




Article

Sustainability Challenges and Drivers of Cross-Border Greenway Tourism in Rural Areas

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Abstract: This article provides a practical example of the development of cross-border tourism and its link to achieving sustainable development goals. Greenways (GWs) are successful and recognized initiatives in Western Europe, but have recently also shown development trends in Eastern Europe, notably, in the Baltic Sea Region and Russia. These initiatives improve the quality of life and provide opportunities for sustainable economic activities for the local communities, especially in rural areas, adding value to their natural, cultural, historical and human heritage. The authors studied examples of best practice in scientific literature and practice, encouraging the development of cross-border tourism and GWs in Europe and Russia, in order to further adapt it to other continents. Analyzing the environmental, economic, social and institutional factors in the region and their role in sustainable development, the need for institutional regulation that would allow the development of a wider development of GWs is identified. Research results reveal sustainable development dilemmas of positive socioeconomic effects of GWs and negative environmental effects of increased flows of tourists. Focus groups and expert interviews allowed us to assess the level of various factors contributing to sustainable development and clarify the directions of the future research.

Keywords: greenway; rural areas; sustainability; resources; tourism; EU; Russia

1. Introduction

Currently, the issue of sustainability is particularly important on the agenda of international and European institutions. Last year, the European Commission (EC) with the European Green Deal [1] strategy issued a strong signal to address the sustainability, climate change and environmental challenges, increasing the European Union Climate ambition for 2030 and 2050. In order to deal with these challenges, EC stands for immediate further actions related to reducing the environmental pollution, restoring the ecosystem and biodiversity, efficient use of energy and other natural resources, promoting green businesses and the circular economy, adopting sustainable and smart mobility solutions. This encourages various industries, including tourism, to think about the urgent need for developing sustainable tourism offers and products. All of these issues relate, directly and indirectly, to the assessment of the sustainability of the infrastructure, sites and objects of this research in the natural environment.

In the post-2020 framework, cross-border and interregional cooperation will be supported through the continuation of Interreg and the creation of Interregional Innovative Investments. This new initiative will target regions with matching "smart specialization" assets, which will receive support to build pan-European clusters in priority sectors, one of which is the circular economy. As tourism activity often helps regional and local cross-border communities to thrive, the future focus on this type of collaboration could be beneficial for the tourism sector and for applicants of future projects [2].

Although many regions and local communities are conscious of the unpolluted environment and natural resources available in their rural areas, they lack competence and experience on how to develop the economic potential of these valuable tourism resources, in a modern and an international tourism offer. Furthermore, it is essential that these regions do not just focus on the existing needs of tourists, but also on the development of tourism destinations, assuming sustainability principles and preserving available natural resources, landscapes and biotopes.

At the same time, it should be recalled that the tourism sector is not just international tourism, but also domestic tourism serving locals. This was particularly evident during the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic.

Greenways (GWs) are successful and recognized initiatives in Western Europe, but have recently also shown development trends in Eastern Europe, having a huge abandoned infrastructure of former railways, tunnels, dams and other objects of interest. Usually, GWs are routes, trails and natural corridors that are used in harmony with the environment, offering opportunities for sports, tourism and recreation. These initiatives try to improve the quality of life and give the opportunity for sustainable economic activities for the local communities and towns. GWs help local communities to add value to their natural and human heritage and to collaborate with the authorities [3–5].

According to Little [6], who gives the most general definition, GWs are linear open space systems created either along a natural corridor or above the earth, or along an anthropogenic corridor to connect parks, nature reserves and streams, as well as cultural and historical places.

Ahern [7] defined GWs as linearly planned networks with aesthetic and ecological objects, used for recreation, cultural and other activities. Additionally, he highlights the importance of sustainability values and an environmentally responsible attitude towards these destinations.

In Europe, the GWs movement has established an association for representing its interests and making proposals at a political level. The Lille Declaration, European Greenways Association [8], provides an explanation of GWs. It was then updated in the Sopron Declaration [9] by explaining that GWs are created on the basis of historic routes, rivers and railways, and used for "green" travel purposes with nonmotorized vehicles. The next significant feature of GWs is that the local communities develop them in order to promote a healthy lifestyle. Also, GWs look for a contribution to the local economy by corresponding to the needs of locals and visitors [9].

Szabo with coauthors [10] stress that GWs products are a new type of alternative tourism product and they are down-up developed products initiated by local communities.

In this study, the authors understand GWs as recreational objects—natural and cultural systems connected by common tourist demand and supply flows—which are more or less institutionalized and characterized by public access to resources, additionally creating multiplier developmental effects for geographically "attached" local communities.

There are several classifications of GWs that complement each other. The systematization of research approaches makes it possible to identify three main types of GWs by the content characteristics:

- Recreational Greenways with paths, roads and tracks [11,12];
- Ecologically significant Greenways within specially protected natural areas [13];
- Historical routes and complex systems or networks [14].

Furthermore, GWs link together tourism routes or trails of different scales (see Figure 1). Most often researchers [10,15,16] mention five categories, from urban to transnational routes and GWs networks.

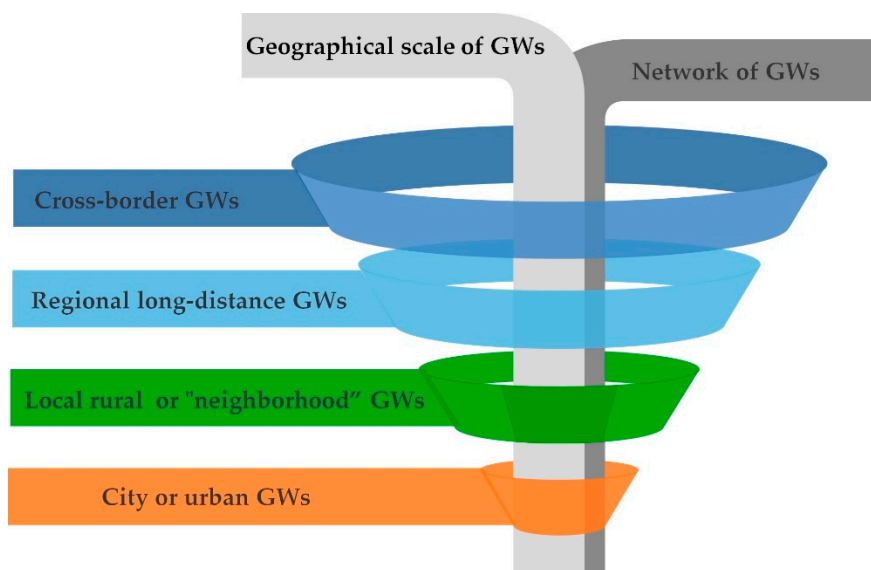


Figure 1. Classification of greenways (GWs) by geographical scale (source: authors).

City or urban GWs with a length of several kilometers are created for recreation of citizens in water–green zones and familiarization with their sights. Although located in urban or city areas, these tourism trails follow the general greenway principle—the organization of safe and convenient movement of people by means of nonmotorized vehicles, including families with young children, elderly people and people with disabilities.

Local rural or “neighborhood” GWs with a length of several tens of kilometers are routes located in natural and rural areas. They are created for the development of educational and ecotourism, daily and weekly recreation in the form of hiking, cycling, horse riding, skiing, picnic areas and trails by water, allowing people to experience nature.

Regional long-distance GWs routes with a length of several hundred kilometers unite different regions or countries with preserved characteristic features of the natural and historical–cultural heritage. These routes usually link together several municipalities and regions.

Cross-border long-distance routes, also with a length of several hundred kilometers, cross areas of two or more countries having common physical or administrative borders. These routes are less common; however, recently they have become more important, especially in Europe. The European Union (EU) has recognized this importance by allocating EU funds for the development of such cross-border GWs tourism trails, especially under the European territorial cooperation programs.

In northeast Europe, such cross-border long-distance GWs routes have attracted significant attention lately. These GWs link together various countries having common historical heritage, natural values, objects or sites and promote GWs as a single tourism product or offer. European countries, such as Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania, are small in size with the possibility of crossing a whole country within one day. This is a crucial problem on how to attract domestic travelers to stay for 2–3 days on domestic GWs trips. Cross-border GWs broaden the range of tourism offers by geographical scale with one common branding or promotional strategy in order to attract a critical mass of tourists for overnight stays instead of one-day excursions.

GW networks link together several GWs of different geographical scales and are promoted or positioned for tourists as a single tourism offer. Aggregating the length of all routes included in the GWs networks results in thousands of kilometers. GWs networks bear the issue of intermodality, especially when several GWs of one network are interconnected by sea, like connections between Latvia and Sweden or Finland. This means that tourists combine several modes of transport (train, ship, bus or other) to move from one GW to another. GWs can help to form new tourism borders of

these countries, by combining natural, historical and cultural factors and bringing these countries out of administrative borders.

In our research, we will deal with long and local GWs; therefore, our case study includes cross-border long-distance greenways with local sidings. Local municipalities are actively creating sidings of the main GWs, which provide connection between local places and the main GWs. This is the reason why we will not focus on urban GWs. There are no large urban areas in our area of exploration, except Riga and Pskov.

The purpose of this research is to analyze the subjects, mechanisms and factors contributing to the sustainable development of local communities in the context of promoting GWs as a joint tourism product. This goal is achieved by solving the following interrelated tasks:

- Determine the conceptual framework of the study based on a systematic review of the current state of research in the field of greenways;
- Substantiate a methodology for studying the design of the greenways system, based on the integration of socioeconomic and natural science approaches;
- Summarize the results of an empirical study based on an in-depth discussion of factors and constraints affecting the formation and development of greenways as a mechanism for sustainable development of local communities;
- Develop a cognitive model of the process and the results of the formation and development of the greenways system;
- Justify the conceptual basis for further research as part of an interdisciplinary approach.

The research question of the study is that an effective strategy for the formation and development of GWs, contributing to the sustainable development of geographically related local communities and rural areas, assumes a stable system of spatial-network interactions of all stakeholders in this process and the cooperation of resources that go beyond industries or types of organizations involved. We assume that the effects of the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic will result in changes in society behavior, including outdoor leisure activities in GWs.

2. Materials and Methods

The goal and objectives stated by the authors lead to the use of interdisciplinary methodology for the study of the role of greenway projects in the sustainable development of local communities, which allows the development of conceptual schemes, cognitive models and analytical tools, taking into account the complexity of the research object. The paradigm of sustainable development and its new hybrid models (green and blue economics, low-carbon, circular economics) has been used as a framework for analyzing the factors and constraints affecting the sustainable development of local communities in the context of the formation and promotion of greenways, as well as for developing an explanatory model of this process and its results.

The purpose of this research is to analyze the subjects, mechanisms and factors contributing to the sustainable development of local communities in the context of promoting GWs as a joint tourism product. We analyzed the contribution to develop the joint offer in the tourism market, simultaneously preserving natural and cultural resources by promoting greenways as a common tourism product for sustainable tourism purposes. The task was to identify the main factors for the development of greenway (nature-protected areas, existing tourist attractions/objects, infrastructure, institutional regulations for border crossings, population, employment, organic farms, geocaching points etc., and available financial instruments) to integrate all aspects of sustainability—environmental, social, economic, cultural and institutional—to substantiate recommendations for the development of business and new tourism routes, etc.

The basis of the methodological design is the spatial approach, which provides the possibility of studying the prerequisites and results of the implementation of GW projects in time and spatial dynamics. The mechanisms of transforming various types of territory resources (environmental, social,

image, human, institutional) into economic capital are studied. The theoretical design of this study, integrating the territory, natural and social resources of development, is the concept of development of local communities. Local communities refer to a group of people united by sustainable formal and informal relationships that are driven by cohabitation and activities within a common territory. The comparative approach made it possible to characterize empirical practices and results of formation and development of GW projects within the framework of cross-regional comparisons between Russia, Latvia, Estonia, Finland and Sweden, and acted as an empirical object of the study. The method of system thinking, i.e., looking at connections between system elements, at new properties that emerge from these connections and feedback, and at the relationships between the whole and its parts, was also used.

To systematically review the current state of greenway research, the authors applied an English-language search on electronic databases (Web of Science, Scopus and EBSCOhost Academic Search Complete) in the period from 2000 to 2019 to identify relevant sources. Search for “greenways” and “green corridors” words in the title, abstract and keywords of the papers were used to find relevant articles and conference proceedings in the three databases.

The methodology of empirical research was based on a combination of integrative research methods that allows methods such as traditional content analysis of documents, analysis of statistics of socioeconomic development [17,18], a cartographic method, focus-group discussion, expert semistructured interviews and case studies (see Figure 2). Traditional analysis of print, electronic and network media content, analysis of regulatory documents reflecting the state of institutional resources, analysis of statistical data, and the cartographic method were used to collect empirical data to identify and characterize the territory’s resources for the creation and improvement of GW tourism offers. Analysis of documents included three previously developed project proposals: tourism development strategy of Vidzeme region (Latvia), Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia until 2030, The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Lille Declaration and the Sopron Declaration. We analyzed tourism statistical data of traveling purpose and length of domestic trips using United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), Eurostat and national statistics data.

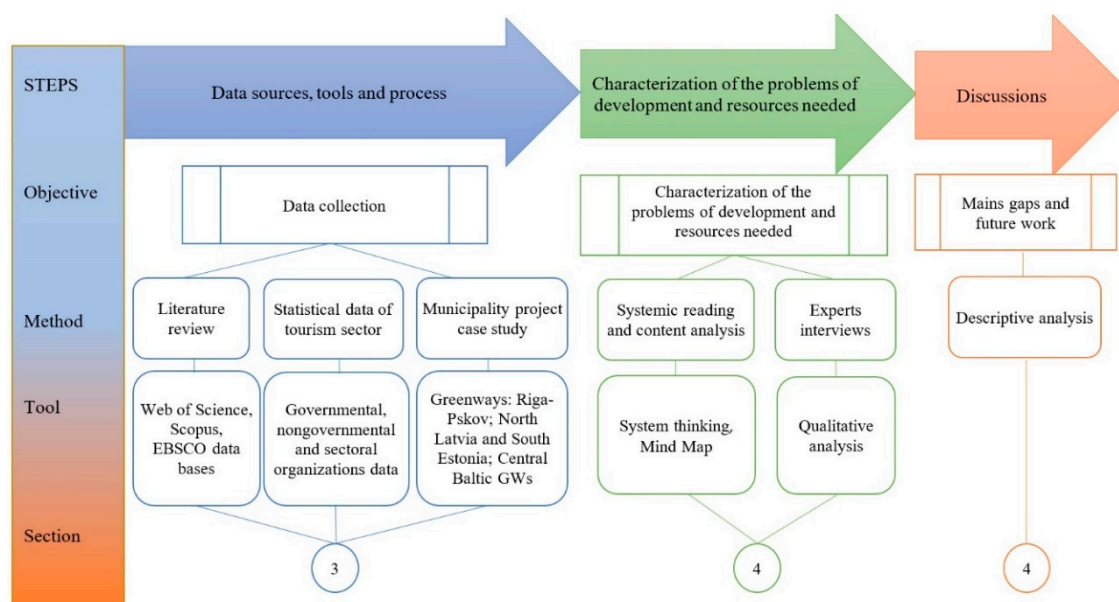


Figure 2. Structure of the methodology used for this research article (source: authors).

Semistructured interviews were organized in four stages. The round of interviews was organized with the aim to explore and to approbate with interviewees the overall context of this research. The interview questions allowed for affirmation on the topicality, key statements,

research questions, the geographical scale, and main stakeholders. These interviews lasted from 40 to 60 min. We started with the first 11 interviews, selecting informants based on the purposive sampling method [19], with most appropriate knowledge, expertise and willingness to be interviewed. Furthermore, the snowballing method was applied during all interviews, when all informants were asked to suggest other potential interviewees [20].

After defining the conceptual framework of this research and conducting the literature review, the second round of interviews was organized to affirm the importance and relevance of conclusions. These interviews allowed gathering of comments of interviewed experts on the particular topics and research gaps to be addressed through the case studies. These interviews lasted from 40 to 60 minutes.

The third round of interviews focused on case studies. Informants were asked to comment on development perspectives of particular GWs, dimensions of sustainability issues in rural areas covered by analyzed GWs, main challenges, and enablers for the development of sustainable GW tourism offers. These interviews lasted from 60 to 90 minutes.

Last round of interviews allowed for the approbation of conclusions of this research, and to collect comments and expert views on the developed cognitive model of the impact of GWs on achieving sustainable development goals. These interviews lasted from 40 to 60 minutes.

The main resources of local communities for the development of GWs, as well as practices and problems of their use, were identified using 10 focus group discussions. The semistructured interviews were conducted with 104 experts from Latvia, Estonia, Finland, Sweden and Russia in order to verify the data of focus group discussions and conclusions obtained from the analyses. Interviewed experts represented development and tourism specialists, heads of local and regional authorities, representatives of public and local tourism business associations and the Latvian Greenway Association. Characteristics of target groups of GWs analyzed were based on the method of secondary data analysis.

For the case studies, we selected three GWs: (1) the cross-border GW Riga–Pskov; (2) the cross-border GW of North Latvia and South Estonia; (3) the cross-border network of Central Baltic GWs, interconnecting various GWs located in Latvia, Sweden, Finland and Estonia. We had site visits to case studies in order to better explore and investigate the challenges and sustainability drivers.

The cross-border GW Riga–Pskov links together regions of Latvia and Russia. Although this GW links together regions and rural areas with comparatively common natural values and cultural, historical heritage and traditions, this GW goes beyond the Schengen area. This means that tourists and travelers are required to cross the external EU border with all the resulting administrative and visa obligations. This GW is approximately 400 km long, mainly interconnecting rural areas, except for urban cities, Riga in Latvia and Pskov in Russia. This GW is being developed with the support of the Latvia–Russia cross-border cooperation program of European Neighborhood Instrument (2014–2020). In total, 14 project partners are implementing this project, representing local municipalities, regional governmental authorities and one nongovernmental organization (NGO), a regional tourism promotion association. The total budget planned for this GW development project is 793,036 EUR.

The cross-border GWs of North Latvia and South Estonia link together rural areas of these two countries. The specifics of this GW are found in the use of old narrow-gauge railway causeways in South Estonia and North Latvia. This common historical heritage allows the development of new economic potential for tourism purposes in the rural areas of both countries. This GW is approximately 750 km long and is developed with the support of the Interreg Latvia–Estonia cross-border cooperation program (2014–2020). This project is implemented by 24 project partners that include local municipalities, municipal tourism information centers and two tourism and GW promotion associations. The total budget planned for this GW development project is 1,174,938 EUR.

The cross-border network of Central Baltic GWs links the northern part of Latvia with almost all coastal areas of the Baltic Sea, Estonia, Southern Finland with the Turku archipelago and Sweden with Gotland Island. This GWs network is still in the conceptual development stage and will be over 1500 km long. The development of this GW network is the consecutive step of the creation of GWs of North Latvia and South Estonia, extending and widening tourism opportunities to northern

European countries with the common border of the Baltic Sea. This network will link together recently created and older GWs offering new opportunities for sustainable tourism with distinctive wildlife, geographical features and rich scenery. The common interest of all stakeholders involved in the development of this GW network is to increase the region's attractiveness for tourists, bring new income, and promote sustainable development of the rural areas in the northern EU. This GW network has specific interconnections of rural areas over the sea and inland, promoting sustainable and smart intermodality. The attraction of the support from the Interreg Central Baltic cross-border cooperation program is envisaged for the development and wider promotion, or marketing, of this GW network. The composition of partners in this project is more specific as it foresees multisectoral and multilevel cooperation of local municipalities, regional governmental administrations, private companies, NGOs and associations operating in the tourism industry. The total budget planned for this GW network development project is 872,000 EUR.

The main activities of all three GW development projects mentioned above are spatial planning and design of the routes, preparation of the printed and interactive electronic cartographic material of these routes, investments in the GW-related tourism infrastructure, setting up the counters for travelers and tourists, information stands, signs and GW labeling, and cleaning or improving the surface of the GW routes. In addition, planned marketing and promotion of GWs as one common tourism offer through various and wide information, communication, raising awareness and networking activities to local and external travelers, tourists and other tourism stakeholders. Also, the experience exchange of GW developers with other countries and educational activities of local tourism service providers are important components of these projects.

The empirical evidence, resulting from traditional document content analysis, semistructured interviews, focus group discussions and case studies, is analyzed and interpreted, based on narrative synthesis, and enables the development of an explanatory model of the process and results of formation and development of a GWs system and to justify the conceptual basis for further research within the framework of interdisciplinary approach.

The step-by-step structure of the research methodology of the article is shown in Figure 2.

3. Literature and Policy Review

3.1. Insight into the Development of Sustainable Tourism

Over the past three decades, the tourism sector has continued to grow globally and has played a very important role in the economic development of many countries around the world. The tourism sector in the European Union makes a significant direct and indirect positive contribution to EU economic growth, job creation and safeguarding, and SME activities. Although it is resilient, the sector faces shared EU-wide challenges, including the need to ensure sustainability and digital transformation [2].

Sustainable tourism is firmly positioned in the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. The tourism sector has a dual nature in terms of sustainability and conservation of resources. On the one hand, tourism demands wonderful places and untouched nature, but on the other it has a significant negative impact on the depletion and pollution of natural resources. Therefore, proper monitoring and management of tourist flows becomes an important challenge and a priority for local governments and tourism enthusiasts trying to balance socioeconomic positive effects with undesirable environmental effects [21,22].

For many countries, especially the developing countries, tourism is one of the main sources of income and allows the country to improve its competitiveness in the international arena. According to the UNWTO, international tourist arrivals worldwide have grown from 530 million in 1995 to 1.5 billion in 2019. In Europe, the growth of international tourist arrivals is similar to the average growth globally; for example, it was 4% in 2019 [23]. In parallel with growth, there is an increase in competition among directions, as well as their diversification. The development of tourism in all countries also affects many related industries, such as telecommunications, agriculture, construction etc. The quality of

tourism offers and income from tourism make a significant contribution to the economic well-being of the country [24,25].

UNWTO helps to promote and position sustainable tourism offers, and notes that, particularly developing countries, have the opportunity to benefit from sustainable tourism [26]. On the road to a greener and more sustainable economy, various factors play a significant role. A discussion about the opportunity to travel, learn about other cultures, visit other countries and build economic ties between countries affects the possible organization of lifestyles. Can industrialized countries serve as an example to increase material well-being or should we learn from economically relatively less-developed countries to reduce material consumption, yet still retaining satisfaction with our lives [27]?

Sustainable development in tourism can be achieved, if, in addition to economic sustainability, human, cultural and natural resources are also constantly and equitably used. According to Amerta and coauthors [28], the benefits of sustainable tourism development should be expressed in the form of a positive impact on all parties interested in tourism, such as local communities, government, investors etc., both now and in the future.

In recent years, national and European policies have intensified their focus on sustainable tourism, which recognizes that economic development and environmental conservation (protection) are objectives that reinforce each other, because investments in sustainability guarantee the long-term competitiveness of the sector. Sustainable tourism generally recognizes the following aspects:

1. The conservation of biodiversity and the optimal use of natural resources;
2. Preserving and respecting the cultural heritage and identity of the host communities, their traditions and values, as well as improving mutual understanding and tolerance;
3. Social and economic activity, which is long-term and viable, and provides benefits for all stakeholders, helps to combat poverty, provides opportunities for permanent employment, income and social services at the local community level [2].

Rural tourism as an alternative to mass tourism can contribute to sustainable development goals (SDGs) by facilitating inclusive development at local level. It is a tool to spread development through tourism to the undeveloped regions and communities. It offers an opportunity for tourists to experience the lifestyles of rural people—their way of living, events, traditions, culture, cuisine and crafts that have unique appeal [29–31].

Rural tourism is positioned as the green or “slow tourism,” and plays a significant role in rural areas, allowing tourists to “self-experience” nature and agrotourism activities [29,32]. As part of rural tourism, agrotourism encompasses excursions and visits to farms and other agricultural companies that offer demonstrations of farming methods, tasting their products, and recreational, leisure and other activities using local resources of farms [33,34]. As acknowledged by Adamov and coworkers [35], the sustainability of rural and agrotourism is seen in combining the local resources of particular rural areas with modern tourism activities and offers. GW is one such opportunity. In GW tourism, offers shall be based on existing preferences of GW travelers willing to experience nature, landscape and country life, and be entertained with rich cultural and historical traditions and products of local communities and farms.

3.2. Greenways: Scientific Discourse and Practical Implementation

Our research focused on scientific articles on GWs not only in Europe, but worldwide. The publication can be listed as: publications on the grounds of sustainable development and sustainable development goals (SDGs); publications on the realization of rural tourism related to a green economy and sustainable development; practical examples of projects and initiatives in protected areas, development of rural areas and border areas; the analysis of results in a greening economy in the rural areas at regional, national and transnational level, as well as case studies, directly describing different aspects of the development and implementation of greenway projects. The topic

has been widely studied and included in research articles by scientists from many different countries (US [36], Spain [37], Germany [36], Finland, Poland, Italy [38], Denmark, Austria, UK [39], Russia [40], Romania [41], Hungary [10,42], the Baltic States [43], Ukraine [44] etc.).

The term GW can be associated with a wide variety of keywords: “greenway,” “green routes,” “green corridors,” “rural tourism,” “green,” “sustainability” etc. To get an idea of the scope of research in this area, we searched for keywords “greenways” and “green corridors” in the title, abstract and keywords of papers using the academic databases Scopus, Web of Science Core Collection and EBSCOhost Academic Search Complete. These databases were selected as the most popular scientific literature sources. The results of the searches are represented in Figure 3.

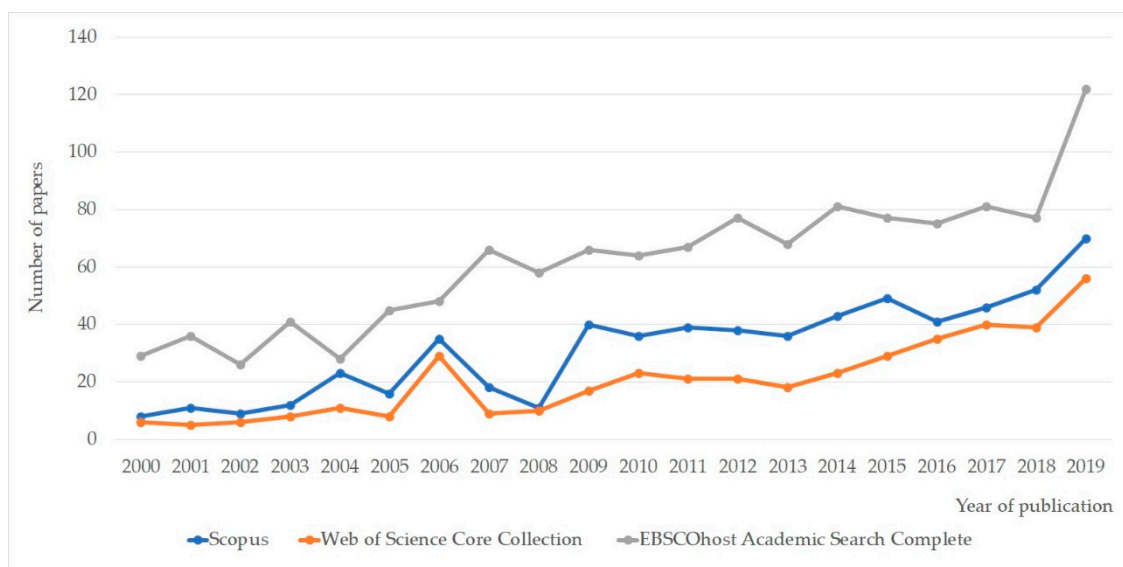


Figure 3. Number of papers published in academic databases, based on search for keywords “greenways” and “green corridors” (source: authors’ compilation based on data from Scopus, Web of Science (WoS) and EBSCOhost).

Data represented in Figure 3 show that the interest of academics in the issues related to GWs and their development have been growing slowly over the last two decades. However, Web of Science, Scopus and EBSCOhost Academic Search Complete do not represent all existing literature; it mostly has indexing journals based on impact evaluations, while Google Scholar gives more comprehensive coverage.

In order to widely apply, the goals of sustainable development in practice is not enough to adopt strategies and set goals, it also depends on consumers and their daily choices: their behavior, choice of food and products, their hobbies, willingness to pay for or refuse certain goods or services etc. As a result of this, the global consumption of energy and other natural resources is gradually changing and people are becoming increasingly aware that their decisions have long-term consequences [45]. Many scientists have studied various issues of human behavior and attitudes, as well as the factors that determine them, and these can affect the sustainable development of rural and active tourism [46–53]. According to Bak and Cheba, the situation in the field of sustainable development, currently is much better in the Eastern European than in the Southern European countries [54].

European Destinations of Excellence (EDEN) was created to help to promote the sustainable development of tourism in all member states of the European Union. Every two years, national competitions are held in each country, as a result of which a tourist “destination of excellence” is selected. In recent years, themes have included the following: best emerging European rural destination of excellence (2007), tourism and local intangible heritage (2008), tourism and protected areas (2009), aquatic tourism (2010), tourism and regeneration of physical sites (2011), accessible tourism (2013), tourism and local gastronomy (2015), cultural tourism (2017) and well-being tourism (2019) [55].

Thus, tourists have the opportunity to learn about the characteristics of each country and the variety of different tourist destinations. Many of EDEN's annual themes include greenway principles according to winner locations and by providing tourism services.

Tourism plays an important role in the economies of all Central Baltic region countries, yet the lowest income from international tourism recipients in Europe is in Central/Eastern Europe, which was 57.9 billion EUR in 2018, while in Europe as a whole it was 483.1 billion EUR in 2018 [23]. Continuous development of tourism attractions is the objective of any economy; however, the increase in numbers of tourists can be harmful to the natural and cultural resources as tourists mostly move among attractions via motorized modes of transportation, which contradicts strategic sustainable development priorities to preserve and protect natural and cultural resources.

Currently, there is a need for planning and designing such cities and settlements that would not only allow you to live and work, but would also contribute to physical education and outdoor activities, as well as social interaction between residents. In this regard, urban green paths can contribute [56]. The use of GWs can provide many environmental and social benefits. In the late 20th Century, architects and landscape planners noted the benefits of planning, designing and using GWs [36,57,58]. Urban green spaces are becoming especially important nowadays, when the level of urbanization is constantly growing.

Ahern [7] discussed different characteristics of GWs, provided arguments for and against GWs, and presented a "typology for GW classification based on scale, goals, landscape context and planning strategy."

Open and green spatial systems based on GW planning are an important component of modern cities. The integration of GW projects into urban management decision-making, requires an interdisciplinary approach and a comprehensive system-wide evaluation of results. Research on various theoretical and operational aspects of GW planning is growing. However, the issues of integrated assessment of the impact of GW on sustainable development of urbanized systems are very limited [59].

The main factors influencing the development of GWs are nature protected areas, existing tourist attractions/objects and products, infrastructure, institutional regulations for border crossing, destination management authorities, population, local community, employment, business, organic farms, geocaching points, available financial instruments etc.

European GWs typically "upcycle" disused infrastructure of transport corridors for multiuse, nonmotorized recreational and tourism purposes [14]. Upcycling is a form of recycling which provides the added value of the product by increasing the economic value, quality and better functionality [60,61]. In the case of GWs, for instance, old abandoned railways are developed into tourism routes, improving the economic potential of this infrastructure.

The development of GWs contributes to the development of physical activity among the population, as usually green lanes are used for cycling or walking, i.e., active time in the air. This is especially important, because it allows creation or modification of new infrastructure, replacing old and cracked sidewalks in densely populated urban areas. Thus, the development of GWs helps to make certain parts of the city more attractive from an aesthetic point of view. Studies also show that many residents begin to use bikes not only for outdoor activities, but also for trips to work or even on business trips [62–64].

Regarding local consumption, the largest target group for GW usage is the urban population or citizens whose needs and habits have to be taken into account when developing GW tourism offers; for example, assuming that they are mostly one-day travelers, the attractions and recreational activities on GW sites and objects should be developed accordingly, so that they are convenient and friendly for "one-day" use.

3.3. Sustainability Drivers in the Field of Recreation Tourism in GWs

World heritage sites, national parks, global geoparks, Ramsar sites, biosphere reserves and regional protected area (PA) networks are the most suitable protected areas for tourism development [65].

The main attractions for visitors to PAs and GWs include the beauty of nature, water areas, mountains, culture and the opportunity to enjoy it in different activities. PAs provide preconditions for the development of tourism based on the resources of nature; moreover, these are secure and facilitated places and, in some cases, can be considered as tourism destinations. Local municipalities are supporting tourism and leisure business activities, including GWs, because PAs are one of the most important business activities in areas with limited economical and industrial activities. The distribution area of tourism activities depends on the restrictions in the particular PA, for example, the type of ecosystem and its approachability. In cases of uninhabited PAs, gateway territories with tourism infrastructure for PAs are often created [24,66].

The main challenge for sustainable development of tourism in protected areas is to balance the flow of visitors, provide accessibility to the sea, lakes and other unique nature places and objects for society, and suitable infrastructure elements and behavior of visitors with the protection goals set up for the area at different political levels. In a relatively short period of time—about twenty years—Latvia has become an equal partner, internationally, in the promotion of sustainable tourism experiences [67].

The economy can help improve the environment as a whole, as well as try to ensure that tourism has developed and made a profit. However, it should be noted that tourism can also make a huge contribution to the preservation of the environment, and ecotourism issues are being increasingly discussed, which, even with an increase in the number of tourists, can have a lesser impact on the environment. Thus, tourism (including sports) and the environment are constantly interacting, i.e., quality of the environment affects tourism, and in turn, tourism affects the quality of the environment [68,69].

Carbon (greenhouse gas) reduction is analyzed considerably more than any other significant sustainability drivers of tourism, and studied in detail. Table 1 illustrates the main sustainability drivers of tourism and GWs, in particular.

Table 1. Sustainability drivers of recreational tourism in GWs within protected areas (PAs).

Influencing Drivers of Sustainable Tourism in GWs	Driver Input in Sustainable Tourism in GWs
Safe conditions for solo visitors, seniors and tourists. Public space for everyone to use. Education about nature and natural resources in the context of consumption.	Loyal visitors who take responsibility according to the rules for being in PAs.
The capacity of the place, people and infrastructure.	Preserved nature and interpretation of wildlife and environment awareness activities by participation.
Maintenance of infrastructure and accessibility to GWs.	Saving of financial, human, nature and operational resources.
Cooperation between administrative borders for joint and long cross-border GWs.	Longer distance routes for locals and more attractive for domestic and international tourists.
Intercultural communication, self-enrichment of visitors.	Changed experience, language skills. Innovations for tourism and leisure.
Health and relaxation benefits.	Productive work and development of new ideas and concepts.
Use of modern information and communication technology tools in providing services. Easily and quickly find route information.	Cooperation on a global scale. Saving of resources. The analysis of cost benefit for future investments.
Increase in the length of stay per visitor in PAs. Increase frequency of repeated users and visitors.	Reduction of carbon emission. Growth of the economy on a local scale. Social responsibility to the place of visit.

Source: authors, based on Livina and Atstaja [24].

Development of GWs brings several benefits for different stakeholders [70–74]:

- **Development of ecotourism** as ecological and ecosystem aspects stand out in GWs. This may include the preservation and development of abandoned and degraded former railway and other infrastructure for recreational purposes, raising awareness on environment aspects and linking people with "nearby nature," as well as many other aspects;
- **Connectivity** is an important characteristic of GWs as it includes alternative more environmentally friendly forms of mobility, in particular, pedestrian, bicycle and horse riding. By reducing air pollution and reducing traffic, you can achieve significant benefits and improve public health [75];
- **Economic aspect** Developed tourism attractions and objects promote many forms of local economic activity and investments. Research shows that tourists using GWs tend to purchase more from local producers and service providers, thus stimulating development of a business, employment and an increase in the additional income of local communities [76,77]. To develop employment and improve the economy in tourist areas, it is possible to modify and transform old, abandoned and unused objects into new tourism infrastructure objects; for example, old railway stations can be transformed into food or accommodation facilities, as well as information centers or bicycle maintenance centers.
- **Intercultural exchange** Research shows that different tourists traveling in one route tend to communicate with each other, exchanging their values, identity and experience of different cultures and nations. In such a way, locals can receive intercultural experiences and internationalization, which affects productivity and creativity [78,79].

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Greenways: Social–Environmental–Economic Dimensions

In the last decade, the European Commission has been promoting the development of the socioeconomic potential of tourism, which is based on sustainable values and protection of natural resources. In this regard, GWs have attracted a lot of attention. In the last two EU fund-planning periods (2007–2013 and 2014–2020), European territorial cooperation (ETC) programs envisaged a comparatively large proportion of resources for supporting sustainable and ecotourism projects. The Estonia–Latvia cross-border cooperation (CBC) program, Latvia–Russia CBC, Latvia–Lithuania CBC and Central Baltic CBC programs have supported and confirmed GW development projects as best case examples. GW development initiatives have been recognized as the benchmark or flagship projects contributing to the priorities and goals of the EU strategy for the Baltic Sea region.

The concept of GWs is determined by four main directions in our case studies:

- Tourism and recreation—supporting the development of ecologically friendly tourism, sports and recreation;
- Ecology, education and interpretation—support for environmental activities, such as the conservation of biological diversity, flood control, water treatment, scrubbing of bushes and environmental awareness information stands;
- Environmentally friendly travel and transport—opportunities for the development and promotion of the use of nonmotorized transport are provided;
- Economic development and public services—improving the quality of public services and revitalizing the local economy.

According to the analysis of the case studies, we can underline such a scheme for developing GWs:

- The main axis is indicated, connecting places that are attractive to tourists from the point of view of locally historical, natural and cultural heritage. The route should include tourist and hospitality infrastructure and facilities, namely: hotels, museums, agrofarms, rural estates or other places for rest, cafes and restaurants, information stands, billboards with information tables with maps and the logo of the "green trail," GW labeling in nature and others.

- A network of local thematic paths of loops connecting to the main axis is developed—cycling, walking, horse riding, water etc.
- Local initiatives are supported, the purpose of which is the protection of the natural and cultural heritage, carried out by active leaders of public organizations, cultural and environmental enthusiasts, artists and craftsmen, teachers, children and young people, entrepreneurs and others.
- Promotion and dissemination—a smartphone app for GWs, regular promotional campaigns of GWs in domestic sources in local languages, as well as accounts in social media and digital platforms in foreign languages for export markets.

At the initial stage, it is necessary to develop a route that should pass along roads, rivers and historical paths. The route is designed to combine the following components:

- Natural objects—specially protected natural objects, picturesque landscapes, ecological trails, natural monuments (unique landforms, springs, water bodies, centuries-old trees, unique flora and fauna).
- Historical objects are archaeological monuments (sites of primitive people, mounds, ancient fortifications etc.), historical monuments (places of historical events, battles), architectural monuments (wooden architecture, military defenses, religious sites, manor-park architecture).
- Museums of various profiles, reflecting the natural, historical and social characteristics of the region.
- Centers of crafts and ethnography, where you can take part in the manufacture of handicraft products and participate in folk rites.
- Hotels, recreation centers, farmsteads for accommodation and meals for tourists on route.
- Entertainment facilities and activities to experience various local events—local festivals, environmental campaigns and sports holidays that form an important part of the traveler and tourist experience on the GW routes.
- Themed loops can be created on the route, suggesting a deviation from the main route.
- Nonmotorized means of transportation should be used on the route—on foot, on bicycles, skiing, horses, kayaks, rafts and boats.

For successful functioning of the GW project, the support of local authorities and land owners is required. Cooperation harmonization and agreement with road and infrastructure owners is a critical part of GWs: the route must be accompanied by a system of information signs and notices on the trail, and advertising is used to promote GW tourism products.

To integrate all aspects of sustainability—environmental, economic, social, cultural and institutional (Figure 4)—GWs could be one of the tourism products; they can contribute to developing the joint offer in the tourism market, while at the same time conserving natural and cultural resources.

As a result of the development of GWs, the following goals can be achieved:

1. Environmental—to preserve the unique corners of nature and historical and cultural heritage, and create a source of funding for their protection.
2. Economic—to create new jobs, increase the income of the local population and develop local initiatives (handicraft, museum work etc.).
3. Social—introduce the population to a healthy lifestyle, increasing the comfort level of the population, providing opportunities for self-realization, encouraging young people to stay in rural areas.
4. Institutional—establish a joint management organization that initiates the necessary changes in legislation on border crossing issues in the border area.

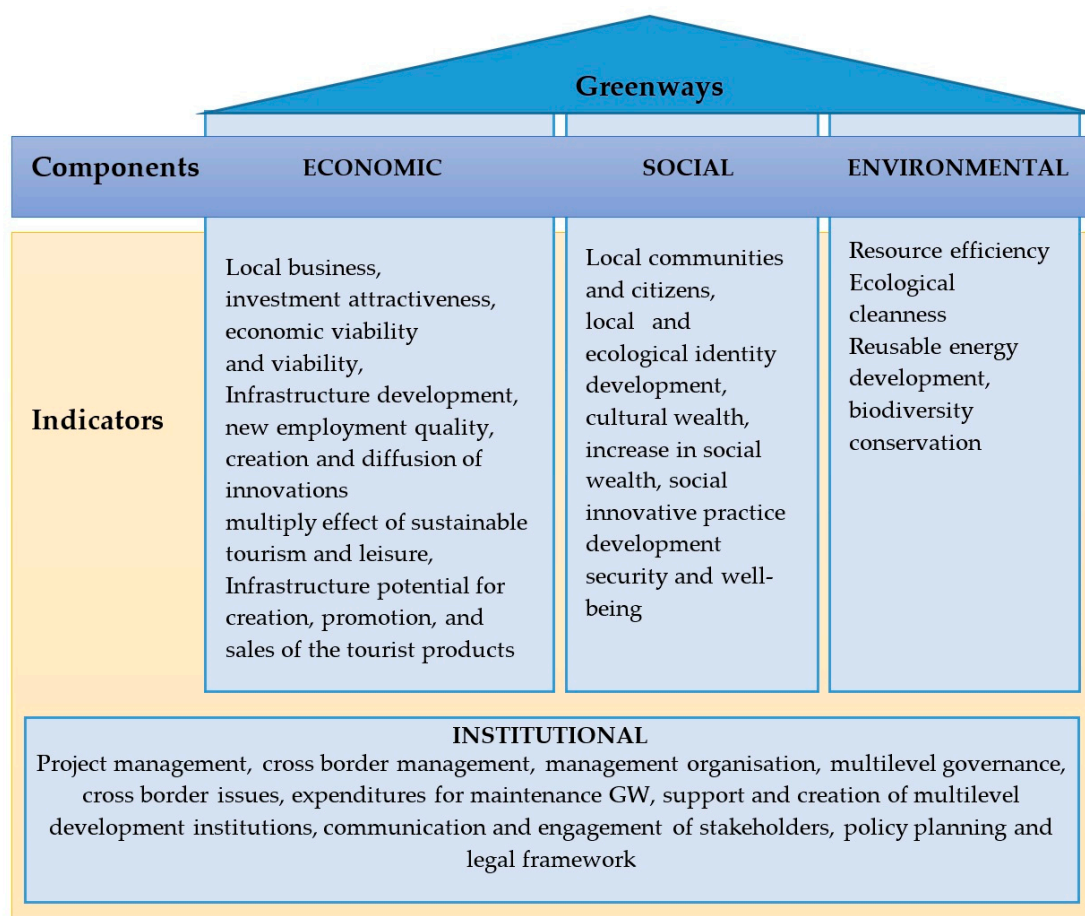


Figure 4. Integration of all aspects of sustainability in GW projects (source: authors).

4.2. Subjects, Resources and Problems of Development of Greenway Projects: Experience of Empirical Research

Greenway tourism routes meet different needs of diverse target groups of all ages. Greenways provide travel opportunities for *families with children* or *groups of elderly tourists (seniors)* willing to see and experience local nature, to investigate local culture, historical and natural heritage. Their expectations from the excursion are related to seeing objects at different sites and places appropriate for this group. It is also important to have options for overnight stays and catering for families with children, and for seniors, comfortable accessibility to the route, medical services and offer of public catering are important factors. For *people with disabilities* using special wheelchairs, traveling through Greenways with more easily accessible routes and sightseeing objects is essential, along with creative and other activities appropriate for people with disabilities. Access to other services is also important. *Individuals or groups of friends* are willing to experience more active sports and recreation activities, then Greenway tourism offers can provide opportunities for mountain biking, canoeing, swimming and other activities. Increasingly, interest-group trips are becoming more popular as an event.

The users of the GW trail are important; initially, at least, they are mainly local travelers. People aged 15 or over actively took part in tourism for personal purposes in 2018 in the European Union and the European Economic Area (EEA) countries. The statistical data shows that on average 64.1% made at least one trip per year. There are large differences among countries; for example, the highest participation rate was observed in Norway (91%) and the lowest rate in Romania (27%). In our research area, participation rate was 57.7% in Latvia and 79.5% in Estonia [80]. Greenways are impeccably suited to short domestic trips. In 2017, an average of 50.1% of short domestic travel was estimated in EU countries, in Latvia 63% and in Estonia 65.1%. In Spain, the highest number of short domestic trips was 67.8% and the lowest rate in Luxembourg 1.3%, which is determined by geographical

characteristics [81]. Same-day domestic trips by residents in Latvia had a tendency to increase slightly from year to year (Figure 5). We can also assume that thanks to the coronavirus 2019 pandemic, the number of domestic and one-day trips could grow in 2020.

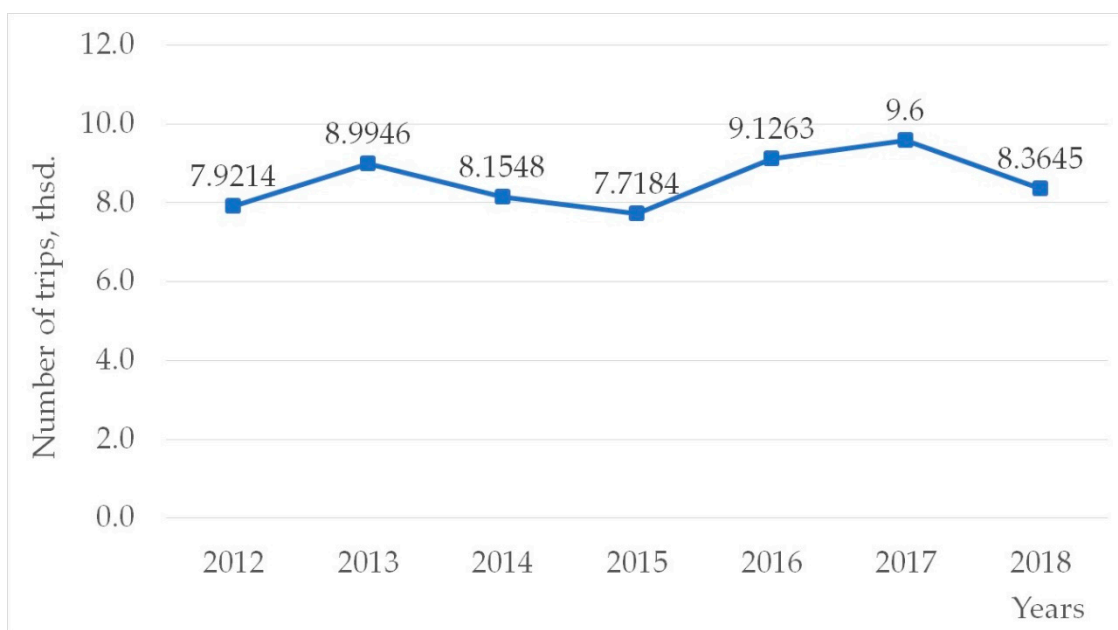


Figure 5. Same-day domestic trips of Latvian residents 2012–2018, number of trips, in thousands (source: [82]).

In 2018, Pskov region was visited by approximately one million excursions and 400,000 individual tourists. Of these 1.4 million tourists, one tenth were visitors from abroad [83]. Therefore 1 million domestic tourists visit the Pskov region a year.

Users of urban, local, regional and cross-border GWs may also be a specific target group as organic farm visitors or geocachers.

One of the most important sectors of the economy is agriculture. For its sustainable development, it should be based on all three main pillars: to focus on the environment, be socially responsible and be as economically advantageous as possible. At present, one of the models for this development is organic agriculture. It allows you to develop rural areas and in practice proves the possibility of increasing environmental, social and economic sustainability at all levels from regional to global. For small farms engaged in organic farming, attracting tourists can open up additional opportunities. The principles of ecotourism can be used both for the development of organic agriculture, and the development of the well-being of the local community and the preservation of social and cultural heritage [35,84–88].

Geocaching is a real game that over the past twenty years has become more popular around the world. The idea of the game is to use apps for smartphones or other GPS-enabled devices to search for treasures. Such treasures are called caches, they are usually hidden or disguised in specific places and each is marked with GPS coordinates. In 190 countries on all seven continents, there are more than 3 million caches. It can look like any ordinary object, such as a birdhouse, brick or stone. Geocaching is suitable for individuals of all ages. However, there are also various levels of difficulty: from easily accessible hiding places to hiding places that cannot be reached without good physical preparation or even special equipment (underwater breathing apparatus, climbing equipment, boat etc.). It means that different groups of people, i.e., families with children, young people, adults and seniors can use geocaching. Like many games, geocaching can include various game functions, for example, online avatar, level, category, bonuses etc. [89–92]. The main reasons for the popularity of geocaching are the study of nature and the environment, the discovery of new places and recreation [93,94]. Geocaching

is becoming increasingly popular, inclusive and a fun and healthy pastime for individuals of all ages. It is also great for groups like local associations, families, friends and youth groups working in teams. This also applies to the greenway route and facilities and, therefore geocaching can also be one way of attracting greenway visitors.

Tourism contributed, directly 3.3% and indirectly 10.4%, to the world's GDP in 2019 [95]. As public authorities invest in the development and maintenance of green roads, the key issue is the number of potential users and their spending during the journey. Unfortunately, when these projects are started, in most cases, especially in rural areas, there are no such visitor statistics. Data on visits to tourism information centers, numbers of visitors in main tourism spots, and nights in hotels and guesthouses are all used to support the GWs initiatives. The ability to learn a partial number of visitors and to promote specific sites can be accessed through a geocaching game. For example, the Central Baltic program project, cult identity, in its last project stage to promote ancient cult sites in the Vidzeme region of Latvia, put 50 geocaches in the area in 2013. These geocaches are still at nature sites and attract geocachers and their friends, especially, to visit these places. The statistics of visiting geocaches are available on the website <https://www.geocaching.com/play/search> in different types by days and by hours, and it also provides qualitative feedback data about emotions and feelings from notes.

In all Baltic countries, the state of the environment is relatively good, which cannot be said about the economic and social problems. In this regard, the main focus is mainly on issues such as poverty reduction, GDP, inflation, unemployment, the exchange rate etc. However, it is known that the economic downturn is often used not only for economic changes, but also for changes in people's behavior, paying particular attention to environmental issues, such as climate change, depletion of biodiversity, reduction of nonrenewable resources etc. [50,96].

The domestic tourism market is an integral part of the Latvian tourism sector and an important focus of the Latvian tourism marketing strategy. The main requirements for a tourism product at present are quality, innovation, compliance with modern market trends and requirements, namely demographic changes and changes in consumer behavior, security, authentic offers, and environmental protection [97–99]. Since most European tourists have rather high requirements for tourism products, these requirements should also be considered in Latvia [69]. The nature of Latvia, despite the rapid economic development in the 20th Century, is still rich and diverse compared to the average for Europe or the world. Therefore, Latvia, although a small country, but as an independent state and a member of the EU, is an attractive tourist destination, especially due to its convenient geographical location and interesting and friendly tourist offers.

The greenway tourism offer includes the basic elements of tourism value: a chain of tourist information, transport to a greenway access point, accommodation, transport at a greenway site, food and shopping, places of interest and a trip review. The more this supply represents local businesses and farms, the more tourists and one-day visitors will be able to spend money and leave a contribution for the development of the local economy.

In September 2018, a pilot test was carried out by a group of 19 students from Latvia for a part of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Trail in Estonia, near the town of Pärnu (Figure 6, see in the map the green line, Pärnu–Liu). This testing included pocket money (20 EUR per 4–5 students), with the main aim to assess and test services offered during hiking on this trail. Unfortunately, not one group from four fully spent this money. What can we learn from this test about local offers for tourists and visitors? Locals are not well-prepared or motivated to do small business in this field because during the shoulder season the flow of visitors is low [100].

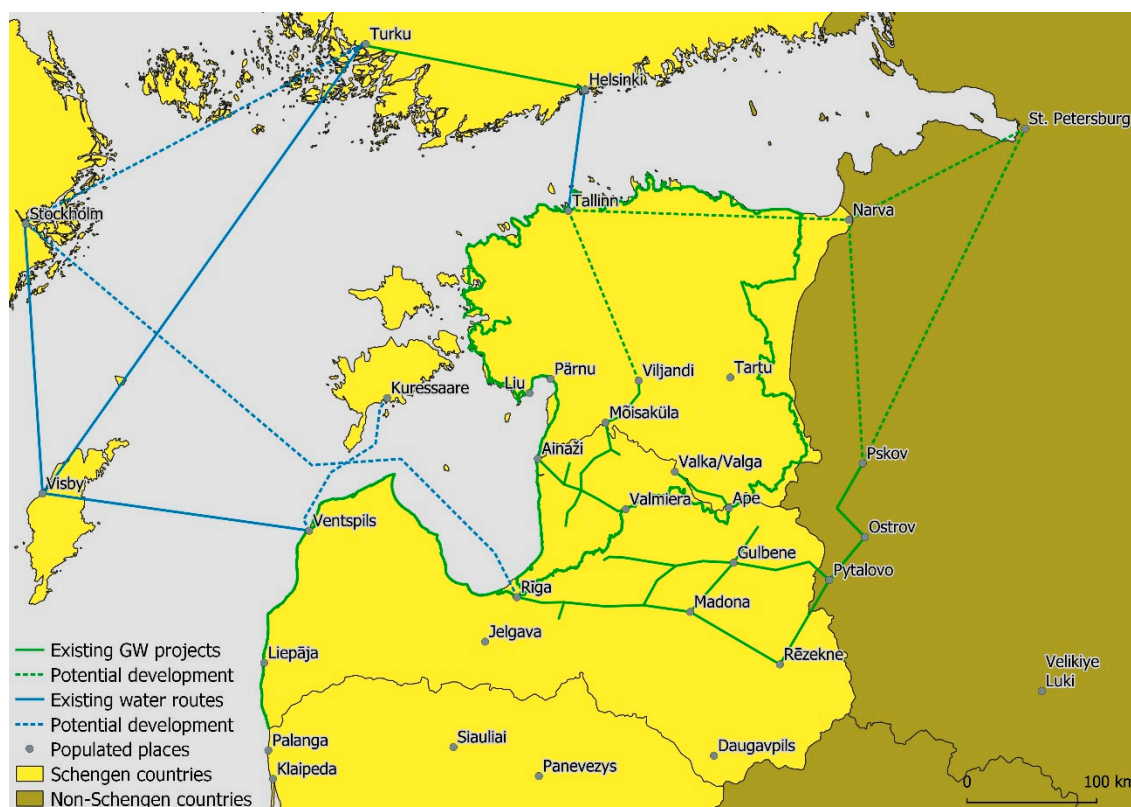


Figure 6. Existing and potential greenway projects in the Baltic Sea region (source: authors' compilation).

4.3. Case Studies of Greenways: Pskov–Riga, Estonia–Latvia and Central Baltic

Greenways are successful and recognized initiatives in Western Europe, but have also recently shown development trends in Northeastern Europe and Russia, which has a huge abandoned infrastructure of former railways, tunnels, dams and other objects of interest.

The current situation of GWs is different in regions of Russia and northeastern EU, such as Latvia, Estonia and Finland. Some greenways are well-developed for the tourism purposes, some are not so accessible for all groups of tourists and do not comply with internationally recognized requirements, for instance, there are different conditions of accessibility of dams or other routes, surface of routes appropriate for travel. In those regions, comparatively minor investments are necessary in order to improve the accessibility of greenways.

Over the last decade, the principles of greenways have also developed and established first routes with information and basic infrastructure in Eastern Europe, for example in Latvia, Estonia and in part of the Pskov (Russia) region.

We collected the information about different existing and potential GW projects in the Baltic Sea region. All information is represented in Figure 6. We used a green color to show the existing land routes, the blue color shows the existing waterways and the dotted line shows the potential connections.

To analyze the visitor flows, the first electronic visitor counters on greenways were set up. Visitor flow analyses should be provided and presented to the local population so that they can plan and calculate the supply of services.

From the content analysis of documents and materials of empirical research (interviews), it can be noted that at each of the considered stages there are similar problems.

Experts acknowledge that planning intermunicipal tourist destinations is particularly difficult, due to historically weak intermunicipal cooperation, or even the “historical discontent.” Significant differentiation in resource provision and the inability in many cases to consolidate budgets impedes the efficient use of financial resources in the development of the general tourist direction [101].

Probably, the coronavirus 2019 pandemic will keep positive changes in human behavior and the number of visitors in rural nature areas will continue to grow, or at least maintain the current level. It is necessary to continue to create convenient and safe access points for greenways with public and private transport, thereby contributing to achieve sustainable development goals.

After analyzing empirical data, we identified and characterized the structure of greenways stakeholders, resources and functions (see Table 2).

Table 2. Structure of greenway stakeholders, their resources and functions.

Category	Organizations/Stakeholders	Resources	Functions
commercial	enterprises, companies producing “green” products and services	investment and financial resource, human resources, material and technical resource	forms a wide range of products and services related to GW projects
science and education	structures of academic and applied science organizations of vocational education	intellectual resource, human resource, material and technical resource, information resource	development of science-based GW projects, the formation of human resources, the formation of individual and organizational competencies for the implementation of GW projects
government	state authorities, departmental structure of executive authorities, budget funds, regional development agencies, environmental management bodies, environmental protection bodies, traffic management institutions	administrative resource, fiscal resource, information resource	setting priorities for the environmentally sustainable development of local territories, developing institutional mechanisms for supporting and developing GW projects
infrastructure	construction and road organizations, transport and communications organizations, hotel industry	human resource, material and technical resource, information resource, organizational and service resource	creation of communication links; organizational maintenance of GW projects
information and consulting	information and analytical centers, information databases and knowledge, scientific coordination centers, consulting firms, advertising agencies	information resource, expert resource, organizational and service resource	information and expert support for GW projects; their organizational and service support
finance and investments	investment funds, venture capital funds, public–private partnership, insurance funds, credit organization, fundraising	financial resource	diagnosis and selection of the most effective projects; their financial provision
consumers and users	individual and associated subjects of the consumer market	financial resource, information resource, symbolic resource	formation of consumer demand for green products and services and their promotion in new segments of the consumer market
nonprofit sector	public organizations (environmental, local community, senior clubs, hobby clubs), associations and unions of participants in GW projects	information resource, network resource, expert resource, lobbying resource expert resource, symbolic image resource, information resource	formation of public opinion and ensuring environmental priorities in the implementation of GW, functions of cooperation of subjects and the conversion of their resources to promote GWs

Data collected in Table 2 show that mostly all sectors need information, financial, expert and organizational resources.

Beyond national/regional strategies, experiences with transnational interregional, and cross-border cooperation in the tourism sector have generally been positive. Therefore, countries and regions could integrate tourism into their relevant territorial cooperation strategies (including integrated territorial development strategies), which could involve both EU and non-EU countries. Transnational cooperation projects 2014–2020 have aimed to promote sustainable tourism and Europe as a tourism destination. Where tourism represents an opportunity for interregional, cross-border or transnational cooperation, this could also be reflected in relevant forms of partnerships (including innovative partnerships). Many Interreg projects have resulted in positive economic, environmental, and knowledge-sharing effects [2]. According to many authors, cities and governments around the world adopt a new agenda of the UN SDGs [102] and implement them at the national and local levels. In addition, it is generally accepted that it is business that is important in achieving sustainable development goals, by creating new technologies, solutions and innovative business models. These trends directly or indirectly affect all sectors of the economy through a shift towards more sustainable production and consumption patterns, including the tourism and recreational sectors of the economy, changing historical patterns and creating new challenges (as evidenced by this review of greenway sustainable development solutions). However, there are key questions about how much government and business are willing to respond to these changes. We believe that the establishment of an independent coordinating institution would facilitate cooperation between the stakeholders involved. This requires a set of criteria, factors and indicators that would allow the methodology to be adapted to a specific area.

4.4. *A Cognitive Model of the Impact of Greenways on Achieving Sustainable Goals*

According to Jongman et al. [103] ecological networks and GWs can be interpreted differently, depending on different historical types of nature management, research traditions, different levels of administration and geographical scale, and, ultimately, on the coordination of interests of different subjects of nature management, and the presence of a political will. This combination of various complexes of components creates completely different forms and directions for development of ecological networks and GWs.

The research approach, which includes three levels of scientific analysis—discriminative, structural and functional—make it possible to identify the main structural and logical connections between GWs and SDGs and visualize them in the form of a cognitive model.

The cognitive approach to the study of GW projects as multicomponent systems, and the development goals that are closely related to the goals of sustainable development, allows us to describe GW structure and the various processes taking place in them. We can also identify the influence of different factors of external environment on the management of existing situations in the system, and based on it, substantiate decisions concerning the management necessary for problem solving arising in such poorly structured systems. This cognitive model depicts the main groups of factors and relationships that arise with the sustainable development of the system (see Figure 7).

Some factors identified in the model may have a different impact in achieving sustainable development goals [42], depending on the qualitative performance of the factor. For example, the level of security of the tourist destination is able to have a positive impact on Goal 11 if the tourism destination is well-managed from a security and police point of view. At the same time, it can have a negative impact on Goal 11 if the number of visitors is increasing and security services are not following the behavior of tourists and locals. As a result, it can increase crime and pickpocketing activities.

We admit that this model does not reflect all possible relationships between factors. As one plunges into a problem, scales up and replicates GWs projects under various conditions, the model will be refined; however, this model may act as a starting model in identifying the most general patterns inherent in the analyzed situation.

The proposed cognitive model provides an approximate overview of factors and actions that influence and can give additional effects on the sustainable development of individual parts of the regional system. Based on the cognitive map, a system dynamic model of the GWs could be developed. It allows us to create the forecast scenarios of GW development.

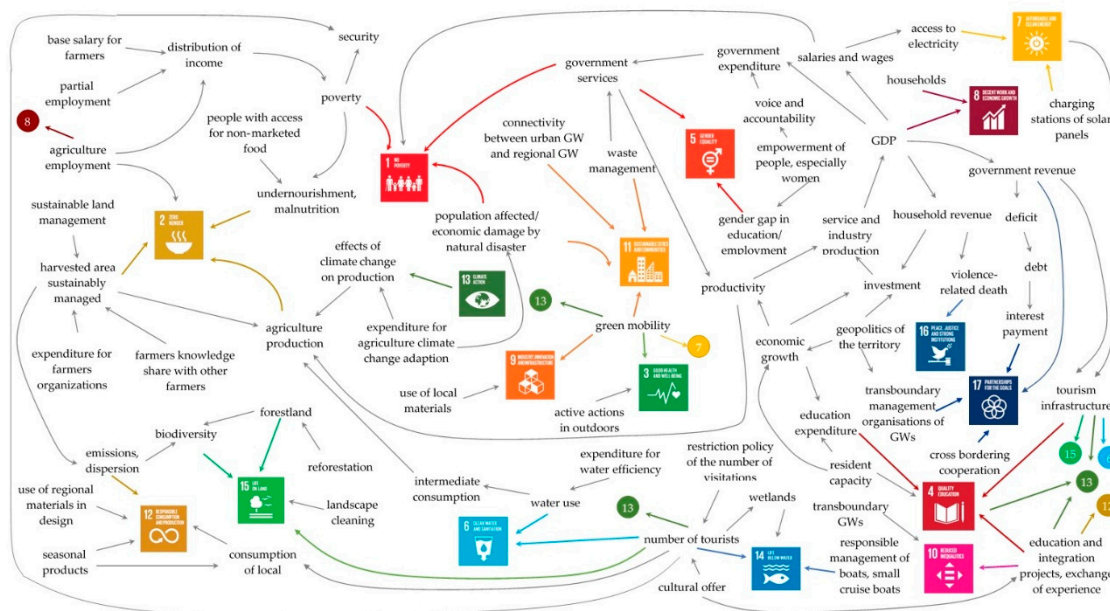


Figure 7. A cognitive model of the impact of GWs on achieving sustainable development goals (source: authors).

5. Conclusions

GWs as large-scale regional development cooperation projects can make important contributions to the implementation of SDGs. The achievement of the SDGs depends on the actions taken at different levels and through the cooperation of governmental organizations of countries involved, local society, the private sector and other stakeholders mobilizing all available resources. Thereof, GWs can promote peace and cooperation, common development and prosperity, openness and inclusiveness, and mutual understanding and trust.

GWs also take into account the impact of climate change, which includes the promotion of green and low-carbon infrastructure construction and the creation of a regional infrastructure network and connection of it among countries along the projects.

Investments in infrastructure can help to reduce poverty by boosting economic growth and increasing employment and earnings for the poor. In doing so, it can thereby enhance human development by improving the opportunity to access education, culture and health.

Development of the GWs and achieving the SDGs requires a clear implementation framework, adequate financing and investment in infrastructure and human resources, as well as collaboration of all stakeholders at various levels.

Both theory and practice in Latvia show that planning the development of local tourism is quite a complex process and requires solving many complex problems, current issues and implementing declared activities, particularly in places where the supply of tourism services or tourism resources exceeds the borders of one local administrative municipality. In such cases, one of the solutions is the establishment of a joint management organization. Joint visual identity and labeling are crucial parts to get satisfied visitors after their trip on the greenway tourism route.

Our case studies confirm that promotional campaigns in social media are crucial for domestic visitors in their native languages and with periodical repetition, as well as prepared and easily found information for foreign visitors in main languages in online resources and printed maps of GWs.

Locals can earn from tourists via GWs if tourism services are developed by locals that meet visitor needs. Unfortunately, research findings show that tourism services are provided in limited capacity in different parts of the GWs.

Maintained GWs are safe and secure for locals and tourists, particularly in cross-border regions with low population density. Placing warning signs on video surveillance at small infrastructure sites is recommended in order to prevent vandalism.

It is recommended to plan for the purchase and installation of remote visitor counters when developing new GW projects or some of its infrastructure elements. Statistics of visitors will help in the appropriate policy planning and decision-making about investments for improvements of GWs and rural areas, in general. Also, monitoring and analysis of GW tourist flows will allow better design of tourism and related services based on user experiences and preferences. Furthermore, these data bring opportunities to better manage tourist flows in order to reduce negative environmental effects in areas with excessive tourist pressure.

This research opens new avenues for future research to address sustainability indicators in measuring the development of rural areas and cross-border cooperation. Future studies can perform a sustainability assessment to examine how tourism influences outputs. Moreover, new destinations can be considered in cases in which visitor flow is so far insignificant. Future research can weigh the first stage of the framework in favor of sustainability aspects with sustainable development goals. For example, in the social perspective, the number of job opportunities can be considered as the employment rate plays a critical role in poverty in society and others. Future studies can answer an interesting question—how can local governments make better decisions about sustainability?

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