UNIVERSIDADE CATÓLICA PORTUGUESA

Destination Certification on Sustainable Tourism: The Managers Perspective

Diogo Pinto Teixeira Neves

Católica Porto Business School
2022

UNIVERSIDADE CATÓLICA PORTUGUESA

Destination Certification on Sustainable Tourism: The Managers Perspective

Final Work in Academic Context

presented to Universidade Católica Portuguesa

in order to obtain the master's degree in Service Management

by

Diogo Pinto Teixeira Neves

under the guidance of
Professor Doutor Jorge Manuel Soares Julião

Professor Doutor Marcelo Rudolfo Calvete Gaspar

Católica Porto Business School, Universidade Católica Portuguesa

April 2022

Resumo

O mundo está a mudar rapidamente e a sustentabilidade está a ser um dos principais motores da mudança. A indústria do turismo não é exceção e os seus agentes estão, também eles, a modificar os seus padrões e comportamentos de modo a tornarem-se mais sustentáveis. A certificação de destinos como um todo, classificando-os como destinos turísticos sustentáveis é um processo relativamente novo que vai além da prática atual de certificação de empresas de turismo. Há um número relativamente pequeno de destinos certificados em todo o mundo. Como este fenómeno está numa fase inicial, há uma oportunidade de estudar a experiência do pré e pós-certificação para o destino e os seus visitantes.

Esta investigação centrar-se-á na experiência do destino e o seu objectivo é investigar a perspetiva dos gestores do destino sobre estes programas de certificação. Os seus objectivos incluem a recolha de informação sobre a(s) razão(ões) pela qual os gestores de destino decidiram candidatar-se a um programa de certificação e quais foram as suas expectativas iniciais; investigar as consequências da adesão a esse programa; e compreender a perceção dos gestores de destino sobre o futuro da sua participação no programa de certificação.

Era importante proceder a uma revisão bibliográfica para recolher informações sobre temas relacionados com este assunto, a fim de melhor compreender o que já estava a ser escrito, permitindo, assim, uma compreensão das lacunas de investigação, que levaram aos objectivos de investigação escolhidos. Para alcançar os resultados desejados, a metodologia escolhida para realizar esta pesquisa foi a realização de entrevistas a diferentes gestores, cujos destinos estão a participar num programa de certificação.

As principais conclusões mostram várias razões diferentes para os destinos decidirem aderir, bem como expectativas iniciais distintas por parte dos seus gestores. Demonstram, também, uma percepção positiva em relação aos programas de certificação e o desejo de continuarem a confiar neles para melhorarem os seus resultados e prosseguirem o seu caminho de sustentabilidade.

Palavras-chave: sustentabilidade, turismo sustentável, certificação de destinos, critérios do GSTC, gestão de destinos, indústria do turismo

Total de palavras: 9859

Abstract

The world is changing rapidly and sustainability is being one of the main drivers of change. The tourism industry is no exception and its players are also modifying their patterns and behaviours in order to become more sustainable. The certification of whole destinations as sustainable tourism destinations is a relatively new process which goes beyond the current practice of certifying individual tourism businesses. There are a relatively small number of certified destinations worldwide. As this phenomenon is on an early stage, there is an opportunity for studying pre and post destination certification experience for the destination and visitors.

This research will focus on the destination experience and its aim is to investigate the perspective of destination managers on these certification programs. Its objectives include collecting information on the reason(s) why destination managers decided to apply for a certification program and which were their initial expectations; investigating the consequences of joining such program; and understanding destinations managers' perception on the future of their participation in the certification program.

It was important to proceed with a literature review to gather information on topics related to this subject in order to better understand what was already being written, enabling for an understanding of research gaps that led to the chosen research objectives. To achieve the desired results, the chosen methodology to carry out this research was to conduct interviews to different destination managers whose destinations are participating in a certification program.

The main findings show several different reasons for destinations deciding to join as well as distinct initial expectations by their managers but they also demonstrate a positive perception towards certification programs and the desire

to keep relying on them to improve their results and to continue their sustainability path.

Keywords: sustainability, sustainable tourism, destination certification, GSTC criteria, destination management, tourism industry

Total words: 9859

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank everyone that, in some way, has crossed paths with myself during this master's program and contributed to the writing of this thesis.

My first acknowledgment has to go to my parents for everything they do for me and for their immense support throughout all stages of my academic life.

Secondly, I would like to thank my two supervisors, Professor Jorge Julião and Professor Marcelo Gaspar who made this work possible. Their guidance and advice helped me go through all stages of this project.

I would also like to give a special thanks to Green Destinations, in the name of Mr. Albert Salman and Mr. Hugo de Jong, for their continuous support in the last two years and to all 6 destination managers - Mr. Ronald Sultana, Mrs. Joana Rodrigues, Mrs. Elizabeth Bauchwitz, Mr. Albert Folch, Mr. Joël Eichler and Mrs. Kristina Bogataj - that accepted the challenge of being interviewed for this research project and gave a valuable contribution to it. Without them, this would have been much harder.

Lastly, I would also like to give a special word of appreciation to my friends Rúben, Catarina and Márcia for all their support and words of motivation during this journey.

Index

Table Index

Abbreviations

GD – Green Destinations

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

GSTC – Global Sustainable Tourism Council

IPDT – *Instituto de Planeamento e Desenvolvimento do Turismo*

UNWTO – United Nations World Tourism Organization

USD – United States Dollar

Introduction

I.   Problem Situation and Motivation

The tourism industry represents, in current days, a role of essential importance in the economic and social life of the majority of countries in the world (Bunghez, 2015).

However, there has been a lot of debate on how tourism is causing some harmful effects due to its uncontrolled expansion and some harmful behaviours by tourists. Phenomena like overtourism, excessive energy consumption and climate change are disrupting the industry and being prejudicial to locals and to our planet. This has caused people to become more aware of the importance of sustainability and of changing their current habits. There is now, among others, a growing concern for environmental issues and more reflection when choosing a new holiday destination. These concerns have had a significant boost since the world has sunk it the global pandemic of COVID-19. This health crisis has made citizens realize that we do not another planet and that tourism cannot go back to his old state.

Aiming at countering these issues, global leaders and destination managers are also changing their approach to tourism management and focusing a lot more on sustainable tourism. This trend is already being observed in tourism policies and strategies worldwide (Mihalic, 2016).

One of the strategies being adopted by some destinations managers is to certify their destinations as a whole. The certification of whole destinations as sustainable tourism destinations is a relatively new process which goes beyond the current practice of certifying individual tourism businesses. There are a

relatively small number of certified destinations worldwide. As this phenomenon is on an early stage, there is an opportunity for studying pre and post destination certification experience for the destination and visitors.

Current research is still very broad and some of it focuses slightly on some benefits, challenges and opportunities that these programs can bring for destinations. That existent gap was what made way for this research paper to happen.

This research also aims to pave the way for future studies related to destination certification that will add to this one, exploring different perspectives, different destinations managers or other relevant topics, enabling for a better development of this kind of programs and also for better understanding of what they can represent for the future of tourism.

II.   Research Definition

Following the explanation of the problem situation and the motivations behind the topic choice, it is important to emphasise that the aim of this investigation is to understand the reason(s) why different types of destinations have decided to join a destination certification program, to analyse the consequences that participating in such program brought to those same destinations as well as to understand their future perception on the industry and expectations for their participation in the certification program.

In line with this aim, these specific objectives were outlined:

- To collect information on the reason(s) why destination managers decided to apply for a destination certification program, and which were their initial expectations.

- To investigate the consequences (both positive and/or negative) of joining such program.
- To understand destinations managers' perception on the future of their participation in the certification program.

This study will focus only on destinations that are currently participating in the Green Destinations Awards & Certification program and that present substantial differences on their contexts and characteristics.

III. Methodology

In order to bring this thesis to a successful conclusion, different methods were utilized. To begin with, a literature review was conducted for the purpose of collecting the most relevant pieces of information that are related to this investigation, using databases such as Science Direct, Research Gate, Google Scholar and Taylor & Francis Online. During this research process, the chosen keywords included sustainable tourism, destination certification, sustainable tourism certification, sustainability, sustainable development goals and tourism impacts. To narrow this search down, the abstract of several research papers was read and the ones that were less useful to the investigation were automatically excluded from further reading. Furthermore, the Mendeley Desktop software was a crucial tool to organize and reference the selected papers.

The next phase included an empirical study, consisting of interviews to 6 destinations managers/representatives whose destinations are participating in the Green Destinations Awards & Certification Program, a third-party certification program. These representatives include Mr. Ronald Sultana (Island of Gozo, Malta); Mrs. Joana Rodrigues (Torres Vedras, Portugal); Mrs. Elizabeth Bauchwitz (Tibau do Sul, Brazil); Mr. Albert Folch (Terres de L'Ebre, Spain); Mr.

Joël Eichler (Goeree-Overflakkee, the Netherlands) and Mrs. Kristina Bogataj (Poljanska Dolina, Slovenia).

Finally, the data collected from those interviews was entered into the NVivo software, specialized in qualitative data analysis.

IV. Thesis Outline

This master thesis is divided into four main categories.

This introduction is followed by the "Literature Review", a chapter where it is possible to find the existent information that is relevant to this research topic, gathered after a thorough analysis of several scientific papers and other pertinent sources.

The second category, by the name of "Methodology", explains which methods were utilized to carry out this research and, subsequently, to answer the proposed research questions. There is also an explanation as to why those methods were chosen instead of others.

The third and four categories are more practical and related to the investigation results. The earliest presents all the results that will answer the research questions and the latter provides a discussion of those same results in a critical manner and draws some conclusions.

Literature Review

1. Introduction

This chapter compiles existent information that is relevant for the research topic in hand, gathered after a thorough analysis of several scientific papers and other pertinent sources such as specialized websites and book chapters.

To begin with, in the next section (2. "Tourism and Sustainability"), the growing relationship between tourism and sustainability will be explored as well as the several opinions on the emerging concept of sustainable tourism. This section will also explore the Triple Bottom Line model of sustainability and its application to the tourism industry.

The following section (3. "COVID-19 and the Tourism Industry") will investigate the effects felt on the tourism industry due to the COVID-19 pandemic, substantiated by some statistics, together with the prospects of change that are considered to be mandatory for a better and more sustainable future.

The other section on this chapter (4. "Destination Certification") will focus the growing trend of assessing and certifying destinations as a whole on sustainability. The concept and the different types of certifications will be clarified and different visions on the effectiveness of certification schemes will be compared. This section ends with a visualization of the benefits, challenges and opportunities related with assessment and certification programs for destinations.

2. Tourism and Sustainability

In the most recent years, sustainability has been in everyone's mind due to worries about global warming and unexpected phenomena caused by climate change. It is commonly defined as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs (Visser & Brundtland, 2013). However, this concept is very broad and needs some tweaking when related to tourism. The tourism industry is one of the biggest in the world and, in some cases, has been causing some harmful effects, which is becoming a big concern that needs to be addressed quickly. As any other economic field not does only bring some economic benefits to states, but it also creates some serious problems as excessive energy consumption and increasing negative environmental effects, including climatic change. Furthermore, it is causing nature to be wasted due to its uncontrolled expansion, tourist destinations are suffering from overtourism, causing local people's quality of life to be negatively affected (Streimikiene et al., 2021).

To tackle this issue, a new concept has emerged: sustainable tourism; and it has become accepted as a desirable and politically appropriate approach to tourism development. Most scientists state that it concerns an economic, social and environmental development of tourism that aims at the continuous improvement of tourists' experiences. Sustainable tourism has the very specific purpose to make a balance between protecting economic benefits, meeting the needs to the host population in terms of improved living standards both in the short and long term (Zolfani et al., 2015). Some research goes even further and states that sustainable development has been established as the optimum strategy for a balanced management of tourism destinations and that it is considered the main prerequisite for the distinctiveness and viability of each destination in the long run (Gkoumas, 2019).

According to Mihalic (2016), sustainable development has three main pillars: economic, environmental and socio-cultural. It is the equilibrium between these three that will allow for sustainable development in tourism. This model, applied to the tourism industry, comes after the model proposed by Elkington (1998), commonly known as Triple Bottom Line, that defended that organizations should not only care for the financial aspects of their business but also take into consideration the social and environmental aspects.

Conversely, some authors say that the sustainable development model has largely failed to address the social and environmental challenges of the 21st century and that true sustainability will only occur when it is valued as a part of the taken-for-granted daily life of individuals and cultures across the globe (Galvani et al., 2020). In order for sustainable tourism to be turned into a social norm, it is vital to educate both organizations and consumers as well as other interested parties (Streimikiene et al., 2021).

Despite the difference of opinions, there is already a generalized consensus that sustainable tourism is the way forward. For example, a study conducted by (Casado-Aranda et al., 2021) concludes that the paradigm needs to change and that topics like environmental degradation, economic exploitation, and overcrowding of traditional tourism services must be replaced by care for the animals, nature, and local landscape of tourist destinations. However, political leaders need to come up with more than just theoretical ideas as they risk sustainable tourism to turn irrelevant as a feasible option for tourism development (Liu, 2003). According to Mihalic (2016), this is already happening as he states that sustainable tourism is already being included in tourism policies and strategies worldwide. Nevertheless, the same author also reiterates that for sustainable tourism to work, there needs to be a junction of three factors: cooperation between stakeholders, keeping visitors happy by matching or surpassing their expectations and raising awareness on sustainability and ethics.

IPDT, a tourism consultancy company based in Porto, considers sustainable tourism to be the alternative to mass tourism. Planning and sustainable management are considered essential aspects in the capitalisation of the sector as one of the main advantages for the global economy. According to the same publication, that is why destinations should develop a strategy that defends an integrated vision, with added value for the economy, society, culture and environment (IPDT, 2021). To highlight the importance of this matter, the UNWTO declared 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development recalling the potential of tourism to advance the universal 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UNWTO, 2017).

3. Covid-19 and the Tourism Industry

In 2020, the world was sunk in a global pandemic that brought up a vast number of new challenges but also opportunities. The tourism industry was one of the most affected and several people lost their main sources of income and according to (Williams, 2021), the coronavirus has had a negative impact on 81% of the global workforce. All the positive predictions that UNWTO had made in 2019 regarding the increase of tourism arrivals have rapidly changed and transformed into negative figures. The final result was a reduction of 30% in tourism arrivals in 2020, the equivalent to a USD 300–450 billion loss for the worldwide tourism sector (Casado-Aranda et al., 2021).

It is clear that this pandemic challenged us to think about the unsustainability of the pre-crisis travel and tourism industry (Romagosa, 2020). However, the truth is that nobody knows know the industry will react and come back after the pandemic is over. According to (Ioannides & Gyimóthy, 2020), there are two

possibilities: the first one is that the sector will gradually revert to the pre-crisis unsustainable growth-oriented trajectory and the second one consists of an alternative scenario that entails a transition towards a radically different way of doing things, constituting an opportunity for society at large to pause and ponder the way forward. Another study also shares the latter opinion and states that the world cannot afford to return to levels of travel experienced previously, particularly by the wealthiest segment of the world's population. According to the same author, this is not only because of the social unrest overtourism provoked, but also because the industry's environmental damages which were already beyond unsustainable (Romagosa, 2020). Other authors also back up this position by presenting the positive effects that the pandemic has brought to the environment. The aviation industry that contributes about 1-2% of global greenhouse gas emissions and about 3-5% of global CO_2 emissions, suffered huge losses and that helped boosting some environmental indicators. Between 23 January 2020 and 21 April 2020, travel restrictions caused air traffic to decline by around 63% in the total number of flights and about 75% in the number of commercial flights. The strong decrease in both short-term and mid-term aviation travel will lead to a reduction in greenhouse emissions, particularly CO_2. It will also probably lead to a decrease in air temperature due to the decreasing greenhouse effect (Cheval et al., 2020).

One thing is guaranteed, tourism will stay with us. According to (Galvani et al., 2020), tourists will still overwhelm the world's most popular destinations, but perhaps not quite as much as before. It is also their vision that travel and tourism may be the most effective way for individuals to change their global consciousness and that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the industry can only accelerate the evolution towards a more transformative form of tourism. In order to avoid the same impacts on future pandemics, companies in this sector will have to make their products more resilient and be able to adapt to the

predicted change in consumer interests, which will include greater demand for sustainable products (Streimikiene et al., 2021).

This phenomenon is already being observed as sustainability leaders are becoming more aware of the need for a change. The Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organization mentioned that "Sustainability must no longer be a niche part of tourism but must be the new norm for every part of our sector… It is in our hands to transform tourism and that emerging from COVID-19 becomes a turning point for sustainability". Another proof of this is that on July 9th, 2021, the representatives of some european cities and other tourism stakeholders met in Porto, on the occasion of the UNWTO Mayors Forum for Sustainable Urban Tourism and signed the Porto Declaration, Tourism and the Future of Cities, where they have recalled some important statements about urban and sustainable tourism and have agreed to work towards 14 goals that aim to achieve a better future for cities by sustainably managing urban tourism destinations (UNWTO, 2021).

4. Destination Certification

The tourism industry has been seeing a growth in the number of existent sustainability certification schemes for tourism products and services. However, recent research states that they are still causing confusion amongst tourists due to the multitude of labels in the market (Grapentin & Ayikoru, 2019). Despite that, the industry is facing an emerging trend: certifying tourism destinations as a whole. Two decades ago, (Murphy et al., 2000) already considered destinations to be the most important player in the tourism system, considering it as "the marketplace where supply and demand compete for attention and consumption" and in 2002, Font & Sallows (2002) already alerted for the need of making a

greater effort to promote standards and best practices in sustainable tourism around the world, through accreditation bodies.

Certification programs are now starting to be embraced by several destinations as a way of achieving their sustainability goals, whilst gaining tools to better manage their territory. They are considered to be a way of ensuring that a tourism destination meets certain standards, where infrastructural, economic, social, and environmental aspects of tourism development are being evaluated simultaneously (Carvalho, 2021).

The same researcher states that there are three different types of certifications: first party when destinations self-proclaim that they are sustainable, but no external verification is carried out; second party when destinations claim that their services meet the clients' expectations or third-party when a destination goes through an independent audit to verify if it complies with clearly defined and accredited standards. The latter is considered to be the most credible and will be the focus of this research.

Despite third-party certification being the most credible and becoming more popular amongst destinations, this was not always the case, and it is possible to identify research stating this scenario. Early research alerted that, similarly to what was happening with other certification schemes, there was the need of a neutral and widely accepted agency for monitoring, controlling and regulating the efforts of tourism certification bodies in order not to increase suspicion and distrust among tourists towards the credibility of such programs (Sasidharan et al., 2002).

In 2010, the Global Sustainable Tourism Council was created with the aim of fomenting the increased knowledge and understanding of sustainable tourism practices, the adoption of universal sustainable tourism principles, and the promotion of sustainable tourism accreditation, products and services (GSTC, n.d.). In 2013, the GSTC Destination Criteria was released and still serves as the

world's baseline standards for tourism destination management and as a framework for national or regional sustainability standards (GSTC, n.d.).

The most recent research already has a new perspective on destination certification and defends that investing in destination certification is an attractive for the next generation tourists because they will have sustainable practices as one of their priorities (IPDT, 2021). This goes hand in hand with the research that suggests that the certification methodology will guarantee that a certain destination meets set standards (Carvalho, 2021).

4.1 Challenges, Benefits and Opportunities

As stated previously, participating in a destination certification program is becoming more common nowadays but it is also important to analyse the existent research on the challenges, benefits and opportunities that joining this type of programs brings to such destinations.

Interestingly, Dodds & Holmes (2020) have pointed out in their research that there is little evidence that destinations fighting for the sustainable tourism segment gain any competitive advantage from having an environmental certification. However, there is also some conclusions that sustainable tourism certification on a destination can result on tourist loyalty if progress is tangible and they have a positive experience during their stay (Lemy & Pramezwary, 2017). Others say that these schemes can be used for both external and internal marketing to raise awareness on both tourists and residents for the need of travelling and behaving more responsibly (Grapentin & Ayikoru, 2019). According to the same research paper, certification programs for destinations oblige leaders to look into their own territory and help them identifying things that they might have not considered as a problem before. Lastly, this type of programs have the benefit of enabling data to be used for benchmarking purposes, helping destinations to track their progress throughout time and to

compare themselves with territories with similar characteristics (Grapentin & Ayikoru, 2019).

In their research, (Grapentin & Ayikoru, 2019) have also identified several challenges and opportunities. The first mentioned challenge has to do with a destination's size and the role that stakeholders have. It is stated that it is difficult to find the best approach for large areas, especially because they usually rely on local partners, and it is difficult to gather them all on the same table. Another mentioned issue is lack of internal management and coordination capacities to deal with the assessment process, sometimes caused by the lack of human resources and competences. In the authors' opinion, some destinations apply but they do not really know what they are doing. Lastly, the absence of funding and the lack of awareness of the benefits of the assessment have also been considered to be two big obstacles for destinations.

Given that there are still some identified challenges, there is still room for improvement. Certification programs have the potential "have the potential to develop into powerful tools that could enhance the role of sustainability in tourism" (Grapentin & Ayikoru, 2019). Since there are not many certification bodies operating on destinations as a whole, they also have the potential to prevent confusion arising from the growing number of certification schemes for individual tourism businesses that has been mentioned previously. Certification bodies together with already certified destinations have also the opportunity to raise more awareness of these schemes and their potential benefits to more tourism destinations and prospective tourists and to offer them hands-on support so that they can understand the benefits and start to implement change in their territories (Grapentin & Ayikoru, 2019).

5. Summary

This chapter covered the most relevant theoretical literature on this subject. To introduce the topic, it was important to understand the concept of sustainability as well as its connection to the tourism industry. It was unanimous between researchers that despite being very big and important for some countries in particular and for the world in general, the tourism industry is also causing some harmful effects to the locals' quality of life and contributing for excessive energy consumption and increasing negative environmental effects, including climatic change. This created a need for change and after the analysis of several papers on the topic, it was possible to conclude that sustainable tourism is considered to be the desirable and politically appropriate approach to tourism development.

Next, it was addressed the relationship between the COVID-19 pandemic and the tourism industry. In this part of the chapter, the huge impacts that the pandemic had on the industry were presented and substantiated by some statistics. However, the existent literature also reinforced the unsustainability that was taking over tourism before the pandemic and provided two options for the revamp of the industry: either the sector will gradually revert to the pre-crisis unsustainable trajectory, or it transits towards a radically different way of doing things. The only guarantee given by the people who have already studied this matter is that tourism will not disappear and that it is here to stay. It is now up to all of us to rethink our behaviours going forward. Still in this direction, research also mentions that worldwide leaders are now more aware of this need for change and that are starting to take matter in their own hands.

Another topic analysed on this chapter was the certification of destinations as a whole. Research concluded that despite the growing number of existent sustainability certification schemes for tourism products and services and the confusion that they cause among tourists, a new type of certification program

was emerging: certifying destinations as a whole. Such option is now being adopted by a vast number of destinations as a way to differentiate themselves and, at the same time, to gain tools to better manage their territory. However, the existent research on the topic is still very scarce and insufficient to better understand this new strategy adopted by tourism destinations.

Recognizing the shortage of studies referring to this topic, it is proposed to study the following questions:

Q1: Why are destination managers are choosing to enrol their destinations in destination certification programs?

Q2: Which are destination managers' initial expectations when joining the chosen destination certification program?

Q3: Which consequences (both positive and/or negative) are arising from participating in a destination certification program?

Q4: Which are destination managers' expectations for the following years regarding the certification program and their sustainable tourism path?

Methodology

1. Introduction

The previous chapter consisted of collecting the existent research on several topics that are relevant for this investigation and it ended up with a formulation of four proposed questions to be studied.

In this chapter, the methods and strategy of investigation chosen to carry out this research and to answer the proposed questions will be presented. It will also contain information regarding its scope and the way data was collected, treated and analysed.

2. Research Methodology

The choice of the research methodology for studies like one this can be considered a crucial part of the process as it is the starting point to achieve the desired research objectives. Before choosing the opportune research methods, it was decisive to do an extensive literature review as seen on the previous chapter. This allowed for a better understanding of the topic in hand, namely on the gaps of the existent literature. At the end of such process, it was possible to come up with the four main questions that this research paper aims to answer.

In order to carry out this research, a qualitative analysis approach was utilized, as it suited better the proposed research objectives, when compared to the quantitative analysis approach. Qualitative research methods derive from words and images, not numbers. They change people from simply being respondents to also being participants in this type of data collection, which allows for a more

naturalistic and interactive research process (Genot & Saunders, Mark; Lewis, Philip; Thornhill, 2018).

The purpose of this research was to execute an exploratory study. This type of studies aims to discover what is happening and gain insights about a topic of interest (Genot & Saunders, Mark; Lewis, Philip; Thornhill, 2018). In this case, about gaining insights on destination certification from the destination managers' perspective.

In order to materialize this exploratory study, the chosen research method was to conduct semi-structured interviews, constituting a mono method qualitative study. The interviews were made to 6 destinations managers whose destinations are participating in a destination certification program and were carried out on a one-to-one basis, through online channels such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams. The interviewees that contributed to this research were Mr. Ronald Sultana (Island of Gozo, Malta); Mrs. Joana Rodrigues (Torres Vedras, Portugal); Mrs. Elizabeth Bauchwitz (Tibau do Sul, Brazil); Mr. Albert Folch (Terres de L'Ebre, Spain); Mr. Joël Eichler (Goeree-Overflakkee, the Netherlands) and Mrs. Kristina Bogataj (Poljanska Dolina, Slovenia).

In the next section of this chapter, a further explanation on the chosen methods to answer the research questions will be provided. Furthermore, the following section will also contain more detailed information on the process of collecting, treating and analysing the data.

3. Research Design

3.1. Design Methodology

As previously mentioned, the chosen methodology to carry out this research was conducting interviews to different destination managers whose destinations participate in a destination certification program.

The first step was to choose which type of interview to perform. In order to better answer the proposed research questions, the choice fell for semi-structured interviews as they allow for more flexibility with regards to questions, enabling to adapt them depending on the flow of the conversation.

The next step required writing the interview guide, that served as a checklist to ensure that all relevant topics were going to be mentioned during the time of the interview.

After that, interviewees were chosen by having in mind the characteristics of the destinations they represent and their current status in the certification program they are enrolled in. The purpose was to choose destinations who varied in geographical location, length of participation in the certification program and also in their current award level. These destination managers were then invited by email to participate in this research paper, to which they have all promptly accepted, leading to the interview scheduling.

The final step was performing the interviews. They have all taken place in the Zoom platform and had an average duration of approximately half an hour. In order to better perform the data analysis (explained in the following sub-section), all interviews were recorded with the authorization of the interviewees and those recordings were used for investigation purposes only.

3.2. Data Analysis Methodology

The chosen method to analysis the resulting data from the performed interviews was a qualitative data software programme called NVivo. After the interviews were conducted, all of them needed to be transcript in order to be analysed by this software. The following step was to create different codes to

divide the information in different categories to facilitate its analysis, based on the research questions of this investigation. In the following chapter, a further explanation is given on these categories. The use of the NVivo enabled for a quicker and easier access to the data, facilitating its use when extracting the desired results.

4. Summary

This chapter described the methodology that was adopted to carry out this research and to gather the necessary data that lead to the desired results, needed to answer the proposed research questions.

To begin with, a literature review was carried out and it allowed for a better understanding of the topic in hand, namely on the gaps of the existent literature. After the literature review was concluded and the research questions were defined, there was a need to decide which type of analysis would suit this investigation better. On that note, the decision was to carry out a qualitative analysis through semi-structured interviews. These interviews were conducted to six destinations managers whose territories are participating in a sustainable tourism certification program.

Lastly, after having the raw data available, the NVivo software was the chosen tool to analysis that data and to help transform it into concrete results, that will be presented in the following chapter.

Results and Data Analysis

1. Introduction

In the last chapter, the justification for the chosen research methodology was shown. This one has the objective of presenting the analysis and results that have arisen from the interviews carried out to managers whose destinations are participating in a sustainable tourism certification program. The next section ("2. Data Collection Methodology") will expand on the data collection methods, followed by sections "3. Results" and "4. Analysis" where results will be presented and analysed. Lastly, a summary of the main findings of this chapter will also be carried out.

2. Data Collection Methodology

As stated before, data was sourced from the realization of online interviews through the Zoom platform with the six destination representatives. The chosen destinations present different characteristics with all of them being from different countries and one being from another continent. They have also been participating in the certification program for different periods of time and some have different award levels.

The selected interviewees were contacted by email and invited to take part on this research paper. In that email, they were informed about the topic of the interview and given examples of questions to be made in order to be able to better prepare for it.

This data can only be found on this research paper and has not been used for any other purpose.

3. Results

This section will present the results for the four proposed research questions, based on the answers provided by the six selected destinations managers in their interviews. In the next chapter, those same results will be discussed and conclusions will be taken.

3.1. Reasons for applying to a destination certification program

The first research question aims to understand the reason(s) why destination managers are choosing to enrol their territories in sustainable tourism certification programs.

Goeree-Overflakkee, in the Netherlands, was one of the first destinations to apply for the Green Destinations certification program and according to its manager, Mr. Jöel Eichler, that was precisely one of the reasons to do it, to become a pioneer. The municipality "had the opportunity to be one of the first in the program and that's a little bit pioneering. As a municipality, a thing that we like to do is to be one of the first to do something." (Eichler, 2021). Following that, another reason was to use the certification program as a learning tool, "(…) because we can learn how to be more sustainable, and how we can manage our destination." (Eichler, 2021). This Dutch destination went further and provided a third reason for their participation in a certification program. According to Jöel "it is also to give the inhabitants some kind of pride. We are one of the best in the

world, (…) and we really love to win prizes and put it in local papers (…)" (Eichler, 2021).

Similarly to Goeree-Overflakkee, Torres Vedras was also one of the first destinations to join the Green Destinations program and its representative, Joana Rodrigues, presented her two main reasons for such decision. The main reason was the international visibility that Green Destinations was able to provide. According to Joana, "(…) what really made a difference for us was that this new program was recognized on an international level. This was a big step for us at the time as it was the first time that we were going to be evaluated on an international level. Our president has always loved new challenges and that also had an impact." (Rodrigues, 2021). The other reason was related to the fact that the evaluation was going to be made "(…) by an external and unbiased third-party team that did not know us (…)" (Rodrigues, 2021). Despite having only joined Green Destinations in 2020, a Slovenian destination named Poljanska Dolina identified a similar reason for joining, as the "(…) purpose of which is for external evaluators to tell us how successful we are in implementing our policies. Green Destinations is a third party and they actually observe our work. This is very important when planning new activities because we still want to do it in a green way." (Bogataj, 2021).

Terres de L'Ebre, a destination in Spain "(…) had already been working for many years on tourism marketing and communication, promoting sustainability and nature conversation (…)" (Folch, 2021) and since the destination "(…) has two national parks, the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism, a Biosphere Reserve and we thought it was also good to certify the whole territory as a sustainable tourism destination." (Folch, 2021). According to Albert Folch, "the Green Destinations program was more specific for the tourism activity." (Folch, 2021).

Tibau do Sul, a destination in Brazil, decided to create a tourism strategy plan and realized that "(…) our vision was to become a sustainable destination and to be in harmony with nature." (Bauchwitz, 2021). This realization and the fact that "(…) another destination nearby, called São Miguel do Gostoso, (…), was racing with us to become the most sustainable municipality in north-eastern Brazil." (Bauchwitz, 2021), were the two main reasons that led them to search for a destination certification program. They started analysing "(…) how were we going to be sustainable, where we should start, who were the most well-known certifiers in the world… So we began our search and that was where we found Green Destinations that matched with everything we were looking for." (Bauchwitz, 2021). Furthermore, and similarly to what was mentioned by Joana Rodrigues and Kristina Bogataj, Elizabeth Bauchwitz also mentioned that it was important to the have the assurance "(…) that someone from the outside, a third-party certifier, was looking at us from a neutral perspective, without us knowing anyone from there." (Bauchwitz, 2021).

Finally, there was another reason presented, this time by the representative of the Island of Gozo, in Malta, that stated that "one of the reasons why is that joining forces in a community allows for the sharing of knowledge." (Sultana, 2021).

3.2. Initial Expectations

The second research question focuses on the expectations destination managers had before joining the certification program.

Goeree-Overflakkee's main expectation was for the program to "(…) give us good tourists in our municipality (…)" (Eichler, 2021), referring to tourists that are already aware of sustainability and whose behaviours are responsible and harmless for the territory.

Ronald Sultana, from the island of Gozo, presented his initial expectations with the first one being to "(…) present Gozo as a sustainable tourism destination." (Sultana, 2021). His objective was to differentiate his brand from the rest and he expected Green Destinations to "(…) provide us with more details of how to do it and more information of other countries and what they are doing." (Sultana, 2021).

Similarly to the island of Gozo, also Terres de L'Ebre were looking to "(…) add value to our brand by reinforcing our efforts on sustainability." (Folch, 2021). According to their manager Albert Folch, they were already doing well in terms of visibility because they were doing a good job with their marketing campaigns but were expecting Green Destinations to recognize their sustainability efforts to boost the strength of their brand.

Also on a more marketing perspective, Kristina Bogataj, from Poljanska Dolina, expected Green Destinations to provide "(…) promotion and visibility on the national scale and then on the international of course." (Bogataj, 2021).

Being on a more embryonic stage, Tibau do Sul had the expectation that Green Destinations would help them to "(…) understand what it really meant to be sustainable." (Bauchwitz, 2021). Another important expectation was for "(…) Green Destinations to tell us if we were on the right path or not." (Bauchwitz, 2021).

Lastly, Joana Rodrigues, representative of Torres Vedras, admitted to not having any particular expectation in the beginning as "(…) it was a new program; nobody knew who was behind it and we were not really sure what advantages it would bring us." (Rodrigues, 2021). However, despite that uncertainty of being one the first to ever apply, it was "(…) really clear that our objective was to have a diagnosis done so that we knew what our weak points were and, from there, start to improve and also to find our strengths so that we could capitalize on those." (Rodrigues, 2021).

3.3. Consequences

The third research question aims to gather information on positive and/or negative consequences that destinations are facing from their participation in certification programs.

3.3.1. Positive Consequences

During the interviews, destination managers have identified several positive consequences related to their participation in the certification program.

The very first that some mentioned was that the certification program enabled them to have a diagnosis done to their current status. Managers from destinations in distinct countries such as Slovenia, Spain and Brazil were very pleased with this first evaluation as it allowed for a better understanding of which areas where there to improve and also as it confirmed the good work that they were already doing in other areas.

Another underlined aspect was the marketing benefits associated with having a sustainable tourism certificate, both internally and externally. Having a sustainable certificate enabled inhabitants to feel proud of the place they live, contributing for a better interaction with tourists. Being able to say they are one of the most sustainable destinations in the world also allowed a destination like Terres de L'Ebre to use that in their advantage on their marketing campaigns as it has a very strong impact on people's minds.

Also related, a positive consequence mentioned by Elizabeth Bauchwitz and Ronald Sultana, was that having the certificate allowed Tibau do Sul and the island of Gozo, respectively to differentiate themselves from the competition. In the case of Tibau do Sul, having the seal was a motivation to be different and to be ahead of the neighbouring municipalities.

The learning aspect and the sharing of knowledge associated with certification programs were also mentioned as a positive consequence. Destinations such as the island of Gozo or Poljanska Dolina were able to learn a lot from the tools provided by Green Destinations and also from the sharing of experiences among other destinations enroled in the program and industry experts.

Finally, a fifth highlighted positive consequence was the change of behaviours internally and also the change on the way stakeholders started to be involved in the fight for sustainability. Some destination managers have mentioned that they have actually changed their internal procedures and others have mentioned the crucial work that started be developed with local stakeholders, with some noticeable results.

In Table 1, it is possible to easily understand what was mentioned by destinations managers in their interviews.

Table 1 - Positive Consequences

Positive Consequence	Destination Manager	Quotes from interview data
Destination Diagnosis	Kristina Bogataj	"(…) with the program, we got to know the areas where we are good and also the areas where we still need to improve, (…) so that so that we can get better and keep the same path."
	Albert Folch	"(...) joining Green Destinations enabled us to confirm the work that we had been doing in sustainability as an international recognition was telling us so."
	Elizabeth Bauchwitz	"(…) this certification program helped us to understand where we really are, to have a good diagnosis on sustainability. (…) we were given a radiography and a perfect report of where we stood and even if it sometimes hurts to know the result, it is needed in order to improve."

Marketing Benefits	Jöel Eichler	"(…) it gives inhabitants some kind of pride. We are one of the best in the world, you may be lucky to live here. And we really love to win prizes and put it in local papers."
	Albert Folch	"(…) quickly noticed that when were first nominated to be on the Top 100 most sustainable destination list, that had an impact internally (in Spain) and we use it to our advantage. (…) What we do, is to use our Green Destinations stamp to promote ourselves and the first thing that we say is that we are a Biosphere Reserve and that Green Destinations put us as one of the 100 most sustainable destinations in the world and this has a very strong impact on the consumers/visitors' minds because they already position us very high in their minds."
Differentiation	Elizabeth Bauchwitz	"(…) this can also serve as a competitive factor and as a way to differentiate yourself from the others. Since we are in a touristic area here in the North of Brazil, there is a lot of competition among several destinations and having a certificate to differentiate you from the rest adds value to yours."
	Ronald Sultana	"(…) it allows Malta to create a diversified product."
Learning Aspect/Sharing of Knowledge	Kristina Bogataj	"(…) can join the consulting by Slovenia Green, which is supported by Good Place and the Slovenian Tourism Organization. (…) This way we can learn from them and know what we can implement to our destination, and which are the things where we could learn from and so on."
	Ronald Sultana	"(…) sharing of knowledge was very useful for Gozo to go on the right path. Was it 100% successful? I think nobody is 100% successful for sure. However, it directs you on the right path in order to obtain the objective."

Internal Changes/Work with Stakeholders	Albert Folch	"(…) stakeholders confirmed that it was worth to keep working on this direction (…) it is truth that, when you are certified, all public leaders and politicians start to think more about sustainable development when creating policies or designing strategic plans."
	Elizabeth Bauchwitz	"all businessmen are working together with the local community and we have already started to implement some measures. (…) This started because of our need to improve, and I would say that the biggest achievements are coming more from our inhabitants, our local community as they are starting to change their way of thinking and embrace sustainability."
	Joana Rodrigues	"(…) We have been having a close relationship with stakeholders and the local community which is being really beneficial for us to better manage our territory in several components like sustainable tourism, environment protection and the preservation of natural resources that is one of our main strengths. I can say that there is, in fact, a direct connection between the work that we have been doing internally, within our teams and what is seen on the field."

3.3.2. Negative Consequences

From all the interviews that were performed, only a destination manager has identified a negative consequence related to their participation in the certification program.

The negative aspect that was identified was the fact that Goeree-Overflakkee is not seeing any results in terms of being able to attract the right type of tourists. According to Jöel Eichler, this lack of results "(…) also makes us think if we want to be a part of the program for much longer because it also comes with costs and

a lot of work to be part of the program and there has to be some time where it pays off in the matter of right tourists." (Eichler, 2021). He also argued that "If you're looking at the way that the tourists develops in our municipality and in our country, there's a big growth in the number of tourists, regardless of the certification. (…) There are several islands, next to each other, and one of those stopped being part of the program. (…) Us and Schouwen-Duiveland are still part of it, but the island next to us, Veere, is not part of it anymore and you don't see any change in the number of visitors who go there." (Eichler, 2021).

Other negative aspects mentioned by other destination managers were related to the certification program itself. Some have considered it to be time consuming and exhaustive but have recognized the importance of it being that way, highlighting the ones that really want to be sustainable. Another mentioned aspect was the lack of motivation that a destination can face when they reach the Platinum level on the Green Destinations certification program as they cannot go any higher without having to pay an extra amount to be fully certified by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council.

3.4. Future Perspective

One of the objectives of this research paper was also to gather information on the future perspective of destination managers on their participation in the certification program.

3.4.1. Certification Program

Five out of the six interviewees expressed their desire to continue with the certification program. Only one, Jöel Eichler, from Goeree-Overflakkee, has expressed his concerns as is not getting the desired results. He states that "Certification wise, I really doubt right now. Because we don't see a big change in the way it has an advantage for us. I don't see an increase in it. And when you

hear the forecasts of the tourists, it keeps on growing the number of tourists that want to visit our destination. (…) and I don't know, if we're putting a lot of money in certification program, if it really attracts the right, the right people." (Eichler, 2021). All the others want to keep working to either maintain or increase their current award level. Kristina Bogataj alerts they "only have Platinum to go now and that's the next step. We want to get every criterion as good as possible and one day achieve the Platinum level. Mostly, we want to keep learning how we can provide the best tourism experiences to our guests and how to manage that with our locals and our providers. That is a really important aspect because if our locals are not satisfied in here, our guests won't be satisfied as well, so we really want to involve the locals as much as possible but we are still working on that." (Bogataj, 2021). The island of Gozo is also on the gold level and Ronald Sultana says that "(…) the next level is the platinum label. So let's drive towards that. And I think that's very important. You know, the competitive drive is it helps it helps a lot." (Sultana, 2021). He also adds that they "(…) have to continue developing our brand. Diversifying, yes, but increasing the quality of it." (Sultana, 2021). Albert Folch also goes in the same direction and states that "the objective is to keep going and to achieve the maximum level, given by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council but we are still a little bit short, we have to think about going to Platinum first and only after that the full certification that seems quite difficult to achieve. We will go step by step." (Folch, 2021). Elizabeth Bauchwitz admits that "every criterion that has been marked as yellow or red needs to be improved and we will work to make that happen. We are trying to improve in every item but, despite the uncertainty of the current time, we are still working on it and will do our best." (Bauchwitz, 2021). Finally, also Joana Rodrigues, from Torres Vedras, reiterates that they "(…) aim to continue to participate in the Green Destinations program. Despite already being at the Platinum level, we still have much to improve on. We have still some criteria

where we don't have the desired grade as we want to achieve a 100% score. We all need to improve, not only us as a municipality, but also our stakeholders with our help. We cannot work alone and say that we are sustainable if we don't work closely with them so that they can also claim to be sustainable and offer visitors the best experience." (Rodrigues, 2021).

4. Summary

This chapter's main objective was to present the results of this investigation. Before the presentation of those results, an explanation was given on the chosen methodology to collect the necessary data and on how the process was developed.

The second part of this chapter presents the results gathered from the interviews. For an easier interpretation of the results, they were divided in different categories, each one representing one of the research questions.

Lastly, the third and last section of this chapter divulged an analysis of the results based on the research objectives.

Discussion and Conclusions

1. Introduction

This master thesis had the aim of exploring the emerging trend of sustainable tourism certification programs for destinations as a whole and to understand destination managers' perspective on them, by gathering information on the reasons why they have decided to apply to such programs, on their initial expectations, on the consequences, both positive or negative, that their destinations were facing from that participation and also on their expectations for the following years.

On the previous chapter, the results of this investigation were presented and in this chapter those same results will be discussed and conclusions will be drawn. This chapter will also include a section with a reflection on the main limitations faced during the investigation process and another one with some recommendations for future pieces of research on this topic.

2. Discussion of the Research Objectives

In the beginning of the 21st century, there were already authors alerting for the need for sustainable practices and standards in sustainable tourism to be promoted through accreditation bodies (Font & Sallows, 2002). The results show that this alert was correct as there are already hundreds of destinations adopting these standards and sharing their good practices.

2.1. Reasons for Applying

In the literature review it was mentioned that a third-party certification is the most credible from all three types and the results confirm this observation. The results have shown that the fact that a program provides a third-party certification is actually one of the main reasons that makes a destination decide to join as it gives credibility to the whole process. Destinations like Torres Vedras, Poljanska Dolina and Tibau do Sul have highlighted this factor and the importance it had on their choice.

2.2. Positive/Negative Consequences

The results of this investigation also confirm what some of the literature has presented in recent years, namely on the positive and negative consequences that can arise from these programs. Dodds & Holmes (2020) have mentioned that there was little evidence that destinations fighting for the sustainable tourism segment gain any competitive advantage from having an environmental and this statement was confirmed by the Dutch destination Goeree-Overflakkee that is even considering their participation based on this lack of results. However, all the other destinations disagree with this position and have stated that having the possibility of differentiating themselves from others by having a certificate was an advantage in current days. Looking at the benefits, Grapentin & Ayikoru (2019) said that these schemes could be used for marketing on both the internal and external markets and that was exactly what happened in Spain with Terres de L'Ebre. Due to the Covid-19 restrictions, having the Green Destinations seal was a big instrument to attract the internal market to visit their territory, having had great success. Still on the benefits, some destinations have mentioned the ability to share experiences and knowledge as well as the possibility to track their progress over time in order to improve as a major advantage of these programs and also as a reason for them to join, which falls in accordance to was described by Grapentin & Ayikoru (2019) in their research, stating that data could be used

for benchmarking purposed, helping destinations to track their progress throughout time and to compare themselves with territories with similar characteristics.

The same authors have mentioned that for destinations to have success, they have to rely on local partners and that it could be difficult to gather them all on the same table, especially in larger areas (Grapentin & Ayikoru, 2019). The interviewed destination managers have also highlighted the importance of working closely with their stakeholders and noted that participating in a certification program has actually helped them on that subject and that they are all seeing good results from that interaction.

2.3. Expectations for the Future

Shifting to the future of the industry, the existent literature is clear on the fact that sustainability needs to be the way forward and according to Mihalic (2016), this is already happening as sustainable tourism is being included in tourism policies and strategies worldwide. The results of this research paper help to confirm this positioning and there was a general consensus from destination managers on the need of remaining on the sustainability path, independently of their continuity on a certification program or not. In his intervention, Albert Folch admitted that when a destination is certified, "(…) all public leaders and politicians start to think more about sustainable development when creating policies or designing strategic plans." (Folch, 2021).

2.4. Summary

To sum up, this investigation has confirmed some of information on the existing literature for this topic and added some relevant new results to the discussion table. It is clear that a growing number of destinations are opting for

certification programs, most of them with great success and that they remain motivated to keep improving and to keep sustainability on the top of their priorities while absorbing the most knowledge they can from the certification program process. There is certainly room for improvement from all sides and a big potential of growth as awareness for this topic is also growing. The expectation is for certification programs to establish themselves as a crucial tool to help destination reach their goals.

3. Research Conclusions

This research paper studied the destination manager's perspective on sustainable tourism certification and it aims to understand the reason(s) why different types of destinations have decided to join a destination certification program, to analyse the consequences that participating in such program brought to those same destinations as well as to understand their future perception on the industry and expectations for their participation in the certification program.

This will also pave the way for future studies related to this topic that will add to this one, exploring different perspectives, different destinations managers or other relevant topics, enabling for a better development of this kind of programs and also for better understanding of what they can represent for the future of tourism.

It is clear that sustainability is a growing trend and that a growing number of destinations are adapting their strategies and policies in order to match current challenges.

Certification programs for destinations are also becoming more popular and destinations are enrolling for several different reasons. Whereas some are looking

to start their sustainability path and look at certification bodies as the perfect ally to pave their way, others already had sustainability as a common practice and see certification programs as a way to be recognized and to promote themselves.

Another clear conclusion from this investigation is that the vast majority of the consequences related to the participation in this kind of programs is positive. Destinations feel that third-party certifications are more trustworthy and capable of providing a more realistic evaluation of their current status and that all work they have to put in to complete the required criteria is helping them to better manage their territories and to achieve the desired results. Most destinations are quite happy with the results they are achieving and are showing willingness to keep participating and improving their results.

The results presented on this research paper enable to conclude that certification programs for destinations as a whole are indeed starting to conquer their space in the industry and becoming a very useful tool for destinations in their sustainability path. The trend is for current destinations to maintain and improve their sustainable status and for a growing number of destinations to gain awareness on sustainability and to start searching for certification programs to be able to help them pave their way and become more competitive in what is predicted to be new reality in the tourism industry.

4. Limitations of the Research

It is important to highlight that the results of this research have some limitations attached.

There are hundreds of destinations participating in different certification programs across the globe and the results of this investigation are based on the perspective of only six destinations managers, whose destinations are all

participating in the same certification program. These results enable for an understanding of certification programs but are not statistically representative. Destinations managers from other destinations either on the same certification program or on a different one might have completely different experiences and the results would have been necessarily dissimilar.

This study focused only on four variables of the participation on a certification program (reasons for applying, initial expectations, consequences and future expectations) and do not reflect the full perspective of destination managers on these programs.

5. Recommendations for Future Research

The limitations of this study, stated on the previous section, also provide room for some recommendations for future research.

Future investigations could focus on having information on more destinations as well as destinations participating on different certification programs, to expand and solidify the current understanding of such programs.

Furthermore, another potential investigation path could be to take a more quantitative analysis and analyse the evolution in the number of destinations participating in certification programs throughout the years.

Another recommendation would be for future investigations to study other aspects of certification programs in other to better understand them, namely on the actual work destinations have to put in, in order to reach their desired award level or the changes suffered by the territory during that period. Field visits and in-person interviews could help strengthen this type of research.

Finally, it would also be interesting to understand the perspective of other stakeholders of the sustainable tourism industry for an even broader and more

complete cognizance of certification programs. This list of stakeholders include, for example, local residents, tourists, accommodation sites' mangers and tour operators.

Bibliography

Bauchwitz, E. (2021, December 9). (D. Neves, Interviewer)

Bogataj, K. (2021, December 14). (D. Neves, Interviewer)

Bunghez, C. L. (2015). The importance of tourism to a destination's economy. *Proceedings of the 26th International Business Information Management Association Conference - Innovation Management and Sustainable Economic Competitive Advantage: From Regional Development to Global Growth, IBIMA 2015, 2016*, 240–247. https://doi.org/10.5171/2016.143495

Carvalho, F. (2021). the Status of Resource Management and Certification in Tourism Sustainability Implementation Literature. *Journal of Spatial and Organizational Dynamics*, *9*(2), 91–114.

Casado-Aranda, L. A., Sánchez-Fernández, J., & Bastidas-Manzano, A. B. (2021). Tourism research after the COVID-19 outbreak: Insights for more sustainable, local and smart cities. *Sustainable Cities and Society*, *73*(April). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scs.2021.103126

Cheval, S., Adamescu, C. M., Georgiadis, T., Herrnegger, M., Piticar, A., & Legates, D. R. (2020). Observed and potential impacts of the covid-19 pandemic on the environment. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *17*(11), 1–25. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17114140

Dodds, R., & Holmes, M. R. (2020). Is blue flag certification a means of destination competitiveness? A Canadian context. *Ocean and Coastal Management*, *192*(August 2019), 105192. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ocecoaman.2020.105192

Eichler, J. (2021, December 10). (D. Neves, Interviewer)

Elkington, J. (1998). Partnerships from cannibals with forks: The triple bottom line of 21st-century business. *Environmental Quality Management*, *8*(1), 37–51. https://doi.org/10.1002/tqem.3310080106

Folch, A. (2021, December 10). (D. Neves, Interviewer)

Font, X., & Sallows, M. (2002). Setting global sustainability standards: The sustainable tourism stewardship council. *Tourism Recreation Research*, *27*(1), 21–31. https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2002.11081353

Galvani, A., Lew, A. A., & Perez, M. S. (2020). COVID-19 is expanding global consciousness and the sustainability of travel and tourism. *Tourism Geographies*, *22*(3), 567–576. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2020.1760924

Genot, E. J., & Saunders, Mark; Lewis, Philip; Thornhill, A. (2018). Research Methods for Business Students. In *Synthese* (Vol. 195, Issue 5). https://www.amazon.com/Research-Methods-for-Business-Students/dp/1292208783/ref=sr_1_2?dchild=1&qid=1614706531&refinements=p_27%3AAdrian+Thornhill+%2F+Philip+Lewis+%2F+Mark+N.+K.+Saunders&s=books&sr=1-2&text=Adrian+Thornhill+%2F+Philip+Lewis+%2F+Mark+N.+K

Gkoumas, A. (2019). Evaluating a standard for sustainable tourism through the lenses of local industry. *Heliyon*, *5*(11), e02707. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2019.e02707

Grapentin, S., & Ayikoru, M. (2019). Destination assessment and certification: Challenges and opportunities. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, *11*(13), 1–24. https://doi.org/10.3390/su11133691

GSTC. (n.d.). *History of GSTC*. https://www.gstcouncil.org/about/gstc-history/

Ioannides, D., & Gyimóthy, S. (2020). The COVID-19 crisis as an opportunity for escaping the unsustainable global tourism path. *Tourism Geographies*, *22*(3), 624–632. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2020.1763445

IPDT. (2021). *Sustentabilidade: Importância do Turismo Sustentável para os Destinos*. https://www.ipdt.pt/sustentabilidade-turismo-destinos/

Liu, Z. (2003). Sustainable tourism development: A critique. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, *11*(6), 459–475. https://doi.org/10.1080/09669580308667216

Mihalic, T. (2016). Sustainable-responsible tourism discourse - Towards "responsustable" tourism. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, *111*, 461–470. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2014.12.062

Murphy, P., Pritchard, M. P., & Smith, B. (2000). The destination product and its impact on traveller perceptions. *Tourism Management*, *21*(1), 43–52. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177(99)00080-1

Mutiara Lemy, D., & Pramezwary, A. (2017). *Could Certification on Sustainable Tourism Result in Destination Loyalty*. *28*(Ictgtd 2016), 273–280. https://doi.org/10.2991/ictgtd-16.2017.54

Rodrigues, J. (2021, December 9). (D. Neves, Interviewer)

Romagosa, F. (2020). The COVID-19 crisis: Opportunities for sustainable and proximity tourism. *Tourism Geographies*, *22*(3), 690–694. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2020.1763447

Sasidharan, V., Sirakaya, E., & Kerstetter, D. (2002). Developing countries and tourism ecolabels. *Tourism Management*, *23*(2), 161–174. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177(01)00047-4

Streimikiene, D., Svagzdiene, B., Jasinskas, E., & Simanavicius, A. (2021). Sustainable tourism development and competitiveness: The systematic literature review. *Sustainable Development*, *29*(1), 259–271. https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.2133

Sultana, R. (2021, December 6). (D. Neves, Interviewer)

UNWTO. (2017). *2017 International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development*. https://www.unwto.org/tourism4development2017

UNWTO. (2021). *Porto Declaration Tourism and the Future of Cities*.

Visser, W., & Brundtland, G. H. (2013). Our Common Future ('The Brundtland Report'): World Commission on Environment and Development. *The Top 50 Sustainability Books*, 52–55. https://doi.org/10.9774/gleaf.978-1-907643-44-6_12

Williams, C. C. (2021). Impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on Europe's tourism industry: Addressing tourism enterprises and workers in the undeclared economy. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, *23*(1), 79–88. https://doi.org/10.1002/jtr.2395

Zolfani, S. H., Sedaghat, M., Maknoon, R., & Zavadskas, E. K. (2015). Sustainable tourism: A comprehensive literature review on frameworks and applications. *Economic Research-Ekonomska Istrazivanja* , *28*(1), 1–30. https://doi.org/10.1080/1331677X.2014.995895