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RESPONSIBLE AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM: A COMPARISON OF COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Responsible tourism (RT) has emerged as a significant means of implementing a pro-community, pro-poor, and sustainable program. As the term is relatively new, it is attracting considerable attention worldwide. However, it is often confused with sustainable tourism (ST) due to sharing similar underlying principles. This article thus endeavors to analyze the theoretical basis of both concepts by examining community perceptions in tourist destinations. A structured survey questionnaire was first administered among 387 residents from four tourist destinations in the Indian state of Kerala. Following the data analysis, it was observed that responsible tourism is significantly linked to sustainable tourism. Furthermore, the former fulfills the objectives of the latter in such a way that rather being different from sustainable tourism, it is a limited version of it. Whereas sustainable tourism is more a theoretical concept, responsible tourism is an action component with more practical implications. Consequently, the findings provide insights for academicians and policymakers into defining and implementing both concepts at various levels.

Contribution/Originality: This study offers two contributions to existing discussions on responsible and sustainable tourism: (1) it is unique in its attempt to validate both concepts through community perceptions; (2) it is one of only a few studies to investigate the relationship between the two concepts, which share similar attributes.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is connected to sustainability concepts such as pro-poor tourism (Michot, 2010), community tourism (Woodley, 1992; Choi and Sirakaya, 2006; Saji and Narayanasamy, 2010; Guzmán *et al.*, 2011), responsible tourism (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Kerala Declaration, 2008; Mathew and Koshy, 2014; Mathew and Sreejesh, 2017), eco-tourism (Herath, 2002; Stem *et al.*, 2003; Das and Syiemlieh, 2009), and sustainable tourism (Bramwell and Lane, 1993; Godfrey, 1998). Among these concepts, responsible tourism has recently emergence and gained widespread attention among practitioners (Mihalic, 2014). It is defined as a sustainable development initiative aimed at improving the lives of the local community through increased economic, social, and cultural benefits and reduced environmental issues—thereby, offering an enhanced holiday experience for visitors (DEAT, 1996). Responsible and sustainable tourism have been incorporated into a single principle called the triple bottom line (TBL) approach (Elkington, 2018), having both evolved from the widely recognized theme *sustainable development*. However, initiatives have proliferated with these labels and added various findings to the corresponding literature;

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unfortunately, attempts at unraveling such an imbroglio are rare. Instead of working to define the concepts, researchers and practitioners simply use the term as a matter of convenience in the continuing absence of relevant literature. The terms sustainable and responsible tourism are, therefore, often confused and debated among both academicians and practitioners, which further complicates the task of distinguishing different terms that are conceptually similar. Consequently, this study endeavored to understand how sustainable and responsible tourism are related, which was found to be significant from the responses of residents. The study also observed that both responsible and sustainable tourism are based on the same premise of *sustainable development*; however, whereas the former is an action component, the latter is theoretical.

This paper is structured as follows: first, the concepts are introduced, followed by a description of the methodology, data analysis, and results, and then concludes with a detailed discussion of the findings, practical and theoretical implications, and scope and direction for future research.

1.1. Context of the Study

Responsible Tourism (RT): This concept originated in the early 1990s (Smith, 1990; Cooper and Ozdil, 1992). The first official reference appeared in *A White Paper on The Development and Promotion of Tourism* (DEAT, 1996), which reported that responsible tourism had emerged from discussions as the most appropriate concept for the sustainable development of tourist destinations in South Africa, having been earlier defined as *"about enabling local communities to enjoy a better quality of life through increased socio-economic benefits and improved natural resource management"* (Spenceley *et al.*, 2002). The First International Conference on Responsible Tourism occurred in 2002, leading to the Cape Town Declaration that defined RT as "tourism that *'creates better places for people to live in, and better places to visit'*" (Cape Town, 2009). The *Responsible Tourism Manual for South Africa* later mentioned "providing better holiday experiences for guests and good business opportunities for tourism enterprises" (Spenceley *et al.*, 2002). The concept became more popular following the Kerala government adopting responsible tourism as its vision in 2007 and issuing the *Kerala Declaration on Responsible Tourism* in 2008, which defined RT as "tourism management strategy embracing planning, product development, management, and marketing to bring about positive economic, social, cultural, and environmental impacts. For tourism operators, it is about providing more rewarding holiday experiences for guests whilst enabling local communities to enjoy a better quality of life and conserving the natural environment" (Kerala Declaration, 2008). Responsible tourism clearly specifies responsibility in the areas of economy, society, culture, and environment (DEAT, 1996; Cape Town Decleration, 2002; Kerala Declaration, 2008; KRTC, 2012).

Sustainable Tourism (ST): This concept originated from sustainable development (Butler, 1991; Stabler, 1997; Mowforth and Munt, 1998), a term coined during the 1980s (WCED, 1987) that is considered to be the origin of sustainability movements worldwide. The Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future*, commissioned by the United Nations, stated that sustainable development "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987). The World Tourism Organisation (WTO) defined sustainable tourism as meeting "the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. It is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity, and life support systems" (WTO, 2001). ST thus gives extensive consideration to both current and future social, economic, and environmental impacts, as well as the needs of visitors, industry, and local communities; despite being defined as all types of tourism (Liu, 2003), ST is firmly based on the three premises of economic, social, and environmental sustainability (Purvis *et al.*, 2019). Cater (1993) suggested the key objectives for sustainable tourism to be improving the living standards of local communities, satisfying visitors' needs, and protecting the natural environment. Farrell (1999) further proposed the integration of local economy, society, and environment—the *sustainability trinity*. Similarly, Inskeep (1991) defined five main criteria for sustainable tourism

that addressed the economic, social, and environmental responsibilities on the one hand and the responsibility toward tourists, global justice, and equity on the other.

RT–ST Relationship: Responsible and sustainable tourism are significantly related (Smith, 1990; DEAT, 1996; Sharpley, 2000; Chettiparamb and Kokkranikal, 2012; Mathew and Sreejesh, 2017), primarily due to both concepts being based on the same triple bottom line (TBL) principle (Krippendorf, 1982; Elkington, 1994). Generally, RT and ST are concerned with the environmental, economic, and social aspects of tourist development in holiday destinations. According to several researchers (English Tourist Board, 1991; Bramwell and Lane, 1993; Hawkes and Williams, 1993; Briguglio *et al.*, 1996; Sharpley, 2000; WTO, 2001; Buckley, 2012; GSTC, 2015), sustainable tourism necessitates the conservation of regional sociocultural, environmental, and economic elements. Agenda 21, the action plan that emerged from the 1992 United Nations Conference on sustainable development in Rio, introduced the three dimensions of economic, social, and environmental sustainability (UN, 2002). Later, cultural sustainability in tourism was also introduced to ensure respect for and enhancement of the heritage, culture, and distinctive traditions of host communities (Craik, 1995; Wall, 1997; Butler, 1998; UNEP and WTO, 2005). Along with TBL, the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) also incorporated the cultural dimension in its criteria for the performance evaluation of tourist destinations and entities (GSTC, 2015).

Responsible tourism also embraces the triple bottom line approach (DEAT, 1996; Spenceley *et al.*, 2002; Kerala Declaration, 2008; Mathew and Sreejesh, 2017). The 1996 South African *White Paper* (1996) focused on monitoring and assessing the social, environmental, and economic impacts of tourism, and managing and encouraging the economic, natural environmental, social, and cultural elements (Spenceley *et al.*, 2002). Similarly, the Kerala Tourism Policy (2012) set out its criteria for responsible tourism (DEAT, 1996; Kerala Declaration, 2008; Kerala Responsible Tourism Criteria (KRTC), 2012) that emphasized the economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions. Meanwhile, the Cape Town Declaration detailed that "responsible tourism and sustainable tourism have the same goal, that of sustainable development. The pillars of responsible tourism are therefore the same as those of sustainable tourism" (Cape Town, 2009), such that they are inseparable. Finally, Frey and George (2010) concluded that "these approaches have one in common, objective of minimizing negative social, economic, and environmental impacts, whilst maximizing the positive effects of tourism development" (p.). In summary, RT and ST are, theoretically, a single concept comprising economic, social, cultural, and environmental variables.

The researchers discussed and reached a consensus on the dimensions of RT and ST: economic, social, cultural, and environmental sustainability for both concepts. They then empirically explored the indicators and theoretical basis of both concepts, so that hypotheses in terms of their dimensions and construct could be developed to understand their relationship. The scope of the study was limited to a community perspective when considering sustainable development goals.

2. METHODOLOGY

The main objective of this study is to understand the theoretical background and community perspective of responsible and sustainable tourism; hence, local residents' understanding of both concepts is incorporated. To measure their understanding of responsible tourism, a scale was adapted from Kerala government's criteria for responsible tourism (KRTC, 2012): 15 items covered the four first-order dimensions and were each assessed using a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from1—strongly disagree to 5—strongly agree. The first dimension, economic responsibility, refers to the potential of tourism to provide employment and income for local communities. The second dimension, social responsibility, concerns empowering the community and encouraging its participation in the management and development of the destination. The third dimension, cultural responsibility, reveals the role of tourism in conserving heritage and promoting traditional art and culture. The fourth dimension, environmental responsibility, reflects local residents' awareness that tourism should not negatively affect the natural environment.

To assess the same four first-order dimensions of sustainable tourism, a 25-item scale, again employing a five-point Likert-type scale, was adapted from the UNEP and WTO (2005) guidelines for sustainable tourism. Economic sustainability refers to residents' views toward tourism that provides their community with a regular livelihood. Social sustainability refers to tourism that offers equal employment opportunities and income distribution to the community. Cultural sustainability reflects residents' awareness of tourism's role in recognizing and preserving local traditions, art, and culture, and preventing its exploitation. Finally, environmental sustainability represents the efforts made to avoid tourist activities exerting a negative environmental impact

This study focused on four international tourist destinations in the Indian state of Kerala—Kovalam, Kochi, Kumarakom, and Thekkady—where the Kerala government had started its implementation of responsible and sustainable tourism initiatives from 2007. Residents aged 18 years and above from these destinations were selected as the sampling frame for this study, from which respondents were selected through systematic random sampling. The researchers first identified the sampling interval by dividing the total number of residents, derived from the voters' list, in each destination by the total number of respondents required. The researchers then selected residences between 1 and the sampling interval using a random number table. These residences were visited between January and May 2016 to collect the responses and demographic details of the inhabitants by means of a structured survey questionnaire. Even though 387 respondents completed the survey questionnaire, only 359 responses (93%) were usable, of which Table 1 shows 64% are female and 62% have lived in the particular destination for over thirty years. In terms of occupation, 14% of respondents run their own businesses, 7% work in the government sector, 33% are professionals employed by private companies, and the majority of 46% work as daily wage earners, tourist guides, farmers, and allied agricultural workers. Almost three-quarters of the respondents were aged over 30.

Table-1. Demographic Details.

Category	Range & %	Range & %	Range & %	Range & %
Age	18–30	30–50	Above 50	
	26%	53%	21%	
Gender	Female	Male		
	64 %	36 %		
Years of Residence	1–10	10–20	20–30	Above 30
	5%	11%	22%	62%
Occupation	Business	Govt. Sector	Private Companies	Other
	14%	7%	33%	46%

Source: Research Data.

2.1. Data Analysis

First, the analysis checked the date for missing values and outliers, and found none. Further checks revealed that for the standardized items all values fell within the range of ±1.96, while kurtosis and skewness were in the range of 3 and 0, respectively, showing that the responses are free from both skewness and kurtosis, and supporting the hypothesis of multivariate normality (Norusis, 1990; Chou and Bentler, 1995; Hair *et al.*, 1998).

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were also performed to ensure the validity of the concepts and measurement models. Table 2 shows that Cronbach's alpha, estimating the reliability of all four measurement models for responsible and sustainable tourism, are above 0.70 and at the acceptable level (Field, 2005). The variance explained for all four dimensions of both concepts exceed the minimum threshold of 0.50, indicating that variance due to measurement error is less than that captured by the factor. Moreover, the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy being over 0.5 and Bartlett's test of sphericity p < 0.001 also showed the results to be acceptable for principal component analysis.

Table-2. Factor Loadings, Variance Explained, and other Validity Measures.

Concepts and Dimensions	Loading	Eigenvalues	Variance Explained
Responsible Tourism			
Economic responsibility	.83*	2.64	65.78%
Employment opportunities	.75		
Purchasing of local products	.64		
Skill development	.53		
Development of local enterprises	.67		
KMO	.73		
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	.00		
Social responsibility	.87*	3.42	67.87%
Community engagement	.84		
Inclusive employment	.85		
Affirmative actions in developing enterprises	.79		
Capacity building for engagement	.81		
Community awareness	.78		
KMO	.84		
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	.00		
Cultural responsibility	.89*	1.82	62.05%
Promotion of local art and souvenirs	.94		
Promotion of culture, heritage, and traditions (CHT)	.93		
KMO	.50		
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	.00		
Environmental responsibility	.84*	1.73	67.14%
Community awareness	.91		
Efforts in nature conversation	.86		
Waste minimization	.92		
Waste management	.91		
KMO	.50		
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	.00		
SUSTAINABLE TOURISM		3.42	56.09%
Economic sustainability	.76*		
Income-earning opportunities	.76		
Improved living standards	.58		
Job creation	.52		
Visible economic benefits	.89		
Growth of microenterprises	.81		
Local economic links	.82		
KMO	.84		
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	.00		
Social sustainability	.86*	4.52	52.04%
Pro-community initiatives	.80		
Advancement of the underprivileged	.83		
Local community empowerment	.72		
Traffic and local congestion	.70		
Infrastructure development	.71		
Disabled-friendly environment	.73		
Curbing of antisocial issues	.69		
Recreational opportunities	.60		
KMO	.83		
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	.00		
Cultural sustainability	.85*	3.37	56.2%
Conservation of heritage	.76		
Efforts to preserve culture and traditions	.85		
Aesthetic maintenance	.83		
Community-friendly development	.72		
Preservation of rural settings	.82		
KMO	.73		
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	.00		
Environmental sustainability	.85*	3.71	61.23%
Conservation measures	.84		
Pollution control	.85		
Industrial response	.87		
Disturbance and noise	.72		
Protection of natural environment	<.50		
KMO	.81		
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	.00		

*reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha).

CFAs were performed for each dimension of both concepts to check their reliability and validity. The analysis examined the goodness of fit of the measurement model using the comparative fit index (CFI), incremental fit index (IFI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and standardized root mean residual (SRMR), along with

the usual Chi-square test. The measurement model for responsible tourism demonstrated that the data fit the model very well and the higher order factor consisted of four first-order dimensions (c2: 218.12, df: 227; CFI: 0.94; IFI: 0.93; SRMR: 0.041; RMSEA: 0.043). That for sustainable tourism also favored an adequate fit and that the second-order factor consisted of four first-order dimensions (c2: 228.21, df: 228; CFI: 0.93; IFI: 0.96; SRMR: 0.05; RMSEA: 0.042). This study examined the validity and reliability of the first-order dimensions following the example of Netemeyer *et al.* (2003) and found convergent validity and reliability.

The hypotheses were reviewed for an understanding of the relationship between the responsible and sustainable tourism concepts, including the associated dimensions of economic, social, cultural, and environmental. Following regression, it was found that respondents' perceptions of responsible tourism explained 84% of the variance (VE) with sustainable tourism. Examining the path coefficients, it was further discovered that their favorable perception of responsible tourism significantly influenced their perception of sustainable tourism (β= 0.92; p < 0.01). Similarly, the results also showed that their favorable perception toward the dimensions of responsible tourism significantly influenced their favorable evaluation of those of sustainable tourism: economic and economic sustainability (β = 0.85; p < 0.01; VE = 66%); social and social sustainability (β = 0.93; p < 0.01; VE = 79%); cultural and cultural sustainability (β = 0.77; p < 0.01; VE = 55%); environmental and environmental sustainability (β = 0.65; p < 0.01; VE = 40%). The findings of this study confirm a high correlation between the variables and the subsequent explanatory power of responsible tourism on sustainable tourism.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study attempted to analyze and understand the underlying association of responsible with sustainable tourism. It was observed that local residents in the selected destinations considered responsible tourism as an agent of sustainable tourism. It was also confirmed that local residents viewed responsible and sustainable tourism as each comprising four first-order dimensions: social, economic, cultural, and environmental. All four dimensions of responsible tourism were significantly associated with the community's perception of sustainable tourism. Likewise, the high explanatory power of responsible tourism over sustainable tourism and the former's detrimental role in catalyzing sustainable tourism can be seen across all dimensions. Respondents' perceptions of responsible tourism explained 84% of the variance (VE) with sustainable tourism, which is higher than normal, and significantly influences their perception of sustainable tourism (β = 0.92; p < 0.01). The effects observed between the individual dimensions of responsible and sustainable tourism were also significantly related.

As mentioned earlier, both sustainable and responsible tourism are based on the three premises, the triple bottom line, of sustainable development: economic, sociocultural, and environmental. As a major contributor, practicing responsible tourism exerts a significant influence on maintaining sustainable tourism at a destination; similarly, each premise plays a significant contributory role on one another. However, the practical and theoretical implications of both concepts need further investigation to offer clarity to academicians and practitioners.

Generally, responsible tourism is regarded as an agent of sustainable development, and thus the sustainability of a destination (Smith, 1990; Hunter, 1997; Chettiparamb and Kokkranikal, 2012; Mathew and Sreejesh, 2017). Its approach focuses on the quality of both the destination and the lives of its residents. In fact, Leslie (2012) specifies that responsible tourism is concerned with people, the environment, and values and culture, and reducing any negative impacts by improving working conditions, enabling community engagement, promoting cultural heritage, and protecting the environment. However, interpreting the concept of sustainable tourism remains elusive, with any attempt being criticized as inadequate and inaccurate (Cocklin, 1995; Hunter and Green, 1995; Swarbrooke, 1999; Liu, 2003; Miller and Twining-Ward, 2005; Lane, 2009; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2010). Moreover, there is no consensus on how to effectively measure sustainable tourism development, due in particular to the lack of clarity in its practical applications and difficulty in its implementation (Wheeller, 1993; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2010; Chettiparamb and Kokkranikal, 2012).

To date, an exhaustive list of sustainable tourism indicators in a variety of versions have been generated (Ecetat and Ecotrans, 2004; UNWTO, 2004; TSG, 2007; EC, 2014; GSTC, 2015), resulting in the concept being termed "intellectually appealing" rather than practically oriented (Wheeller, 1993). Indeed, the paradox of promoting various forms of tourism, such as eco-, green, alternative, responsible, soft, pro-poor, community, accessible, or low-impact tourism, as a sustainable development model reveals that sustainable tourism is more of a conceptual term. Liu (2003) argued that these sustainable forms of tourism should be considered strategies for achieving sustainability, which requires field-level innovations. In addition, sustainable tourism has a pivotal relationship with the concept of "carrying capacity" (Butler, 2011), as it takes into consideration tourist satisfaction and market (UNWTO, 2004; Mihalic, 2014).

Lane (2009) described sustainable tourism as a balanced triangular relationship between "people, host areas and their habitats, and the tourism industry," in which no stakeholders upset the equilibrium. It has also been frequently explained in terms of economic and environmental dimensions (Hunter, 1995; Coccossis, 1996; Swarbrooke, 1999; Baros and David, 2007), although according to Mihalic (2014), economic performance is the highest priority and environmental the lowest in sustainable tourism (Bohdanowicz *et al.*, 2005; Blackstock *et al.*, 2008; Bramwell *et al.*, 2008; Mihalic *et al.*, 2012). Academia thus considers sustainable tourism more a plan or concept.

Leslie (2012) and Mihalic (2014) both agree that responsible tourism is "a behavioral trait." Responsible differs fundamentally from sustainable tourism in responsibility and actions: stakeholders take responsibility and initiate actions to achieve sustainable tourism development (Chettiparamb and Kokkranikal, 2012). It is a community-driven and location-specific initiative that affects the quality of life of a destination's residents. Ownership by the local government and responsibility for actions by diverse stakeholders are the key drivers for practicing responsible tourism, which plays a crucial role in expediting corporate social responsibility (CSR) projects (Merwe and Wocke, 2006) where participatory planning and community development are essential. Kumarakom is one destination pioneering responsible tourism, as recognized by the UN's World Tourism Organisation, and was also commended in the 2014 Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) Gold Awards. Recent discourses have concluded that responsible tourism is a solid concept linked to sustainability initiatives and strongly focused on sustainable development (WTO General Assembly, 1999; TSG, 2007, 2012; Blackstock *et al.*, 2008; Diotallevi, 2013). Whereas sustainable tourism can be generalized to the global arena, responsible tourism is adaptable to local conditions (Meyer and Helfman, 1993). Furthermore, as a theoretical concept, sustainable tourism is related more to the awareness of sustainability, while as responsible tourism is more practical form, an action component, of sustainable tourism (Mihalic, 2014). In short, responsible tourism should be considered an agent of sustainable development at a destination.

Overall, the findings of this study largely support the hypothesis that responsible and sustainable tourism have the same objective: sustainable development. Responsible tourism is not new or different, but neither is it a synonym for sustainable tourism; responsible tourism conceives sustainable tourism being achieved through taking responsibility or being accountable for the actions. In addition, the findings revealed that the community's perception of responsible tourism is a key predictor to its view of sustainable tourism at that destination.

3.1. Scope and Directions for Future Research

The first limitation to this study was in defining the concept of and developing a measurement model for sustainable tourism: as the concept has evolved from sustainable development, it has multiple interpretations and assessment scales. Ideally, sustainability requires triangulation to determine the stakeholders, which could include market players and tourists as well as the destination's residents. Furthermore, the limited empirical evidence available to explain responsible tourism in terms of quantitative and scientifically measured values increases the challenge, even though this concept is universally regarded as a strategy for sustainable destination management and community development. However, in this study, only the basic concept of sustainable development and triple

bottom line approach were employed in selecting the variables and defining the constructs, while the sole concern was with the perceptions of local residents. The study could be extended, though, by incorporating the views of different stakeholders and including more variables by adopting a triangulation model. As destination-specific studies can produce more meaningful outcomes for tourism, further improvisation of the scales could also be explored to understand the destination in terms of its dynamics. There are many other concepts which are similar in content but different in names. More studies would be welcomed to understand the theoretical foundations of many other concepts with different names but similar content, as well. Finally, as this study did not examine the views of business or tourists, taking account of the impact on the host community, the repercussions could also be further explored.

4. CONCLUSION

This study attempted to understand the underlying function of the two concepts of responsible and sustainable tourism. Following data analysis, both concepts were observed as based on the triple bottom line principle and shared the same objective of sustainable development. Furthermore, responsible tourism was shown to significantly explain and contribute to sustainable tourism. The literature review revealed that sustainable tourism is broad, elusive, and difficult to define, as it has to take into account the perceptions of tourists, market players, as well as the community. On the other hand, responsible tourism was shown to be a sustainable form of tourism that focuses on the quality of life for the host community by building a strong institutional mechanism to sustain it. When sustainable tourism is presented as a theoretical concept, responsible tourism is regarded as an action component with practical implications. Although both concepts share the same attributes, responsible tourism has the additional aspect of being a relatively new initiative that defines the responsibility of stakeholders as initiating specific actions for the sustainable management of tourist destinations. Sustainable management inevitably involves: stakeholder participation, specifically the community, industry, and government; a well-designed institutional mechanism; and ownership at the destination level. Thus, responsible tourism should be adopted as a model initiative that can be employed as a strategy for the sustainable management and development of tourist destinations.

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