Emilion, located on the right bank of the Garonne River, is the world’s first wine intangible cultural heritage. Bordeaux is also an important tourist transit point in France. It is the only way from Paris to the Basque Country. Local representative foods include steak, stewed lamb shank, wild mushroom salad, caviar, eel, Le gâteau des rois, etc. In 2019, a total of 12 restaurants in Bordeaux were included in the “Michelin Star Restaurant List”. Bordeaux is famous for its wine. It has 9 wine-producing regions, 38 appellations of origin and hundreds of wineries of various sizes. Founded in 1948, the Bordeaux Wine Association is responsible for the promotion and coordinated development of the entire Bordeaux wine region.

It is understood that in 2019, France received a total of 2.2 million Chinese tourists, bringing economic revenue of 3.5 billion euros. According to Catherine ODEN, General Manager of the China Office of Atout France, similar to the Chinese leisure market, tourism and leisure methods such as cycling and RV camping have become very popular in France in recent years. “More and more travellers pay more attention to their inner feelings, and their travel motives tend to return to life itself. Therefore, Atout France gradually launches the content of ‘slow travel’ destinations.” At the same time, relevant personnel said that according to the current market demand, France as a Tourist destination has launched various new routes and gameplay in the update iteration. For example, the newly created in-depth tasting route “Gourmet Valley”, from Dijon in Burgundy, through Lyon, and then to Marseille in Provence in southern France, covers a total distance of 620 kilometers, gathering 393 kinds of food and 32 special in-depth experiences (oushinet, 2023). It is an innovative angle to allow tourists to participate in the daily life of local people’s food, cooking, and food selection. Therefore, the food and wine trip to Europe advocated in this article is also a major future prediction and trend envisioned by Europe for Chinese tourists in the post-epidemic era, and it should play a vital role in strengthening the economic, cultural, and even political relations between China and Europe.

## 2. Riesling of Germany

Viticulture in Germany has been around for centuries. Schloss Johannesburg is the world’s first Riesling winery. Black oak barrels line the winery’s 900-year-old cellar. Riesling wines are usually pure varietal wines and are rarely aged in oak barrels. When it comes to fine wines, Riesling is in the top three alongside Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc. Riesling is considered highly “terroir expressive”, meaning that its character is largely influenced by where the wine is grown. In German wine regions, Riesling wines tend to have apple and tree fruit flavours, with a pronounced acidity that balances the residual sugar in the brewing process. Pfalz (Pfalz) is north of Rheinhessen, the production area ranks second in Germany, and the output ranks first. Until 1993, it was called Rheinpfalz, then Pfalz, meaning “palace”, derived from the Latin word “palatium”. This is a famous tourist destination in Germany. In recent years, the market has a great demand for the wine here, and the wine industry has developed

very rapidly. Thanks to its fairly balanced sugar and acidity, Riesling is a versatile wine pairing not only with white meat, fish or pork dishes, but it is also one of the few wines that perfectly matches the rich flavours of Thai and Chinese dishes.

According to the forecast of the German National Tourist Office, in 2023, the tourism exchanges between Germany and China will be resumed at a steady speed. It is estimated that among the annual inbound tourists in Germany, the number of tourists from China will recover to about 20%-30% compared with 2019. "This is a positive and positive signal. I believe that after the climbing period of market restart, the tourism exchanges between the two countries will be smoother and usher in a faster recovery period." This is the comment made by Li Zhaohui, the chief representative of the German National Tourist Office, on related newspapers this year (takungpao, 2023).

### **3. Rioja of Spain**

Wine has a lot to do with La Rioja, so it's no surprise that the region is home to more than 500 wineries. Some winery facilities are open to the public and offer tours, tastings, food workshops, and more. Here is the "Wine Palace", where you can learn, taste and enjoy everything in the wine world. The town of Haro stands out, where you can find some of the most famous wineries with the greatest wine tradition in La Rioja. The high-quality origin of Rioja wine in Spain is located in the north of Spain. It is one of the best wine origins in the world. It is the most famous and oldest wine-producing region in Spain. The total area of vineyards is 65,326 hectares, divided into three regions, with a total of more than 140 villages and over 600 wineries, not only rich in high-quality wine, but also rich in wine tourism resources.

- Experience the San Mateo Festival or the La Rioja Harvest Festival

The Harvest Festival is celebrated throughout the San Mateo area in September. The scenic vineyards are packed with wine parties of all kinds. If you head to the capital, Logroño, these days, you'll enjoy San Mateo's festivities, concerts, fireworks, and street performers. The parade through the Paseo del Espolón is popular, with children dressed in national costumes and carrying grapes picked from all over the region. Join them in the traditional "grape stomping" ceremony - the first step in obtaining grape juice for winemaking.

- Be a grape picker for a day

In La Rioja, various wineries and companies organize grape picking, some of which are suitable for families. You'll learn how the grapes are picked in a fun way, and you can even take part in a grape stomping ceremony.

- Go to Logroño for tapas

A trip to Logroño for tapas is a great way to sample a wide range of La Rioja wines as well as delicious tapas, and a must. Visitors, in particular, are sure to head to Laurel Street, where the street shop pubs are packed with skewers, and visitors will find something special at each pub.

In 2019, Spain received 1.3 million Russian tourists nationwide, but this will plummet to around 120,000 in 2021. In addition, the number of Chinese tourists entering Spain is also declining. From

Asian countries including China, the number of tourists entering Spain will drop by 12.2% in 2021. Among them, the decline in the number of Chinese tourists is extremely obvious.

However, major institutions in Spain are actively cooperating, hoping to greatly attract Chinese tourists after the epidemic. From the report of the Spanish newspaper El País at the beginning of this year (elpais, 2023), we can know that, the Spanish government has launched a recovery plan for the Chinese tourism market to attract travellers from the Asian giant after the end of the restrictions imposed by Beijing until January due to the pandemic. Turespaña, dependent on the Secretary of State for Tourism, plans to start a trip to China this Saturday to meet with heads of airlines and tour operators to improve connectivity between the two countries and explain the tourist offer in Spain. In 2019, before the coronavirus paralyzed travel, 701,000 Chinese visitors arrived.

## Chinese post-epidemic tourism

Before the pandemic, China had become the world's largest tourist source market, according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization. In 2019, Chinese tourists spent a total of US\$255 billion on international travel, while domestic tourism has become the backbone of growth and employment, with more than 6 billion trips that year alone, supporting employment and business across the country. Zurab Pololikashvili, Secretary-General of the United Nations World Tourism Organization, led a high-level delegation to Hangzhou to participate in China's official reopening meeting. He warmly welcomed the lifting of travel restrictions, which he believed to be a major boost to economic growth and social opportunities in the Asia-Pacific region and the world. Pololikashvili points out that reopening borders thus represents "the moment the world has been waiting for" (UNWTO, 2023).

In mid-May this year, MasterCard released the report "Chinese Tourists' Outbound Travel and Overseas Payment Behavior", comparing the cross-border travel activities of Chinese tourists before and after the epidemic, and in-depth analysis of the characteristics of outbound tourists, travel intentions, and destinations, and consumption preferences during the trip. The experience and pain points highlight the rising willingness of Chinese tourists to go abroad after the epidemic, as well as the significant changes in related consumption behaviours. The report pointed out that 92% of the interviewed Chinese tourists who travelled abroad before the epidemic plan to go abroad again in 2023, and the higher the income, the more times they have travelled abroad before the epidemic, and the stronger their willingness to go abroad. Without considering objective factors such as visas and entry-exit restrictions, 49% of the respondents who intend to leave the country in the future said they would leave the country within one month, and 80% said they would leave the country within three months. People of different genders, city levels, and ages have similar intentions to leave the country in terms of time, but those with an annual income of more than 500,000 and frequent travellers before the epidemic will tend to leave the country earlier.

- From the perspective of the city level, tourists from first- and second-tier cities account for more than 80% of the outbound tourists.
- From the perspective of customer age, people aged 21 to 45 have the strongest willingness to travel abroad in the future.

- Tourists traveling with their partners or children are more willing to go abroad, but they are more cautious about taking their elders abroad.

With the development and progress of the payment industry, the competition in the overseas payment market has become increasingly fierce. The report shows that the three payment methods of bank cards, e-wallets, and cash meet most of the payment needs of Chinese tourists. 98% of the respondents have used any one of bank cards, domestic e-wallets, and cash to pay, and bank cards are the most popular (87% of the respondents have used them). In addition, compared with before the epidemic, outbound tourists are willing to spend more time and have a stronger willingness to spend after the epidemic.

- After the epidemic, the average travel time increased from 9 days to 11 days, and the growth of business travel was more significant.
- The overall per capita budget of outbound tourists increased from 34,000 yuan to 40,000 yuan (4,313 euros to 5,074 euros), an increase of 16%.
- The growth of personal travel is more obvious, with an increase of 19%; the increase in business travel is 7%.

Almost all popular destinations have seen increases in per capita budgets, with the United States having the highest per capita budget and the largest increase from pre-pandemic levels. Compared with before the epidemic, outbound tourists will reserve a longer pre-departure preparation period, and the “leave and go” has been significantly reduced. Overall, most potential outbound tourists will book air tickets and hotels within one week to one month before traveling. Compared with before the epidemic, the booking time of air tickets and hotels for all popular outbound destinations has advanced. The booking time for short-distance travel is 2 to 3 weeks in advance, among which tourists to Japan and Thailand are about 1 week earlier than before the epidemic; the booking time for long-distance travel is more than 3 weeks. The report pointed out that Japan and China’s Hong Kong region are still the most popular destinations for outbound travel after the epidemic. In the rankings of personal travel and business travel, Japan and Hong Kong, China, respectively ranked first. After the epidemic, the popularity of the United States, France, and Italy increased significantly, and their rankings have all risen by 3 places. In addition, although China’s Hong Kong region, China’s Macao region, and Thailand are often the first stops for Chinese tourists to go abroad, as their age and income level increase, more tourists will choose to go to Japan and the United States (mastercard, 2023).

Although China plays a marginal role in the market mix of world wineries, it is considered one of the most promising markets for wine and tourism. An online survey collected the choices of 110 Chinese tourists on food and wine tour packages to Europe. The results highlighted that more than 77.48% of Chinese tourists aged 16-35 and over 50 from western China have a bachelor’s degree or above, and their monthly income ranges from 1,000 to 2,000 Euros. They travel 1-2 times a year on average. They want to go to Europe to attract popularity. After they want to go to Europe to attract popularity, they are more afraid of unfamiliar local culture and language, and cannot find a suitable winery. Reputation and high-quality planned local planning, most want to learn the knowledge of grape varieties and tasting, travel comfort and travel safety are most important to them. More than 80% of the people made positive comments on the questionnaire. This survey undoubtedly played a vital role in Chinese tourists going to European wine regions that are well-known or still developing their reputation.



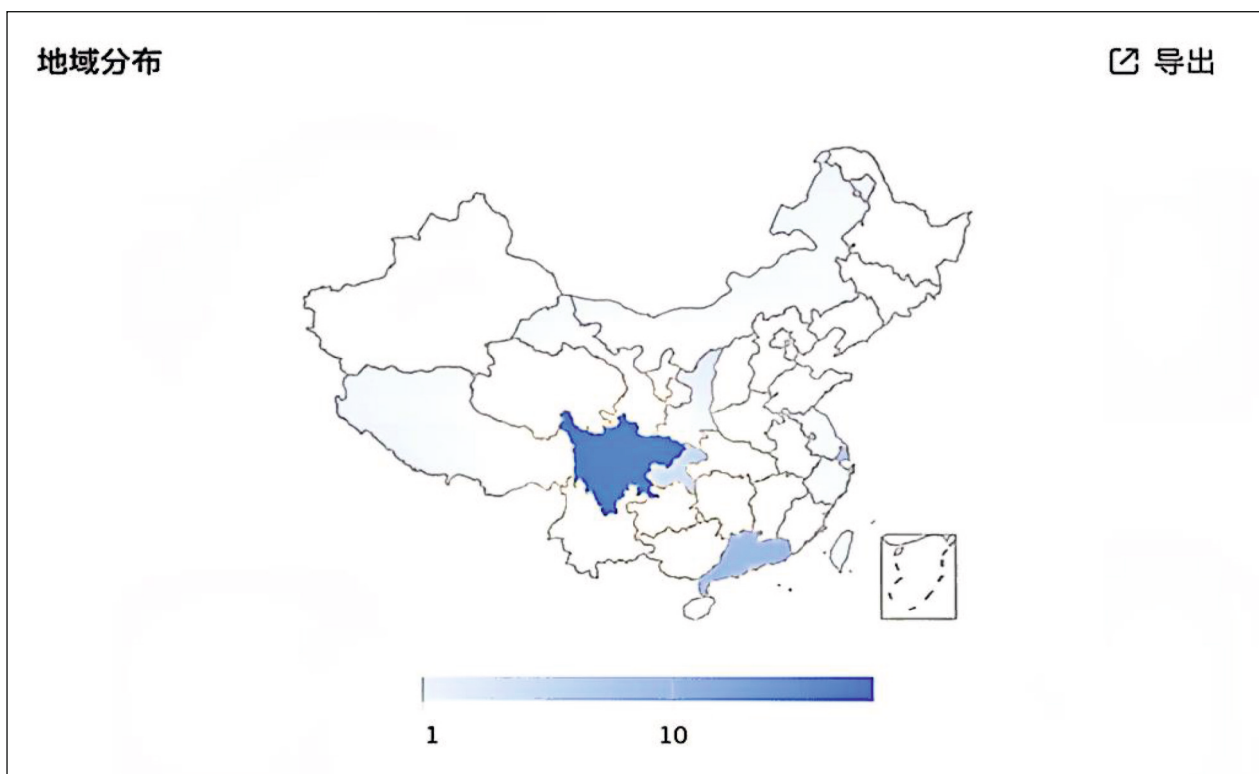
## Data analysis.

### Future trends for Chinese wine tourism

Chinese tourists come to Europe for wine and food tourism. In order to capture trends and perceptions about wine tourism in China, a survey has been carried out. This survey focuses on whether Chinese tourists want to go to Europe to participate in wine and food is distributed through 6 WeChat groups with more than 110 people.

The following results were obtained:

- a) Socio-demographic characteristics: More than 59.5% of the respondents were female, aged 26-50 (56.76%), and had a bachelor's degree (55.86%). These characteristics fit well with the features detected by some studies describing the profiles of Chinese outbound tourism.
- b) Geographical distribution: Responses came from all regions of China, but the western region accounted for the majority (64.84%).



**Fig. 5.5.** Geographic Analysis of Online Surveys. Source: Own survey.

- a) Socio-professional status: More than 25% were retirees, employees of foreign or private companies (24.32%) or civil servants (15.32%).
- b) Travel habits: Nearly 62.24% of the respondents travel 1-2 times a year. Income: 37.84% of the people earn 1,000-2,000 Euros per month, while the other big group is those with 800-1,000 Euros per month, up to 12.61%.

- c) Type of travel: 63% of people like to travel independently, nearly 30% like to travel by car, and only 7.2% like to travel with a group.
- d) Factors considered in travel: travel comfort (79.28%), travel safety (72.97%), and travel expenses (58%) are the factors that most affect the way of travel.
- e) Interest in wine tours: Over 88% of respondents said they would really like to take a vineyard tour, with only 12% saying they would not.
- f) Previous wine tourism experience: 100% said they had taken a winery tour. Wine varieties (64%) and wine tasting (45%) are the most extensive knowledge of wine among the interviewees.
- g) Future experience of wine tourism: Rich activity experience (47.06%) and high-quality wine tourism routes (29.41%) are the primary factors for people to participate. Charming scenery (56.76%), suitable winery accommodation (14.41%), and convenient transportation (12.6%) are the most important factors affecting the choice of destination. The friendliness of the winery (68%), the reputation of the wine region (48%) and the high-quality local wine planning itinerary (48%) are the main objectives of the vineyard tour.
- h) Views on food and wine tourism in the three major regions of Europe: 77.48% of people are particularly interested and want to try, 18.92% are interested and 3.60% are not interested at all. Unfamiliarity with local culture and language (75.68%) and not being able to find a suitable winery (32.43%) are the biggest obstacles for Chinese tourists to participate in wine, food and wine tourism in these three places. More than 90% of them are willing to share their possible wine, food and wine tourism experiences and ideas on domestic or foreign social networking sites.

## **Conclusions.**

### **Wine and tourism future development in China**

Wine culture is currently in full swing in China. Wine consumption is becoming more and more appreciated, is associated with a lifestyle, and is boosting domestic production in China, the import of wines that come mostly from European countries, and the import of wines that come with the consumption of leisure activities (wine fairs, tastings, visits to wineries and food and wine tourism within and beyond China's borders).

Leisure and tourism activities related to wine culture have great potential for Chinese outbound tourism with the revival in the post-COVID scenario. Wine tourism is a tourism based on tangible and intangible heritage and is a tourism modality in full expansion throughout the world.

Wine tourism is also associated with the development of experiential tourism, which is highly valued by Chinese tourists. It can be carried out in group mode but also in independent travel mode, a growing segment of Chinese outbound tourism. These are tourism practices that are considered safe, with visits that can be outdoors.

All these factors mean that the link between wine and tourism not only reinforces purely economic relations but also strengthens relations from a cultural point of view. Wine tourism has regions with great potential that can attract an increasingly segmented flow of Chinese outbound tourism, which seeks quality products and is interested in unique experiences that this type of tourism can undoubtedly offer. Future developments in wine tourism point to positive trends that can strengthen the ties between China and the rich traditional European wine regions.

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## 6. ECOTOURISM AND VIRTUAL REALITY: THE GLOBAL SOUTH ISSUES

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**Abstract.** Virtual reality (VR) and virtual platform technology appear to be appealing marketing tools and offer opportunities for tourists to see destinations without visiting, reducing environmental pollution, and indirectly supporting ecotourism via conservation. Ecotourism and VR share some affinities, and this path remains scarcely explored. This study interrogates the relationship between ecotourism and VR in the global south, highlights the issues associated with VR application in ecotourism in the global south, and explores probable options for the application of VR in ecotourism in the region. This has become imperative due to the disparity between the north and south poles in the annual United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the postulations of diffusion of innovation theory (DIT); the diffusion of any innovation is often difficult, irrespective of how obvious its advantages are. Understanding these difficulties with reference to the global south has become imperative in scholarship to aid tourism policymakers in Africa and increase their attractiveness in the post-COVID-19 era. Literature is the major source of data, and a total of 492 (n) articles were sampled, of which 30% fit into the study. Conservation, revenues, and employment were areas of common interest and mutual benefits between VR and ecotourism, while internet, electricity, cost, policy, trust, increasing the number of visitors, and carrying capacity were discussed as challenges of VR application in ecotourism in the region. Probable options like hybridization and others were suggested as paths for the sustainable application of VR in the ecotourism sector in the region.

**Keywords:** Africa, Ecotourism, Tourism & Virtual Reality (VR).

### Introduction

Virtual reality (VR) technologies offer tourists a travel experience without necessarily visiting destinations; they are a persuasive and innovative marketing tool (Jung, Dieck, Moorhouse and Dieck, 2017); and, to some extent, virtual platforms and events are perceived to be more environmentally compatible than the conventional hosting of events and activities physically (Pearlmann and Gates, 2010; Sa, et al., 2019; Hofstädter-Thalman, et al., 2022; cited in Lekgau and Tichaawa, 2022). This environmentally friendly feature of VR draws it into a common relationship with ecotourism, a form of tourism with interests in conservation of the environment (The International Ecotourism Society, 2015). It has been suggested that VR can serve as an alternative for conservation purposes, therefore working for ecotourism (Odum, 2022), which aims mainly at environmental protection (Forje, Awazi and Kimengsi, 2022).

Ecotourism is mainly concerned with the judicious use of natural resources and landscapes for sustainability. There are several definitions of ecotourism (see Fennell, 2001; Ceballos-Lascurain, 2006; Odum, 2018). The International Ecotourism Society (2015) defines it as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the wellbeing of the local people, and involves interpretation and education”. Although the concept is not devoid of disciplines and author bias, there are associated features of ecotourism, viz. (i) it contributes to the conservation of biodiversity; (ii) it sustains the wellbeing of local people; (iii) it includes an interpretation or learning experience; (iv) it involves responsible action on the part of tourists and the tourism industry; (v) it is delivered primarily to small groups by small-scale businesses; (vi) it requires the lowest possible consumption of non-renewable resources; and (vii) it stresses local participation, ownership, and business opportunities, particularly for rural people (Woods, 2002:10). It is championed in the global south as a local economic development (LED) option (Musavengane, 2018; Venkatesh and Gouda, 2016; as cited in Harilal and Tichaawa, 2020). But academic interrogations concerning issues associated with exploring it via VR seem scarce.

There is literature concerning VR, other information communication technologies, and tourism and their associated benefits (Almir and Maida, 2020); synergy between ecotourism and VR (Odum, 2022); and the need to understand VR from a substantive background as technological adaptations vary geographically, (Asimah, Hurriyati, Gaffar and Wibowo, 2022). Conversely, while studies abound on tourism and VR, there are few on VR and ecotourism, and there is limited scholarship in the area of issues associated with VR and ecotourism, especially from developing nations. Moreover, the practice of virtual participation is the new normal, and the situation is not the same for countries in the global south, especially African countries, where technology (such as VR) is rarely used, until the COVID-19 era (O’g’li, 2021) in 2020.

There is literature on values associated with VR, but understanding issues associated with virtual reality and ecotourism is scarce; moreover, such knowledge from the global south is limited or does not exist. Meanwhile, Africa harbours ecotourism resources that are of international concern to organizations like the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), namely: Aldabra, Victoria Falls, Kilimanjaro National Park, the Cradle of Humankind, etc.

The study is set to address the following: (a) exploring the relationship between ecotourism and VR in Africa, (b) highlighting the issues associated with the application of VR in ecotourism in Africa; and (c) exploring probable options in the application of VR in ecotourism resources and destinations, using Africa as a reference point.

## Method

Literature reviews are usually done to support a new course or fill a lacuna that needs to be filled. It usually points to the need for future studies or a direction for further research. And speculate on the new types of interventions available (Ferrari, 2015). A narrative review was adjudged best for this study because, it is insightful in presenting a bigger perspective on the topic (such as virtual reality in the global south with reference to ecotourism).

The articles selected cover mainly topics in virtual (V) and virtual reality (VR) with reference to the tourism industry. The publications were selected from the African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism, and Leisure (AJHTL), which is domiciled in Africa, starting from 2020 (the year of COVID-19, when alternative means for tourism survival were mainly sought for and the year most scholars gave serious attention to VR as a plausible innovation in tourism, (see, Moorehouse, et al., 2018). This was made easy through a quick scan of topics and abstracts, since abstracts give readers a brief summary in their search, and they decide if the abstract is relevant or not (Green, Johnson and Adams, 2006).

AJHTL is an ideal journal, as the scope is limited to Africa. Moreover, a similar study of ecotourism in national parks used literature featuring only a journal (Rhama, 2020). Literature considered of high significance based on the topic was used, but, usually from the year 2020 until the present (first quarter of 2023 as of May 18, 2023).

Other secondary sources were used to achieve and support the three objectives stated. This was mainly done via narrative review, it usually addresses one or two questions, and there are no clear-cut criteria for the selection of articles (Ferrari, 2015). Rather, what was done was to ensure that, majority of the articles used were mainly discussing issues concerning Africa, and thematic analysis made the discussion explicit.

The adoption of VR has gained popularity since the advent of COVID-19 because it offers a safer and more affordable alternative to conventional movement and gives visitors a sense of travel without movement. Moreover, applying VR in tourism would help the tourism sector recover from the COVID-19 pandemic (Wibisono, Rafdinal, Setiawati and Senalasaki, 2023). Nevertheless, the literature on the adoption of VR in ecotourism is limited; moreover, the implications of its adoption in ecotourism destinations in the global south seem undocumented. The implication of studying this nature is enormous and invaluable to ecotourism stakeholders, including the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Wild Fund (WWF), the governments of countries in the global south, and academia, among others. It is worthy to note, this study is a detour from existing literature, where scholars dwell mainly on the marketing values and potentials of VR with reference to tourism (Verkerk, 2022). The essence of a literature review is to fill gaps, which this study stands to do.

A total of 492 (n) articles were published from February 2020, with volume 9, issue 1, as the first for the year, to February 2023, with volume 12, issue 1 (see **Table 6.1** for details). All articles were skimmed and scanned with the purpose of getting articles with topics on VR or Virtual (V). The result showed 6 (30%) n (See **Table 6.2**). This result also showed a dearth of literature about VR and virtual tourism research in developing nations, especially Africa. This calls for a study of this nature, which makes it timely and novel.

**Table 6.1.** List of publications from AJHTL. Source: Author's compilation (Cf: <https://www.ajhtl.com>).

S/No.	Year	Volume/Issue	Number of Articles	Number of articles with VR/V topics
1	2020	9(1)	81	Nil
2	2020	9(2)	69	1(Virtual Reality)
3	2020	9(3)	25	Nil
4	2020	9(4)	25	Nil
5	2021	10(1)	25	Nil
6	2021	10(2)	25	Nil
7	2021	10(3)	20	Nil
8	2021	10(4)	25	1(Virtual)
9	2021	10(5)	11	Nil
10	2021	10(6)	19	Nil
11	2022	11(1)	25	1(Virtual Reality)
12	2022	11(2)	25	Nil
13	2022	11(3)	25	Nil
14	2022	11 (First special edition)	10	Nil
15	2022	11(4)	25	1(Virtual)
16	2022	11(5)(Special edition)	9	Nil
17	2022	11(6)	23	1(Virtual)
18	2023	12(1)	25	1(Virtual Reality)
19	-	-	492	6

**Table 6.2:** Topics with VR/V in AJHTL from 2020-2023. Source: Author's compilation (Cf: <https://www.ajhtl.com>).

S/no.	Year	Topics
1	2023	Predicting the Adoption of Virtual Reality Tourism in the Post COVID-19 Pandemic Era
2	2022	Virtual Leisure and Recreation Reality and Well-Being During COVID-19 Pandemic - The future of Ghana Tourism: Does Technological Self-Efficacy Matter?
3	2022	Exploring the Use of Virtual and Hybrid Events for MICE Sector Resilience: The Case of South Africa
4	2022	Virtual Reality: Saving Tourism in South Africa?
5	2021	Reimagining tourism: COVID-19 and the potential of virtual tourism in South Africa
6	2020	Tourism and Virtual Reality (VR) in Developing Nations



## Exploring the relationship between ecotourism and VR in the global south

**Conservation:** One of the major tenets of ecotourism is conservation. It has been argued that, as an economic justification for the preservation of natural settings (Mowforth and Munt, 1998, as cited in Kent, 2003), this value is also shared with VR. VR can limit the number of visitors to a destination, and conserve the integrity of the environment (Odum, 2020). Both aim at conservation of natural and pristine spaces, as money generated from VR packages can serve the ecotourism sector. This mutual responsibility makes it an ideal path to explore for tourism developers in Africa, where pristine and relatively undisturbed settings abound, such as Victoria Falls, Korup National Park, Cross River National Park, etc. While there are concerted efforts by the government to preserve these natural settings, VR has the ability to limit human encroachment if managers of natural settings use it.

**Revenue:** Both can generate income for destinations. Ecotourism generates income for host communities (Rhama, 2020; Harilal and Tichaawa, 2020). The Mount Cameroon National Park (MCNP) and the Douala Edéa Wildlife Reserve (DEWR) communities admitted the positive economic impact of ecotourism (Harila and Ticchaawa, 2020). Similarly, locals attested to the high positive economic impact of mountain gorilla tourism in the Butogota Council area, where, direct and indirect employment showed 55.6 percent and 53.1 percent of entrepreneurial opportunities in the area. Ecotourism is associated with local economic development (LED) (Muresherwa, et al., 2020). Virtual reality gadgets generate billions of dollars (Laurits, Wes, Greg, & Carletta, n.d.). This shows that, probably, designing VR headsets and games from ecotourism destinations will increase what is generated annually, and serve as a source of income for the countries whose destinations images will be used.

**Employment and infrastructural development:** Create job opportunities. VR will absorb technologically inclined youths, who will design and manipulate the computer and internet, work in base stations, and develop applications that support, use, and adapt VR technologies both within and outside eco-destinations. Similarly, when a people's culture is seen by outsiders in their tourist brochures, when a community's traditional land is built upon by others, indeed when an ecologically fragile region is promoted as an unspoilt destination, then it is only fair and natural that the local communities whose traditional way of life sustained the resources in the first place be given special preference in employment and social services' (Marguba, 2008, p. 49). Within Nigeria, the National Park Service (NPS) gives priority to community members whose lands are used during employment. They design empowerment programs and trainings for host communities. The NPS reserves some jobs for locals, such as park rangers, trackers, caterers, drivers, mechanics, clerks, etc. (Marguba, 2008).

NPS has provided portable water for Chad Basin, Kainji Lake, and Yankari National Parks; electrification of communities in national parks such as Wikki Camp of Yankari National Park, Kainji Lake National Park, here, the National Grid was extended from Wawa to Oli River Camp, covering a distance of about 73 kilometers. There are similar projects in different communities where National Parks exist in Nigeria, like in Cross River National Park and Chad Basin National Park (see Marguba, 2008, p. 51–53).

## Issues with VR and Virtual platforms in the global south

**Internet and Electricity:** COVID-19 quickened the use of virtual platforms and means to enjoy eco-tourism destinations. The practice of participating in events virtually is the new normal, especially in developed countries (Elhamid, et al., 2020; O'g'li, 2021). But the situation seems not to be the same for countries in the global south.

This may not be unconnected to poor internet connectivity and electricity, as these factors affect the use of VR. Electricity supply in some African nations is highly epileptic, and Eytayo and Makhosazana (2021) added that irregular electricity supply hinders tangible contributions to economic development in developing African nations. This is more worrisome for countries that perceive ecotourism as an economic messiah. By implication, a shortage of electricity supply affects VR and its usage. Some West African nations live with limited or shared electricity loads, especially in Nigeria and Ghana, despite the government's huge investment in electricity. VR needs electricity or an alternative electricity (power) source to function. An empirical study in Ghana shows that intermittent power outages negatively impact the smooth operation and use of information and communication technologies (Asimah, et al., 2022), and VR is no exception. Conversely, during pandemics like COVID-19, quality of life also needs to be maintained, especially, positive mental health, to ensure well-being. Asimah, et al. (2022:1862), using previous literature, suggested that 'leisure and recreation may have a positive influence on one's wellbeing', and there are studies in support of this assertion (Zins and Ponocny, 2022). Therefore, ecotourism enjoyed through VR may have the ability to affect Africans positively if an enabling environment and facilities are made available.

Furthermore, internet connectivity is still poor in some regions of the continent. In Ghana, poor internet networks are a major issue when using virtual platforms (Asimah, et al., 2022). While developed nations are using 5G and above, some countries in Africa, like Nigeria, are currently launching 5G, and the cost seems to be beyond the reach of the majority of the poor.

**Cost:** VR and its components are not cheap. The price of internet data for online surfing is high, except in cases of bonus or bonanza, when the time is limited, or at night during sleeping hours (12AM-6AM). The cost of VR facilities such as teleporters may be expensive, a simple teleporter with a four dimensional view, like the one in the Marriot Hotel (see Odum and Ukekwe, 2020), will be expensive, including the cost of its maintenance. This cost implication of VR is one of the reasons some scholars discourage the use of virtual platforms (Bakibinga-Gaswaga, et al., 2020), while in places like Ghana, the cost of internet bundles and other virtual gadgets affects the use of virtual platforms (Asimah, et al., 2022).

This issue of cost may affect the adoption of VR in ecotourism in developing nations. Access to the internet is vital; meanwhile, in Africa; the number of individuals with internet access appears low. Mahler, Montes, and Newhouse (2019:1) assert that

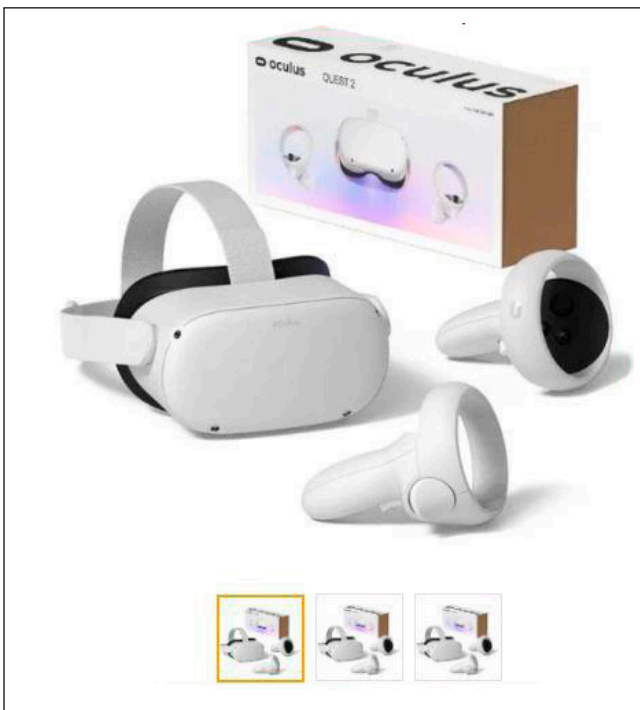
*“access to the internet is essential for businesses, public institutions, and households to flourish in the modern economy. In the private and public sectors, internet access can help spur productivity gains and deliver services more efficiently. For households, internet access can*

*increase opportunities, build human capital, connect households to other parts of the country, and contribute to personal well-being. Yet Sub-Saharan Africa remains a long way from achieving universal internet access. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU), which tracks internet usage globally and across countries, says only 1 in 5 people in Sub-Saharan Africa used the internet in 2017. While internet access in Sub-Saharan Africa has grown rapidly in recent years, access rates remain well behind the rest of the world.”*

The implication is the need for internet access if Africa is to enjoy VR like others.



**Fig. 6.1.** Meta Quest Pro VR Headset. It cost \$997.00 as at 18th of July, 2023. The image above is advancement from Meta Quest 2. (Internet source: <https://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/product>).



**Fig. 6.2.** VR headset by Oculus. (Internet source: <https://www.konga.com>).

The Global System for Mobile Communications (GSMA) said, *"Network quality continues to improve, but download speeds are yet to exceed 10 Mbps, and Sub-Saharan Africa is lagging other regions"* (GSMA, 2022:2). Getting gadgets, as seen in plates one and two, is expensive, while the cost of data likely needed to stream online is still high in Africa. GSMA argued, *"Sub-Saharan Africa is the only region where the cost of 1GB of data as a percentage of monthly GDP per capita exceeds 2%"*. (GSMA, 2022:4).

Given the afore-mentioned background, it is evident that VR equipment and associated accessories are expensive for a region where poverty is still high, with many living on less than \$1.90 per day (Enoch and Jacobus, 2022). In Ghana, the cost of virtual tools and network data is expensive (Asimah, et al., 2022), and this is similar to what occurs in other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, where network data is still expensive (GSMA, 2022). Conversely, this may have made some scholars discourage people from participating in virtual activities (Simmonds, 2019, as cited in Asimah, et al., 2022). Meanwhile, if a pandemic strikes, virtual means and platforms such as VR appear as acceptable alternatives; VR tourism may be a way of enhancing people's wellbeing. This issue might be, how will people accept and adapt to VR since its knowledge and application are still limited.

**Policy issues:** Tourism policy is the fulcrum that drives sustainable tourism development (STD). In African countries, where it is well crafted, it is poorly implemented, while some need an outright review to fit current realities. Due to political instability and a wave of coups in the early 1980s, most of the tourism policies are military edicts that have limited input from communities; therefore, reviews have become inevitable (Nyakunu and Rogerson, 2014; Cobbinah, et al., 2015; Cobbinah and Darkwah, 2016; Odum, 2020).

Tourism policy in Africa should be simple and implementable. With VR and other technologies, there is a need for a review to capture the peculiarities associated with these new technologies, especially in infringement of rights, to avoid litigation because of patents in scenes and sites, which can be easily copied or manipulated by technological experts. For instance, the Indian government once complained about Bangladesh's construction of a replica of the Taj Mahal (Guttentag, 2010). And, it is interesting to note, the Taj Mahal records millions of tourists per year. What happens if developed nations and former colonial masters' copy or replicate some ecotourism destinations in Africa in VR settings? Meanwhile, most African nations have, to date, maintained strong ties with non-African nations that colonized them. What are the laws to safeguard such infringements if they happen in the near future?

**Trust:** Trust is a key element in marketing, as people might be weary of making or booking online due to a lack of trust. Sofu and Sofu (2016) advised the need for education concerning the associated dangers and pitfalls when doing online transactions and interactions with the advent of social networks and the internet. This is not unconnected to the risk of fraud, where people's credit cards are emptied in an attempt to make an online payment; misrepresentation of facts; and deceptive advertising.

**Increase the number of visitors and carrying capacity:** VR can boost the chances of visitors having travel experiences at different destinations within a limited time, which requires extensive lodging and travel arrangements. This is one of the major advantages of VR cited by scholars (Hofstädter-Thalman, et al., 2022), because it has the ability to propel actual travel interest, but when a destination is flooded with tourists beyond its capacity, carrying capacity is exceeded, with attendant environmental and social consequences.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Ecotourism is a competitive sector that relies on ecological resources to thrive, and each destination tries to maintain customers. The interest in VR, virtual tourism, and leisure activities increased because of COVID-19. There seems to be a disparity in the use of VR in the ecotourism sector across the globe, despite its associated benefits; Sub-Saharan Africa lags behind due to the afore-mentioned challenges. The government, a major ecotourism stakeholder in Africa, pays limited attention to tourism; this is reflected in poor tourism policies, with scholars calling for a review of tourism policies in different countries on the continent. Where the government pays interest, the use of VR in the ecotourism sector may contend with poor electricity supply and the cost of internet data. Life was not easy during COVID-19 due to restricted movement, people's well-being was uneasy, and access to the internet in Africa was costly (GSMA, 2022). The use of VR during COVID-19 and the post-pandemic era will require financial implications that Africans may not be able to afford, as the majority still live on less than \$2.00 per day (Enoch and Jacobus, 2022). Non-Governmental organizations (NGO) can play a crucial role in bridging the afore-mentioned gaps, such as by educating host communities and assisting the government in making robust and feasible VR policies. NGOs have a serious and reliable relationship and connections with communities; because of their non-profit status, they achieve local development and outreach (i.e., education on VR) in the field of eco-tourism (Ivanova and Khalifa, 2019); they are invaluable in aiding communities in developing countries by helping in research projects. NGO perceptions of tourism are mainly concerned with bringing new and positive behaviours, values, and attitudes to visitors and destinations (Genc, 2015). Therefore, with NGOs, Africa can begin studies on the intricacies of adopting VR in the ecotourism sector, given VR's benefits.

Beyond the above issues, VR and ecotourism seem intertwined in some aspects, mainly conservation. The major tenet of ecotourism is the cautious use of natural resources for sustainable development. In the same vein, VR aims to use natural scenes without physical interaction and do zero harm to the ecosystem. Although, VR can propagate the desire to visit a destination physically, if a visitor desires so. Both command revenue; with a physical visit, ecotourists spend money from booking to actual travel, while visitors also pay to enjoy ecotourism destinations via VR. What vary may be the amount involved and the level of fulfilment and satisfaction. This may depend solely on the individual's perception and acceptance of VR technology.

Theoretically, the technology assistance model (TAM) explains that people accept technological innovations differently; TAM posits that a prospective user assumes that using a specific application system (Surendran, 2012) (i.e., VR) will enhance his or her job or life performance. Therefore, tourism stakeholders, especially in Africa, need to understand the synergy between VR and ecotourism, while the former needs to be explored. Besides, technology diffuses through innovation, communication channels, time, and the social system. The diffusion of any innovation (i.e., VR) is often difficult, irrespective of how obvious its advantages are (Aririguzoh, et al., 2021), based on DIT. This probably explains the dearth of literature concerning VR and ecotourism in the global south. And this calls for scholarship, as VR has come to stay with advancements in other forms such as augmented virtual reality (AVR).

## Suggestions

1. Expansion of internet and electricity usage outside capitals and major cities in Africa (Mahler et al., 2019).
2. Hybridization of ecotourism virtual reality packages, where some information may not be easily dished out, especially for unpopular destinations. Rather than giving out the full experience, it may be packaged in a way that will attract and motivate tourists to visit the destination. While popular destinations may need to capture all the details to either draw tourists or reduce traffic due to environmental concerns.
3. Re-Orientation of all tourism stakeholders in Africa about VR pros and cons. Despite the associated benefits of VR, geographic issues, socio-political options, community perceptions, and tourism stakeholders in each country have serious roles to play in the use of VR.

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<https://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/product>

<https://www.konga.com>

## 7. EXPRESSION OF TOURISM INNOVATIVENESS AND EVALUATION OF ITS ECONOMIC IMPACT

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**Abstract.** The changes in the tourism market in the current period are mainly driven by the Millennials with the highest economic purchasing power (Dimock, 2019), who currently make up the largest population generation on the planet (Purani, Kumar and Sahadev, 2019). These consumers grew up surrounded by innovation, modern technologies, the Internet and social networks, their habits and decision-making processes are different from those of previous generations. The impact of the demand created by this generation on the service sector, tourism and the economy is different. Due to the change in the needs of consumers, the demand for the consumption of innovations increases, which encourages the tourism sector to implement innovations.

Innovativeness in the tourism sector is increasing due to rapid technological progress and access to technology. Technologies in the tourism sector allow the use of user-owned technological devices for the aggregation of data from different sources of information and its analysis. Users can see comparisons of different data, contact tourism service providers and other customers more easily, receive unique offers, make unique itineraries or service orders. Meanwhile, tourism businesses can more easily manage relationships with customers, provide personalized offers, optimize supply and demand, and make the right business decisions. This means that the innovativeness of tourism enables the consumer to choose new types of tourism services, and the service providers can manage them more easily.

The innovativeness of the tourism sector has an economic impact on the following areas of economic impact: investment, job creation, national product, the country's balance of payments and as an equalizing function. Three main directions for the evaluation of the economic impact of tourism innovation have been identified: evaluating the economic impact caused by the inputs of innovation, evaluating the microeconomic or macroeconomic impact. When evaluating inputs of innovativeness, important indicators are: investments in R&D, number of patents. Microeconomic evaluation indicators: increase in added value, better quality services and products, taking a larger market share, profitability. Macroeconomic indicators: GDP, employment, exports.

Analysing research conducted by scientists from various countries, it was found that the greatest economic impact is caused by innovativeness in tourism before the trip (Gursoy, 2019; Nie, et al., 2020), i.e., innovativeness determining the decision to travel. After compiling and verifying the economic impact model of tourism innovation, performing correlational and regression analyses, structural equation modelling, the positive economic impact of tourism innovation in European countries was determined. The innovativeness of tourism has a positive effect on capital investments in the tourism sector, total employment, gross domestic product, production value of the tourism sector, total added value, final consumption expenditure, purchase of tourism sector goods and services, export. Based on the modelling of structural equations, it was determined that the innovativeness of tourism leads

to an increase in capital investment in the tourism sector, the gross domestic product, the value of production of the tourism sector, and the increase in exports.

**Keywords:** tourism innovativeness, expression of tourism innovativeness, economic impact of tourism innovativeness, evaluation of economic impact of tourism innovativeness.

## Introduction

The service sector is developing intensively. Changes in the demand generated by innovative consumers also lead to transformations in the tourism sector. Tourism is changing fundamentally. Total spending on tourism is increasing, but the amount of money spent per travel is decreasing. Due to the changed needs of consumers, the demand for innovation consumption is increasing, which in turn encourages the tourism sector to innovate. In the tourism sector, innovative solutions are applied before, during, and after the trip. Innovativeness in the tourism sector is mainly used for planning the trip through various online platforms or mobile applications. Innovativeness is becoming a necessity in the tourism sector. A report by the "Pacific Asia Travel Association" (PATA) and "Oxford Economics" (2018) states that 80% of travel is organised online. The importance of innovativeness is increasing rapidly. The expression of innovation is captured in increasingly diverse processes. Both technological and non-technological innovations are applied. This is because tourism businesses need to adapt to changing market conditions and to offer a new generation of modern services. Innovativeness is believed to be the only way to achieve this. Innovativeness is a tool that can help tourism businesses increase market competitiveness and achieve economic benefits. The evolution of the consumer and tourism industry, determined by innovativeness, is leading to changes in the economy and motivating to invest into innovative solutions in tourism business.

The aim of the research is to evaluate the economic impact of tourism innovativeness on capital investment in tourism sector, gross domestic product, value in the tourism sector, export in European countries.

The object of the research is the economic impact of inbound tourism innovativeness.

The research objectives:

1. To analyse the expression of innovation in the tourism sector.
2. To establish the directions for the evaluation of the economic impact of tourism innovativeness.
3. To evaluate of the economic impact of tourism innovativeness by using correlation analysis and modelling of structural equations.

Research methodology: during the research, the methods of analysis, synthesis, aggregation, and comparison are used to analyse the theoretical scientific material. The research method of descriptive statistics is used for the analysis of the latest trends in the tourism sector. The research methods of correlation, regression, and structural equations modelling are used to verify the evaluation model of the economic impact of tourism innovativeness.

## Expression of innovativeness in the tourism sector

The expression of innovativeness in the tourism sector is evolving depending on technological possibilities. First, innovation (as an innovation complex) was adapted for the convenience of the user, later the advantages for the service provider - management of communication processes between the user and the customer - were taken into account. Later, the innovation was applicable exclusively to increase the efficiency of the supplier's operations - to manage administrative processes. This means that the penetration of innovation is increasing to fully improve the user experience.

Internet technologies are used to increase user convenience, increase added value for the customer. In the tourism sector, innovation is most often applied through a complex of innovations (online platforms). The Internet becomes accessible not only from the computer, but also from other smart devices, such as tablets, smartphones, other technological solutions. Consumers are increasingly using smart devices. For even greater user-friendliness, content is being adapted for smaller, mobile devices.

One other manifestation of innovation in the tourism sector is virtual communities. Virtual communities are both treated as innovation and promote a different increase in innovation in the tourism sector. Virtual communities allow people to communicate to meet their needs for both information and sharing. Such a process provides a reason for a community to exist. Online applications and online rankings and commentary websites are becoming popular among virtual communities. In addition, the use of videos and panoramic photos when ordering online is becoming more common. Priority is given to sustainable tourism considering the ecological concept of tourism. This is often facilitated by innovative technologies (Alla and Mykhaylo, 2017; Opazo-Basáez, Vendrell-Herrero and Bustinza, 2021). Innovativeness in the tourism sector, enabled by technology, not only helps to realize the potential of sustainable tourism, but is also important in other respects. For example, the expansion of tourism services by geographical area is relevant. This helps to personalize the offers to the target user. Geographical application of services is a way to inform tourism users about their environment, the specifics of tourism services, to provide other useful information depending on the geographical location of the user. It is also possible to combine the services of several companies into one service - package (Alsos, Eide and Madsen, 2014), for example, city walks and bicycle paths with stops in cooperating companies. Networks provide an opportunity to co-create and transfer knowledge between firms, as well as create a sense of trust (Jernsand, et al., 2015; Moretz, et al., 2022).

The definition and theory of innovativeness in the tourism sector are related to the general directions of research on innovativeness. The tourism sector is closely linked to other industries, thus mutual symbiosis is crucial. The tourism sector accepts and adapts innovations created by other sectors, thereby creating innovativeness that leads to greater added value for the consumer. The development of innovativeness in the tourism sector occurs due to changing technologies, changes in infrastructure and education, social changes, etc. (Kozak, 2017). The expression of innovation in the tourism sector is based on the improvement of services through modern information technologies. Computer reservation systems and online platforms designed to increase user convenience have been first introduced in the tourism sector as innovativeness. Later, innovativeness has been introduced through mobile applications designed to increase the availability of online services. Innovativeness in the tourism sector has been expressed through content management systems, enabling users to generate content. A new form of communication has emerged - communication between users by using information

technologies. This has changed the consumption of tourism services from a business-to-consumer perspective to two-way communication, which has led to changes in marketing, transformations in the provided services, and changes in the economy. Later, innovativeness started to be used as a relations management system to manage communication between the user and the service provider. Most recently, innovativeness has been introduced as an administrative solution to optimise the processes of a tourism service provider. Recent trends in the expression of innovativeness in tourism reveal that not only the Internet and various applications but also mobile devices are enabled. Computer applications, Internet platforms or mobile applications integrate Internet content on a device used by a consumer, in addition to the technical capabilities of the consumer's mobile device (e.g., NFC, GPS, camera, etc.) (Bilgihan and Nejad, 2015; Rodriguez, Williams and Hall, 2014). As follows, significant additional added value for consumer is created, consumer's needs are more precisely identified and met. Due to the additional added value for the consumer, tourism companies and regions have greater potential for positive economic changes, especially because due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, some countries and regions have lost a significant volume of incoming tourism flows.

## **Directions for the evaluation of the economic impact of tourism innovativeness**

The specifics of the service sector determine the characteristics of service innovations compared to production sector innovations: innovations are less defined, focused on customers, innovation is based on skills and communication between organizations, characteristic social and organizational nature of innovation, less structured innovative activity, greater involvement of employees in the innovation process, technological ones are applied much less frequently innovations. Innovations in the service sector manifest as process innovations, integration of products and services, marketing strategies that create value for stakeholders' countries by providing new or improved services. Often product and service innovations are integrated, it is difficult to identify the border between them.

The tourism sector is affected by constant changes in the environment, shaping new demand for tourism. The following factors that change tourist behaviour and tourism demand are distinguished: technological (Tanrisever, et al., 2016); political (Demiralay, 2020; Ghalia, et al., 2019); demographic, socioeconomic (Tanrisever, et al., 2016; Tovmasyan, 2016) and other. New types of tourism are emerging, such as leisure and holiday tourism, business tourism, cultural tourism, ecotourism, heritage tourism, rural tourism, study tourism, religious pilgrimage tourism, spa tourism, medical tourism, visiting friends and relatives, agro-tourism, sports tourism, etc. (De la Hoz-Correa, Muñoz-Leiva and Bakucz, 2018; Paresishvili, Kvaratskhelia and Mirzaeva, 2017; Richards, 2018).

The change in the trends of tourism has an economic impact. The following directions of the economic impact of tourism are distinguished: investment, job creation, national product, the country's balance of payments, and levelling function.

The economic impact of innovativeness is evaluated in one of the three directions: by evaluating the inputs of innovativeness, by evaluating the microeconomic impact, or by evaluating the macroeconomic impact.

The most popular direction for the evaluation of the economic impact of innovativeness is by evaluating the inputs of innovativeness, i.e., expenditure on R&D, number of patents, number of scientific articles, number and duration of implemented innovations, number of staff training, various indices of innovative-ness and other objectively measurable indicators (Frietsch and Schmoch, 2006; Knowles, Hansen and Shook, 2008, Kamaruddeen, Yusof and Said, 2009). This evaluation direction measures only innovativeness, but there is a lack of indicators on the results of innovativeness, thus the economic effect is not emphasised.

The direction of the microeconomic impact evaluates the economic impact of innovative-ness at the micro level, i.e., at the level of a company (Lin, et al., 2020; Mendoza-Silva, 2021; Sandvik, Duhan and Sandvik, 2014). Innovativeness is described as an increase in the quality of goods and services, a share of sales of innovative products. The economic impact is evaluated on the basis of the following indicators: increase in income, increase in market value and share, and increase in profitability.

The third direction of the evaluation of the macroeconomic impact of innovativeness analyses: the impact of the number of innovative companies and employment in knowledge-adoptive sectors on GDP, foreign direct investment, the rate of unemployment, the establishment of new companies, export, market share (Bazhal, 2017; Zervas, et al., 2017). Although this direction of the economic evaluation of innovativeness is the broadest, indicators of innovativeness are questionable because they emphasise innovation inputs, the environment of innovativeness, and the created opportunities to implement innovativeness, but they do not identify and do not evaluate innovativeness.

All the directions for the evaluation of the economic impact of innovativeness are not bound to one particular sector. Three possible tourism innovativeness economic impact measurement steps can be distinguished: analysing contextual factors, determining the impact of business efficiency, and determining performance indicators. The discussed evaluation directions and indicators can also be used to evaluate the economic impact of tourism innovativeness.

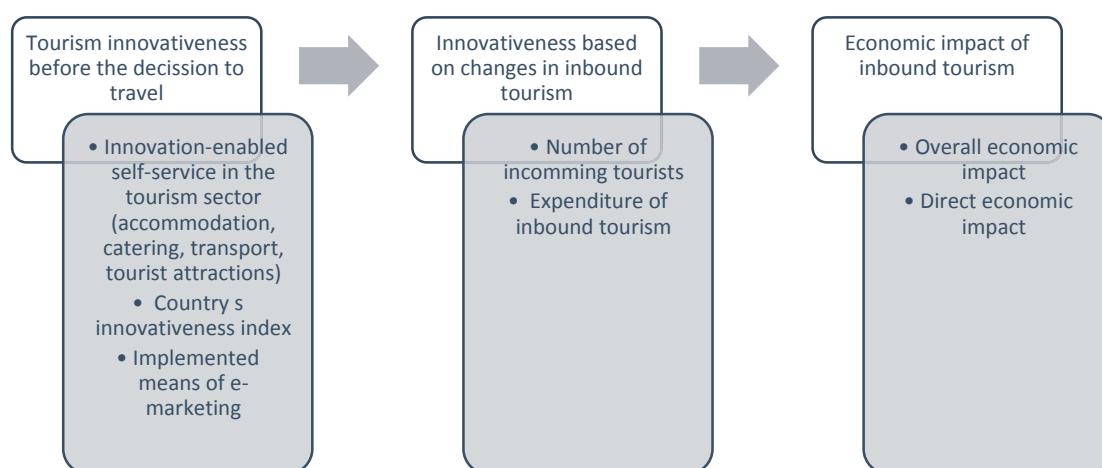
## Research methodology

During the analysis on the economic impact of tourism transformations, it has been found out that the tourism sector is transforming due to the changing consumer. In order to remain competitive, businesses and countries increase innovativeness which in turn determines the changes in tourism. Changes in tourism have been identified to lead to changes in GDP and employment, but there is also an indirect economic effect. Studies conducted in different countries (Maradana, et al., 2019; Maneejuk and Yamaka, 2020; Yüzbaşıoğlu, Çelik and Topsakal, 2014; Divisekera and Nguyen, 2018; Mačerinskienė and Mikaliūnienė, 2014; Valls, Parera and Andrade Suárez, 2012; Martínez-Román, et al., 2015) have confirmed that innovativeness and tourism innovativeness have a positive economic impact at the microeconomic and macroeconomic levels.

The model of the evaluation of the economic impact of tourism innovativeness is developed with reference to the expression of innovativeness in the tourism sector and the latest trends. It has been found that the greatest economic impact is caused by innovativeness in tourism before the trip (Capacci, Scorcu and Vici, 2015; Sirakaya and Woodside, 2005; Karl, 2018; Gursoy, 2019; Nie, et al., 2020), i.e., innovativeness determining the decision to travel. Innovativeness, used by tourism businesses, countries, and other consumers of tourism, creates a self-service supply. With the help of

innovativeness, a potential tourist is provided with information and knowledge about tourist location and tourism services; by using innovative means there is an opportunity to order and manage tourism services.

Meanwhile, innovativeness is also important for creating the self-service demand – a potential tourist uses innovative means to find, acquire, and manage necessary information about tourism services. Combining innovativeness-enabled self-service supply and demand, a decision to buy tourism services and spend money is made. Accordingly, inbound tourism and expenditure in a particular location are increased. All this has a direct overall economic impact. There has been developed a model for evaluating the economic impact of tourism innovativeness, indicating that tourism innovativeness leads to changes in inbound tourism, which in turn lead to changes in the economy, i.e., create an economic impact (**Fig. 7.1**).



**Fig. 7.1.** Model for evaluating the economic impact of tourism innovativeness

The changes in tourism are measured through changes in inbound tourism and its expenditure. The overall economic impact is evaluated as the changes in investment, the number of jobs created, the national product, the country's balance of payments, and the attractiveness of a region. Meanwhile, the direct economic impact is evaluated through tourism satellite accounts. In order to verify the model, an appropriate methodology for evaluating the economic impact of tourism innovativeness must be chosen.

Methods of correlation analysis, regression analysis, and modelling of structural equations have been chosen for the evaluation of tourism innovativeness in a frame of verifying the model of the evaluation of the economic impact of tourism innovativeness. The methodology for evaluating the economic impact of tourism innovativeness is divided into four stages.



**Stage 1.** The selection of statistical indicators is carried out with reference to the groups of indicators described in the model of the evaluation of the economic impact of innovativeness. According to the groups of indicators of the model as well as data collected and stored in Eurostat (2019) and UNWTO (2019) databases, the existing indicators (tourism innovativeness, tourism, and economic impact) are selected and ascribed to the groups of indicators of the model.

**Stage 2.** In order to identify the indicators of tourism innovativeness that have an economic impact, a correlation analysis of the selected indicators is performed. Correlation analysis is a statistical method used to estimate the strength of the relationship between two quantitative variables.

**Stage 3.** Once the correlations between tourism innovativeness of a country, changes in tourism, and economic indicators of a country are established, and the indicators with a strong correlation are distinguished, in the third stage of the research, a multiple linear regression analysis of these indicators is performed. Regression analysis is used to determine how a response variable is dependent on one or more features (Smelser and Baltes, 2001).

**Stage 4.** After the regression analysis is accomplished and in order to determine the interaction and causality (direction of the impact) of the whole set of indicators, in the fourth stage of the research, modelling of structural equations is performed.

In order to accomplish the evaluation of the economic impact of tourism innovativeness, the statistical data of the European countries (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom, Norway, Switzerland) of the period of 2012-2017 have been selected. The data are available in Eurostat, UNWTO and other databases.

## Verification of the model of the evaluation of the economic impact of tourism innovativeness

The developed methodology for evaluating the economic impact of tourism innovativeness has helped to identify that only 22 indicators of tourism innovativeness, tourism, and economic impact correlate with each other (**Table 7.1**).

**Table 7.1.** Indicators of the economic impact evaluation methodology of tourism innovativeness

Group of indicators	Indicator
<b>Indicators of tourism innovativeness</b>	Air transport infrastructure Index
	Innovativeness of transport and accommodation companies' penetration index
	The number of employed ICT specialists
	Self-service degree index
	Numerical country index
<b>Tourism indicators</b>	Number of visitors staying overnight, thousand. pcs
	Number of accommodation facilities (hotels and similar accommodation proposals) (UNWTO methodology)
	Number of rooms
	Number of beds
	Share of the number of beds in private accommodation facilities, in percent
	Total number of people staying in hotels; holidays and others in short-term accommodation service institutions; campers, recreational vehicles, and trailers in parking lots.
	Total number of people staying on holiday and other short-term accommodation in service institutions; camping, entertainment in vehicle and trailer parking lots
<b>Indicators of the overall economic impact</b>	Capital investments in the tourism sector
	Total employment
	The country's balance of payments
	Gross domestic product
	Gross national income per capita
<b>Indicators of the direct economic impact</b>	Production value of the tourism sector
	Total added value, million
	Final consumption expenses
	Purchases of goods and services in the tourism sector
	Export

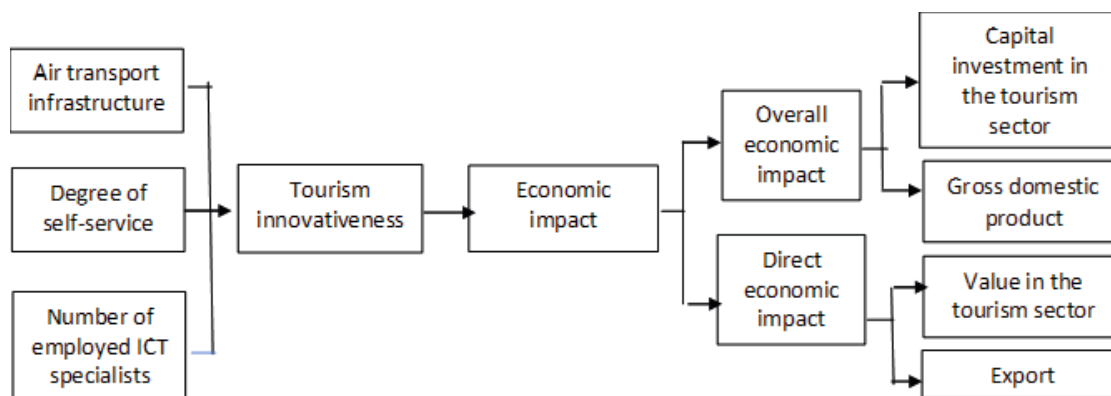
The regression analysis has revealed that three indicators of tourism innovativeness explain eight indicators of the economic impact.

The models of regression analysis of the impact of tourism innovativeness on export reveal that if there is an increase of 1% in the air transport infrastructure, it has the following results: the total employment increases by 0.59–1.08%; country's balance of payments increases by 3.3–5.4 %; gross domestic product increases by 1.19–1.37%; the value of the tourism sector production increases by 0.14–2%; the gross value added increases by 0.89–1.1%; the final consumption expenditure increases by 0.86–1.26%; purchases of goods and services in the tourism sector increase by 1.1–1.55%.

An increase of 1% in the number of employed ICT specialists increases capital investment in the tourism sector by 0.37–0.49%, total employment by 0.84–0.99%, the country's balance of payments by 0.6–1.52%, gross domestic product by 0.78–0.95%, the value of the tourism sector production by 0.58–0.76%, gross value added by 0.65–0.83%, final consumption expenditure by 0.89–1.07%, purchases of goods and services of the tourism sector by 0.5–0.75%, and export by 0.24–1.02%.

An increase of 1% in the degree of self-service increases capital investment in the tourism sector by 0.9–1.23%, total employment by 0.45–1.1%, the value of the tourism sector production by 0.58–0.64%, gross value added by 0.44–2.02%, purchases of goods and services in the tourism sector by 0.67–1.4%, export by 1.09–1.23%.

Modelling of structural equations has helped to evaluate the overall economic impact of tourism innovativeness. There have been developed two similar models of the economic impact of tourism innovativeness, that have confirmed the direction of the impact, and it has been proved that tourism innovation determines economic impact (**Fig. 7.2**).



**Fig. 7.2.** Model of the economic impact of inbound tourism innovativeness by using structural modelling of equations

The model of the economic impact of tourism innovativeness indicates that three indicators of tourism innovativeness (the number of employed ICT specialists, the degree of self-service, and air transport infrastructure) determine a strong economic impact through four indicators: capital investment in the tourism sector, gross domestic product, the value of the tourism sector production, and export. An extremely strong impact has been found in the model. These results justify that the economic impact of tourism innovativeness is significant.

## Conclusions

1. The development of innovativeness in the tourism sector is due to rapid technological progress and the availability of technology. Technologies in the tourism sector help to enable technological devices that are mostly owned by consumers. Meanwhile, tourism businesses can more easily manage relationships with customers, provide individualised offers, optimise supply, and demand, and make the right business decisions. Tourism innovativeness enables the consumer to choose a new type of tourism service. They can be more easily managed by service providers. This is changing the tourism market, which has a different economic impact. The decision made by tourism consumers to travel, the chosen location of travel, the form of travel, and the amount of expenditure determine the income of the chosen location of travel, how many people will be employed, how much investment will be attracted, what national product will be created. Economic growth of the newly discovered regions is taking place since the consumer can travel individually and manage their trip through the means of tourism innovativeness.
2. The economic impact of innovativeness is measured by evaluating the indicators before innovativeness and after innovativeness. Three directions for evaluating the economic impact of innovativeness have been identified: by evaluating the economic impact caused by inputs of innovativeness, by evaluating the microeconomic or macroeconomic impact. For the evaluation of inputs of innovativeness, the following indicators are important: investment in R&D and the number of patents. Indicators for the microeconomic evaluation: increase in added value, the better quality of services and products, higher market share, profitability. Macroeconomic indicators: GDP, employment, export.
3. The novelty of this study is related to the economic evaluation of tourism innovation at the level of European countries. The regression analysis has revealed that in 2012-2017, the following indicators of tourism innovativeness had the overall and direct economic impact: air transport infrastructure, the number of employed ICT specialists and the degree of self-service.
  - An increase of 1% in the air transport infrastructure increases the total employment by 0.59–1.08%, the country's balance of payments by 3.3–5.4%, gross domestic product by 1.19–1.37%, the value of the tourism sector production by 0.14–2%, the gross value added by 0.89–1.1%, the final consumption expenditure by 0.86–1.26%, purchases of goods and services in the tourism sector by 1.1–1.55%.
  - An increase of 1% in the number of employed ICT specialists increases capital investment in the tourism sector by 0.37–0.49%, total employment by 0.84–0.99%, the country's balance of payments by 0.6–1.52%, gross domestic product by 0.78–0.95%, the value of the tourism sector production by 0.58–0.76%, gross value added by 0.65–0.83%, final consumption expenditure by 0.89–1.07%, purchases of goods and services of the tourism sector by 0.5–0.75%, and export by 0.24–1.02%.
  - An increase of 1% in the degree of self-service increases capital investment in the tourism sector by 0.9–1.23%, total employment by 0.45–1.1%, the value of the tourism sector production by 0.58–0.64%, gross value added by 0.44–2.02%, purchases of goods and services in the tourism sector by 0.67–1.4%, export by 1.09–1.23%.

4. Referring to the modelling of structural equations and after the model of the economic impact of tourism innovativeness has been developed, it has been found that tourism innovativeness, expressed in terms of the degree of tourism self-service, air transport infrastructure, and the number of employed ICT specialists, has an economic impact, i.e. determines an increase in capital investment in the tourism sector, gross domestic product, the value of the tourism sector production and export. The impact is positive and strong.

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## 8. THE IMPACT OF LANGUAGE TRANSLATION ON BOOSTING SPORTS TOURISM WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO WORLD CUP 2022 IN QATAR

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**Abstract.** Sports tourism refers to travel for the purpose of participating in or watching sports events or activities. It can include a wide range of activities, such as attending major sporting events like the Olympic Games or the FIFA World Cup, participating in sports tournaments or competitions, or taking part in adventure sports like skiing, surfing, or mountain biking. Sports tourism can also involve visiting sports-related attractions such as museums, stadiums, or training facilities, as well as undertaking sports-themed tours or vacations. Sports tourism has become increasingly popular in recent years, with more and more people traveling both domestically and internationally to participate in or watch sports events. This has led to the development of specialized sports tourism services and facilities, such as sports resorts, training camps, and tour operators, that cater to the needs and interests of sports enthusiasts. Hosting the FIFA World Cup can represent a significant historical milestone and symbolic achievement for the host country. The World Cup is the most prestigious and widely watched sporting event in the world, with millions of viewers tuning in from around the globe. As a result, hosting the World Cup can bring global attention and recognition to the host country, elevating its profile and reputation on the international stage. Language translation can have a significant impact on boosting sports tourism by breaking down language barriers between different cultures and countries. When sports events are held in a foreign country, language can be a major challenge for tourists, making it difficult for them to communicate and navigate their way around. By providing accurate and reliable translation services in all possible languages, sports tourism can be made more accessible and attractive to a wider audience. For example, if a sports event is held in a non-English speaking country, translating the event information and advertising materials into multiple languages can help to attract tourists from all over the world who may not otherwise have considered attending. In order to examine our theory, we performed a content analysis of literature review and the official websites dedicated to the FIFA World Cup 2022 in Qatar. Through this study, we gathered information on how translating content into various languages can help mitigate the challenges posed by language barriers among fans of the FIFA World Cup. It's important to highlight that the diverse group of volunteers brought a wide range of languages, offering a multitude of linguistic possibilities. Our results indicate that having translations available has a positive impact on the success of major sports events, and consequently flourishing of tourism in general and sports tourism in particular.

**Keywords:** Translation, language barrier, big sports events, success, volunteers, FIFA World Cup 2022.

## Introduction

The FIFA World Cup is a renowned international soccer championship organized by FIFA, which takes place every four years. It is widely regarded as the most prestigious soccer event globally, with millions of viewers and enthusiasts from all over the world. The competition features national teams from around the globe competing for the coveted title of World Cup champions. Hosting the tournament can have a considerable influence on the host nation, fostering economic development and creating a sustainable legacy that extends beyond the competition (Hemmonsby and Tichaawa, 2018). The FIFA World Cup was scheduled to be held for the first time in the Middle East, specifically in Qatar, in 2022. This is a historic event as it marks the first time that an Arabic country has been selected to host the tournament. The decision to award the hosting rights to Qatar was made in 2010, with the tournament originally scheduled to take place in 2022. Qatar's successful bid was based on its state-of-the-art infrastructure, innovative cooling technology to combat the country's hot climate, and its commitment to hosting a sustainable and environmentally friendly tournament (Brannagan and Rookwood, 2016). The tournament managed to attract millions of visitors and generate significant economic growth for the country. Qatar had been investing heavily in building new stadiums, hotels, and transportation infrastructure to prepare for the event. The tournament is also expected to have a lasting legacy, with many of the new facilities being used for future sporting and cultural events, benefiting local communities and the economy. Sports tourism refers to travel for the purpose of participating in or watching sports events or activities (Gibson, 1998). It can include a wide range of activities, such as attending major sporting events like the Olympic Games or the FIFA World Cup, participating in sports tournaments or competitions, or taking part in adventure sports like skiing, surfing, or mountain biking. Sports tourism can also involve visiting sports-related attractions such as museums, stadiums, or training facilities, as well as undertaking sports-themed tours or vacations. Sports tourism has become increasingly popular in recent years, with more and more people traveling both domestically and internationally to participate in or watch sports events (Perić, 2010). This has led to the development of specialized sports tourism services and facilities, such as sports resorts, training camps, and tour operators, that cater to the needs and interests of sports enthusiasts (Deery, et al., 2004). Hosting the FIFA World Cup can represent a significant historical milestone and symbolic achievement for the host country. The World Cup is the most prestigious and widely watched sporting event in the world, with millions of viewers tuning in from around the globe. As a result, hosting the World Cup can bring global attention and recognition to the host country, elevating its profile and reputation on the international stage (Higham, 2021).

For many countries, hosting the World Cup represents a significant achievement and an opportunity to showcase their culture, history, and achievements. It can also serve as a catalyst for economic growth, with the influx of visitors and increased investment in infrastructure and facilities generating significant revenue and creating new jobs (Weed, 2006). Hosting the World Cup can also bring the host country's people together in a spirit of national pride and unity. The event can create a sense of excitement and anticipation, with fans and locals alike coming together to celebrate the sport and their country's role in hosting the event. Moreover, hosting the World Cup can have a lasting legacy beyond the event itself. The infrastructure and facilities built for the World Cup can be used for future sporting and cultural events, benefiting local communities and the economy (Homafar, et al., 2011). The event can also serve as a catalyst for sustainable development, with host countries implementing environmental and social initiatives to promote responsible tourism and leave a positive impact

(Preuss, 2013). More interestingly, Preuss (2013) has highlighted that The FIFA World Cup has acted as a catalyst for promoting the adoption of environmentally-friendly cooling technology and building cooling systems in Qatar. This development holds significant relevance for nations characterized by desert-like climates. Consequently, Qatar not only acquires symbolic value from hosting the World Cup, but it also contributes to a lasting global environmental impact and presents a lucrative business prospect. Overall, hosting the FIFA World Cup can represent a significant historical milestone and symbolic achievement for the host country, generating global attention, economic growth, national pride, and a lasting legacy beyond the event itself.

## **Translating the World Cup**

Translating the World Cup presents a unique set of challenges for translators and interpreters due to the tournament's global audience and the diverse range of languages spoken by players, coaches, and fans. The World Cup involves national teams from around the world, each with its own language and culture, which can make communication and understanding difficult. Translators and interpreters must be able to accurately convey the meaning and intent of the speakers, while also taking into account cultural differences and nuances that may affect interpretation (Kondo, et al., 1997). Another challenge is the speed and pace of the tournament, with matches taking place every day and interviews and press conferences happening frequently. Translators and interpreters must be able to work quickly and accurately to keep up with the fast-paced schedule and ensure that communication flows smoothly between all parties involved. Additionally, the World Cup involves a wide range of media and platforms, from traditional print and broadcast media to social media and online streaming (Sluyter-Gäthje, et al., 2018). Translators and interpreters must be able to adapt to the different mediums and ensure that the translations are accurate and appropriate for each platform. Overall, translating the World Cup requires a high level of linguistic and cultural expertise, as well as the ability to work quickly and accurately in a fast-paced and constantly changing environment.

## **Effect of absence of language barriers on tourists**

The absence of language barriers can have a significant positive effect on tourists. Language barriers can create obstacles for tourists when trying to communicate with locals, understand local customs and traditions, navigate the local area, and access local services and resources (Evans, 1976). When tourists do not face language barriers, they are more likely to feel welcome and comfortable in the host country, which can contribute to a more positive overall experience. They can interact more easily with locals, making it easier to form connections and gain insight into local culture. This can lead to more meaningful cultural experiences and a greater appreciation for the host country's unique offerings. Moreover, the absence of language barriers can enhance safety and security for tourists. When tourists can communicate effectively with locals and access local services and resources, they are less likely to encounter dangerous situations or misunderstandings that can lead to conflicts (Gu, et al., 2020). In addition, the absence of language barriers can make it easier for tourists to plan and navigate their trip. They can read signs, menus, and transportation schedules more easily, and can ask for directions or assistance when needed. This can reduce stress and increase the sense of control and confidence when traveling. Overall, the absence of language barriers can have a positive impact on

tourists by enhancing cultural experiences, increasing safety and security, and facilitating trip planning and navigation. This can lead to more positive reviews and word-of-mouth recommendations, which can contribute to the growth of tourism in the host country.

## How translation helped in FIFA World Cup?

Translation can play a significant role in global sports events, such as the World Cup, by promoting multilingual communication and facilitating cross-cultural understanding among participants and fans from different countries (Sakaedani, 2005). Here are some ways in which translation helped FIFA World Cup: Media coverage: Translation supported the dissemination of information and news related to the event to a wider audience (Bielsa, 2007). By providing translation of news articles, interviews, and other media content, the event reached more people in different countries and languages, increasing its global reach and impact. Broadcasting: Translation of sports commentary and interviews during the event enabled fans to follow the matches more closely and provide them with a deeper understanding of the game. Translation also enabled fans to hear from players and coaches from different countries, adding to the excitement of the event. Signage and documentation: Providing multilingual signage and documentation at the event helped international visitors navigate and participate in the event more easily. This included providing translated schedules, maps, and other important information in different languages to ensure that all participants can access the information they need. Marketing and promotion: Translation of marketing and promotional materials helped to attract a wider audience to the event and ensure that people from different countries and language groups were engaged with the event (Sulaiman, 2016). Overall, translation succeeded to break down language barriers and promote multilingual communication, enabling people from different countries and cultures to come together and enjoy the event together.

As the FIFA World Cup 2022 was held in an Arabic country for the first time, translation played a critical role in ensuring effective communication between fans, players, and officials from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Translation services were available at all official World Cup venues, including stadiums, fan zones, and media centres, to assist with language barriers and provide accurate and timely information to attendees (Amarasinghe and Senevirathne, 2020). Translation was also crucial for media coverage of the event, as journalists and broadcasters from around the world needed to report on matches and related news in various languages. Real-time translation services were available to broadcasters, allowing them to provide commentary and analysis in multiple languages simultaneously. In addition, translation helped to promote cultural exchange and understanding during the World Cup. Fans were able to learn about the history and traditions of Qatar through multilingual signage, brochures, and other informational materials, which were translated into different languages. Additionally, translation services played a vital role in facilitating communication and ensuring that the FIFA World Cup 2022 was accessible and enjoyable for fans, players, and officials from all over the world (Thomaz, et al., 2017).

## Diversity of volunteers strengthened translation

A remarkable number of 420,000 individuals applied to volunteer for the event, and out of those, 20,000 were selected. This group included 3,000 volunteers from 150 nations around the world, who were enlisted to provide assistance and contribute to various aspects of the tournament's execution (FIFA, 2022).

The diversity of volunteers with various language backgrounds played a crucial role in strengthening the translation efforts (Human and Van Graan, 2013) during the FIFA World Cup 2022. Qatar had recruited thousands of volunteers from around the world to help with various tasks during the tournament, including translation services. These volunteers brought with them a wealth of language skills, including knowledge of less commonly spoken languages, which proved invaluable in communicating (Nichols, 2017) with fans and teams from all corners of the globe. The volunteers were also trained to handle cultural differences and sensitivities, which helped ensure that translations were accurate and culturally appropriate. The volunteers provided translation services at various locations, including stadiums, fan zones, hotels, and transportation hubs, making it easier for visitors to navigate the country and enjoy the tournament. Moreover, the volunteers' language skills and cultural knowledge helped to create a welcoming atmosphere for visitors, which enhanced their overall experience of the tournament. In addition, the volunteers' diverse backgrounds and experiences contributed to a more inclusive and representative event, which aligned with the tournament's values of diversity and inclusion. Overall, the diverse pool of volunteers with their various language backgrounds played a crucial role in strengthening the translation file during the FIFA World Cup 2022, ensuring effective communication and an enjoyable experience for fans and visitors from all over the world.

During a press conference held on the sidelines of the final match between Argentina and France, Hassan Al Thawadi, Secretary-General of the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy (SC), expressed his excitement over the success of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. Al Thawadi praised the tournament, which he believes achieved the highest level of excellence in all aspects in the history of the event. He stated that the World Cup 2022 showcased Qatar's impressive efforts in organizing the matches and bringing the world together through sports, promoting a message of peace across cultures and beliefs (Qatar-tribune, 2022).

Akbar Al Baker, the Chairman of Qatar Tourism and the Chief Executive of Qatar Airways Group, has announced the launch of the Qatar Tourism Awards. These awards aim to acknowledge the remarkable contributions of the tourism industry's stakeholders in Qatar. According to Al Baker, the tourism sector's businesses and individuals have dedicated themselves to achieving some of the world's most renowned tourism experiences in Qatar. The program's objective is to motivate and inspire partners to create innovative initiatives that will enhance Qatar's status as a world-class tourism destination (Qatar-tribune, 2022).

Qatar has welcomed over 1.4 million visitors from various parts of the world to the FIFA World Cup 2022. The tournament has been praised for its compact layout, convenient features, and family-friendly environment, with more than 53,000 fans attending each match on average and a total of 3.4 million attendees overall. The final match between Argentina and France at Lusail Stadium drew significant attention as was expected, with attendance already exceeding 96% capacity (Qatar-tribune, 2022).

According to a recent report by FocusEconomics, hosting The FIFA World Cup 2022 in Qatar was expected to bring a significant economic benefit to the country. The report stated that during the first two weeks of the event alone, Qatar received 0.8 million visitors, which is almost half the number of foreign visitors the country saw in the entire year of 2019. This surge in tourism was expected to have a positive impact on the private services sector (Satyendra Pathak, 2023).

During a press conference held on the sidelines of the final match between Argentina and France, Secretary-General of the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy (SC) Hassan Al Thawadi expressed that the 2022 World Cup demonstrated the remarkable efforts made by Qatar in organizing the matches. He highlighted that Qatar was successful in bringing together people from various cultures and beliefs around the world through sports, which conveyed a message of peace through sports (Qatar-tribune, 2022).

Al Thawadi further mentioned that the FIFA World Cup hosted by Qatar was something to be proud of, as it was compact, convenient and suitable for families. He emphasized that this event provided an exceptional platform for cultural exchange, which had never been seen before in history. Fans from different parts of the world had the opportunity to experience Qatari and Arab culture for the first time, and they were always near the stadiums, accommodation, or entertainment facilities. He went on to say that the feedback from all stakeholders, including fans, players, the media, volunteers, and tournament officials, was overwhelmingly positive. The smooth transport operations made it easy for everyone to get around, and the festive atmosphere across the country was thoroughly enjoyed by all. He was confident that this tournament would have a significant impact on the country and the region, both socially, economically, and environmentally, leaving a lasting legacy.

Habib Khalfan, a Qatari citizen who volunteered at Al Bayt Stadium, expressed that he had a flood of mixed emotions before the start of the tournament. However, during his volunteering period, he gained valuable skills and made new friends (Qatar-tribune, 2022).

## Testimony of Excellence

The FIFA World Cup 2022 hosted by Qatar brought together people from all over the world, which created a diverse group of fans and volunteers. As a result, the presence of international volunteers who spoke different languages was a significant advantage for their fellow countrymen who were attending the tournament. The international volunteers provided valuable assistance to fans who faced language barriers while attending the matches, helping to ease their concerns and make their experience more enjoyable (Baum and Lockstone, 2007). The volunteers' ability to speak various languages was also beneficial to the local Qataris, who might not have been familiar with some of the languages spoken by the visitors. Moreover, the volunteers acted as cultural ambassadors, sharing their own cultural experiences with fans from different parts of the world. Overall, the presence of international volunteers added value to the tournament by providing support, cultural exchange, and breaking down language barriers, thus contributing to the success of the event.

The following section is dedicated for describing the statements of individuals who bear witness to the high quality and outstanding nature of volunteering at the World Cup in Qatar and how it helped to promote the country's image as a welcoming and hospitable host. Volunteers bear witness to the positive impact of their work on the success of the tournament.

Braulio Marquez, a Brazilian and one of the 3,000 international volunteers, shared that he had also volunteered during the 2014 World Cup in Brazil. However, he did not experience the tournament's atmosphere as he had hoped since it was held in his own country. On the other hand, he stated that the Qatar World Cup was a unique experience where volunteers could completely immerse themselves in the atmosphere and have daily interactions with people from various cultures, creating unforgettable memories (Qatar Tribune, 2022).

Akniss Abdullina, a Pakistani volunteer at Stadium 974, expressed her longing for Qatar, as the tournament had left a profound impression on her heart and mind. She missed Qatar and everything associated with it (Qatar Tribune, 2022).

Ja'far Abdulhamid, a community leader in Qatar's Filipino community, expressed his great pride and privilege in serving as a volunteer for the FIFA World Cup 2022 with utmost dedication and compassion. He felt elated to congratulate the Qatar government for providing him with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to offer his valuable services for the success of such a remarkable event. He expressed his gratitude to HH the Amir for demonstrating exceptional leadership and allowing the world to witness the beauty of Arab culture and the entire Muslim community by holding such a historic and successful event that was free of violence and treated everyone with fairness and justice (Ashraf Siddiqui, 2022).

According to Iyke Ironcho, a Nigerian volunteer at the recently concluded FIFA World Cup 2022 hosted by Qatar, he has received two appreciation certificates for his volunteer services via email. He expressed his surprise and delight at receiving digital certificates in his name signed by HH the Amir, describing it as an unexpected and amazing experience that he will always remember fondly (Ashraf Siddiqui, 2022).

Expressing appreciation for the efforts of volunteers in large-scale sports events is essential for recognizing their valuable contributions and fostering a positive environment. Acknowledging and expressing satisfaction towards volunteers can have several significant outcomes.

Firstly, it validates the hard work and dedication demonstrated by volunteers. Recognizing their efforts not only boosts their morale but also motivates them to continue giving their best throughout the event. Volunteers often invest considerable time and energy into their roles, and their contributions should be acknowledged and appreciated.

Secondly, expressing satisfaction towards volunteers helps create a positive atmosphere for both participants and spectators. When volunteers feel appreciated, they are likely to exude enthusiasm and positivity in their interactions with others. This, in turn, enhances the overall experience of the event for all attendees and creates a welcoming and enjoyable environment.

Additionally, showing gratitude towards volunteers can inspire others to engage in similar acts of service. When individuals witness the recognition and satisfaction bestowed upon volunteers, they may be inspired to volunteer themselves in future events, thus perpetuating a culture of community involvement and support.

## Translation and Volunteers

Translation plays a vital role in facilitating effective communication and fostering understanding between individuals or groups who speak different languages. It enables the exchange of ideas, information, and cultural experiences across linguistic barriers, thereby promoting multiculturalism and global collaboration. Volunteers, on the other hand, play a crucial role in various domains, including community development, humanitarian work, and event organization. They selflessly offer their time, skills, and efforts to support initiatives and causes they believe in. In the context of major events like the FIFA World Cup, volunteers contribute significantly to the smooth functioning of the tournament. They assist with a wide range of tasks such as ticketing, crowd management, hospitality services, language interpretation, and creating a vibrant atmosphere for participants and spectators. The involvement of volunteers in events like the World Cup not only enhances the overall experience for participants and visitors but also highlights the spirit of community engagement and unity. Their dedication and enthusiasm contribute to the success of the event and leave a positive impact on both the host country and the global community. Over 20,000 volunteers hailing from 150 nations actively contributed to the coordination of the World Cup, being allocated across 25 locations, which encompassed the eight World Cup stadiums, hotels, Hamad International Airport, Doha International Airport, Doha Corniche, and the FIFA Fan Festival. These dedicated volunteers took on diverse responsibilities such as issuing tickets, providing services to fans and media, and facilitating protocol procedures. Moreover, their presence was instrumental in generating a joyous ambiance on match days (QNA, 2022).

FIFA Secretary General Fatma Samoura expressed her admiration for the achievement of reaching the significant milestone in volunteer sign-ups. She emphasized the importance of volunteers for the prosperity of football and praised the popularity and passion of the volunteers for the sport. The community of volunteers is unique and expanding, with volunteers from various regions and speaking different languages. As the FIFA World Cup 2022 approaches, the region's closest to Qatar have strong representation, with 43.2 percent from Asia and 40.2 percent from Africa. The majority of applicants speak English, while a considerable number speak French, Spanish, and German. Furthermore, almost half of the volunteers speak a language other than the four primary languages mentioned. Among the applicants, the majority (94.4 percent) speak English, while 23.8 percent speak French, 16.7 percent speak Spanish, and 3.8 percent speak German. Nearly half (48.9 percent) of the volunteers speak a language other than these four (Qatar-tribune, 2022).



## Conclusion

Translation has been a game-changer in breaking down language barriers and promoting multilingual communication (Muñoz-Basols, 2019). With the rise of machine translation tools, people from different countries and cultures can now interact and participate in events together, regardless of the language they speak. One significant area where translation has been instrumental is in global events such as international conferences, meetings, and exhibitions. With attendees coming from different parts of the world, language barriers could be a significant challenge. However, with the help of translation technology, simultaneous interpretation and real-time translation can be provided, ensuring that everyone can participate in the event and communicate effectively. Similarly, translation technology has also facilitated multilingual communication in sports events, music festivals, and other entertainment events. People can now enjoy their favourite sports, music, and cultural events together, regardless of the language they speak. This has not only made these events more inclusive but has also enabled people from different cultures to learn from each other and appreciate their differences. Moreover, translation has played a vital role in promoting global understanding and breaking down cultural barriers. It has enabled people from different countries and cultures to communicate and interact with each other, fostering a more open and inclusive world.

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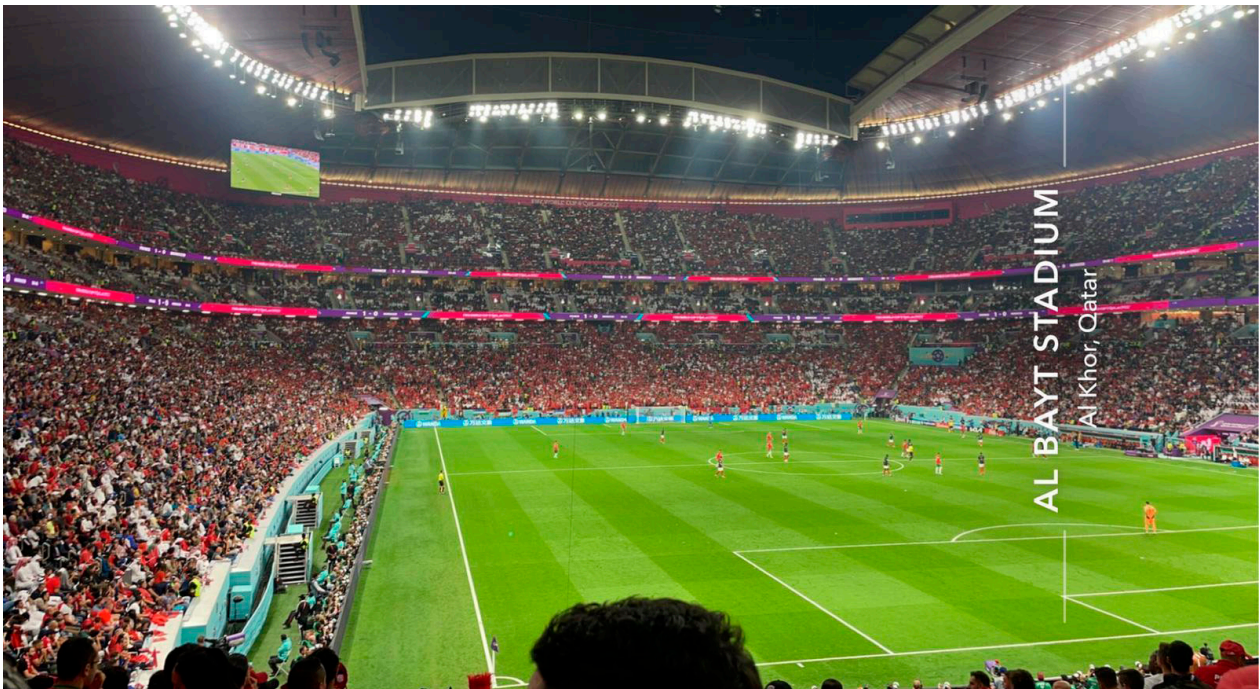
Appendix. Photos from FIBA WORLD CUP 2022  
(Source: Authors' photos).



1. Translation FIFA World Cup, Qatar 2022



2. Volunteers at Al Bayt Stadium, Al Khor, Qatar



3. Al Bayt Stadium, Al Khor, Qatar



4. France v Morocco | Semi-finals | FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022



5. Absence of Language Barriers

# 9. EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESPONSIBLE TOURISM PRACTICES AND RESPONSIBLE BEHAVIOURAL INTENTION

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**Abstract.** This study examines the relationship between responsible tourism practices and behavioural intentions. The proposed conceptual model illustrates the relationship between economic, socio-cultural, and environmental responsibility and tourists' intention to engage in responsible tourism. For descriptive statistics, SPSS 22.0 software was used, while SmartPLS 3.0 software was used for path-analysis-structural modelling (SEM). An exploratory quantitative study investigated how Vietnamese tourists engage in responsible tourism during their trips and the factors that influence their behaviour. The results indicate that tourist responsibility practice positively impacts their intention to behave responsibly, while environmental responsibility factors strongly influence tourist behaviour. From a tourist perspective, this is a pioneering study in responsible tourism because no informed research has been done in Thua Thien Hue. The research proposes a theoretical framework for responsible tourism based on the correlation between responsible practices and responsible tourism behaviour intentions. The study has practical implications for tourism stakeholders.

**Keywords:** Responsible tourism, tourist behaviour, tourist's responsibility.

## Introduction

Over the past few decades, the international community has become aware of the negative effects of mass tourism on the economy, society, and environment. Therefore, sustainable tourism has been introduced as an alternative to mass tourism. In tourism, sustainable tourism development emphasizes the importance of preserving local traditions and sociocultural identities to protect the environment, generate revenue and employment for host destinations, and finally involve local communities in tourism decision-making (Medina, 2005). Responsible tourism, which promotes the conservation of natural resources, culture, and biological diversity, emerged at the same time as sustainable tourism. Creating better places for residents and tourists to visit is part of a responsible tourism approach (Goodwin, 2011). According to Leslie (2013), responsible tourism is about taking responsibility for the consequences of tourism for all stakeholders: businesses, communities, destination management organizations (DMOs), and tourists (Jenkins and Schröder, 2013). Therefore, responsible tourism can be analysed from different perspectives, such as supply-side or demand-side. Responsible tourism (RT) focuses on the actions and awareness of sustainable travel among all stakeholders (Mondal and Samaddar, 2020), which considers the three pillars of sustainability: nature, community, and economy.

Although Mihalic (2016) emphasized the role of responsible tourism and stated that responsible tourism gradually reduces adverse economic, sociocultural, and ecological impacts.

Several studies have been published in recent decades about responsible tourism, analysing the concept, its dimensions, and the factors that influence it as well as analysing responsible tourism from both a demand-side and supply-side perspective. Despite this, only limited research has examined whether tourists are willing to adopt more sustainable behaviours (Amin, 2017; Budeanu, 2007; Caruana, et al., 2014; Gong, et al., 2019; Hu and Sung, 2022; Lee, et al., 2017; Nguyen, et al., 2018; Panwanitdumrong and Cheng, 2021; Parikshat, et al., 2021) and which barriers prevent them from making responsible choices (Budeanu, 2007; Goodwin and Francis, 2003). It is still necessary to conduct more research to understand what motivates tourists to be responsible, how responsibility translates into specific practices, and how these practices are measured. However, there hasn't been much research into responsible tourism in Vietnam. Vu (2015) investigated responsible tourism from the perspective of all stakeholders. Those results suggest that responsible tourism can only be developed when the goal of the visit is to experience culture and cultured spirituality. This is because all stakeholders are converging on their responsibilities and benefits. In another study, Nguyen, et al. (2022) analysed the issue of responsible tourism in Vietnam from the perspectives of tourism experts and tourists. According to the survey results, tourists in Vietnam should play a critical role in promoting responsible tourism. In contrast, Bui, Phi, and Le (2022) used a qualitative research approach to seek the gap in the literature regarding the RT behaviours of tour operators and their implementation in the context of Vietnam. In the context of Vietnamese tourism research, there is a lack of studies looking at responsible behaviour from the tourist perspective and what factors impact their behaviour.

As in Vietnam, responsible tourism is largely unexplored in Thua Thien Hue, and few researchers are interested in it. According to Nguyen (2018), there was only one study conducted on the awareness of responsible tourism in Hue. The results show that responsible tourism is still a new phenomenon in Hue and that tourists are not well aware of it. Thua Thien-Hue offers a very diverse and picturesque landscape. Nature and human beings create a harmonious beauty with Bach Ma (White Horse) National Park and other attractive beaches such as Thuan An, Lang Co, and Canh Duong. Buddhist temples and pagodas were built in Thua Thien Hue in the early 20th century, making it an iconic Buddhist centre of Vietnam. Additionally, the province offers dozens of handicraft villages, a rich royal heritage, and a lively folk culture. Thua Thien Hue has developed culture and heritage tourism, pilgrimage tourism, community-based tourism, ecotourism, and wellness tourism. The province can develop responsible tourism, but there is a lack of research on the topic. Few studies in Vietnam have clarified the correlation between tourist responsibility practices and responsible tourism behaviour intentions. This study can be considered a pioneering study on responsible tourism in Thua Thien Hue. To recognize domestic tourists' attitudes toward responsible tourism, this study used a quantitative method. We conducted a survey of domestic tourists who visited Thua Thien Hue from April to June 2022 by filling out a questionnaire. The research findings can contribute to the scientific debate about the discrepancy between responsible tourism practices and responsible behaviours in light of the reopened tourism industry following lockdown restrictions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, we encourage ethical travel to promote responsible tourism.



## Literature review

In the tourism industry, responsible tourism has attracted the attention of many people, including academics in tourism research (Burrai, et al., 2019; Caruana, et al., 2014; Chettiparamb and Kokkranikal, 2012; Choi, et al., 2017; Del Chiappa, et al., 2016; Duminduhewa, et al., 2020; Fang, 2020; Gong, et al., 2019; Hu and Sung, 2022; Lee, et al., 2017; Mathew and Kuriakose, 2017; Mondal and Samaddar, 2021; Parikshat, et al., 2021; Weeden, 2014; Um and Yoon, 2020) and tourism practitioners (Mihalic, 2016), as well as tourists and society in general (Leslie, 2013). Several stakeholders have been included in the delivery of responsible tourism in the 2002 Cape Town Declaration, which emphasizes that sustainability in tourism can only be achieved if stakeholders (governments, communities, businesses, and consumers) take “responsibility”. Several researchers focused on attitudes that affect RT participation whereas others investigated socially responsible consumption traits (Chafe, 2005; Diallo, et al., 2015; Medina, 2005; Prendergast and Tsang, 2019; Song and Kim, 2018) or tourists’ environmental awareness (Chao, et al., 2012; Elgaaied, et al, 2013; Lee, et al., 2013; Panwanitdumrong and Cheng, 2021; Su and Swanson, 2017; Wang, et al., 2018). There have been several debates about responsible tourism, including the relationship between tourist behaviour and responsible tourism (Lee, et al., 2017; Yoon, et al., 2019; Zgolli and Zaiem, 2018); ethical responsibility of stakeholders (Goodwin and Francis, 2003; Lee, et al., 2017); marketing and corporate social responsibility programs; responsibility of tour operators (Nguyen et al., 2018); and responsible tourism from the perspective of the locals (Burrai, Font, and Cochrane, 2014; Chan, Marzuki and Mohtar, 2021; Rasdi, et al., 2019). Many of the studies focus more on stakeholders’ role in delivering responsible tourism than an engaging critique of the term itself. However, responsible tourism has been explored in several international studies on what motivates responsible tourists, attitudes, and, behaviours as well as discrepancies between attitudes and behaviours (Budeanu, 2007; Chafe, 2005; Hu and Sung, 2022; Mondal and Samaddar, 2021; Panwanitdumrong and Cheng, 2021; Su and Swanson, 2017).

The advancement of RT in diverse research strands has led to it being officially accepted and endorsed by numerous tourist destinations, marketers, policy-makers, and academic research organizations throughout the world (Del Chiappa, Grappi and Romani, 2016). Tourism impact can be more effectively developed following the implementation of RT by all stakeholders. Although there has been an increase in studies of responsible tourism contexts in recent years, there have been few studies about tourist responsibility and intention behaviour from the triple bottom line of responsible tourism. This study will fill a research gap by examining the correlation between tourist responsibility and responsibility intention behaviour. Tourist responsibility is measured from the perspective of the triple bottom line of responsible tourism, which are economic, socio-cultural, and environmental.

### The concept of responsible tourism

RT emerged alongside sustainable tourism development, but it is difficult to understand (Chettiparamb and Kokkranikal, 2012; Hall and Kim 2012). In reality, tourism stakeholders lack a clear understanding of RT and sustainable development and often fail to introduce them. Since the 1970s, RT has been considered one of the “new forms of tourism”. RT involves the actions and consciousness of all stakeholders regarding sustainable travel (Mondal and Samaddar, 2020), which considers the three pillars of sustainability: nature, local communities, and the economy. Thus, responsible tourism is all

forms of tourism that respect the natural, built, and cultural environments of the host as well as all interests of all stakeholders. As a result, UNWTO published the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism in 2001. This code emphasized the need for all stakeholders to take responsibility for making all forms of tourism sustainable and aimed to promote responsible, sustainable, and universally accessible tourism. However, the phrase RT appears in 2002 by The Cape Town Declarant and has been extensively studied since then. According to the 2002 Cape Town Declaration, responsible tourism minimizes negative economic, environmental, and social impacts and generates significant economic benefits for locals, improves the well-being of host communities, and improves working conditions and access to the industry. Responsible tourism provides more enjoyable experiences for tourists through more meaningful connections with local people, and a more comprehensive understanding of local cultural, social, and environmental issues. Practicing responsible tourism maximizes the benefits for the local community and protects their environment and culture (Caruana, et al., 2014; Mathew and Sreejesh, 2017). The European Union contributed a new definition of responsible tourism in the European Charter for Sustainable and Responsible Tourism. There are nine basic principles identified in it to encourage the development and implementation of responsible policies in the tourism sector. Consequently, responsible tourism helps unite stakeholders in the tourism industry (Burrai, Buda and Stanford, 2019). It is not only responsible for decisions, actions, and policies, but is also involved in tourism planning, management, delivery, and consumption.

From the perspective of tourists, responsible tourism involves a lifestyle that fosters cultural and biological diversity as well as environmental and natural conservation, both at home and while traveling (Responsible Travel Handbook). It means that tourists should take responsible behaviour during the trip and when they buy and consume everyday products or services. Responsible tourism creates a different way to think about holidays (Budeanu, 2007) driving an increasing number of people to make their travel decisions based on values like consciousness, sobriety responsible consumption, and respect for the local culture, social, environmental and economic context.

## **Responsible tourist**

RT emphasized tourists' ability to make a difference in their activities by following its values and principles. According to Hall and Kim (2012), RT helps tourists think about their travels and judge the quality of their experiences. RT defines a responsible tourist as one that respects local cultures (tradition, religion, heritage), protects the environment (flora, fauna, landscapes), benefits the local community (economically and socially), conserves natural resources (water, energy), and minimizes pollution (noise, waste, and congestion) (Goodwin, 2011). Responsible tourists seek to experience the destination's authentic offerings while reciprocating equitably. Tourism activities under the RT include exploring a destination's authenticity and preserving its natural, geological, sociocultural, economic, and environmental heritage as well as its natural, geological, sociocultural, and economic heritage. (Budeanu 2007; Kerstetter, Hou and Lin, 2004). While traveling, responsible tourists seek to understand the local context ethically and with awareness (Caruana, et al., 2014). Moreover, before visiting a place, they spend time and resources researching it.

Responsible tourism includes using their purchasing power responsibly as well as using services that contribute to the environment. Travelers who are responsible tourists are concerned about local resources, avoid excessive travel, and preserve the culture and natural heritage of the places they visit.

Responsible tourism is experienced along the continuum of high to low budgetary backup (Baloch, et al., 2022). The low-budget responsible tourism experience can be learned through self-contained and self-organized camping trips accessible by bicycle, animal carts, or train. However, responsible tourism is more problematic when relevant laws are missing in the destination. Therefore, destinations should inform tourists about their responsibilities during their stay.

## **Responsible tourism behaviour intention**

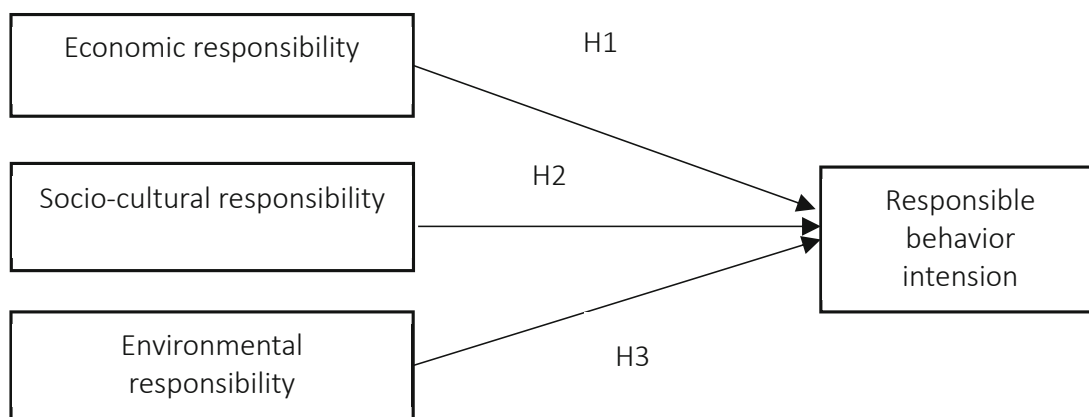
People's behavioural intentions are influenced by both their attitudes and subjective norms. The subjective norm refers to the social norms associated with the act, while attitudes are the strength of an individual's attitude toward the act. Positive subjective norms and positive attitudes should lead to better relationships. Several studies have demonstrated a positive relationship between intentions and behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Depending on the individual and the situation, there may be a difference in the impact of these factors on behavioural intentions. In a few studies, researchers have found that direct prior experience with a certain activity increases the attitude component of the behavioural intention function. It was proposed that consumers should also consider the antecedents of their purchase intentions in addition to the more instrumental motivators of time, money, convenience, etc. Consumers' ethical intentions may not always translate into their buying behaviour, possibly because other factors such as price and previous experiences overshadow ethical considerations.

Researchers identified the following antecedents affecting sustainable development processes and shaping "responsible tourism behaviour" (Hu and Sung, 2022; Panwanitdumrong and Cheng, 2021; Su and Swanson, 2017; Zgolli and Zaiem, 2018). Responsible tourist demonstrates a balanced approach to their travels and contributes to the host community. This includes consuming services that contribute to the tourist's environment and using their purchasing power responsibly. Accordingly, this study examines tourist responsibility through their responsible tourism practices in three categories, including economic, sociocultural, and environmental. There have been several previous studies that have addressed the issue of responsible tourism intention, which is the measure of tourist intention level to engage in responsible tourism (Song, et al., 2014; Diallo, et al., 2015; Hu and Yung-Kun Sung, 2022; Um and Yoon, 2021; Yoon, et al., 2019; Zgolli and Zaiem, 2018). Intentions for active participation in responsible tourism were measured by willingness to participate, time and financial commitment, and recommendations to others.

# The research methodology

## The research model and the hypotheses

According to Um and Yoon (2021), all stakeholders must behave responsibly. Responsible tourism encompasses the behaviour and attitude displayed by every participant in the tourism value chain during the execution process. From a tourist perspective, the experts should check and analyse the items provided by the respondents and determine which items contribute least to tourism responsibility and which items contribute most. From the perspective of the sustainable tourism approach, responsible tourism behaviour involves actions that support economic, sociocultural, environmental, and institutional factors (Mihalic, 2016) While other researchers examine responsible tourism practices on three ethical levels: economical, sociocultural, and environmental (Caruana, et al., 2014; Mihalic, 2016; Lee, et al., 2017; Pratama and Mandaasari, 2020). Therefore, this study investigates economic, socio-cultural, environmental, and responsible intention behaviours. The proposed conceptual model is illustrated in **Fig. 9.1**.



**Fig. 9.1.** Research model and hypotheses. Source: Authors' own elaboration.

## The effect of economic responsibility on the tourist's responsible behaviour intention

Economic responsibility is how tourists use local services and products, which affects the economic status of the destination. Medina (2005) defines economic behaviour as behaviours that contribute to the local community, such as buying and consuming domestic goods. According to other research, the instrument measures tourism responsibility at the community level using four different indicators (local services, regional facilities, local products, and philanthropy) (Gong, et al., 2019). According to Lee, et al. (2017), tourists with more travel experiences made more ethical decisions.

H1: Economic responsibility positively influences tourists' intention to be responsible in tourism behaviour.

## **The effect of socio-cultural responsibility on the tourist's responsible behaviour intention**

In a variety of contexts, socio-cultural engagement underlies responsible behaviour. Furthermore, Bagri, et al. (2009) emphasize the consumer's involvement in community and social activities. Diallo, et al. (2015) found that tourists who are culturally engaged make well-informed consumption decisions. To initiate responsible behaviours, socio-cultural engagement fosters the cognitive and perceptual mobility of tourists. These authors found that tourists are socially motivated to act in favour of responsible tourism (Prendergast and Tsang, 2019; Song and Kim, 2018). Based on this discussion, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2. The tourist's socio-cultural responsibility influences directly and positively their responsible behaviour intention.

## **The effect of environmental responsibility on the tourist's responsible behaviour intention**

It has been shown that tourism rapidly increases carbon emissions, soil erosion, and water eutrophication and that it places enormous pressure on the environment (Su, et al., 2020). The issue of environmental sustainability can be resolved by modifying human behaviour (Han, et al., 2018), which requires individuals to change their behaviours (buying, consuming, and approaching products in an environmentally sustainable manner) (Wang, et al., 2020). This has prompted consumers and academics to put increased emphasis on environmental sustainability. Researchers have identified a set of factors that contribute to tourists' environmentally responsible behaviours based on the value-belief-norm theory, including ecological concern, awareness of consequences, and ascription of responsibility (Wu, et al., 2022). Moreover, environmental behaviour is significantly influenced by behavioural intention based on a model of predicting people's environmental behaviour (Chao, 2012; Panwanitdumrong and Cheng, 2021; Su and Swanson, 2017; Wang, et al., 2018). There are more recent studies related to tourism responsibility and the environmental impact of tourists that can be verified.

H3: Environmental responsibility positively influences tourists' intention to responsible tourism behaviour.

## **Data collection**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between economic responsibility, social responsibility, environmental responsibility, and responsible tourism intention behaviour. Before collecting the main data, a pilot study was conducted with 20 respondents. Considering practicality, finances, and deadlines, our sampling method is convenient. There has been a significant drop in international tourists to Thua Thien Hue as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, we were unable to attract international tourists. The survey is therefore only open to domestic tourists. Participants in the study were selected only from those who volunteered to participate and answer the questionnaire. In Thua Thien Hue, we collected data from various tourist attractions such as the Citadel, Thien Mu pagoda, Dong Ba market, Gia Long tomb, Khai Dinh tomb, Tu Duc tomb, Minh Mang

tomb, Thuan An beach, Lang Co beach, and Bach Ma National Park for 3 months from April to June 2022. The survey was explained to participants and a questionnaire was required.

In this study, respondents were also asked “How are you involved in responsible tourism practices?” and “How can responsible tourism and responsible tourism tours be promoted?”. Based on the Likert five-point scale (from 1 not necessary to 5 necessary), respondents were asked to express their viewpoints on the necessity of actions for responsible tourism tours. Duplicate responses, empty fields, incomplete evaluations, and overly ambitious evaluations were removed from the final data set. The result was 200 valid responses out of 220. **Table 9.1** presents the final data set. To test the proposed conceptual model, we conducted an empirical study of tourists’ exploratory and confirming natures. The objective of this study is to identify how the core variables of responsible tourism practices affect the intentions of responsible tourism behaviour. Therefore, we first used the SPSS 22.0 software to analyse the descriptive data. To hypothesize, we used the partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) method with Smart-PLS 3.0. Compared to the covariance-based squares structural equation modelling method, the PLS-SEM was more suitable to build our theoretical model and had high efficiency in parameter estimation.

### **The measurement of the variables**

To make them applicable to our study, minor modifications were made, as well as a review and recommendation survey conducted by tourism-related experts. As a result of the interviews and the implementation of the recommendations, the wording of the items has been clarified, and the existing measuring scale has been enhanced. As soon as we had completed the questionnaire, we conducted a pre-test through debriefing, which allowed us to exchange points of view, interpretations, and information. Consequently, certain questions have been reformulated. The constructs were measured on a Likert scale with five echelons from 1 “strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree”. (**Table 9.1**).

**Table 9.1.** List of used items

Concepts	Items of measure	Sources
<b>Economic responsibility</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. While traveling, eating at local restaurants contributes to the local economy.</li> <li>2. While traveling, buying local products economically helps the local people.</li> <li>3. While traveling, staying in local accommodations contributes to the regional economy</li> <li>4. I use the services of local travel agencies and guides to contribute to the local economy</li> </ol>	Chao, et al. (2012)
<b>Socio-cultural responsibility</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I refer to the local customs and traditions with respect</li> <li>2. I looking for the community's cultural information</li> <li>3. I learn basic phrases in the language of the visited country/region</li> <li>4. I'm talking to permanent residents of the place I visit, establishing contact with them</li> <li>5. While traveling, unethical behaviours (e.g., prostitution, child labour, sweatshop labour) should not be conducted and do not infringe on customs</li> </ol>	Olga and Aneta (2014); UNWTO (2012)
<b>Environmental responsibility</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. While traveling, walking, or cycling reducing CO2 emission helps to protect the environment.</li> <li>2. I throw the trash into containers if possible disaggregated</li> <li>3. I avoid the use of disposable packaging, especially plastics</li> <li>4. I follow the rules of the protected areas</li> <li>5. I economically consume water and electricity</li> <li>6. Considering whether entering the area of unique natural beauty, will not hurt it</li> </ol>	Goodwin and Francis (2003); Chao, et al. (2012); Lee, Jan and Yang (2013); Olga and Aneta (2014)
<b>RT behavioural intention.</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I will participate in responsible tourism</li> <li>2. I am willing to participate in responsible tourism</li> <li>3. I will attempt to participate in responsible tourism</li> <li>4. I intend to invest time and money to participate in responsible tourism</li> <li>5. I will recommend other people participate in responsible tourism</li> </ol>	Song, et al. (2014); Diallo, et al. (2015); Hu and Sung (2022)

# Results

## Sample data

The survey results indicate that women participated in the survey in greater numbers (55.0%) than men (45.0%). A majority of respondents (66.5%) were between the ages of 18-30. Other groups included persons under the age of 18 (8.5%) and people over the age of 50 (4.5%). Tourists with bachelor's degrees represent 59.0%, high school graduates account for 27.5% and master's degrees account for 10.5%.

**Table 9.2.** Socio-demographic profile of study participants. Source: Authors' field data from Thua Thien Hue, Vietnam (April to June 2022)

	Details	Frequency	Percent (%)
<b>Sex</b>	Female	110	55.0
	Male	90	45.0
<b>Age</b>	Below 18 yrs	17	8.5
	18 - 30 yrs	133	66.5
	31- 50 yrs	41	20.5
	Above 50 yrs	9	4.5
<b>Educational level</b>	First-degree/undergraduate	55	27.5
	Diploma/bachelor	118	59.0
	Master's/Postgraduate	21	10.5
	Others	6	3.0
<b>Occupational status</b>	Business	64	32.0
	Employed	37	18.5
	Civil servant	47	23.5
	Student	34	17.0
	Retired	10	5.0
	Others	8	4.0
<b>Sample size (n)</b>		200	100

## Measurement Model

The reliability and validity of the constructs were rigorously assessed using Cronbach alpha and Composite Reliability as they were motivated by the scholarly literature on the application of PLS-SEM (Hair, et al., 2019). Many researchers favour composite reliability (CR) over Cronbach's Alpha because CR evaluates reliability better than Cronbach's Alpha. In exploratory studies, CRs of at least 0.6 is recommended, while in confirmatory studies, CRs of at least 0.7 is recommended. In addition, many other researchers hold that 0.7 is an appropriate threshold for most case studies, such as Hair, et al. (2019), and Bagozzi and Yi (1988).



Detailed information on the composite reliability is shown in (Table 9.2), where the minimum and maximum are 0.897 and 0.906 respectively, which satisfy the basic requirements. In the literature of Bagozzi and Yi (1998), all factor loadings of constructs were examined, and the 0.6 requirements were utilized to determine how reliable the indicator is. The coefficients of all the constructs in the below table are all above 0.6, with a minimum loading of 0.734 and a maximum loading of 0.871. Detailed information regarding the research constructs as well as their corresponding loadings are presented in table 2 above. In addition, multicollinearity was of great concern to the researchers, which was detected with the help of common method variance (CMV) and variance inflation factor (VIF). CMV does not seem to be an issue in the works (Amoah, et al., 2021; Jibril, et al., 2019). Because of the VIF, which is less than five, which is below the threshold of ten, CMV does not appear to be an issue.

As well as the CR values, the AVE values were also higher than 0.50, the threshold value suggested by Fornell and Lacker (1981). These results verify the convergent validity of the dimensions measured. Additionally, we examined the squares of all correlations with AVE values to determine the constructs' discriminant validity. The square root of the AVE was higher than the correlation coefficients (Fornell and Lacker, 1981), proving discriminant validity.

**Table 9.3.** Construct reliability, validity, and factor loadings. Source: Authors' processing from SmartPLS 3 version.

Constructs	VIF	Factor loadings	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's alpha( $\alpha$ )	AVE
<b>Economic Responsibility</b>			<b>0.906</b>	<b>0.861</b>	<b>0.707</b>
ECR1	1.994	0.839			
ECR2	2.295	0.871			
ECR3	2.316	0.865			
ECR4	1.723	0.786			
<b>Socio-cultural responsibility</b>			<b>0.903</b>	<b>0.866</b>	<b>0.652</b>
SOCULR1	1.767	0.779			
SOCULR2	2.017	0.810			
SOCULR3	2.056	0.823			
SOCULR4	2.497	0.840			
SOCULR5	2.074	0.783			
<b>Environmental responsibility</b>			<b>0.903</b>	<b>0.872</b>	<b>0.610</b>
ENVR1	2.152	0.800			
ENVR2	2.038	0.759			
ENVR3	2.024	0.804			
ENVR4	2.118	0.820			
ENVR5	1.794	0.734			
ENVR6	1.736	0.764			

Constructs	VIF	Factor loadings	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's alpha( $\alpha$ )	AVE
<b>RT behavioural intention</b>			<b>0.897</b>	<b>0.857</b>	<b>0.636</b>
RBI1	1.746	0.753			
RBI2	1.792	0.792			
RBI3	1.895	0.783			
RBI4	2.200	0.814			
RBI5	2.247	0.843			

Henseler, et al. (2015) inspired the researchers to evaluate the existence of the discriminant validity of the latent variables through Fornell-Larcker (1981). Based on the experts' findings (Hair, et al., 2019; Henseler, et al., 2015), all the values in the diagonal form (bold) are greater than 0.5, and **Table 9.3** shows that the average variance extracted (AVE) exceeds 0.7. Fornell- Larcker's discriminant validity criterion shows that the basic and stringent assumptions of the research constructs were established after each construct of AVE had higher coefficients in both column and row positions than the others.

**Table 9.4.** Test of Discriminant Validity – Fornell-Larcker criterion. Source: Authors' processing from SmartPLS 3 version

Construct	Socio-cultural responsibility	Economic Responsibility	Environmental responsibility	RT behavioural intention
<b>Socio-cultural responsibility</b>	0.807			
<b>Economic Responsibility</b>	0.715	<b>0.841</b>		
<b>Environmental responsibility</b>	0.678	0.633	<b>0.781</b>	
<b>RT behavioural intention</b>	0.694	0.680	0.732	<b>0.798</b>

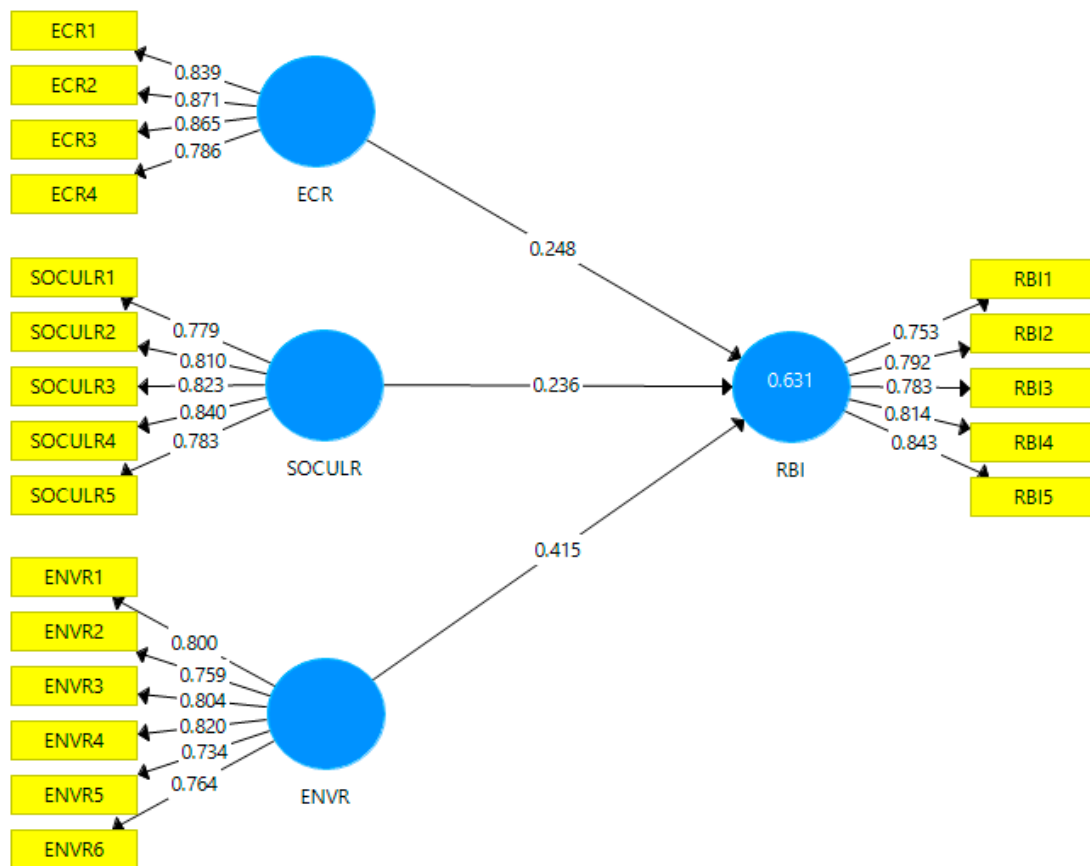
## Structural modelling-path analysis

This study demonstrates the essence of path analysis, also known as structural modelling, which concerns model fit. In this analysis, the causal relationship between the research constructs is revealed. Thus, the results of the study indicate that Responsible Tourism behaviour intention (RBI) has a potential impact or effect on current constructs such as Economic responsibility (ECR), Socio-Cultural responsibility (SOCULR), and Environmental Responsibility (ENVR). **Table 9.5** below shows the regression coefficients of Beta ( $\beta$ ), significant values; T-values, and P-values for the research model. Moreover, the predictive power associated with the research model that determines the values of the regression model was also evaluated. In the following table and figure, the  $R^2$  for the predictive variable (Responsible Tourism behaviour intention) is 53 percent.

A majority of tourists are willing to take responsibility for their behaviour and preserve local culture. A survey found that most tourists respect the region's customs and traditions and avoid unethical behaviour. It was very rare for tourists to seek out community cultural information or learn basic phrases in the local language, despite respecting local cultures. In this regard, tourists should be encouraged to research their destinations before they travel. They should also learn a few words in the local language to have a more meaningful experience with the locals and to preserve the local culture. Economic responsibility positively influences tourists' intentions to behave responsibly in tourism. Most tourists ate at local restaurants and bought local products, which helped the economy and people of the community. Additionally, tourists stayed in local accommodations and used local tour guides and travel agencies. Generally, tourists are positive about economic responsibility, contributing to the prosperity and development of their communities.

**Table 9.5.** Hypothetical path coefficient sources. Source: Authors' processing from SmartPLS 3 version

Relationship	Beta ( $\beta$ )	Standard bootstrap results					Empirical remarks
		Mean value	SD error	t-value	Effect size (Cohen's $f^2$ )	P-value	
<b>H1: ECR -&gt; RBI</b>	0.248	0.247	0.068	3.658	0.076	0.000	Accepted
<b>H2: SOCULR -&gt; RBI</b>	0.236	0.233	0.069	3.434	0.062	0.001	Accepted
<b>H3: ENVR -&gt; RBI</b>	0.415	0.421	0.066	6.318	0.234	0.000	Accepted
<b>Dependent Variable</b>	Coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ )			Adjusted $R^2$			
<b>Responsible tourism behaviour intention</b>	0.637			0.631			



**Fig. 9.2.** Estimated research model

Responsible tourism intentions were significantly affected by environmental responsibility. Most people support the environment by following the rules of protected areas and throwing trash into containers. On the other hand, most tourists avoided using disposable packaging while fewer tourists used water and electricity. Hence, tour operators should inform tourists to conserve energy during their trip and in their routine as well. It is noted that nearly half of tourists have not changed their choice of vehicles to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Tourists need to be aware that choosing the right vehicle is crucial to protecting the environment since only a few tourists walk or cycle.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between responsible tourism practices and the intention to participate in responsible tourism. The study examined the impact of the environmental, sociocultural, and economic responsibilities of tourists on tourism behaviour intentions. Research suggests that the tourist's intention to engage in responsible tourism is influenced by economic responsibility, sociocultural responsibility, and environmental responsibility.

This study contributes to the development of a theoretical framework for responsible tourism by incorporating the concept of responsible tourism behaviour. It also explores the significant role that responsible tourism practices play in predicting responsible tourism behaviour. The concept of tourist responsibility encompasses economic, social-cultural, and environmental responsibility. Economic responsibility means eating at local restaurants and hotels and buying local products and services. Taking a social-cultural responsibility is about respecting local cultures and customs, interacting with the local people, and not acting unethically. The concept of environmental responsibility refers to tourism actions to protect and improve the environment, to use water and electricity economically, and to consider whether their actions hurt the environment. There is a positive relationship between the amount of responsibility of tourists and their intention to participate in responsible tourism. In particular, environmental responsibility plays a crucial role in choosing responsible tourism.

Based on the findings of this study, the intention of responsible tourism should be concerned with responsible tourism practices and attitudes that significantly influence tourist behaviour, a similar finding to previous studies (Chao, 2012; López-Mosquera, et al., 2014; Panwanitdumrong and Cheng, 2021; Wang, et al., 2018; Zhao, et al., 2018). The study provides several practical implications for tourism stakeholders in the context of responsible tourism. To encourage responsible tourism, local governments and communities must foster tourists' attitudes, intentions, and behaviours toward responsible tourism, as tourist responsibility has a significant influence on tourism. Local governments and communities should promote responsible tourism through travel brochures, the Internet, and social media.

Developing responsible tourism may require tourism practitioners and host communities to encourage tourists to perceive responsible tourism positively. Therefore, local governments and host communities can develop educational programs which raise tourists' awareness of the importance of responsible tourism to the region's economies, socio-cultural life, and the environment. Organizing a variety of responsible tourism tours will inspire tourists to travel responsibly by incorporating many activities that involve tourist involvement. Tour operators must protect and improve the environment on a package holiday because environmental responsibility is one of the most significant factors in tourists participating in responsible tourism tours.

The research was limited to the following: First of all, the sample size was small in comparison to Vietnamese subscribers. Therefore, it would be interesting if a larger sample could be used for testing the model's validity and reliability. Secondly, only the opinions of tourists who travelled to Thua Thien Hue, Vietnam were included in the study. As a result, the authors are looking forward to seeing a future study that takes a mixed approach both from the supply and demand side. Lastly, the study may have overlooked other aspects of responsible tourism practices, thus calling on scholars to find other variables relevant to responsible tourism practices.

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