

# ANALYSIS OF FACTORS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN LATVIA

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## ABSTRACT

The concept of sustainable tourism, which balances economic, social, and environmental objectives, is extensively discussed in academic literature but is less commonly implemented in practice. Sustainable tourism development involves economic and social changes that reduce the need for environmental protection. This research examines sustainability through the lens of various tourism impacts on destinations, positing that positive impacts enhance sustainable tourism, while negative impacts impede it. Specifically in Latvia, sustainable tourism, emphasizing environmental conservation, social responsibility, and economic viability, is a critical issue. Understanding its impacts on society, the environment, and the economy is essential. This paper identifies twelve categories of factors affecting sustainable tourism through expert analysis, with key factors including society, environment, tourism products and services, and technical facilities. The goal is to provide insights into how Latvia can utilize these factors to effectively promote sustainable tourism.

**Keywords:** Tourism, sustainability, development, factor, evaluation, environmental conservation, social responsibility, economic viability, community empowerment, stakeholder collaboration.

## ლატვიაში მდგრადი ტურიზმის განხორციელების ფაქტორების ანალიზი

### აბსტრაქტი

ტურიზმის მდგრადობის კონცეფცია, რომელიც აბალანსებს ეკონომიკურ, სოციალურ და გარემოსდაცვით მიზნებს, ფართოდ არის განხილული აკადემიურ ლიტერატურაში, მაგრამ ნაკლებად გამოიყენება პრაქტიკაში. ტურიზმის მდგრადი განვითარება მოიცავს ეკონომიკურ და სოციალურ ცვლილებებს, რომლებიც ამცირებს გარემოს დაცვის საჭიროებას. ეს კვლევა განიხილავს მდგრადობას ტურისტული ინდუსტრიის სხვადასხვა მიმართულებებზე და ამტკიცებს, რომ დადებითი ზემოქმედება აძლიერებს მდგრად ტურიზმს, ხოლო ნეგატიური ზემოქმედება ხელს უშლის მას. კონკრეტულად ლატვიაში მდგრადი ტურიზმი, რომელიც ხაზს უსვამს გარემოს დაცვას, სოციალურ პასუხისმგებლობას და ეკონომიკურ სიცოცხლისუნარიანობას, კრიტიკული საკითხია. მისი გავლენის განსაზღვრა საზოგადოებაზე, გარემოსა და ეკონომიკაზე აუცილებელია.

ეს ნაშრომი, ექსპერტული ანალიზის საფუძველზე, გამოყოფს მდგრად ტურიზმზე მოქმედი ფაქტორების თორმეტ კატეგორიას, მათ შორის, ძირითადია საზოგადოება, გარემო, ტურისტული პროდუქტები, სერვისები და ტექნიკური საშუალებები.

ნაშრომის მიზანია წარმოადგინოს ინფორმაცია იმის შესახებ, თუ როგორ შეუძლია ლატვიაში გამოიყენოს ეს ფაქტორები მდგრადი ტურიზმის ეფექტური პოპულარიზაციისთვის.

**საკვანძო სიტყვები:** ტურიზმი, მდგრადობა, განვითარება, ფაქტორი, შეფასება, გარემოს დაცვა, სოციალური პასუხისმგებლობა, ეკონომიკური სიცოცხლისუნარიანობა, საზოგადოების გაძლიერება, დაინტერესებული მხარეების თანამშრომლობა.

## INTRODUCTION

Sustainable tourism has emerged as a pivotal issue of global significance, capturing the attention of governments, businesses, and tourists alike due to its multifaceted impacts on social, environmental, and economic spheres. As the tourism sector continues to grow, the necessity to balance economic benefits with the preservation of cultural and natural resources becomes increasingly critical. This balance is vital not only for the long-term viability of tourism destinations but also for the well-being of local communities and the global environment. In this context, sustainable tourism aims to mitigate negative impacts while enhancing the positive contributions of tourism to various aspects of life.

The concept of sustainable tourism was officially recognized in the Charter for Sustainable Tourism established in 1995, which regulates the diverse impacts of tourism and strives to maximize its contributions to ecological, economic, and social development. This charter emphasizes the need for a flexible management approach and efficient resource utilization, reflecting the fluid nature of sustainable development (WCED, 1987; World Bank, 1999; Liu, 2003; Rukižienė, 2014). As such, sustainable tourism requires the integration of environmental conservation, social responsibility, and economic viability into the planning and operational processes of the tourism industry.

A comprehensive analysis of the factors influencing sustainable tourism reveals a broad spectrum of elements, including societal, environmental, and economic dimensions. This study identifies twelve categories of factors that play a significant role in sustainable tourism development in Latvia. These categories encompass the economy, society, environment, tourism products and services, infrastructure, technical facilities, governmental management, and criteria for evaluating sustainable tourism development. Notably, technology emerges as a dominant factor, highlighting the importance of modern technological solutions in enhancing sustainability within the tourism sector.

Economic factors are crucial for sustainable tourism development. Tourism revenue significantly contributes to Latvia's GDP, providing employment opportunities and fostering economic growth. However, the tourism industry faces challenges such as market fluctuations, the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, and geopolitical tensions, notably the armed conflict initiated by Russia in Ukraine. These challenges underscore the need for resilient economic planning and policies to ensure the stability and growth of tourism while safeguarding local populations and resources.

Social factors, particularly local community involvement and cultural heritage preservation, are essential for sustainable tourism. The active participation of local communities in tourism planning and development enhances social equity, empowers communities, and fosters social resilience. Moreover, preserving Latvia's rich cultural heritage and traditions is vital for maintaining the country's unique tourist attractions. Sustainable tourism practices help mitigate the adverse effects of overtourism, ensuring that cultural

sites remain valuable and attractive for future generations.

Environmental factors focus on ecological sustainability and resource management. Latvia's abundant natural resources, including forests, lakes, and coastal regions, are key attractions for tourists. Therefore, environmental protection and conservation measures, such as eco-tourism and certification of environmentally friendly practices, are necessary to preserve these resources. Sustainable resource management ensures that tourism operations minimize environmental degradation, maintain biodiversity, and enhance the long-term quality of the environment.

Political and managerial factors also play a significant role in sustainable tourism. Governmental support and effective policies are crucial for promoting sustainable tourism activities. Stakeholder collaboration, involving tourist organizations, local authorities, and the local population, enhances the efficiency of sustainable tourism measures. The integration of sustainability criteria into tourism development plans and the implementation of regulatory frameworks further support the sustainable growth of the tourism sector.

The diversity and quality of tourism products and services are critical for attracting various segments of tourists and reducing congestion at significant landmarks. Diversification of tourism offerings promotes equitable economic benefits across different regions and seasons, mitigating the pressure on popular destinations. Additionally, modernizing and maintaining infrastructure and technical facilities is essential for improving visitor experiences and minimizing the negative impacts on physical assets in the tourism industry.

## ANALYSIS OF FACTORS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN LATVIA

Over the past two decades, sustainable tourism development has been a focal point of extensive discussion and analysis, both in academic circles and practical applications. This heightened interest stems from the significant impacts of tourism and the need for effective management strategies. The role of tourism impacts has become increasingly critical in tourism policy and planning, underscoring the importance of sustainable tourism development. This approach seeks to balance the economic, social, and environmental aspects of tourism, ensuring public needs are met while respecting resource limitations and the rights of present and future generations. Sustainable tourism development aims to facilitate economic and social progress that ultimately reduces the need for environmental protection.

Specifically, sustainable tourism development is characterized by:

1. Integration of Economic Development and Environmental Protection: This principle involves using tourist resources in a manner that benefits local populations and satisfies tourists without causing significant harm to the natural and socio-cultural environment.
2. Equitable Distribution of Wealth and Costs: This en-

tails ensuring that the economic benefits and the costs of preserving tourist resources are fairly distributed among regions, countries, and generations.

3. Linking Quantitative Growth with Environmental Quality: This approach aims to enhance both local populations' and tourists' interests by maintaining attractive and unpolluted environments.

Sustainable tourism aims to minimize its impact on the environment and local culture while generating future employment opportunities for local people. The goal is to ensure that development provides a positive experience for local residents, tourism businesses, and tourists. However, the impacts of tourism—whether intentional or inadvertent—affect natural, economic, social, and cultural environments. Mathieson and Wall (1982) categorized these impacts into social, economic, and physical (environmental) groups. Various institutions and organizations have sought to develop indicators for evaluating tourism impacts. The Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria, developed in 2007-2008 by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council, are widely recognized and used, comprising 34 indicators divided into four groups:

- Effective Sustainable Management: 7 indicators;
- Social and Economic Benefits and Negative Impact Reduction: 8 indicators;
- Cultural Heritage Benefits and Negative Impact Reduction: 4 indicators;
- Natural Environment Benefits and Negative Impact Reduction: 15 indicators.

Despite efforts to implement these criteria, a significant methodological challenge persists: the indicators within each group are not directly comparable due to differing measurement units. For example, comparing tourism income to the number of destroyed plants or crime rates in a destination is complex. Determining the relative importance of these indicators is difficult, and there is no universal measure for all types of tourism impacts.

An effective approach to studying sustainability involves simultaneously researching the three interrelated aspects of tourism development: tourism impacts, influencing factors, and sustainability. This study focuses on these issues using examples from various Latvian destinations. With the growing number of tourist visits to Latvia, challenges related to tourism impacts and sustainability are becoming more evident. Addressing these challenges requires systematic and detailed research, which has not been extensively covered in Latvian academic literature. This paper seeks to identify general factors influencing tourism impacts in Latvia and analyze their importance for overall sustainable tourism development.

Sustainable tourism has now become one of the key issues of global importance for governments, businesses and tourists due to its profound impacts that can be observed in the social, environmental and economic spheres. The purpose of these aspects is to identify the main driving forces for sustainable tourism development in Latvia. This study

identified twelve categories of factors influencing sustainable tourism, including society, environment, tourism products and services, with technology being the most dominant.

Sustainable tourism, officially established in the Charter for Sustainable Tourism in 1995 regulates all aspects connected with tourists' impact, as well as striving to bring the maximal value of tourists' contribution for the ecological, economical, and social life of every country. The expertise, as the concept of sustainable development is a fluid one, requires flexible management approach and field utilization of resources (WCED, 1987; World Bank, 1999; Liu, 2003; Rukuizienė, 2014).

Consequently, there is a vast volume of literature addressing sustainable tourism and incorporating a variety of viewpoints. On the same note, albeit for different frameworks, Mamhoori (2015) affirms the important call for rational sectoral planning while Vodenska (2020) affirms how social factors portend the highest positive influence. Other research focuses on community engagement (Purnomo et al., 2019) at the centre, stakeholder understanding (Kattiyapong et al., 2018) about the strategy, and the crucial part being played by local government in the planning and marketing processes (Fabić & Jurdana, 2018).

Sustainability is critical for the environment, with sustainable tourism seeking to minimize environmental impacts such as waste generation and emissions and seek ways to sustainably preserve habitats (Obersteiner et al., 2021; Chung et al., 2018; Sun et al., 2023). Eco-tourism is an excellent example of the same because it focuses on the responsible utilization of tourism in specific areas of natural importance (Ravikumar et al., 2022). The economic aspect covers building the endogenous business environment to invest in local businesspeople and proper management of foreign investments for sustainable job creation and, therefore, economic development (Go & Kang, 2022).

As seen from the discussions above, UNWTO and many researchers argue that the aim of sustainable tourism should accommodate the interests of the tourism industry, environmental organizations, and communities, and local residents. Stakeholder cooperation and government initiatives reported to be necessary for driving sustained tourism involvement and the longevity of touristic areas (Angelevska-Najdeska & Rakicevik, 2012) (See table 1).

It is crucial to emphasize that when examining the factors influencing the development of sustainable tourism businesses in Latvia, it is essential to consider specific national conditions that impact the economic, social, environmental, and political performance of companies. Below is an evaluation of the key factors and their effects.

Economic Factors. Tourism Revenue and Economic Contribution: Latvian economy heavily depends on this sector, as the share of Tourism industry within the total GDP is quite high. Given that the focus is on the economic aspect of tourism, the idea is rather simple – to make sure that this source of income remains stable and gradually increases while being careful not to harm local populations. Tourism

Table 1.

**Factors affecting sustainable tourism development**

Factor	Influences
<b>Economy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Capital flows and investment</li> <li>- Economic growth and tourism receipts</li> <li>- Forex income generated by tourism</li> <li>- Economic benefits to local communities - Long-term economic planning and policies</li> </ul>
<b>Society</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quality of life for host communities</li> <li>- Social equity and justice</li> <li>- Social resilience and community empowerment</li> <li>- Impact of overtourism on local residents</li> <li>- Community participation in tourism planning and development</li> </ul>
<b>Environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ecological sustainability and resource management</li> <li>- Environmental degradation and pollution</li> <li>- Protection of natural resources and biodiversity</li> <li>- Environmental conservation awareness and support</li> <li>- Long-term impact on environmental quality</li> </ul>
<b>Humanistic Tourism Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cultural integrity and heritage preservation</li> <li>- Social-cultural sustainability</li> <li>- Impact on cultural traditions and elements</li> <li>- Engagement of local communities in cultural tourism</li> </ul>
<b>Natural Tourism Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sustainable use and conservation of natural attractions</li> <li>- Balance between tourism development and natural resource preservation</li> <li>- Impact of tourism on natural landscapes and ecosystems</li> </ul>
<b>Tourism Human Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quality of tourism human resources</li> <li>- Training and expertise of tour operators and managers</li> <li>- Capacity building and skill development in tourism sector</li> </ul>
<b>Tourism Products and Services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quality and diversity of tourism offerings</li> <li>- Innovation in tourism products and services</li> <li>- Sustainable tourism product development</li> <li>- Balance between visitor satisfaction and resource sustainability</li> </ul>
<b>Tourism Quality</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Overall visitor experience</li> <li>- Quality of tourism services and infrastructure</li> <li>- Measures to address overtourism and improve visitor satisfaction</li> <li>- Sustainable tourism standards and indicators</li> </ul>
<b>Infrastructure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Development and maintenance of tourism infrastructure</li> <li>- Access to and quality of infrastructure</li> <li>- Impact of infrastructure on tourism growth and sustainability</li> </ul>
<b>Technical Facilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Availability and quality of technical facilities</li> <li>- Use of technology in tourism management</li> <li>- Efficiency of technical support systems</li> </ul>



<p><b>Governmental Management</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- State management capacity and policies</li> <li>- Government support and investment in sustainable tourism</li> <li>- Regulatory frameworks and enforcement</li> <li>- Role of local authorities in tourism planning and sustainability</li> </ul>
<p><b>Criteria to Evaluate Sustainable Tourism Development</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use of sustainability indicators and metrics</li> <li>- Monitoring and evaluation of sustainable tourism practices</li> <li>- Integration of sustainability criteria in tourism development plans</li> <li>- Long-term vision and strategic planning for sustainable tourism</li> </ul>

Source: prepared by the authors.

contributes to the overall income of a country and provides employment opportunity to the citizens, therefore, it is advisable for a country to depend on the tourism sector though there is a weakness in depending solely on this sector due to fluctuation of the global tourism market.

Currently, the Latvian tourism industry is facing significant challenges that threaten the industry's viability, export opportunities and the preservation of jobs. The industry has been significantly weakened after the Covid-19 pandemic, currently the armed conflict started by Russia in Ukraine has a significant negative impact. In 2020 and 2021, the tourism sector had a downward trend, according to the data of the Central Statistics Office, in 2021, tourism accounted for only 5% of the total export of services (compared to 16.3% in 2019). This is also reflected in the specific indicators of the industry - in 2021, 478 thousand multi-day travelers visited Latvia, which is approximately 25% less than in 2020 and 75.3% less than in 2019 (EC, 2022).

Also, the expenses of foreign multi-day travelers fell by 73%, which was 145 million euros in 2021, and 538 million euros in 2019. The average daily expenses of one multi-day foreign traveler in Latvia decreased from 65 euros in 2019 to 51 euros in 2021. In addition to the complications caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and the geopolitical situation, other challenges have also been identified in the tourism industry, such as the fragmentation of tourism offer, positioning and marketing activities and insufficient tourism statistical data (EC, 2022).

The most important economic feature of activities related to the tourism sector is that they contribute to three high-priority goals of developing countries: the generation of income, employment, and foreign-exchange earnings.

**Investment in Infrastructure:** Tourism development, specifically when targeting the sustainable kind, depends heavily on its infrastructure, from the means of transport, to hotels, as well as tourist attractions. It gives the satisfaction to the overall visitor which in turn benefits the local inhabitants economy. Lack of infrastructure impacts the package tourism in the same way as poor multiplier impact and can ultimately scare the tourists away from an area and hence hurt the sector.

**Social Factors. Local Community Involvement and Benefits:** That is why it is critical to make sure that the local

population is an interested and involved party in the development of tourism as a revenue source. This is because, of all the constraints on tourism development, support from the community is one of the most critical factors that determine the success of a particular tourism venture. And when people identify such obvious advantages for themselves, they will promote and participate in tourism, helping to maintain cultural values and fostering equality of society members.

**Cultural Heritage Preservation.** Latvia is home to a rich and diverse culture and there are several traditions that play an important role in boosting tourism in the country. These are some of the important natural assets that should be protected to allow sustainable tourism to be developed. The criticisms lodged at this perceived phenomenon reflect on the effects of over-tourism as being disastrous to culturally significant places and values. This is how sustainable practices are used to prolong such attractions so they remain popular attractions forever for tourism purposes.

**Environmental Factors. Environmental Protection and Conservation:** It is crucial to learn the production knowledge and critical factors to improve service product in tourism including attracting more tourists to visit Latvia forest, lakes and coastal regions. This is particularly notable given that Latvia has a significant natural resources endowment They identify key features that make a location attractive to tourists, with Latvia being no exception. Measures like the practice of eco-tourism and certification of environment friendly practices help in preserving these resources to retain the tourist appeal and viability of these resources for use.

**Sustainable Resource Management** due to the fact that tourism sustain operations and development in some ways consumes water and energy, its usage should be appropriate and efficient. People often exploit the natural resources of their environment to the maximum, degrading it in the process; the development of this sector is thus hampered through lack of environmental quality.

**Political and Managerial Factors. Governmental Support and Policies:** Public acceptance and support is necessary because government plays a vital role to support sustainable tourism activities.

**Justification:** An important aspect of sustainable tourism is implemented through a government mandate that involves regulation, funding and encouragement of sustain-

able practices. Premier management is key in enhancing the development of tourism in a way that complements national sustainable polys.

**Stakeholder Collaboration.** One important point is the need to develop cooperation with other tourist organizations and local authorities as well as local population to support sustainable tourism. Therefore, the functions of the various stakeholders are more interconnected and the outcome of their individual actions is a higher level of efficiency in developing and implementing sustainable tourism measures.

**Tourism Products and Services. Diversity and Quality of Offerings:** Providing a wide range of and superior tourism products and services could reach out for various segments of tourists and thereby offload congestion on significant landmarks. On this basis, diversification promote receivable pattern of the economic benefits so that the pressure upon some regions and several seasons could be lessened on account of the deterioration of the results.

**Infrastructure and Technical Facilities. Modernization and Maintenance:** There is a need for constant improvement, as well as updating and constant technical upgrading of the tourism sector infrastructures and technological amenities. Go & Kang ( 2022 ) noted that adequately developed facilities improve the experiences of the visitors and help in the balancing of the negative impacts by minimizing the pressure placed on the physical assets in the tourism industry.

**Overall Assessment.** Sustainable tourism development model is depended on the ability of Latvian authorities to implement the goals of economic development without neglecting social justice, cultural, and environmental significance. There is therefore need to want Dorf and Mason policy triangle and support from the local community to achieve this balance. Sustainable tourism practices should be incorporated into various elements associated with the tourism process including physical construction processes that should be environmentally sensitive, and day to day processes that should not have a negative impact of the society and the physical environment.

Through these factors, Latvia shall be better placed to develop a sustainable tourism industry that boosts the economy, enhances the protection of culture as well as enhance cultural and natural resources in the area, benefiting the locals as well as befitting the global community for future growth.

## CONCLUSION

Examining and predicting tourism impacts is crucial for shaping tourism policies, promoting sustainable tourism development, and enhancing regional economies.

To achieve sustainable tourism in Latvia, it is necessary to minimize negative environmental impacts. Successful examples worldwide are limited, and conditions vary significantly in each case. Possible strategies for achieving tourism sustainability in Latvia include:

1. Slowing down tourism development by focusing on loyal tourists rather than attracting more visitors;

2. Keeping the local population satisfied with tourism development by considering their opinions, employing them in the tourism industry, and involving them in tourism management and decision-making processes;

3. Extending the high tourist season by introducing new tourism products, organizing various events, and attracting new tourism segments;

4. Diversifying tourism products to reduce the physical and psychological pressure on the local economy, land, and population;

5. Implementing long-term tourism planning focused on future sustainability.

Future research should include more empirical studies to further explore these findings and strategies.

In conclusion, sustainable tourism development in Latvia hinges on a holistic approach that encompasses environmental conservation, social responsibility, economic viability, and effective governance. By addressing the key factors influencing sustainable tourism, Latvia can foster a tourism industry that not only boosts the economy but also protects cultural and natural resources, benefiting both local communities and the global community. This study provides valuable insights for policymakers, stakeholders, and the academic community in their efforts to promote sustainable development in the tourism sector, ensuring the longevity and resilience of Latvia's tourism industry.

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