



Turisztikai és Vidékfejlesztési Tanulmányok

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Turisztikai és Vidékfejlesztési Tanulmányok

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AZ ADATVEZÉRELT OKOSTURIZMUS DESZTINÁCIÓS KIHÍVÁSAI ÉS LEHETŐSÉGEI MAGYARORSZÁGON

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ABSZTRAKT

A tanulmány a magyarországi turisztikai desztinációk adatérzettségét vizsgálja az okosturizmus és az adatvezérelt döntéshozatal kontextusában. Az adatvezérelt működés a desztinációk számára lehetőséget teremt az erőforrások hatékonyabb felhasználására, a versenyképesség növelésére és a piaci változásokhoz való proaktív alkalmazkodásra, ugyanakkor az adatok hasznosításának szintje vizsgálataink szerint jelentős eltéréseket mutat. Az ismertetett kutatás országos, kvótaalapú kérdőíves felmérésre épül, amely 100, évi legalább 50.000 vendégéjszakát regisztráló hazai turisztikai desztinációt vizsgált, figyelembe véve a látogatóforgalmi és földrajzi jellemzők arányos megjelenítését. Az elemzés feltárja, hogy a desztinációk milyen mértékben alkalmaznak adatokat a stratégiai tervezésben és turizmusfejlesztésben, milyen indikátorokra támaszkodnak, illetve mennyire elterjedtek a valós idejű analitikai és a big data-megoldások. Az eredmények szerint a desztinációk 59%-a beépíti az adatokat a stratégiaalkotásba, ám csupán 12%-uk követ teljes mértékben adatvezérelt, stratégiai igényekhez illeszkedő megközelítést. A kvantitatív mutatók dominálnak, miközben a látogatói elégedettséghez, közösségi jólléthez és fenntarthatósághoz kapcsolódó kvalitatív indikátorok alulhasznosítottak. A valós idejű adatfelhasználás ritka, a big data alkalmazások kezdetiek, az adatmegosztás következtelen. A kutatás rámutat a digitális kompetenciák, az intézményi együttműködés és az analitikai kapacitások fejlesztésének szükségességére.

Kulcsszavak: adatvezérelt döntéshozatal, desztinációmenedzsment, digitális érettség, Magyarország, okosturizmus

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DESTINATION-LEVEL CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF DATA-DRIVEN SMART TOURISM IN HUNGARY

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the data maturity of Hungarian tourism destinations in the context of smart tourism and data-driven decision-making. Data-driven operations enable destinations to use resources more efficiently, enhance competitiveness, and respond proactively to changing market conditions; however, the level of data utilization varies significantly across destinations. The research is based on a nationwide quota-based questionnaire survey covering 100 domestic tourism destinations that register at least 50,000 guest nights annually, ensuring proportional representation in terms of visitor traffic characteristics and geographical distribution. The analysis explores the extent to which destinations use data in strategic planning and tourism development, the types of indicators they rely on, and the prevalence of advanced practices such as real-time analytics and big data solutions. The results show that 59% of destinations incorporate data into the strategy-making process, yet only 12% follow a fully data-driven approach aligned with strategic needs. Quantitative indicators dominate, while qualitative metrics related to visitor satisfaction, community well-being, and sustainability remain underutilized. Real-time data use is rare, big data applications are still at an early stage, and data-sharing practices are inconsistent. The study highlights the need to strengthen digital competencies, institutional cooperation, and analytical capacities in order to support the development of sustainable and competitive smart tourism ecosystems.

Keywords: data-driven decision-making, destination management, digital maturity, Hungary, smart tourism

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1. Bevezetés

A turizmus napjainkra a felgyorsuló technológiai fejlődésre és a látogatói magatartás változásaira adott válaszai révén új korszakba lépett. Az okosturizmus – amelyet a digitális technológiák és az adatközpontú innovációk stratégiai integrációja jellemez – világszerte a versenyképesség, a fenntarthatóság és a látogatói elégedettség növelésének kulcsfontosságú eszközévé vált (Chen et al., 2022; Csapó, 2024; Debreceni et al., 2025). Abban az időszakban, amikor a globális turisztikai ágazat a reziliencia és az alkalmazkodóképesség szempontjai szerint rendezti újra működését, az adatvezérelt döntéshozatal a turizmusfejlesztés egyik sarokkövévé válik.

Az okosturisztikai rendszerek az olyan technológiák hatékony használatára épülnek, mint a dolgok internete (Internet of Things, IoT), a big data-elemzés, a mesterséges intelligencia (MI) és az intelligens infrastruktúra (Bastidas-Manzano et al., 2021). Mindezek hatékony eszközöket kínálnak a desztinációmenedzserek számára az erőforrás-allokáció és a szakpolitikai beavatkozások optimalizálásához (Gretzel et al., 2015; Iványi, 2022). A digitális innováció és a turisztikai kormányzás közötti szinergia lehetővé teszi a desztinációk számára, hogy ne csupán valós időben értelmezzék az átalakuló utazási mintázatokat, hanem személyre szabott, érdemi hatással bíró élményeket is nyújtsanak, amelyek megfelelnek a mai, igényes utazók elvárásainak (Csapody & Jászberényi, 2024; Femenia-Serra et al., 2022). Ebben az összefüggésben az adat már nem a turisztikai tevékenység passzív mellékterméke, hanem a stratégiai irányok alakításának aktív tényezője.

Az adatfelhasználás stratégiai jelentősége szorosan illeszkedik az Európai Unió tágabb turizmuspolitikai célkitűzéseivel, amelyek a digitális transzformációt, a kulturális örökség megőrzését, a fenntarthatóságot és az inkluzivitást a rendszerszintű fejlődés meghatározó eszközeiként kezelik. E célok különösen relevánsak Magyarország esetében, ahol a sokszínű kulturális táj és a dinamikus turisztikai áramlások kedvező alapot teremtenek az okosturisztikai ökoszisztémák fejlesztéséhez. Ugyanakkor, bár a digitális eszközök a vezető globális desztinációkban gyorsan terjednek, a magyar turizmus adatérettsége és a digitális gyakorlatok stratégiai integrációja továbbra is kevésbé feltárt területként azonosítható.

A meglévő nemzetközi szakirodalom jellemzően a technológiailag fejlett városokra vagy a nagyléptékű okosturisztikai pilotprojektekre összpontosít, miközben kevésbé ismert, hogy a kisebb vagy feltörekvő desztinációk miként kezelik és operacionalizálják a turisztikai adatokat. Magyarországon, ahol a helyi kormányzás, az intézményi kapacitás és a digitális kompetenciák jelentős eltéréseket mutatnak, e kérdés különösen fontos. Jelen tanulmány ezt a kutatási hiányt kezeli azáltal, hogy egy 100 településre – ahol a vizsgált települések mindegyike meghaladja az évi 50.000 vendégéjszakát – kiterjedő országos felmérés alapján értékeli a magyarországi turisztikai desztinációk adatvezérelt érettségét. A kutatás azt vizsgálja, hogy e desztinációk miként hasznosítják az adatokat a stratégiaalkotás, a turizmusfejlesztés és a teljesítményértékelés területein, miközben

feltárja a kormányzáshoz, az intézményi felkészültséghez és a szektorok közötti együttműködéshez kapcsolódó akadályokat is.

A tanulmány nem az okosturizmus általános elemzésére törekszik, hanem az adatfelhasználást az okos desztinációfejlesztés alapvető építőelemeként helyezi előtérbe. Az eltérések bemutatásával hozzájárul az okosturisztikai felkészültségről szóló, egyre bővülő diskurzushoz, és megállapításokat kínál a döntéshozók, a desztinációmenedzsment-szervezetek és a helyi érintettek számára. Hangsúlyozza továbbá annak szükségességét, hogy a desztinációk a legalapvetőbb kvantitatív indikátorokon (például a látogatóérkezéseken és a vendégéjszakákon) túlmutatva árnyaltabb, kvalitatív és valós idejű adatforrásokat is alkalmazzanak, amelyek a látogatói élményt, a fenntarthatóságot és a közösségi jóllétet is tükrözik. A kutatás továbbá fejlesztési irányokat azonosít – többek között a kapacitásépítést, a digitális készségfejlesztést és az intézményi koordináció javítását –, amelyek elengedhetetlenek ahhoz, hogy az analitika beépüljön a desztinációkormányzás gyakorlatába.

Végző soron a kutatás paradigmaváltást sürget a holisztikus, adatvezérelt turisztikai kormányzás irányába, amely képessé teszi a magyarországi desztinációkat arra, hogy ne csupán felzárkózzanak a nemzetközi jó gyakorlatokhoz, hanem a digitális érettséget a fenntartható és versenyképes turizmusfejlesztés meghatározó alapköveként alkalmazva vezető szerepet is betöltsenek.

2. Szakirodalmi áttekintés

Az okosturizmus a turizmuskutatás viszonylag új, ugyanakkor gyorsan bővülő területe, amely egyben az ágazat digitális transzformációját és az adatvezérelt innováció növekvő jelentőségét is tükrözi. Széles kutatási agendáját figyelembe véve a 2010 óta megjelenő szisztematikus szakirodalmi áttekintések (SLR-ek) és konceptuális tanulmányok számának folyamatos növekedése e kutatási terület megerősödését és a tudományos közösség tartós érdeklődését jelzi (Csapó & Végi, 2023).

Az „okos” jelző elterjedése a különböző tudományterületeken – az okoseszközöktől, az okosvárosoktól és az okos vidékfejlesztéstől az okos kormányzásig, az akadálymentességig és a fenntarthatóságig (Elkhwesky et al., 2022; Ghafurian et al., 2023; Richards, 2023) – egyszerre mutatja a fogalom rugalmasságát és mindennapi, illetve akadémiai diskurzusba való beépülését. A turizmusban ugyanakkor Borges-Tiago et al. (2022) hangsúlyozzák, hogy bár az „okosturizmus” kifejezés gyakran megjelenik a kutatásban, az üzleti gyakorlatban és a szakpolitikai környezetben, továbbra sem rendelkezik egységes definícióval, és jelentős fogalmi változatosságot mutat.

A szakirodalomban két meghatározó megközelítés azonosítható. Az első az okosturizmus eredetét az okosváros-paradigmához köti, és a technológiai infrastruktúrát, valamint az adatalapú városi hatékonyságot hangsúlyozza (Micera et al., 2013). A második az okosturizmust szociotechnikai jelenségként határozza meg, amely a digitalizáció, a technológiai innováció és a változó turistamagatartás metszéspontjában jön létre (Liu et al., 2023). Liu et al. (2023) szerint ez a fogalmi fejlődés azt mutatja, hogy miként

alkalmazkodott az okosturizmus a technológiai képességek és a társadalmi gyakorlatok változó kontextusaihoz.

Azt viszont egyértelműen megállapíthatjuk, hogy a 2010-es évek közepén Gretzel et al. (2015) meghatározó hozzájárulása alapozta meg az okosturizmus értelmezésének elméleti keretrendszerét. Érvelésük szerint bár a fogalom a turizmus 2010-es években kibontakozó digitalizációjával párhuzamosan vált elterjedtté, gyakran definíciós bizonytalanság kísérte. Gretzel és szerzőtársai az okosturizmust három egymással összekapcsolódó komponens – az okos élmények, az okos üzleti ökoszisztémák és az okos desztinációk – együtteseként konceptualizálták. Meghatározásuk szerint: *„Olyan turizmus, amelyet a desztinációban megvalósuló, az adatok gyűjtésére és hasznosítására irányuló integrált erőfeszítések támogatnak fejlett technológiák alkalmazásával, amelyek az adatokat helyszíni élményekké és üzleti értékajánlatokká alakítják, egyértelműen a hatékonyságra, a fenntarthatóságra és az élménygazdagításra összpontosítva”* (Gretzel et al., 2015).

Ez a keretrendszer az okosturizmust olyan adatvezérelt ökoszisztémaként értelmezi, amely a turisták, a szolgáltatók és a kormányzási szereplők együttműködésétől függ. Ennek megfelelően három elemzési dimenzió rajzolódik ki: az okos desztináció (kínálati oldal), az okos turista vagy élmény (keresleti oldal), valamint az okos üzleti és kormányzási ökoszisztéma (szervezeti és szakpolitikai szint).

Az okos desztinációk különösen központi szerepet töltenek be e paradigmában. Fejlett technológiákat – így big data-analitikát, IoT-rendszereket és valós idejű monitoringot – integrálnak a versenyképesség növelése, az erőforrások optimalizálása és a látogatói elégedettség javítása érdekében (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015; Boes et al., 2016). A technológiai megoldások alkalmazásán túl hangsúlyozzák a szektorok közötti együttműködést, az érintettek bevonását és a közösségi részvételt, mint a fenntarthatóság és a reziliencia mechanizmusait (Koo et al., 2016; Micera & Crispino, 2017).

Az újabb kutatások tovább tágítják ezt a megközelítést, kiemelve, hogy az okos desztinációk túlmutatnak a technológiai infrastruktúrákon, és a kormányzás társadalmi, kulturális és gazdasági dimenzióit is magukban foglalják (Gretzel et al., 2015). Az eredményes okosdesztináció-fejlesztés erős intézményi koordinációra, adaptív szakpolitikai keretekre, valamint a közhatalmi szereplők, a magánszektor és a lakosság közötti közös értékteremtésre épül (Bastidas-Manzano et al., 2021; Femenia-Serra et al., 2022). E tanulmányok összességükben rámutatnak arra, hogy az okosturizmus – amennyiben hatékony kormányzás és adatvezéreltség jellemzi –, egyszerre jelent utat a fenntarthatóság felé és katalizátort a hosszú távú versenyképesség erősítéséhez a globális turisztikai ökoszisztémában.

3. Módszertan

Jelen tanulmány egy tágabb kutatási kezdeményezés részét képezi, amely az okosturizmus magyarországi desztinációkban történő fejlesztésének útjait és kihívásait vizsgálja, különös tekintettel azok adatérettségi szintjének értékelésére. Ennek érdekében országos online

kérdőíves felmérést készítettünk, amely Magyarország mind a 11 hivatalosan kijelölt turisztikai térségét lefedte.

Az adatfelvétel egy professzionális piackutató ügynökséggel együttműködésben valósult meg, amely biztosította a kérdőív technikai infrastruktúráját, és elősegítette a releváns válaszadók elérését. A mintavételi keretbe olyan települések és térségi desztinációk kerültek, amelyek meghatározó szerepet töltenek be Magyarország belföldi turisztikai kínálatában; ennek kritériuma az évi legalább 50.000 vendégéjszaka volt. Kvótaalapú mintavételi stratégia alkalmazására került sor annak érdekében, hogy a desztinációk az ország turisztikai térségein belüli földrajzi eloszlásuk és látogatóforgalmi mintázataik szerint arányosan jelenjenek meg.

Az online kérdőív 2024 őszén több héten át volt elérhető. Minden részt vevő desztinációt egy olyan szakember képviselt, aki az adott önkormányzatnál, egy desztinációmenedzsment-szervezetnél vagy a turizmusfejlesztésben és stratégiai tervezésben aktívan érintett más szervezetnél dolgozott. A válaszadók kiválasztása azon alapult, hogy átfogó ismeretekkel rendelkezzenek a helyi turisztikai rendszerről, a fejlesztési kezdeményezésekről, valamint a folyamatban lévő vagy tervezett okosturisztikai tevékenységekről. Az így létrejött adatbázis alapot biztosított a desztinációk adatérettségének és az okosturisztikai alapelvek befogadására való felkészültségének értékeléséhez.

A tanulmány célkitűzéseivel összhangban, valamint mivel a desztinációs szintű adatérettség mérésére nem állnak rendelkezésre nemzetközileg validált eszközök, a kutatócsoport saját kérdéseket dolgozott ki. Ezek egyszeres és többszörös választásos kérdések formájában kerültek megfogalmazásra, és közvetlenül a turisztikai desztinációk adatérettségének kulcsjellemzőit és dimenzióit mérték.

Jelen tanulmány e tágabb kutatási projekt előzetes eredményeit mutatja be. Az adatbázis leírásához és a kirajzolódó mintázatok azonosításához leíró statisztikai módszereket alkalmaztunk. Emellett a kiválasztott változók közötti összefüggéseket keresztábra-elemzéssel, Pearson-féle khi-négyzet függetlenségvizsgálattal teszteltük, 5%-os szignifikanciaszintet alkalmazva ($p < 0,05$).

Az adatok előkészítése és a statisztikai elemzések az IBM SPSS Statistics 28 szoftverrel készültek, míg a táblázatok és vizuális ábrázolások elkészítéséhez a Microsoft Excel 365 programot használtuk.

4. Eredmények

A magyarországi desztinációk körében az eredmények az adatérettség korai és középhaladó szintje közötti állapotot jeleznek. Az 1. táblázat azt mutatja, hogy a legtöbb desztináció már beépíti a rendelkezésre álló adatokat és jelentéseket a turisztikai stratégiaalkotás folyamatába (59%), ugyanakkor csak kis hányaduk tekinthető valóban adatvezéreltnek, vagyis olyannak, ahol az adatmenedzsmentet tudatosan a stratégiai célok támogatására alakítják ki (12%). A másik végletet azok a desztinációk jelentik, amelyek sem a turizmusfejlesztésben nem használnak adatokat, sem érvényes turisztikai

stratégiával nem rendelkeznek (22%); további 7% pedig ad hoc megközelítésre támaszkodik, ahol az adatfelhasználás a stratégia készítéséért felelős személytől függ. Mindezek arra utalnak, hogy a magyarországi desztinációmenedzsment elsősorban adatokkal informált, nem pedig teljes mértékben adatvezérelt vagy szisztematikusan, bizonyítékokon alapuló stratégiai folyamatokba ágyazott.

1. táblázat: Az adatfelhasználás jellemzői a turisztikai stratégiaalkotásban a vizsgált desztinációkban

Az adatok felhasználása a turisztikai stratégiában és a turizmusfejlesztés során (n=100) – “Milyen mértékben függ a turisztikai stratégia kialakítása, felülvizsgálata és a turizmusfejlesztés az adatoktól?”	
A rendelkezésre álló adatokat és jelentéseket (közösen) beépítjük a turisztikai stratégia kidolgozásába, a turizmusfejlesztésbe.	59,0%
Egyik sem, mivel nem használunk adatokat a turizmusfejlesztés során, illetve nem rendelkezünk érvényes turisztikai stratégiával.	22,0%
Az adatok irányítják és meghatározzák a desztináció turisztikai stratégiájának, turizmusfejlesztésének kialakítását, és az adatkezelési/adatmenedzsment folyamatot kifejezetten a stratégiai fejlesztés igényeihez igazítjuk.	12,0%
Az adatok és az adatokból nyerhető jelentések, beszámolók felhasználása teljes mértékben a turisztikai stratégiaért és turizmusfejlesztésért felelős szereplő/kolléga/vezető belátására van bízva.	7,0%
A stratégia kidolgozásához és a turizmusfejlesztéshez használt adatok és mutatók (n=100) – “Kérjük, jelölje meg, hogy a desztináció/település milyen adatokat és mutatókat használ a stratégia kidolgozásához, a turizmus fejlesztéshez. Több válasz is lehetséges.”	
Mennyiségi mutatók, mint például a turisták érkezése, vendégéjszakák száma, látogatók száma stb.	82,0%
Minőségi mutatók, amelyek a turisták és az érdekelt felek (stakeholderek (érintett személyek), turisztikai szervezetek, szolgáltatók, piaci szereplők) elégedettségének mérésére összpontosítanak, mint például a turisták értékelése a desztináció élményeiről, a turisztikai vállalkozások elégedettsége stb.	46,0%
Minőségi mutatók, amelyek a helyi közösség és az érdekelt felek (stakeholderek (érintett személyek), turisztikai szervezetek, szolgáltatók, piaci szereplők) jólétére, életelégedettségére és életminőségére stb. összpontosítanak.	39,0%
A desztináció teherbíró képességének kezelését mérő mutatók, mint például az egy lakosra vagy négyzetméterre jutó turisták száma, a közlekedési és zajproblémák stb.	21,0%
Egyik sem, mivel nem használunk adatokat a turizmusfejlesztés során, nem rendelkezünk érvényes turisztikai stratégiával.	15,0%
A desztináció erőforrásainak felhasználása, például a víz- és villamosenergia-felhasználás stb.	11,0%

Forrás: saját szerkesztés.

A turisztikai stratégia kidolgozása során alkalmazott indikátorok összetétele tovább erősíti ezt az értelmezést. A legtöbb desztináció stratégiai tervezése továbbra is hagyományos, kvantitatív forgalmi mutatókra – így az érkezésekre, a vendégéjszakákra és a

látogatószámra – épül, amelyeket a válaszadók 82%-a használ (1. táblázat). A kvalitatív mérőszámok alkalmazása kevésbé következetes: a desztinációk 46%-a támaszkodik a turisták vagy stakeholderek elégedettségét tükröző indikátorokra, míg 39%-uk veszi figyelembe a helyi lakosság jóllétéhez és életminőségéhez kapcsolódó szempontokat. Ezzel szemben a teherbíró képesség menedzsmentjét értékelő indikátorokat mindössze a desztinációk 21%-a használja, a környezeti erőforrás-használathoz – például víz- vagy energiafogyasztáshoz – kapcsolódó mérőszámokat pedig csupán 11%. További 15% arról számolt be, hogy sem adatokat nem használ, sem érvényes turisztikai stratégiával nem rendelkezik. Az eredmények alapján megállapítható, hogy a desztinációk döntően a volumenben alapuló teljesítménymutatókra koncentrálnak, miközben az okos desztináció koncepciója szempontjából lényeges dimenziók – így a jóllét, a fenntarthatóság és a teherbíró képesség – alulreprezentáltak, ami hosszú távon vakfoltokat eredményezhet a tervezésben és a hatásértékelésben.

A desztinációkban megfigyelhető adatmenedzsment-megoldások szintén túlnyomórészt belső és fragmentált gyakorlatokat tükröznek. A 2. táblázat alapján a legtöbb desztináció házon belül gyűjti és kezeli az adatait (57%), míg további 24% más önkormányzattal vagy térségi irodával működik együtt az adatgyűjtésben, de az elemzés feletti kontrollt megtartja. Mindössze a desztinációk 8%-a számolt be API-alapú integrációk használatáról, amelyek lehetővé tennék az automatizált adatcserét és az interoperabilitást (API = Application Programming Interface, alkalmazásprogramozási interfész, azaz olyan szabványosított technikai adatkapcsolat, amelyen keresztül egy rendszer lekérhet vagy továbbíthat adatokat egy másik rendszerből emberi, kézi beavatkozás nélkül). A külső, magánszektorbeli szereplőkkel való együttműködés korlátozott: 4% támaszkodik ilyen partnerekre az adatmenedzsment vagy -elemzés terén, és 2% az adatbeszerzésben. E mellett a desztinációk 5%-a semmilyen formában nem végez turisztikai adatmenedzsmentet. Eredményeink azt jelzik, hogy az adatgyakorlatokat továbbra is nagyrészt izolált, önálló rendszerek jellemzik, alacsony integrációs szinttel és korlátozott platformalapú működéssel. Ezek a korlátok csökkentik a skálázhatóságot, nehezítik az adatminőség biztosítását, és szűkítik az adatok újrahasznosításának lehetőségét a turizmus kulcsfontosságú funkcióiban, többek között a szálláshelyek, attrakciók, mobilitás és közművek területén.

Az adatfrissítések gyakorisága tovább árnyalja a desztinációk adatgyakorlatainak alapvetően jelentésorientált jellegét. A 2. táblázat szerint a legtöbb desztináció rendszeres időközönként tekinti át és frissíti adatait, jellemzően szezonálisan (28%), havonta (25%) vagy évente (24%), míg csak kis hányaduk működik közel valós idejű frissítésekkel (14%) vagy heti ciklusokkal (3%). Ez a mintázat arra utal, hogy az adatgyűjtés és -felülvizsgálat elsősorban utólagos jelentési és megfelelési követelményekhez igazodik, nem pedig folyamatos, operatív döntéshozatalt támogat. Következésképpen a gyors, adatvezérelt válaszok – például a csúcsidőszaki terhelésmenedzsment, a dinamikus árazás vagy a valós idejű kapacitáskontroll – támogatásának képessége a vizsgált desztinációk körében korlátozott marad.

A desztinációk által használt monitoringadatok típusai további betekintést nyújtanak az adatérettség általános állapotába (2. táblázat). Az adatgyűjtés magját továbbra is a hagyományos turisztikai statisztikák adják, így az érkezések és vendégéjszakák száma (90%), a szálláshelyek száma (89%), valamint a szálláshely-kihasználtság (64%), e mellett az attrakciólátogatási adatokat a desztinációk 40%-a követi nyomon. Ezzel szemben a tágabb gazdasági és környezeti dimenziókat tükröző adatok jóval ritkábban jelennek meg: mindössze a desztinációk 18%-a gyűjt információt a turistaköltésről, 8% monitoroz környezeti indikátorokat, például energia- vagy vízfogyasztást, a közlekedési áramlási adatok alkalmazása pedig ritka. Ez az összetétel a hagyományos turisztikai mutatókra való erős támaszkodást jelzi, miközben a gazdasági hatásokat, a környezeti teljesítményt és a mobilitási dinamikákat megragadó komplexebb mérőszámok nagyrészt háttérbe szorulnak. Ennek következtében a fenntarthatósági értékeléseket és a teherbíróképesség-menedzsmentet támogató bizonyítékbázis viszonylag gyenge, ami korlátozza a desztinációk megalapozott, előretekinthető szakpolitikai döntéshozatalát.

Az adatok stratégiai felhasználása és a desztinációk adatkezelési gyakorlata közötti kapcsolat feltárása érdekében kereszttábla-elemzést végeztünk (3. táblázat). Az összefüggés statisztikailag szignifikánsnak bizonyult (Pearson-féle khi-négyzet próba, $p=0,003 < 0,05$), ami érdemi kapcsolatot jelez a stratégiai fejlesztés adatfüggőségének mértéke és az adatmenedzsment-gyakorlatok fejlettsége között.

Azok a desztinációk, amelyek turisztikai stratégiájukat adatvezéreltként jellemzik, jellemzően fejlettebb és diverzifikáltabb adatmenedzsment-megközelítést mutatnak. Bár felük belsőleg gyűjti és kezeli az adatokat (50%), jelentős hányaduk API-k használatáról (16,7%), külső adatbázisok web scraping (automatizált webes adatgyűjtés) vagy vásárlás útján történő beszerzéséről (25%), illetve önkormányzatok közötti együttműködésekről (8,3%) is beszámolt. Ezzel szemben azok a desztinációk, amelyek csak beépítik a rendelkezésre álló adatokat a stratégiájukba, döntően belső adatmenedzsmentre támaszkodnak (54,2%), miközben az API-használat továbbra is korlátozott (5,1%). Ugyanakkor e csoport egyharmada (33,9%) külső forrásból származó adatkészletekhez is hozzáfér, ami bizonyos fokú nyitottságot jelez a külső adatintegráció iránt.

Azoknál a desztinációknál, amelyek nem használnak adatokat és nem rendelkeznek érvényes stratégiával, a kép polarizáltabb. Bár többségük továbbra is belső adatkezelésről számol be (68,2%), közel egynegyedük (22,7%) jelzi, hogy egyáltalán nem kezel turizmussal kapcsolatos adatokat. Érdekes módon abban a kis csoportban, ahol az adatfelhasználás a felelős szereplő mérlegelésétől függ, viszonylag magas az API-használat (28,6%), ami ad hoc, ugyanakkor technológiailag kompetens gyakorlatokra utalhat. Kereszttábla-elemzésünk eredményei azt sugallják, hogy ahogyan a desztinációk az adatvezéreltebb stratégiai tervezés irányába mozdulnak el, adatmenedzsment-gyakorlataik is együttműködőbbé és technológiailag integráltabbá válnak. Ezzel szemben ott, ahol nem létezik formális, adatalapú stratégia, az adatmenedzsment nagyrészt zárt és operatív jellegű marad, gyakran elszakadva a stratégiai döntéshozatali folyamatoktól.

2. táblázat: Az adatmenedzsment jellemzői Magyarország vizsgált turisztikai desztinációiban

Adatkezelés és technológiai megoldások (n=100) – “Kérjük, válassza ki azt az állítást, amelyik a legjobban jellemzi, hogyan kezelik az adatokat az Ön desztinációjában/településén?”	
Belső, szervezeten belüli adatgyűjtés és -kezelés.	57,0%
Egy másik önkormányzattal/megyei hivatallal/turisztikai szervezettel együttműködve gyűjtjük az adatokat, de mi magunk elemezzük azokat.	24,0%
Belső, szervezeten belüli és/vagy külső API-kat (alkalmazásprogramozási interfész vagy felület = Nagyban megkönnyítik az alkalmazások fejlesztésének és összekapcsolásának a folyamatát más szoftverekkel, programokkal vagy weboldallal, mivel hozzáférést biztosítanak egy adott eszköz vagy szoftver utasításkészletéhez.) használunk.	8,0%
Egyik sem, mivel nem kezelünk desztinációs/települési turisztikai adatokat.	5,0%
Az adatok kezeléséhez és elemzéséhez külső magáncégek támogatására, bevonására van szükségünk.	4,0%
Az adatok megszerzéséhez külső magáncégek bevonására van szükségünk (webes adatgyűjtés (web scraping) és/vagy adatok, adatkészletek vásárlása).	2,0%
Az adatok frissítésének és felülvizsgálatának gyakorisága (n=100) – “Milyen gyakran frissíti és vizsgálja felül a turisztikai adatokat?”	
Szezonálisan	28,0%
Havonta	25,0%
Évente	24,0%
Valós (vagy közel valós) időben	14,0%
Egyik sem, mivel nem kezelünk desztinációs/települési turisztikai adatokat.	6,0%
Hetente	3,0%
A desztináció/település turisztikai teljesítményének nyomon követésére használt hivatalos adatok típusai (n=100) – “Milyen típusú hivatalos adatokat használ a desztináció/település turisztikai teljesítményének nyomon követésére? Több válasz is lehetséges.”	
Statisztikai adatok az érkezésekről és a vendégéjszakákról	90,0%
Szálláshelyek száma (típusonként)	89,0%
A szálláshelyek kihasználtsága	64,0%
Az örökségvédelmi és egyéb látnivalók látogatóinak száma	40,0%
Turisták és látogatók kiadásai	18,0%
Környezeti információk: vízfogyasztás, hulladék, energia stb.	8,0%
Hajó/komp utasok érkezése (vagy száma)	7,0%
Egyik sem, nem elemzünk desztináció/település szintű turisztikai adatokat.	7,0%
A vasúttal érkezők érkezése (vagy száma)	3,0%
A légi közlekedéssel érkezők érkezése (vagy száma)	2,0%

Forrás: saját szerkesztés.

Kutatásunk során megvizsgáltuk az adatokra való stratégiai támaszkodás és az adatfelülvizsgálatok gyakorisága közötti kapcsolatot is. Az összefüggés statisztikailag szignifikánsnak bizonyult (Pearson-féle khi-négyzet próba, $p=0,002 < 0,05$), ami arra utal, hogy azok a desztinációk, amelyek a stratégiai tervezésben nagyobb mértékben támaszkodnak adatokra, gyakrabban frissítik és vizsgálják felül információikat.

Az adatvezéreltként besorolt desztinációk körében a közel valós idejű adatfrissítés viszonylag gyakori (41,7%), és heti felülvizsgálati ciklusok is megjelennek (8,3%). A fennmaradó válaszok e csoportban egyenletesen oszlanak meg a szezonális, havi és éves frissítések között (egyenként 16,7%). Azokban a desztinációkban, ahol a rendelkezésre álló adatokat és jelentéseket beépítik a stratégiába, de nem érvényesül teljes mértékben adatvezérelt megközelítés, az adatfrissítések hagyományosabb, periodikus mintázatot követnek: a szezonális és havi felülvizsgálatok egyaránt 28,8%-ot tesznek ki, míg az éves frissítések aránya 27,1%. A közel valós idejű adatfrissítések kevésbé elterjedtek (11,9%), a heti frissítések pedig ritkák (3,4%). Abban a csoportban, ahol az adatfelhasználás a stratégiaalkotásért felelős személy mérlegelésétől függ, a frissítések kizárólag szezonális és havi ciklusokban történnek (mindkettő 42,9%), heti vagy közel valós idejű gyakorlatok nélkül (4. táblázat).

3. táblázat: A stratégiai adatfelhasználás és az adatmenedzsment összevetése a vizsgált desztinációk tekintetében

	Az adatok kezeléséhez és elemzéséhez külső magáncégek támogatására, bevonására van szükség	Az adatok megszerzéséhez külső magáncégek bevonására van szükség	Belső, szervezeten belüli adatgyűjtés és -kezelés	Belső, szervezeten belüli és / vagy külső API-kat használunk	Egy másik önkormányzattal / megyei hivatallal / turisztikai szervezettel együttműködve gyűjtjük az adatokat	Egyik sem, mivel nem kezelünk desztinációs / települési turisztikai adatokat
A rendelkezésre álló adatokat és jelentéseket (közös) beépítjük a turisztikai stratégia kidolgozásába, a turizmusfejlesztésbe., n=59	3,4%	3,4%	54,2%	5,1%	33,9%	0,0%
Az adatok és az adatokból nyerhető jelentések, beszámolók felhasználása teljes mértékben a turisztikai stratégiaért és turizmusfejlesztésért felelős szereplő/kolléga/vezető belátására van bízva., n=7	0,0%	0,0%	57,1%	28,6%	14,3%	0,0%
Az adatok irányítják és meghatározzák a desztináció turisztikai stratégiájának, turizmusfejlesztésének kialakítását, és az adatkezelési/adatmenedzsment folyamatot kifejezetten a stratégiai fejlesztés igényeihez igazítjuk., n=12	8,3%	0,0%	50,0%	16,7%	25,0%	0,0%
Egyik sem, mivel nem használunk adatokat a turizmusfejlesztés során, illetve nem rendelkezünk érvényes turisztikai stratégiával., n=22	4,5%	0,0%	68,2%	4,5%	0,0%	22,7%

Forrás: saját szerkesztés.

Bár a mérlegelésen alapuló csoport kisméretű (n = 7), az általános mintázat egyértelműen arra utal, hogy az adatokra stratégiaileg erősebben támaszkodó desztinációk rövidebb

frissítési intervallumokkal, valamint az időben reagáló, operatív döntéshozatal nagyobb kapacitásával működnek.

4. táblázat: A stratégiai adatfelhasználás és az adatfelülvizsgálat gyakoriságának összevetése a vizsgált desztinációkban

	Szezonálisan	Évente	Havonta	Hetente	Valós vagy közel valós időben
A rendelkezésre álló adatokat és jelentéseket közösen beépítjük a turisztikai stratégia kidolgozásába, a turizmusfejlesztésbe., n=59	28,8%	27,1%	28,8%	3,4%	11,9%
Az adatok és az adatokból nyerhető jelentések, beszámolók felhasználása teljes mértékben a turisztikai stratégiáért és turizmusfejlesztésért felelős szereplő/kolléga/vezető belátására van bízva., n=7	42,9%	14,3%	42,9%	0,0%	0,0%
Az adatok irányítják és meghatározzák a desztináció turisztikai stratégiájának, turizmusfejlesztésének kialakítását, és az adatkezelési/adatmenedzsment folyamatot kifejezetten a stratégiai fejlesztés igényeihez igazítjuk., n=12	16,7%	16,7%	16,7%	8,3%	41,7%

Forrás: saját szerkesztés.

5. Következtetések

Jelen tanulmány átfogó képet ad a vizsgált magyarországi turisztikai desztinációk adatérettségéről, rávilágítva az adatvezérelt gyakorlatok alkalmazásában elért eredményekre és a továbbra is fennálló korlátokra. Bár a desztinációk többsége valamilyen formában beépíti az adatokat a stratégiai tervezésbe, csak kis hányaduk működik olyan, teljes mértékben adatvezérelt megközelítéssel, amely illeszkedik a hosszú távú célokhoz. A stratégiai döntések továbbra is erőteljesen alapvető kvantitatív mutatókra támaszkodnak, miközben a kvalitatív indikátorok vagy a fenntarthatósághoz kapcsolódó adatok csak korlátozott figyelmet kapnak.

A valós idejű analitika, a big data-alkalmazások és a külső adatintegrációk továbbra is alulhasznosítottak, ami az adatmenedzsment fragmentált és gyakran zárt jellegére utal. Emellett az adatfrissítések gyakorisága többnyire periodikus, nem pedig folyamatos, ami akadályozza a gyors reagálást és az innovációt. Az érettebb adatstratégiákkal rendelkező desztinációk integráltabb, technológiailag fejlettebb adatmenedzsment-gyakorlatokat és felülvizsgálati ciklusokat mutatnak, ami aláhúzza a digitális felkészültség előnyeit.

A korlátozott digitális készségek, az intézményi fragmentáció és a szektorok közötti gyenge együttműködés továbbra is akadályozza a szélesebb körű elterjedést. Az eredmények ugyanakkor egyértelmű lehetőségekre is rámutatnak: a kapacitásépítés, a digitális készségfejlesztés és a koordináció javítása jelentősen emelheti a magyar turisztikai kormányzás és/vagy menedzsment színvonalát. Az adatelemzés beágyazása a

desztinációmenedzsment alapfolyamataiba nemcsak megvalósítható, hanem elengedhetetlen is a reziliencia, a fenntarthatóság és a globális versenyképesség erősítéséhez az okosturizmus korszakában.

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A PARASZOCIÁLIS KAPCSOLATOK SZEREPE A KULTURÁLIS ÖRÖKSÉG KÖZVETÍTÉSÉBEN ÉS A VIDÉKI TURIZMUS IRÁNTI SZÁNDÉK ALAKULÁSÁBAN: LI ZIQI ESETE

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ABSZTRAKT

A tanulmány azt vizsgálja, hogy a közösségi médiában kialakuló paraszociális kapcsolatok miként járulhatnak hozzá a kulturális örökség megőrzéséhez, valamint a vidéki turizmus iránti érdeklődés növekedéséhez. A vizsgálat középpontjában Li Ziqi videói állnak, amelyek esztétizált, lassú narratívában jelenítik meg a hagyományos vidéki életformát, valamint a kézműves és gasztronómiai tevékenységeket. A kutatás vegyes módszertant alkalmaz: egyrészt kvalitatív tartalomelemzés keretében elemzi a videók vizuális és narratív elemeit, valamint a hozzájuk kapcsolódó nemzetközi nézői kommenteket, másrészt kérdőíves felmérést végez kínai válaszadók körében annak érdekében, hogy feltárja a kínai közönség nézőpontját, érzelmi kötődését és viselkedési szándékait. Az eredmények arra utalnak, hogy a paraszociális kapcsolatok az inspiráción keresztül növelik a vidéki turizmus helyszíneinek látogatási és a hagyományos tevékenységek kipróbálási szándékát. Ezáltal a videók segíthetnek megőrizni a kulturális örökséget.

Kulcsszavak: influenszer, közösségi média, kulturális örökség, paraszociális kapcsolat, vidéki turizmus

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THE ROLE OF PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS IN COMMUNICATING CULTURAL HERITAGE AND SHAPING RURAL TOURISM INTENTIONS: THE CASE OF LI ZIQI

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how parasocial relationships formed on social media can contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage and the increasing interest in rural tourism. The focus of the research is on the videos of Li Ziqi, which showcase traditional rural lifestyle and crafts and recipes, through an aestheticized and slow narrative. The study applies a mixed-method approach. A qualitative content analysis was conducted of the visual and narrative elements of the videos, along with international viewer comments. A survey among Chinese respondents explored the perceptions, emotional attachment, and behavioral intentions of the Chinese audience. The results suggest that parasocial relationships increase both the intention to visit rural tourism destinations and the willingness to try traditional activities through the mediating role of inspiration. In this way, such content may contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage.

Keywords: influencer, social media, cultural heritage, parasocial relationships, rural tourism

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1. Bevezetés

Kína az egyik leggyorsabban fejlődő ország, urbanizációja jelentős, viszonylag rövid idő alatt nagymértékben nőtt a városi lakosok száma (Zhu et al., 2024), hiszen a városokban több munkalehetőség van és a szülők gyermekeiknek is jobb jövőt tudnak biztosítani (Lin, 2024). Az urbanizáció hatására a kínai városok jelentős mértékben megváltoztak, rengeteg ember számára adnak otthont. A hagyományos épületek és utcák helyét folyamatosan átvették a felhőkarcolók, lakó- és irodaházak, valamint a bevásárlóközpontok (Cao et al., 2014).

A városi élet emellett sokszor nehéznek is tűnik, hiszen a fiatalok rengeteget dolgoznak, emellett a társadalmi elvárásoknak is meg kell felelniük, ami pedig korai kiégést is okozhat (Gong, 2017). A kínai fiatalok egyre nagyobb számban diplomáznak (Statista, 2025b). A növekvő verseny és a munkaerő pótolhatósága miatt a hasonló végzettségű és közös vonásokkal rendelkező személyek egyre inkább individualizálódnak és elszigetelődnek a társadalmi csoporton belül (Beck, 1999). Ez a verseny a kínai társadalomban is egyre inkább megjelenik.

Az ázsiai gazdasági fejlődés a nyugatihoz képest sokkal zökkenőmentesebb volt, ez a gyors fejlődés pedig gyors alkalmazkodást igényelt a társadalom részéről (Dychtwald, 2021). Kínában az egy főre eső GDP 1990 és 2019 között 32-szeresére nőtt, ezzel a világon a legnagyobb változást megélt nemzet. Példaként a második legnagyobb ilyen típusú változást Lengyelország élte meg, ahol az egy főre eső GDP 1990 és 2019 között 9-szeresére nőtt (Dychtwald, 2021).

A kínai városi lakosság 1980-ban még 20% alatt volt, 2024-re pedig a lakosság közel 70%-a él már városban (Statista, 2025a). A városi lakosság száma 2000 és 2020 között megduplázódott (Lin, 2024). A gyors technológiai fejlődés hatására az elveszettség érzése egyre jellemzőbb a társadalomban (Shao, 2025). A nagymértékű és gyors változás kulturális nosztalgiát hívott életre (Zhu et al., 2024), hiszen a nosztalgia segít megbirkózni a gyors változásokkal. A nosztalgia által a gyors változások mellett is megőrizhető a kulturális identitás (Hillenbrand, 2010). A nagyvárosi élet pörgése helyett a fiatalok nagy része visszavágyik a csendesebb, nyugodt vidéki életformához (Lin, 2024), sokszor vonzóbb számukra a nyugodt, békés élet (Wulf et al., 2021). A legtöbben azonban inkább csak nosztalgikus módon, a gondtalan múltba vágyódnak, hiszen a városi élet sokszor kényelmesebb, megélhetést nyújtó, illetve vidéken nehéz munkát találni (Lin, 2024).

A kutatás célja annak vizsgálata, hogy egy influenszerrel ápolts paraszociális kapcsolat miként járulhat hozzá a kulturális örökség megőrzéséhez és a vidéki turizmus népszerűsítéséhez.

2. Szakirodalmi áttekintés

A hagyományos kínai kultúra egyre népszerűbb a kínai fiatalok körében (Li & Sun, 2025), például a kínai Z-generáció egyre tradicionálisabb módon ünnepli a kínai újévet, utazás helyett hazalátogatnak, és hagyományos ételeket főznek (Wang, 2025). Ha mégis

elutaznak az ünnepek alatt, akkor kulturális helyszíneket keresnek fel (Wang, 2025). A kínai kalligráfia és festészet is egyre népszerűbbek a fiatalok körében (Xinhua, 2022), de a teakultúra, a harcművészetek és a táncok iránt is növekszik az érdeklődés. (Cai, 2022; Yin & Zhang, 2024).

A fiatalok fontosnak tartják a hagyományos ételek, művészetek, fesztiválok és kulturális örökségek meglétét egy úticél kiválasztásakor (Joseph, 2025). A vidéki turizmus népszerűségéhez a földrajzi eredetmegjelöléssel ellátott termékek is hozzájárulhatnak, ezek nemcsak a desztinációt teszik vonzóbbá, de a helyi gazdaságot is megerősítik (Bozkurt et al., 2025).

A falusi turizmus olyan szolgáltatások és programok összessége, melyeket a helyi lakosok és szolgáltatók kínálnak (Gannon, 1994). Segíthet továbbá a korábban értéktelennek hitt erőforrásokat piacképesé tenni (Gonda, 2016), középpontjában a vidéki életmódélmény áll, elemei például a vidéki hangulat, gasztronómia, fesztiválok (Molnár & Remenyik, 2017).

A kulturális turizmus részeként a hagyományőrző fesztiválok tovább erősíthetik a vidéki turizmust, a területet vonzó turisztikai desztinációvá is tehetik (Jászberényi et al., 2022). A közösség bevonása kulcsfontosságú a turisztikai desztináció fenntarthatóságának szempontjából (Li et al., 2026). A fiataloknak nem elég, hogy csupán a közösségi médián keresztül kövessék a különböző hagyományos művészetekkel kapcsolatos tartalmakat, de részei is szeretnének lenni (Joseph, 2025), így a közösségi média is erős hatást gyakorol az utazási motivációra (Krátki et al., 2022). A turizmusban a desztinációk autentikussága kulcsfontosságú motiváció, melyet a fogyasztók szerint nem helyettesíthet digitális élmény (Csapó et al., 2023). Az offline közösségek sokkal inkább képesek bevonni a fogyasztókat, mint az online közösségek (Németh et al., 2023), így például a hagyományos tevékenységek kipróbálása is nagyobb élményt jelenthet, mint azok online megtekintése.

A virtuális eszközök, például online videók a helymarketingben is alkalmazhatók, formálhatják az emberek véleményét az adott desztinációról és ezáltal hathatnak az utazási döntésekre (Gerdesics et al., 2019). Emellett az MI használata és a co-creation a szolgáltatók részéről növelheti az egyes tevékenységek hatékonyságát és a vásárlói elkötelezettséget (Csapody & Jászberényi, 2024; Marien & Papp, 2024). A turizmus napjainkban társadalmi jelenséggé vált, pozitív hatással van az utazók életminőségére, boldogságérzetére (Gonda, 2024), a hagyományos tevékenységek végzése pedig növeli a nyugalomérzetet (Henriksen et al., 2022), ez pedig remekül ellensúlyozza a városi élet okozta stresszt (Gong, 2017). Viszont a vidéki helyszínek kialakításakor egy megfelelő kényelmi szintet is biztosítani kell, fontos szempont lehet a fejlett infrastruktúra kialakítása is (Vereckei-Poór, 2023). Emellett, a vidéki turizmusban különösen, természetvédelmi örökség esetében a turizmusfejlesztés során figyelembe kell venni az adott terület ökológiai teherbíró képességét is (Raffay, 2023).

A kínai fiatalok vegyítik a hagyományos és a modern művészeteket, így különleges új művészetet alkotnak (Chen & Li, 2022). Ez megjelenik a zenei életben is, a nyugati elemek használata segítheti a globális zenei sikert (Yu, 2022). A kínai divattervezők is egyre több

hagyományos elemet visznek a terveikbe, sokszor ötvözve a hanfut modern, nyugati elemekkel (Yang, 2023; Joseph, 2025). A hagyományos művészetek iránti növekvő érdeklődés segíti továbbá az eszközök hagyományos gyártását, a hagyományos elkészítési módok fennmaradását (Xinhua, 2022). A kínai fiatalok az egyediséget és a magas minőséget keresik, de fontos számukra a vásárlás érzelmi oldala is. Kedvelik a helyi termékeket is, hiszen náluk különösen jelen van a nemzeti öntudat (Zhang, 2025). A kínai fiatalok egy új közösségimédia-trend hatására már külföldi utazásaik során is hanfu viseletben készítenek képeket, így hirdetve a kínai kultúrát (Lu, 2024; Zhang et al., 2023).

A hanfu a nosztalgiafogyasztás egyik legszembetűnőbb példája (Joseph, 2025), először 2003-ban kapott figyelmet, de igazán 2018-ban lett népszerű a közösségimédia-megjelenésekkel (Beijing Review, 2022; He et al., 2023). A hanfu a kínai han népcsoport hagyományos viselete, az 1. képen látható a hagyományos és a modern változata is. A hanfu viselése korábban egy szubkultúra sajátossága volt, de mára a mainstream része lett, a fiatalok a mindennapi életben is szívesen viselik (Joseph, 2025), ezáltal közelebbinek érzik a kínai történelmet, valamint kiemelkedhetnek a fast fashion uralta tömegből is. A hanfu mindezek miatt segíti a hagyományok átadását a fiatalabb generációk számára (Yin & Zhang, 2024). A hanfu a lassúság ellentrend képviselője is, minőségi hanfu mind anyagában, mind szabásában is a hagyományokat követi, így nemcsak a felvétele, de az elkészítése is hosszú folyamat (Huang, 2023).

1. kép: Hagyományos és modern hanfu



Forrás: New Moon Dance (2026a, 2026b)

A vidéki turizmus egyik hajtóereje egy egyszerűbb élet iránti nosztalgia érzése. E mellett vonzó lehet azok számára is, akik ki szeretnék próbálni a hagyományos tevékenységeket, vagy meg szeretnék tapasztalni az autentikus vidéki életérzést, a helyi közösségek erejét

(Kovács, 2020). Egy vidéki szállás tovább tudja növelni a vonzerejét, ha különleges szolgáltatásokat nyújt, például kulturális programokat, tevékenységeket szervez (Kaposi, 2018). A hagyományos tevékenységek terjedésével az ezeket bemutató kínai influenszerek és tartalmak népszerűsége is nő.

A közösségi média egyre erősebb hatást gyakorol a fogyasztói magatartásra, így a desztinációválasztásra is (Hussain et al., 2024). A népszerű desztinációk a közösségimédia-felületeken is népszerűbbek (Arora & Lata, 2020). A nézők aktívabban reagálnak az olyan tartalmakra, amelyek utazásra motiválják őket (Coronel, 2023). Ha a tartalomgyártót hitelesnek ítélik, az tovább növelheti az utazási vágyat és az influenszer desztinációválasztásra gyakorolt hatását (Cheng et al., 2020). Az utazások közösségi médiában történő megosztását szórakoztatónak tartják az utazók, emellett az elismerés is motiváló tényezőként jelenik meg (Oliveira et al., 2020). A közösségi média utazási információk keresésére és átadására is alkalmas, az influenszerek tudást adnak át, a nézők pedig aktívan keresik azt (Saini et al., 2023).

Különösen erős az influenszer hatása, ha a nézőnek paraszociális kapcsolata van a tartalomgyártóval (Dinc, 2024). A paraszociális kapcsolat kialakulását erősítheti a forrás hitelessége, szakértelme és megbízhatósága (Yilmazdoğan et al., 2021; Zheng et al., 2022). Az utazási motiváció alakulásakor mind az érzelmi, mind az értelmi szempontok fontos szerepet kapnak (Meng et al., 2024). A paraszociális kapcsolat kialakulása szempontjából fontos továbbá a hitelesség, a hasonlóság és a technológiai tudás, melyek segítségével minőségibb tartalmak készülhetnek (Dewantara et al., 2025). A paraszociális kapcsolat hatására a desztináció iránt is pozitívabb attitűdöt mutatnak a nézők, ami utazási motivációként is megjelenik (Zheng et al., 2022). A paraszociális kapcsolatok mellett, a desztinációhoz kapcsolódó történetek is hatásosak lehetnek az utazási motiváció kialakításakor (Joseph et al., 2024). Az utazási vágyat az eszképzizmus is elősegíti (Chen et al., 2025). Az utazók szeretnék elvonulni, kiszakadni a hétköznapi életből, így akár kevésbé látogatott helyeket felfedezni, vagy nem megszokott élményeket átélni (Chylińska, 2022).

Az eszképzizmus részeként a nosztalgia is hatással lehet a fogyasztók döntéseire, utazási motivációjukra (Earl & Hall, 2023; Wulf et al., 2021). A kulturális örökség a nosztalgikus utazás egyik fő hajtóereje (Lee, 2015). A történelem és a kultúra mélyebb megismerése, valamint a személyes nosztalgia is növelheti egy desztináció vonzóságát (Prayag & Del Chiappa, 2023). Azok, akik a személyes történelmük részeként tekintenek egy kulturális örökségi helyszínre, az utazással az identitásukat is megerősíthetik (Poria et al., 2003). Az örökségi helyszínre utazók motivációja lehet például a tanulás, a kultúra megismerése vagy rekreáció (Poria et al., 2004). A látogatók és a turisztikai helyszínek kölcsönösen hatnak egymásra, dinamikus kapcsolat van az emberek és a környezet között (Bapiri et al., 2021). Az autentikus desztinációk erősebb nosztalgiaérzést váltanak ki az utazókban (Prayag & Del Chiappa, 2023), hiszen a befogadók számára fontos, hogy a tartalom, amit fogyasztanak, vagy a desztináció, amit meglátogatnak, valódi és autentikus

legyen. E mellett aktívan is részt kívánnak venni különböző tevékenységekben, így át tudják élni a nosztalgiát és a vidéki életérzést.

A nosztalgikus vidéki életmódot bemutató legismertebb kínai influenszerek közé tartozik Li Ziqi, a legnépszerűbb, nemzetközileg is ismert kínai influenszer, aki a YouTube-on több mint 31 millió, a kínai TikTokon (Douyin) több mint 50 millió, a Sina Weibo felületen pedig több mint 26 millió követővel rendelkezik. Li Ziqi videói hosszabb formátumúak, 10-20 perc hosszúak is lehetnek, ezzel is a lassúság ellentrendet követi, szemben a közösségi médiában egyre gyakoribb rövid formátumú, maximum pár perces videókkal. A videók sokszor egy egész év munkáját mutatják be, leforgatásuk és szerkesztésük is időigényes folyamat. A videók minden esetben a kínai kultúra hagyományos elemeit mutatják be, például főzés, kézműves tevékenységek vagy kertészkedés. A videók nagyon esztétikusak és megnyugtatóak, az egyszerűséget hangsúlyozzák, szemben a modern mindennapokkal. Míg videói a hagyományos értékeket képviselik, elkészítésükhöz modern technológiát alkalmaz, emellett saját márkája is a modern életet élőkhez szól; elsősorban instant ételeket árul, melyek hagyományos alapanyagokból készülnek. De nemcsak az ő esetében jelenik meg ez a kettősség, a hagyományos művészeti eszközöket és a hanfu viseletet is sokan online szerzik be (Xinhua, 2022).

A nosztalgiafogyasztás másik modern példája a nosztalgikus tartalmú kosztümös drámák terjedése, vagy a harcművészeti valóságshow-k népszerűsége (Cai, 2022; Xing, 2023). Ezen tartalmak fogyasztásakor a nézőben, azaz a befogadóban kialakulhat az egyoldalú érzelmi kötődés, a paraszociális kapcsolat (Horton & Wohl, 1956). A paraszociális kapcsolat kialakulását egy közvetítő közeg, azaz a média teszi lehetővé, ezen keresztül szerez a befogadó információt a médiaszereplőről (Törőcsik & Szűcs, 2021). Az adott médiaszereplő mögött gyakran egész háttérpar áll, segítve a paraszociális kapcsolat kialakulását, ami részben tervezett marketingtevékenység eredményeképp értelmezhető (Törőcsik, 2017).

A szakirodalom alapján feltételezhető, hogy a Li Ziqi tartalmait által közvetített kulturális örökség több, egymással összefüggő pszichológiai és viselkedési folyamaton keresztül fejti ki hatását. A korábbi kutatások szerint a hitelesnek és autentikusnak érzékelt tartalmak elősegítik a paraszociális kapcsolatok kialakulását (Yilmazdoğan et al., 2021; Zheng et al., 2022). A paraszociális kapcsolat hatására a befogadók erősebb érzelmi bevonódást élhetnek át, amely megjelenhet eszképzizmus és inspiráció formájában is (Dinc, 2024; Chen et al., 2025). A szakirodalom alapján ez megjelenhet a desztináció meglátogatására irányuló szándékban, valamint a hagyományos kulturális tevékenységek kipróbálására való nyitottságban is (Zheng et al., 2022; Joseph et al., 2024).

A kulturális örökség hiteles reprezentációja emellett hozzájárulhat a kultúra megbecsüléséhez, valamint a hagyományos tevékenységek és kulturális helyszínek iránti pozitív attitűd kialakulásához. A szakirodalom alapján ezért feltételezhető, hogy a kulturális reprezentáció, a paraszociális kapcsolat, az inspiráció és az eszképzizmus együttesen járulnak hozzá a kulturális örökség iránti érdeklődés és a vidéki turizmus iránti szándék növekedéséhez.

3. Vizsgálati módszerek

A közösségi média szerepe a kulturális örökség közvetítésében egyre hangsúlyosabbá válik. Bár a szakirodalom számos kutatásban vizsgálta az influenszerek, a paraszociális kapcsolatok és a turisztikai szándék kapcsolatát, kevés figyelem irányult arra, hogy a kulturális örökséget közvetítő tartalmak esetében milyen mechanizmusokon keresztül alakul ki ez a hatás. Különösen kevésbé feltárt terület a kulturális reprezentáció, a paraszociális kapcsolat, az inspiráció és a vidéki turizmus összefüggésrendszere.

Jelen tanulmány célja annak feltárása, hogy Li Ziqi videói milyen módon járulnak hozzá a paraszociális kapcsolatok kialakulásához, valamint, hogy ezek a kapcsolatok miként befolyásolják a kulturális örökség iránti érdeklődést és a vidéki turizmus iránti szándékot.

A kutatás ezért az alábbi kérdések megválaszolására törekszik:

- K1: Milyen tartalmi és narratív elemek jelennek meg a videókban, amelyek hozzájárulhatnak a paraszociális kapcsolat kialakulásához
- K2: Hogyan értékelik a kínai nézők Li Ziqi tartalmainak hitelességét és kulturális reprezentációját?
- K3: A paraszociális kapcsolat hatással van-e a hagyományos tevékenységek kipróbálására irányuló szándékra?
- K4: Milyen szerepet játszik az inspiráció a paraszociális kapcsolat és a turisztikai szándék közötti kapcsolatban?

A kutatás vegyes módszertani megközelítést alkalmaz, első lépésként kvalitatív tartalomelemzés készült Li Ziqi videóinak és a hozzájuk kapcsolódó nemzetközi nézői kommenteknek a vizsgálatával. A kvalitatív szakasz célja azon visszatérő témák, jelentések és érzelmi reakciók feltárása volt, amelyek hozzájárulhatnak a paraszociális kapcsolatok, az inspiráció, az eszképzizmus, valamint a kulturális örökség iránti érdeklődés kialakulásához. A tartalomelemzés során a nemzetközi közönség Li Ziqiről alkotott véleménye került vizsgálatra. A kvalitatív eredmények és a kapcsolódó szakirodalom alapján került kialakításra a kérdőíves kutatás elméleti modellje és a vizsgált konstrukciók köre. A második, kvantitatív szakasz célja a kvalitatív elemzés során azonosított jelenségek empirikus vizsgálata és a változók közötti összefüggések tesztelése volt a kínai nézők körében, hiszen míg a nemzetközi nézők külső megfigyelői Li Ziqi videóinak, addig a kínai nézőknek valódi tapasztalata van a kínai vidéki élettel kapcsolatban.

A kutatás a vizsgált jelenség komplexitásából adódóan vegyes módszertani megközelítést alkalmaz, amely ötvözi a kvalitatív tartalomelemzést és a kvantitatív kérdőíves adatfelvételt. A két módszer kombinációja lehetővé teszi egyrészt a médiatartalmak és a nézői reakciók mélyebb értelmezését, másrészt a feltárt jelenségek empirikus vizsgálatát egy konkrét célcsoport körében.

3.1. Tartalomelemzés

A kutatás első szakaszában kvalitatív tartalomelemzés készült Li Ziqi videóinak alapján. Az elemzés célja a videók vizuális és narratív elemeinek, valamint a nézői reakciókban

megjelenő jelentések feltárása volt, különös tekintettel a paraszociális kapcsolatok jelenlétére. Az elemzésbe összesen hat videó került bevonásra a YouTube platformról. A mintavétel célzott kiválasztással történt: a három legújabb és a három legnépszerűbb videó került kiválasztásra annak érdekében, hogy a tartalom időbeli változásai és a legnagyobb elérést generáló videók jellemzői egyaránt megjelenjenek.

Az elemzés során a videók több szempont mentén, manuálisan kerültek kódolásra, beleértve a megjelenített tájat, tevékenységeket, narratív elemeket, valamint a kulturális örökséghez kapcsolódó tartalmakat. Kiemelt figyelem irányult azokra az elemekre, amelyek a néző számára az intimitás, a személyesség és a mindennapi életbe való betekintés érzetét keltik.

A videókhoz kapcsolódó nézői kommentek szintén elemzésre kerültek. A kommentek kiválasztása elméleti telítettség elve alapján történt, azaz addig kerültek bevonásra, amíg új jelentéstartalmak már nem jelentek meg. A választás elsősorban a hosszabb, reflektív jellegű hozzászólásokra esett. Az elemzés célja a nézői percepciók, érzelmi reakciók, valamint a paraszociális kapcsolatok megjelenésének feltárása volt. Az elemzés eredményeit egy összefoglaló kódtáblázat rendszerezte, amely videónként tartalmazta a megjelenő helyszíneket, tevékenységeket, narratív elemeket, kulturális örökségi motívumokat, a paraszociális kapcsolatot támogató tartalmi elemeket, valamint a kommentekben megjelenő visszatérő témákat.

3.2. Kérdőíves kutatás

A kutatás második szakaszában kérdőíves adatfelvétel készült a tartalomelemzés eredményeinek kiegészítése és kvantitatív vizsgálata céljából. A kérdőív célja a kínai közönség percepcióinak, érzelmi kötődésének, valamint viselkedési szándékainak mérése volt. A kérdőív célcsoportját így kínai válaszadók alkották, elsősorban Magyarországon élő kínai egyetemi hallgatók és oktatók, valamint a kitöltők ismerősei. A szerző a Pécsi Tudományegyetem Egészségtudományi Karán működő Hagyományos Kínai Orvoslás Konfuciusz Intézet hallgatójaként közvetlen kapcsolatban áll kínai oktatókkal és hallgatókkal, ami lehetővé tette a célcsoport hatékony elérését. A kérdőíves adatfelvétel során a résztvevők toborzása részben ezen kapcsolati hálón keresztül történt: több válaszadó személyesen is részt vett a kitöltésben, valamint közreműködésükkel a kérdőív további kínai hallgatókhoz is eljutott. Az adatfelvétel 2026 áprilisában, online formában történt egyetemi csatornákon keresztül, valamint személyes megkeresés és hólabda módszer alkalmazásával. Összesen 116 válasz érkezett, amelyek közül 16 kitöltő nem ismerte Li Ziqi tartalmait, ezért ezen kitöltők kizárásra kerültek az elemzésből. A végső minta az adatok tisztítása után így 100 darabból áll.

A kérdőív több, korábbi kutatásokban már validált skálára, valamint saját fejlesztésű tételekre épült. A válaszok mérése hétfokú Likert-skálán történt (1 = egyáltalán nem ért egyet, 7 = teljes mértékben egyetért). A paraszociális kapcsolat mérésére az Audience-Persona Interaction Scale (Auter & Palmgreen, 2000) rövidített, a kutatás kontextusához igazított változata szolgált. Az eszképzizmus és inspiráció dimenziók mérése pedig Wu &

Holsapple (2014) nyomán történt, szintén a kutatás fókuszára igazítva az állításokat. A kulturális reprezentáció, a kultúra megbecsülése, valamint a turisztikai szándék mérésére saját fejlesztésű tételek kerültek kialakításra, a kutatás elméleti része alapján.

A kérdőív Likert-skálát alkalmazott (1–7), ahol az 1 az egyáltalán nem ért egyet, a 7 pedig a teljes mértékben egyetért választ jelentette. A kérdések a kvalitatív vizsgálat alapján azonosított dimenziók mentén vizsgálták a fogyasztókat, beleértve az eszközizmust, az inspirációt, a paraszociális kapcsolatot, a kultúra megbecsülését, a kulturális reprezentációt, valamint a turisztikai és a tevékenységek kipróbálása iránti szándékot. A kérdőívben alkalmazott konstrukciók az 1. táblázatban kerültek összefoglalásra. Ezek mellett a kérdőív demográfiai kérdéseket tartalmazott.

1. táblázat: A kérdőívben alkalmazott konstrukciók

Kvalitatív eredmény	Kapcsolódó konstrukció
Érzelmi kötődés	Paraszociális kapcsolatok
Nyugalom iránti vágy, kiszakadás	Eszképizmus
Inspiráció a vidéki élet kipróbálására	Inspiráció
Pozitív kultúramegítélés	Kulturális reprezentáció
Kultúra iránti tisztelet	Kultúra megbecsülése
Vidéki helyszínek iránti érdeklődés	Turisztikai szándék
Hagyományok iránti érdeklődés	Tevékenységek kipróbálási szándéka

Forrás: saját szerkesztés.

A kérdőívben használt konstrukciók forrásait és elemszámát a 2. táblázat foglalja össze. A saját fejlesztésű tételek kialakítása a szakirodalmi áttekintésben bemutatott elméleti összefüggések alapján történt. A kulturális reprezentáció tételei a kulturális hitelesség és kulturális közvetítés irodalmára épültek, míg a kulturális megbecsülés, a turisztikai szándék és a hagyományos tevékenységek kipróbálására vonatkozó tételek a kutatás céljaihoz igazodva kerültek megfogalmazásra.

2. táblázat: A kérdőívben használt konstrukciók forrásai és elemszámai

Konstrukció	Itemek száma	Forrás
PSR	6	Auter & Palmgreen (2000) adaptált változat
ESC	3	Wu & Holsapple adaptált változat (2014)
INS	3	Wu & Holsapple adaptált változat (2014)
REP	3	Saját fejlesztés
CULT	3	Saját fejlesztés
TOUR	3	Saját fejlesztés
ACT	3	Saját fejlesztés

Forrás: saját szerkesztés.

A kutatás pilot jellegű vizsgálatnak tekinthető. A minta nem reprezentatív, mivel a válaszadók toborzása hólabda mintavétellel és egyetemi kapcsolati hálókon keresztül történt. Ennek következtében az eredmények elsősorban a vizsgált mintára vonatkoztathatók, és nem általánosíthatók a teljes kínai népességre.

4. Eredmények

Az alábbi fejezet a kutatás empirikus eredményeit mutatja be. Először a kvalitatív tartalomelemzés főbb megállapításai kerülnek ismertetésre, majd a kérdőíves felmérés alapján kapott kvantitatív eredmények következnek. Bemutatásra kerülnek a leíró statisztika, a változók közötti összefüggések, valamint a mediációs elemzés eredményei, amelyek a vizsgált modellben szereplő kapcsolatok mélyebb megértését teszik lehetővé.

4.1. A nemzetközi közönség vizsgálata

A kvalitatív tartalomelemzés során hat darab (a három legújabb és a három legnagyobb megtekintésű), különböző időszakokból (2019–2024) származó videó került vizsgálatra. Az elemzés előre meghatározott kategóriák mentén zajlott, amelyek magukban foglalták a megjelenített környezetet, a bemutatott tevékenységeket, a narratív elemeket, a kulturális örökség reprezentációját, valamint a paraszociális kapcsolat kialakulását támogató tartalmi elemeket. Az elemzés a YouTube felületén elérhető, a videókhoz kapcsolódó nézői kommentek vizsgálatára is kiterjedt. A kommentek közül az angol nyelvű, nemzetközi hozzászólások kerültek bevonásra, míg a Kínában elérhető közösségimédia-felületek és az ott megjelenő kommentek ebben a kutatási szakaszban nem képezték az elemzés részét.

3. táblázat: A tartalomelemzés rövidített kivonata

ID	Év	Hossz	Táj	Tevékenység	Narratíva	Kulturális örökség	Paraszociális elem
1	2024	12:27	kert, természet, otthon, konyha, tópart	selyemkészítés, selyemfestés, ruhakészítés, zongorázás, ének	lány zene, természet, feliratozás, time lapse	selyemkészítés, selyemfestés	nagymama, otthon, háziállatok, születésnap, éneklés
2	2024	14:06	kert, otthon, természet	házimunka, étkezés, tükörkészítés, kertépítés	lány zene, természet, feliratozás, time lapse	hagyományos alapanyagok és technikák, hagyományos ruhák és építészet	háziállatok, otthon, kutya, személyesség
3	2024	14:00	természet, erdő, otthon, hálósoba	gardróbjavítás, gyűjtögetés, természetes lakk és festék készítése	lány zene, természet, feliratozás, time lapse	hagyományos ruházat és bútor, természetes lakk és festék készítése	otthon, nagymama, kutya, személyesség

4	2019	10:11	erdő, kert, otthon, konyha, vidéki táj	gyűjtögetés, ételkészítés, étkezés	lány zene, természet, feliratozás, time lapse	újév, hagyományos ételek készítése, hagyományok	háziállatok, nagymama, ismerős, személyesség
5	2021	20:33	kert, otthon, erdő, természet, konyha	kertészkedés, építkezés, ételkészítés, étkezés	lány zene, természet, feliratozás, time lapse	hagyományos építészet, hagyományos receptek	kutya, család, háziállatok, közös étkezés, személyesség
6	2019	10:05	bambusz-erdő, otthon, kert, konyha, patak	gyűjtögetés, ételkészítés, étkezés	lány zene, természet, feliratozás, time lapse	hagyományos ételek, gyűjtögetés, természeti táj, hagyományos vidéki építészet	nagymama, kutya, közös étkezés, személyesség

Forrás: saját szerkesztés.

Ahogy a 3. táblázatban is látható, az elemzett videók egységesen vidéki, természeti környezetben játszódnak, visszatérő helyszínek a kert, erdő, otthon és konyha. A bemutatott tevékenységek jellemzően hagyományos, kétféle munkákhoz kapcsolódnak, mint például gyűjtögetés, betakarítás, főzés, kézműves tevékenységek, illetve építés és felújítás. E mellett főleg az újabb videókban kiemelt szerepet kapnak a hagyományos kínai kézműves technikák, mint például a selymekkészítés vagy a hagyományos lakkozás, amelyek a kulturális örökség aktív megőrzését tükrözik. A régebbi videókban a súly főleg az ételkészítésen és az ehhez kapcsolódó gyűjtögetésen és kerti munkán van.

A videók narratívája minimalista, főként a vizuális elemek dominálnak. A lány zene, a természet hangjai, valamint a timelapse-technikák alkalmazása nyugodt, meditatív hangulatot teremt. A lassúság és az egyszerűség hangsúlyozása tudatosan szembeállítható a modern, felgyorsult életmóddal, ezáltal erős eszkézipista élményt kínál a nézők számára. A vizsgált tartalmakban a hagyományok nem statikus elemként jelennek meg, hanem a mindennapi élet integrált részeként, amelyet a tartalomkészítő aktívan gyakorol és továbbörökít.

A videókban erőteljesen megjelennek a paraszociális kapcsolatot kiváltó elemek. Visszatérő motívum a családi kapcsolatok, különösen a nagymamával való interakciók bemutatása, valamint a személyes tér és a mindennapi élet intim pillanatainak megosztása, különös figyelmet kapnak ezek között is az étkezések. Az érzelmi kifejezések és a legújabb videóban megjelenő közönség felé irányuló üzenet tovább erősítik a néző és a tartalomkészítő közötti kapcsolat illúzióját.

A videókhoz kapcsolódó nézői kommentek elemzése során strukturált tematikus tartalomelemzés került alkalmazásra. Az elemzéshez előzetesen kialakított szempontok szolgáltak, amelyek a kutatás célkitűzéseire és a paraszociális kapcsolatokkal foglalkozó szakirodalomhoz igazodtak. Videónként körülbelül 30 angol nyelvű komment került áttekintésre, így összesen mintegy 180 hozzászólás vizsgálatára került sor. A kiválasztás

során elsősorban a hosszabb, reflektív jellegű kommentek kerültek előtérbe, amelyek érzelmi reakciókat, kulturális értelmezéseket vagy a videók által kiváltott személyes élményeket tartalmaztak. A rövid, pár szavas hozzászólások nem kerültek részletes elemzésre.

Az elemzés során a visszatérő témák és motívumok táblázatos formában kerültek rögzítésre. A kutatás célja nem a kommentek mennyiségi elemzése, hanem a visszatérő jelentésmintázatok feltárása volt, ezért a hangsúly a tematikus ismétlődések azonosításán volt. Az elméleti telítettség akkor lett elfogadott, amikor körülbelül 15-20 komment elemzése után már nem jelentek meg új tematikus kategóriák, hanem az újabb hozzászólások a korábban azonosított motívumokat ismételték. A kódolást a szerző végezte, a következetesség biztosítása érdekében ugyanakkor valamennyi videó és komment azonos elemzési szempontok alapján került feldolgozásra.

A kommentek elemzése a paraszociális kötődés több jelére utalt. A nézők gyakran érzelmileg telített módon reagálnak, például hiányérzetet fejeznek ki a tartalomkészítő távolléte idején, illetve személyes kapcsolatként írják le a vele való viszonyukat. E mellett a tartalomgyártó nagymamája iránt is erős kapcsolatot éreznek, aggódnak érte, valamint jó egészséget kívánnak neki: „A nagymama még él. Egészséges és boldog [...] ó annyira, de annyira hiányoztatok [...] Senki sem tud helyettesíteni téged Liziqi” (YouTube-komment).

A nézők továbbá kiemelik a tartalomkészítő inspiráló, életmódváltó hatását, például a vidéki életre való áttérést vagy életmódbeli változásokat említene. Emellett a kommentekben gyakran megjelenik a kulturális megértés és nyitottság növekedése, ami arra utal, hogy a tartalom hozzájárul a kínai kultúra pozitív percepciójához a nemzetközi közönség körében: „Kedves Liziqi, megváltoztattad az életemet! Segítettél könnyebben elfogadni édesanyám elvesztését (ő is ismert téged), meglátni a szépséget az apró dolgokban és megőrizni a mentális egészségemet. Miattad kezdtem el főzni” (YouTube-komment).

A tartalomelemzés eredményei alapján a vizsgált videók komplex módon ötvözik a kulturális örökség bemutatását, az esztétikus és eszkéipista élményt, valamint a paraszociális kapcsolatépítést. Ezek az elemek együttesen hozzájárulhatnak a nézők inspirációjához és a kulturális, illetve turisztikai érdeklődés erősödéséhez, valamint a kultúraközi megértés elősegítéséhez. A tartalomelemzés során a nemzetközi közönség véleménye és reakciói voltak megfigyelhetők, akik számára a kínai kultúra csupán közvetve ismert, így a kvantitatív kutatásba a kínai közönség került bevonásra, hogy a videókban megjelenő vidéki élet és kulturális tevékenységek olyan körben is vizsgálhatók legyenek, amelyben közvetlenül ismerik ezeket.

4.2. A kínai közönség vizsgálata

A kvantitatív kutatásba 100 fő válasza került bevonásra. Az online kérdőívet kitöltők életkora 17 és 56 év között volt, a minta többségét fiatal felnőttek alkották. A nemek megoszlása alapján a válaszadók között többségben voltak a nők, míg a férfiak kisebb arányban képviseltették magukat (62 fő nő, 36 fő férfi és 2 fő nem válaszolt). A válaszadók túlnyomó része Kínában városi környezetben él (87 fő), míg kisebb részük vidéki lakos (13

fő). Emellett a legtöbb résztvevő felsőfokú tanulmányokat folytat vagy már rendelkezik egyetemi végzettséggel. A minta földrajzilag változatos, több kínai tartományból is tartalmaz válaszadókat.

A kérdőív hét konstrukciót mért, ezek a paraszociális kapcsolat (PSR), az inspiráció (INS), az eszképzizmus (ESC), a vidéki turisztikai szándék (TOUR), a hagyományos tevékenységek kipróbálási szándéka (ACT), a kultúra megbecsülése (CULT) és a reprezentáció (REP).

A kutatás első lépésben a vizsgált konstrukciók megbízhatóságát és alapvető statisztikai jellemzőit vizsgálta, majd korrelációs, regressziós és mediációs elemzések történtek SPSS-szoftverrel. A mediációs hatás vizsgálatához az IBM SPSS Statistics-szoftverhez elérhető PROCESS macro (5.0 verzió) került alkalmazásra (Hayes, 2022). A vizsgálat során a 4-es számú modell (egyszerű mediáció) került lefuttatásra. A közvetett hatások szignifikanciájának tesztelése bootstrap eljárással történt, 5000 újramintavétellel, 95%-os konfidenciaintervallum mellett.

Minden konstrukció megbízhatónak bizonyult, a Cronbach's Alpha minden esetben 0,7 feletti volt (PSR = 0,9, INS = 0,92, ESC = 0,91, TOUR = 0,76, ACT = 0,71, CULT = 0,74, REP = 0,81). A leíró statisztikai eredmények alapján a válaszadók magas szintű kulturális megbecsülést mutattak ($M = 5,84$; $SD = 1,03$), valamint viszonylag erős vidéki turisztikai szándék volt megfigyelhető ($M = 5,24$; $SD = 1,26$). A reprezentáció megítélése szintén pozitív volt ($M = 5,07$; $SD = 1,24$). Az eszképzizmus ($M = 4,69$; $SD = 1,56$) és az inspiráció ($M = 4,79$; $SD = 1,53$) közepes szinten jelent meg. A paraszociális kapcsolat mértéke volt a legalacsonyabb a vizsgált konstrukciók közül ($M = 4,05$; $SD = 1,41$). Ezeket az adatokat összefoglalva a 4. táblázat mutatja.

4. táblázat: A konstrukciók megbízhatósága, átlaga és szórása

Konstrukció	Cronbach's Alpha	Átlag (M)	Szórás (SD)
REP	0,808	5,07	1,24
ESC	0,906	4,69	1,56
INS	0,915	4,79	1,53
PSR	0,898	4,05	1,41
CULT	0,744	5,84	1,03
ACT	0,712	5,29	1,19
TOUR	0,752	5,24	1,26

Forrás: Az SPSS elemzés alapján saját szerkesztés.

A korrelációs elemzés eredményei alapján a paraszociális kapcsolat szignifikáns, közepes erősségű pozitív kapcsolatot mutatott mind a hagyományos tevékenységek kipróbálása ($r = 0,532$; $p < 0,001$), mind a vidéki turisztikai szándékkal ($r = 0,520$; $p < 0,001$). Ez arra utal, hogy azok a válaszadók, akik erősebb érzelmi kötődést alakítanak ki a tartalomkészítő felé, nagyobb nyitottságot mutatnak a hagyományos kulturális tevékenységek és a vidéki

turizmus iránt. E mellett a paraszociális kapcsolat erős összefüggést mutatott az inspirációval ($r = 0,729$; $p < 0,001$) és az eszközizmussal ($r = 0,651$; $p < 0,001$), ami alátámasztja, hogy a nézők számára a tartalom érzelmi élményt is nyújt, valamint segít nekik kikapcsolódni és elvonatkoztatni a hétköznapi problémáktól.

A paraszociális kapcsolat és a turisztikai szándék közötti kapcsolat mélyebb megértése érdekében mediációs elemzés került elvégzésre, amelyben az inspiráció mediáló szerepét vizsgáltuk. Az elemzés a PROCESS macro (Model 4) alkalmazásával történt, bootstrap eljárással (5000 mintavétel, 95%-os konfidenciaintervallum).

Az eredmények alapján a paraszociális kapcsolat szignifikáns pozitív kapcsolatot mutatott az inspirációval ($\beta = 0,792$, $p < 0,001$), míg az inspiráció szintén szignifikáns pozitív kapcsolatban állt a turisztikai szándékkal ($\beta = 0,341$, $p < 0,001$). A paraszociális kapcsolat közvetlen hatása a turisztikai szándékokra nem bizonyult szignifikánsnak ($\beta = 0,195$, $p = 0,072$). Ugyanakkor az indirekt hatás szignifikáns volt ($\beta = 0,270$, 95% CI [0,089; 0,499]), mivel a konfidenciaintervallum nem tartalmazott nulla értéket. Az eredmények tehát összhangban állnak egy olyan mediációs modellel, amelyben az inspiráció közvetítő szerepet tölthet be a paraszociális kapcsolat és a turisztikai szándék között.

5. Következtetések

A pilot jellegű kutatás célja annak feltárása volt, hogy a közösségi médiában kialakuló paraszociális kapcsolatok miként járulnak hozzá a kulturális örökség iránti érdeklődés növeléséhez, valamint a vidéki turizmus és a hagyományos tevékenységek iránti szándék alakulásához. A vizsgálat Li Ziqi videóin keresztül elemezte ezt a jelenséget, vegyes módszertani megközelítést alkalmazva. Az eredmények alapján a vizsgált jelenség komplex módon értelmezhető, ahol az érzelmi és élményalapú tényezők is kiemelt szerepet játszanak.

Az első kutatási kérdéssel (K1) összhangban, a kvalitatív tartalomelemzés során a videókban megjelenő paraszociális elemek azonosításra kerültek, ilyenek a személyes tér bemutatása, a családi kapcsolatok (különösen a nagymamával való interakciók), valamint a mindennapi élet intim pillanatai, ezek mind hozzájárulnak a néző és a tartalomkészítő közötti érzelmi kötődés kialakulásához.

A kutatás kvantitatív részében a kínai nézőpontra került a hangsúly. A második kutatási kérdés (K2) arra kereste a választ, hogy a kínai nézők hitelesnek tartják-e Li Ziqi tartalmait. A kérdőíves felmérés eredményei azt mutatták, hogy a kínai válaszadók hitelesnek tartják a tartalmakban megjelenő tevékenységeket és a kínai kultúra bemutatását, ezáltal a tartalmak kulturális reprezentációját pozitívan értékelik, azonban a videókat a vidéki élet idealizált változatának tartják. Emellett a válaszadók érdeklődnek a hagyományos kultúra iránt, ez arra utal, hogy a tartalom nemcsak a nemzetközi közönség számára közvetít kulturális értékeket, hanem a helyi közönség számára is hiteles és releváns marad, hozzájárulhat a hagyományos értékek fiatalabb generációk számára történő közvetítéséhez.

A harmadik kutatási kérdés (K3) esetében az eredmények szignifikáns pozitív kapcsolatot jeleztek a paraszociális kapcsolat és a hagyományos tevékenységek kipróbálására irányuló szándék között, továbbá az inspiráció mediáló szerepet tölt be. Ez arra utal, hogy a nézők nemcsak érzelmileg kötődnek a tartalomkészítőhöz, hanem konkrét viselkedési szinten is nyitottabbá válhatnak az általa bemutatott tevékenységek iránt.

A negyedik kutatási kérdés (K4) eredménye az inspiráció kulcsszerepére mutat rá, amely összekapcsolja a paraszociális kapcsolatból fakadó érzelmi kötődést a viselkedési szándékokkal. Az elemzés alapján a paraszociális kapcsolat szignifikáns pozitív kapcsolatban áll az inspirációval, az inspiráció pedig szintén szignifikáns pozitív kapcsolatban áll a turisztikai szándékkal. Ugyanakkor a paraszociális kapcsolat közvetlen hatása nem bizonyult szignifikánsnak, míg az indirekt hatás igen, ami összhangban áll egy teljes mediációt feltételező modellel. Az eredmények alapján feltételezhető, hogy az érzelmi kötődés önmagában kevésbé kapcsolódik a turisztikai szándékhoz, mint az inspirációval együtt megjelenő érzelmi bevonódás.

Összességében az eredmények arra utalnak, hogy a paraszociális kapcsolatok és a turisztikai szándék, valamint a hagyományos tevékenységek kipróbálása iránti szándék közötti összefüggésben az inspiráció fontos közvetítő tényező lehet. A kvalitatív és kvantitatív eredmények egymást erősítve támasztják alá, hogy az érzelmi bevonódás és az esztétizált élmény kulcsszerepet játszik a kulturális örökség közvetítésében. A kvalitatív és kvantitatív eredmények alapján feltételezhető, hogy Li Ziqi tartalmi nemcsak esztétikai élményt nyújtanak, hanem hozzájárulhatnak a kulturális örökség továbbadásához és a kulturális identitás erősítéséhez is. A tartalmak különösen alkalmasak lehetnek arra, hogy hidat képezzenek a hagyományos és modern életforma között, miközben inspirálják a nézőket a kulturális élmények iránti nyitottságra.

A vegyes módszertani megközelítés lehetővé tette, hogy a kvalitatív és kvantitatív eredmények egymást kiegészítve járuljanak hozzá a vizsgált jelenség megértéséhez. Míg a tartomelemzés feltárta a paraszociális kapcsolatok kialakulását támogató narratív és vizuális elemeket, valamint a nézők érzelmi reakcióit, addig a kérdőíves vizsgálat statisztikai úton is alátámasztotta az érzelmi kötődés, az inspiráció és a turisztikai szándék közötti kapcsolatokat.

A lassúság az ellentrend alapja, ami nem feltétlenül felel meg az aktuális korszellemnek (Nagy et al., 2020), azonban egyes elemeit beemelve a mindennapokba, a modern, de hanfu által inspirált ruhák viselése, a kínai és nyugati művészetek ötvözése a modern hangzás miatt, kulturális utazások, hagyományos ételek elkészítése, fesztiválokra való részvétel, vagy nosztalgikus tartalomgyártók és kosztümös drámák online megtekintése mind segítenek egy kicsit megnyugodni, visszakerülni a gondtalanságba, még akkor is, ha ez csak egy rövid ideig tart és utána vissza kell térnünk a gyors mindennapokba.

A kutatás több szempontból is hozzájárul a szakirodalomhoz és a gyakorlati alkalmazásokhoz. Elméleti szempontból a tanulmány rámutat arra, hogy a paraszociális kapcsolatok hatása nem közvetlen, hanem mediált folyamatokon keresztül érvényesülhet.

Az inspiráció központi szerepének azonosítása pedig új perspektívát kínál a közösségi média és a turisztikai viselkedés kapcsolatának megértésében.

Gyakorlati szempontból az eredmények fontos tanulságokkal szolgálnak a vidéki turizmusfejlesztés és a kulturális örökség megőrzése szempontjából. Az eredmények alapján a potenciális látogatók érdeklődésének felkeltésében nem csupán a turisztikai attrakciók bemutatása fontos, hanem azok történeteken, személyes élményeken és hiteles szereplőkön keresztüli közvetítése is. A vidéki desztinációk számára ezért előnyös lehet olyan tartalomkészítőkkel vagy helyi véleményvezérekkel való együttműködés, akik képesek érzelmi kötődést és inspirációt kialakítani a közönségben.

A vizsgálat arra is rámutatott, hogy a nézők nem kizárólag a vidéki környezet iránt mutatnak érdeklődést, hanem a hagyományos tevékenységek kipróbálásának lehetősége is vonzó számukra. Ez arra utal, hogy a vidéki turisztikai szolgáltatók számára érdemes lehet interaktív programokat, kézműves foglalkozásokat, hagyományos gasztronómiai élményeket vagy helyi kulturális örökséghez kapcsolódó workshopokat kínálni, amelyek aktív részvételt biztosítanak a látogatók számára.

Az eredmények továbbá azt sugallják, hogy a kulturális örökség digitális bemutatása nem csupán marketingeszközként értelmezhető, hanem hozzájárulhat a hagyományos tudásformák és kulturális gyakorlatok fennmaradásához is. A tartalomkészítők és desztinációmarketinggel foglalkozók számára kiemelten fontos lehet olyan narratívák és vizuális elemek alkalmazása, amelyek nemcsak bemutatják a kultúrát, hanem inspiráló élményt is nyújtanak a közönség számára. A közösségi média így a vidéki turizmus és a kulturális örökség megőrzésének összekapcsolásában is szerepet játszhat. A közösségi média hatékony eszköz lehet a kulturális örökség globális közvetítésében és a kultúráközi megértés elősegítésében is.

A kutatás eredményeinek értelmezése során több korlátozó tényezőt is figyelembe kell venni. Egyrészt a kérdőíves adatfelvétel nem reprezentatív mintán alapul, mivel a válaszadók többsége fiatal, városi, felsőfokú végzettséggel rendelkező személy volt. Ez korlátozza az eredmények általánosíthatóságát a teljes kínai lakosságra. Másrészt az adatok önbevalláson alapulnak, amely torzíthatja az eredményeket, különösen az érzelmi és attitűdbeli változók esetében. A mediációs modellben szereplő kapcsolatok elméleti alapon feltételezett irányokat követnek, azonban a keresztmetszeti adatfelvétel nem teszi lehetővé az oksági kapcsolatok bizonyítását. A jövőbeni kutatások longitudinális vagy kísérleti módszerek alkalmazásával pontosabban vizsgálhatják a változók közötti oksági összefüggéseket. A kvalitatív tartalomelemzés esetében a minta korlátozott számú videóra és kommentre épült, így bár mélyebb értelmezést tesz lehetővé, nem tekinthető teljes körű reprezentációnak.

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RE-VALUING RURAL HERITAGE: THE ROLE OF PLACEMAKING AND PLACESHAPING

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the ways in which rural heritage is being transformed from an arena of production into a consumption space. In this ‘new rurality’, tourism becomes one of the main forces of cultural heritage transformation. Although traditional models of rural tourism tend to frame the countryside as an unchanging space providing nostalgia and tranquillity, new styles of tourism based on the creative use of rural resources offer a more dynamic model. In particular, lifestyle, image, and other elements of intangible heritage become new constructors of place, and placemaking processes give new meanings to these resources. Another theme covered is how the expansion of tourist-focussed experiences is stimulating curation of the rural by a growing army of influencers, platforms, and social media. In more creative settings intangible resources can be given new meanings through creativity, leading to an increase in ‘place value’. A new model is presented of the relationship between placemaking, placeshaping, and place value creation, which underlines the importance of re-valuing the rural world. These principles are applied in Living Labs developed by the Crocus Project.

Keywords: cultural heritage, curation, placemaking, placeshaping, rural tourism

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A VIDÉKI ÖRÖKSÉG ÚJRAÉRTÉKELÉSE: A HELYALKOTÁS ÉS A HELYALAKÍTÁS SZEREPE

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ABSZTRAKT

Ez a tanulmány azt vizsgálja, hogy a vidéki örökség hogyan alakul át a termelés színteréből fogyasztási térré. Ebben az „új vidékiségekben” a turizmus a kulturális örökség átalakulásának egyik fő hajtóerejévé válik. Noha a vidéki turizmus hagyományos modelljei általában a vidéket változatlan, nosztalgiát és nyugalmat nyújtó térként ábrázolják, a vidéki erőforrások kreatív felhasználásán alapuló új turisztikai stílusok dinamikusabb modellt kínálnak. Az életmód, a kép és a szellemi örökség egyéb elemei válnak a hely új alkotóelemeivé, és a helyteremtési folyamatok új jelentést nyernek ezen erőforrások révén. A cikk kitér arra, miképp ösztönzi a turisztikai élmények terjedése a vidékkel kapcsolatos kurátori tevékenységet az egyre növekvő számú influenszerek, platformok és a közösségi média által. Kreatívabb környezetben a szellemi erőforrások a kreativitás révén új jelentést nyerhetnek, ami a „helyérték” növekedéséhez vezet. A helyteremtés új modelljét is bemutatja a tanulmány a helyformálás és a helyértékteremtés közötti kapcsolatáról, amely aláhúzza a vidéki világ újraértékelésének fontosságát. Ezeket az elveket alkalmazza a Crocus-projekt által kifejlesztett Living Labs.

Kulcsszavak: kulturális örökség, kurátori tevékenység, helyteremtés, helyformálás, vidéki turizmus

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1. Introduction: The forgotten countryside

One of the common contemporary discourses about rural regions is their role as forgotten, undervalued areas compared to dynamic, valuable cities.

An exhibition curated by the famous Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas at the Guggenheim in New York examined the contemporary state of the countryside. *Countryside, The Future* addressed “urgent environmental, political, and socioeconomic issues” in “the rural, remote, and wild territories collectively identified as ‘countryside,’ or the 98% of the Earth’s surface not occupied by cities”. The rural was positioned as a vast but often neglected space, subsumed to the needs of contemporary urban life: “Data storage, fulfillment centers, genetic engineering, artificial intelligence, robotic automation, economic innovation, worker migration, and the private purchase of land for ecological preservation are in many cases more actively experimented with in the countryside than in the city.” Climate change, one of the issues examined in the exhibition, is largely caused by urban activities and needs, but the effects are most keenly felt in rural areas.

Koolhaas indicates a need to re-think the rural beyond traditional approaches, to account for the new pressures being applied to the rural by an expanding urban world. But, as Shapiro (2020) notes, “*Countryside, The Future* reflects the musings of an urbanite who longs for the countryside, but who is too smart to indulge in nostalgia for something he knows was a fiction all along.” The fictionalisation of the rural includes, according to Koolhaas, the reduction of architecture to structures “based strictly on codes, algorithms, technologies, engineering, and performance, not intention.” Alongside the “enduring mythology of the countryside”, Koolhaas singles out tourism and the wellness economy as having a particularly negative effect on the rural world.

Koolhaas rails against tourism as one of the forces changing a “world formerly dictated by the seasons and the organisation of agriculture” into “a toxic mix of genetic experiment, science, industrial nostalgia, seasonal immigration, territorial buying sprees, massive subsidies, incidental inhabitation, tax incentives, investment, political turmoil – in other words more volatile than the most accelerated city.” He also makes the keen observation that the current fad for wellness (often embedded in the countryside as a slow, acceptable form of travel), has limitations: “Otium and wellness are words that are very close to each other, but [...] they are currently extremely far removed from each other because otium is a kind of intellectual state [...] an ambition to develop the whole person. Wellness is much more [...] limited and focused on yourself, a condition that can never generate that creative existence.” — Rem Koolhaas.

Drawing on Lefebvre’s (2003) prediction of the “complete urbanisation” of society, Koolhaas argues that the term “countryside” is now inappropriate, since rural areas now consist of “regimented landscapes of production” linked to cities. This penetration of the rural by the urban follows Lefebvre’s idea of the new rural, in which the urban becomes an inclusive, hybrid realm (Shapiro, 2020). But alongside his seeming pessimism, Koolhaas argues that “the countryside must be rediscovered as a place to resettle, to stay alive; enthusiastic human presence must reanimate it with new imagination.” This reflects an

abiding theme of the new rural: rather than being the antithesis of the urban, the rural world possesses a creativity that can also be a valuable counterpoint to Florida's 'creative cities'. In the same vein, Koolhaas asks if the transformation of the rural represents the post-city, a concept that could be 'insanely beautiful' if articulated properly. However, Koolhaas ignores the spread of suburbs and exburbs, the growing evidence of the continuity between the urban and rural.

2. Rediscovered: Towards a new rurality

What Koolhaas identifies clearly is that we are in a moment of the rediscovery of the rural, stimulated by financial crisis, the Covid pandemic and the rising cost of living in cities. How does the New Rurality differ from the old?

The traditional approach to the rural tends to highlight specific types of resources and impacts: ecological, economic, social, cultural. Such views position the countryside as a generator of raw materials for development. Contemporary tourism development tends to concentrate on one form of rural transformation: the commodification of rural spaces for tourism consumption. This is often based on nostalgia, a loss of authenticity, and a lack of agency on the part of the rural world.

However, different rural tourism futures are also possible, as the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP, 2026) website notes: "Rural heritage is a valuable source of history, culture and nature, connecting people, places and times. Its importance goes beyond conservation; it brings together tangible, intangible, and natural elements that strengthen communities, support sustainability, and improve well-being by promoting shared values."

In fact, the interpenetration of the rural and the urban provides new impulses (the new rurality) that challenge the nostalgic and retrograde division between urban and rural (also stimulated by populist politics, as will be discussed later).

Among the values linked to rural heritage by the CAP are generational knowledge transfer, mobilising local communities, strengthening social, cultural and digital connectivity, "ensuring that rural areas remain vital parts of broader networks."

In this context, the CAP highlights the European Capital of Culture (ECOC) as a new source of urban-rural dialogue. In contrast to Florida's 'super cities', the cities that host the ECOC have gradually been getting smaller and more embedded in the rural. The average population of the first five cities to host the ECOC was almost 2 million, but between 2022 and 2026 the 13 ECOC cities averaged just over 130,000 (and Bad Ischl just one-tenth of this number of residents).

The growing rurality of the ECOC is one reason for the CAP highlights cities that have hosted the ECOC (rather like Veszprém) as examples of creative rural development. For example, Bourges 2028 is currently developing its ECOC approach through the RER Europa project, "a tourist, cultural, and ecological journey" connecting Bourges' tangible, intangible, and natural heritage, while "fostering innovative and dynamic connections between urban and rural areas."

The growing links between urban and rural are seen as essential to development and innovation, injecting new impulse from the urban world. The rural is seen as a backward and unchanging world, with traditional values and the myth of the rural idyll.

3. Transformed: The un/changing countryside?

In his study of the politics of the UK countryside, Woods (2017) highlights the growth of contested version of rurality. The “rural idyll has stimulated counter-urbanisation and the development of myths that identified the countryside with national identity.” This created a ‘moral geography’ in which rural places and rural people became the repositories of true national values, developing a politics of exclusion in rural space with racist and xenophobic undertones. But we should be careful “not to reproduce a false dichotomy between a dynamic rural present and a stable rural past, but must rather recognize that the rural has always been a space of change and development.” This now includes the introduction of ‘intrusive’ ideas and activities related to urban life, such as the growth of tourism, and investment through counter-urbanisation and gentrification by in-migrants looking for the rural idyll. The process creates issues around energy transition, tourism development, access to public services, local housing, and employment, which use rural space but also draw in actors from outside the rural world.

These forces are also stimulating transformations in rural areas. Much has been written about how tourism is transforming the countryside (Cheer, 2024; Sharpley, 2004; Kordel, 2016). However, less attention is paid to how this transformation is caused and shaped. Tourists are usually seen as the actors who stimulate change through their demand for authentic experiences, hastening the transformation of rural areas into consumption spaces. As a result, the provision of experiences has become central to shaping the new rurality, through the addition of physical attractions and interpretive elements to the physical landscape.

The shift away from an agrarian resource base has brought attention to a new range of resources — those of lifestyle, image, and other elements of intangible heritage. These are the constructors of ‘place’, and placemaking has become a major scenario for rural and urban change. The move away from physical resources also changes the basis of value creation in places and competition between places. Because using tangible culture as a basis for tourism carries the threat of serial reproduction (Richards & Wilson, 2006), value is increasingly derived from the creative deployment of intangible heritage. Instead of the development of comparative advantage (Porter, 2008) the focus moves towards competitive advantage (OECD, 2014).

This shift, evident as much in rural areas as in cities, is also linked to new actors, such as the rural creative class (Herslund, 2012). As Vaz et al. (2017) point out in the case of traditional music in Portugal, these new rural actors are characterised by mobility and pendularity: “they are incursionists in rural areas at different times of their life cycle. They are transforming the paradigm of the countryside, through its many representations and enactments of the countryside.” These incomers include commuting peri-urbans, nature

excursionists, organic farmers, heritage enthusiasts, tourism entrepreneurs, and “tourists and their rediscovery of rural culture, as tourists and tourism activities.”

The attraction for many of these urbanites is the countryside as a repository of virtues (such as tranquillity, nature, tradition, and authenticity) which cities lack. As a result, “Local identities, habits, traditions, ways of life, traditional forms of culture have been the drivers of the growing demand and offer of cultural tourism”, particularly rural cultural tourism. Many rural areas have therefore become consumption spaces where history and tradition form the basis of identification instead of agricultural production (Richards & Wilson, 2006). The result is a proliferation and serial reproduction of culture and a search for new configurations based on intangible resources and creativity, including creative tourism, music, crafts, and gastronomy. These incomers also stimulate a transfer of cosmopolitan aesthetics to rural areas, transferring the values of Urbanity into the values of the New Rurality.

The construction of the New Rurality has also shifted from purely instrumental values such as economic growth, towards intrinsic values, such as the lifestyle attributes linked to the countryside. This is also linked to new conceptualisations of rural space.

3.1. The new rurality

With the changing valuation of the rural world, the notion of ‘rurality’ itself has become a source of differentiation that has attracted investment and immigration. As Vaz et al. (2017) argue “This is reflected in the recovery and rehabilitation of vernacular houses, in the revitalization of the historic and traditional spaces and cultural traditions, in the growing demand for second homes and for permanent housing by new residents who work in nearby urban centers and in the growing tourist demand.” The consumption of the countryside through the reproduction of culture and the replication of rural lifestyles becomes more important than agricultural production, through tourism, urbanisation and gentrification. These processes are driven by the search for a ‘rural idyll’ and brings in new rural class with higher incomes and educational levels, both compared with their new rural neighbours and their former urban compatriots.

It is becoming increasingly clear that rural transformation is also widening the range of actors involved in rural development. The pandemic has thrown more light onto new groups of actors that are having an impact on rural areas, such as incomers and digital nomads (Richards, 2026a). Rodrigues et al. (2024) argue that these groups are often attracted to a ‘new rurality’, characterised by escaping urban bustle, seeking authenticity and developing new creative communities with access to technology to support experimentation.

Querol Vicente et al. (2020) outline the debates that have arisen around the growth of the new rurality. The concept originated in Latin America, where the *nueva ruralidad* was linked to the emptying of changing economic function of rural spaces and resulting depopulation. This was also linked to an increased scale and intensity of exploitation of rural resources and decreasing diversity of crops and economic models. Depopulation is

often identified as the major challenge for rural areas, particularly as populations age. Resistance to depopulation has included the creation of new products, diversification, and adaptation. Tourism and leisure became particularly important in this regard, as part of the constant adaptation of rural areas to new forms of capitalist extraction (Querol et al., 2016). The rural became an empty space, linked to lifestyle consumption rather than production, generating a revalorisation of the rural as a living space. As Urquijo et al. (2018) note in their analysis of Argentina, the new rurality is linked to the rise of non-agricultural activities such as rural tourism, outmigration, and new urban–rural interactions.

The approach to the new rurality in the 1990s was based on the permanent occupation and exploitation of rural space. But in the 21st century the emergence of diverse forms of mobility, including the growth of rural tourism, has changed this perspective. Querol Vicente et al. (2020) point to the disappearance of an immobile and backward rural world as a result of the financial crisis (and more recently Covid), stimulating in-migration and diversity.

Querol Vicente et al. (2020) link the growth of rural tourism to the transition from the 19th-century view of the rural as museum, encapsulated by the growth of open-air museums towards contemporary presentations of the rural as a living space. This also points to an important difference between traditional modes of cultural tourism, which tends to promote a passive rural gaze, and the new modes of creative tourism which are more actively involved with the living culture of the destination.

The increase in tourism is related to particular styles: event-based, activity-based, and place-based tourism. The latter “focused on the promotion of life in the countryside. Emphasis was on rural daily life: accommodation had to be in the rooms of local houses, and the life on small dairy farms [...] must be shared with visitors who would experience herding, the use of tractors, cheese making and similar activities” (Querol Vicente et al., 2020).

Similarly, in Argentina, Urquijo et al. (2018) note several cultural events have been organized. These included the 2005 “land art” event, which entailed land art in crop fields planted with soybean, maize and sunflower. Other activities included marathons, pork meat product workshops, bicycle races, popular *carneadas* (slaughtering and butchering of livestock and subsequent consumption of dairy and meat products) and rock concerts. Similar developments are noted in Europe by Fisker et al. (2021). These activities linked to the use of intangible heritage therefore reflect a transition in which the new rurality “is thus not only about adopting new livelihoods, but also establishing a renewed sense of place and sense of belonging” (Urquijo et al., 2018).

The new rurality discourse is often framed by a narrow dichotomy between ‘old’ and ‘new’, or the transformation of rural life, “from a production-oriented (farming and agriculture) to consumption-oriented (e.g. rural tourism)” (Urquijo et al., 2018). But the changes are far wider than this. The penetration of the rural world by modern capitalist investment means that a broader shift is taking place, from production to consumption to intensification.

Traditional forms of agricultural production based on commodities have shifted towards consumption-based models as the returns from agricultural production have fallen and regulation has encouraged farmers to reduce the volume of crops grown. This has stimulated an intensification of production as well as a growth in set-aside land, particularly in Europe, where the Common Agricultural Policy has hastened these trends.

4. The expansion of rural experiences and the drive towards curation

The transformation of agricultural production and the expansion of the experience economy have created a growing range of rural experience for tourist consumption. Given the relative limited range of tangible heritage resources in the countryside, many of these experiences are based on intangible heritage. This shift is reflected in a sharp increase in research on intangible heritage (Richards, 2026b).

The growing supply of experiences and expanding use of intangible resources create a need for selection or curation. As Richards (2026b) argues, the rural world is now being mediated by a growing range of curators. Rural tourism experiences are curated by experts, social media, and algorithms.

- Expert curation usually involves a single expert selecting content for a larger audience, including the traditional museum curator, or travel blog writers.
- Social curation involves groups of people in the curation process to collectively find, organise, and share content (e.g., Flickr, Reddit, Digg), also termed “crowdsourcing”.
- Algorithmic curation utilises computer programs to select content for users, such as Google search or Netflix. Algorithms rank and personalise content, such as the top 10 attractions or restaurants on TripAdvisor.

This experience explosion also creates a need for distinction, particularly in rural areas. As Blapp and Mitas (2020) note in their analysis of creative tourism in rural Bali, the uniformity of rural resources means there is a tendency towards serial reproduction of culture and creative experiences in the countryside.

How can we create links between distinctive rural places and tourism?

5. Curating a creative rurality

Curation is one potential answer, because it can create attention for many different aspects of rural life, even those hidden from rural dwellers themselves. We are seeing a growth in curation of the rural for tourists, including expert lifestyle entrepreneurs and algorithmic platforms.

For example, Malva Wine, run by Ainara Murillo, a former marketing executive, has re-invented the culture of wine into a series of curated, creative experiences: “Wine is territory. It is memory. It is a form of relationship. It is landscape. It's time. It is identity. It is legacy. These are different layers of the creative experience of wine and the rural context. And also an opportunity: that of building cultural value, just commercial value. Usually, we talk about product. Positioning. Communication. But rarely about culture.

Place. Meaning. That's where I place my work. Malva was born as a boutique of cultural strategy and practice, Specialising in wine, place and wine tourism” (Malva, s. a.).

Murillo (2025) has developed a number of creative concepts for wine, based on her own experience of marketing and her connection with the land. These include creative enotourism, a ritual of cultural meditation linking craft, wine and landscape, the cultural Mosaic of wine and Wine Knot Lab, which combines the history of knotting of rope and string with the transport and enjoyment of wine. Each participant in the Wine Knot Lab designs their own bottle-carrier in macrame.

Social curation is driven by social media, which can unite extensive communities of users around subjects of interest. Many travellers chart their journeys on social media, inspiring others to follow in their footsteps. This means that tourists are being directly influenced by other travellers, rather than travel suppliers. Among the top 20 influencers in Europe is Eva Zu Beck.

Eva is a travel creator with 870K Instagram followers, known for her adventurous spirit exploring remote locations. She focuses on sustainable, off-the-grid living, providing immersive storytelling, often accompanied by her dog. Her viral adventure stranded on Socotra Island has captivated her audience.

Such influencers, blog and vlog creators can have substantial impact on travel behaviour. This is most notable in social media hotspots in cities, where viral trends and information cascades drive visitors towards the same few sites (Van der Zee et al., 2020). In rural areas there is also a growing number of locations that are being flooded with visitors thanks to social curation. These include the Alpine village of Hallstatt in Austria, which has only 700 residents but can be flooded by up to 10,000 visitors a day. The Lofoten Islands in Arctic Norway are remote, but are being discovered by growing numbers of visitors attracted by social media.

The islands, renowned for their dramatic fjords, rugged mountains, and picturesque fishing villages, have become a digital phenomenon. Social media platforms are flooded with stunning images of Lofoten, drawing an ever-increasing number of visitors eager to recreate these iconic shots (Shorty News, 2025).

In Croatia, Plitvice Lakes, located in the largest National Park in the country, have become a major attraction. Inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979, increasing visitor numbers have been recognised as a problem by UNESCO: It comes as no surprise that Plitvice Lakes National Park attracts impressive numbers of visitors. Inevitably, heavy visitation potentially poses direct and indirect risks to the integrity of the property (UNESCO World Heritage Convention, 2026).

The Park attracted almost 1.5 million visitors in 2024, largely in July and August, and this has forced the management to adopt a range of measures to reduce negative impacts. These include one-way systems on paths, timed ticketing, and a relatively high entry price.

The challenge of social curation lies in the viral nature of demand that can be created. In France, viral social media posts and popular shows like ‘Lupin’ have turned Mont-Saint-Michel into a cult destination, attracting around three million visitors a year. Kinderdijk in

the Netherlands with only 60 permanent residents gets 600,000 visitors annually, many from cruise ships.

Pienza, a charming Tuscan village, is renowned for its revolutionary Renaissance urban planning. But it is not the blueprint central square that is drawing modern visitors: instead, many come in search of its famed pecorino cheese (Lahiri, 2026).

In terms of algorithmic curation, the Italian platform BeCountry encourages farmers to create an authentic experience and share unforgettable moments with the BeCountry community. BeCountry emphasises its passion “for good food, for authentic experiences, for the regions of Italy and the excellent products that they offer. We are a platform at the service of users who share this passion. We believe that farms are the beating heart of the Italian countryside, contributing work handed down across generations.”

BeCountry weaves traditions and culture into stories that can be shared with visitors. In this way, they hope to strengthen local communities, encourage local tourism and give a voice to farmers. BeCountry also features creative tourism experiences with cheese, which were also found to be important in the Crocus Project. There is a “shepherd’s day with cheesemaker’s workshop”, which allows guests to “participate in every step of milk processing, discovering the value of animal care and dairy processing... After collecting the milk, you will enter our dairy workshop, where we will guide you in creating your own goat cheese using traditional methods passed down through generations. To end on a high note, you will participate in a tasting of o-mile products, with a selection of fresh and aged cheeses, artisanal cured meats, and freshly prepared hot ricotta.” Visitors can enjoy the following:

- Hand milking the goats, to learn an ancient art and connect with the animals;
- Guided tour of the farm, to learn about farm life and connection to the land;
- Cheese-making workshop, with explanation of traditional techniques;
- Active participation in milk processing, from curd to final processing;
- Tasting of artisanal cheeses, typical cured meats, Cassio bread and freshly prepared warm ricotta;
- Opportunity to take home one’s own cheese, for a tasty and unique souvenir.

This experience costs 80 euros per person through the platform, which also enables tourists to give the experience as a gift to somebody else.

These examples underline the importance of building the identity of rural places to prevent them becoming just one more countryside stopover for the passive visitor. In this sense, the Crocus Project has been investigating the potential of creative placemaking and creative placeshaping processes to re-value rural tourism.

6. Re-valuing and re-placing the rural

Regenerating rather than exploiting through tourism means “supporting the capacity of a place to thrive on its own terms without packaging nature or culture into spectacles for touristic consumption” or simply viewing places as passive backdrops for economic activity (Higham & Bian, 2026). This implies understanding value in a holistic way: not just in terms

of the economic benefits of tourism, but as a holistic form of value, which recognises the systemic basis of natural and human activity. We can employ placemaking and placeshaping as new carriers of value creation, which encompass a new, more holistic form of public value: ‘place value’. Place value is most likely to be enhanced by forms of tourism that support relationality, such as regenerative tourism or creative tourism (Richards, 2020).

This new place-based approach should support new forms of understanding, such as systemic and practice-based analyses. Taking a practice approach, for example, we can see the new rurality as a practice developed by a set of actors who have differing roles in, and interpretations of, the rural world.

7. Practices of the new rurality

Practice approaches are beginning to be applied in a wide range of fields to aid the analysis of complex social systems and avoid the classic actor—structure dichotomy. Bargeman and Richards (2020) apply a practice approach to tourism, also integrating elements of Randall Collins’ (2004) Interaction Ritual Chains. The basic elements of the social practice approach as adapted from Shove and Pantzar (2010) by Richards (2021) are conceptualised as comprising resources, meanings, and creativity. Essentially, resources cannot be effectively harnessed unless they have meaning for people who have the competences or creativity necessary to use them. Shove and Pantzar employ the example of driving: the basic resource of a car is useless without the meaning of this object as a form of transport and the competence to drive it.

Richards translates these elements into a systemic model of tourism as a placemaking system, combining the elements of resources, meaning, and creativity. If we consider rural tourism, we can readily identify these placemaking elements.

7.1. Resources

Bryden et al. (2011) provide examples of rural assets, such as “water; food; timber and raw materials; land for utilization and absorption of nutrients and organic matter; renewable energy; cultural diversity; people, who are at one and the same time self-reliant and yet cooperative, often highly motivated, possessing important local knowledge, are culture bearers, and in some cases have high levels of formal education; biological diversity and landscape value; places for tourism and recreation based on landscapes, biodiversity, cultures, archaeology, history, recreational opportunities.” Rural areas therefore contain a rich store of resources that are potentially available for tourism development but harnessing these requires meaning to be attributed to them.

7.2. Meaning

Richards (2020) conceives of meaning-making as a process that is embedded in place. Harrison and Tatar (2008) see place meanings as being generated through the interaction

of people, events and localities. Places attain meaning “through a continual flow of people and events, which can be designed through programming.” In rural areas, we see this effect reflected in the growing number of events being staged in the countryside (Fisker et al., 2021). The formerly agricultural meanings on the countryside are transformed into a series of new meanings that are linked not just to the traditional rural idyll but also to the creative and regenerative potential of contemporary rural life. However, the production of these new meanings also requires creativity.

7.3. Creativity

The creativity attached to the New Rurality is most evident in the development of creative lifestyles, new forms of relationality, and alternative economic models. As Vaz et al. suggest, rural incomers, particularly those in rural-urban fringe and urban shadow areas, find the rural idyll to be “flawed or blocked”, and they often act to make their vision of the countryside a reality. This new rural imperative corresponds to the idea of creativity as a problem-solving resource (Newton, 2012).

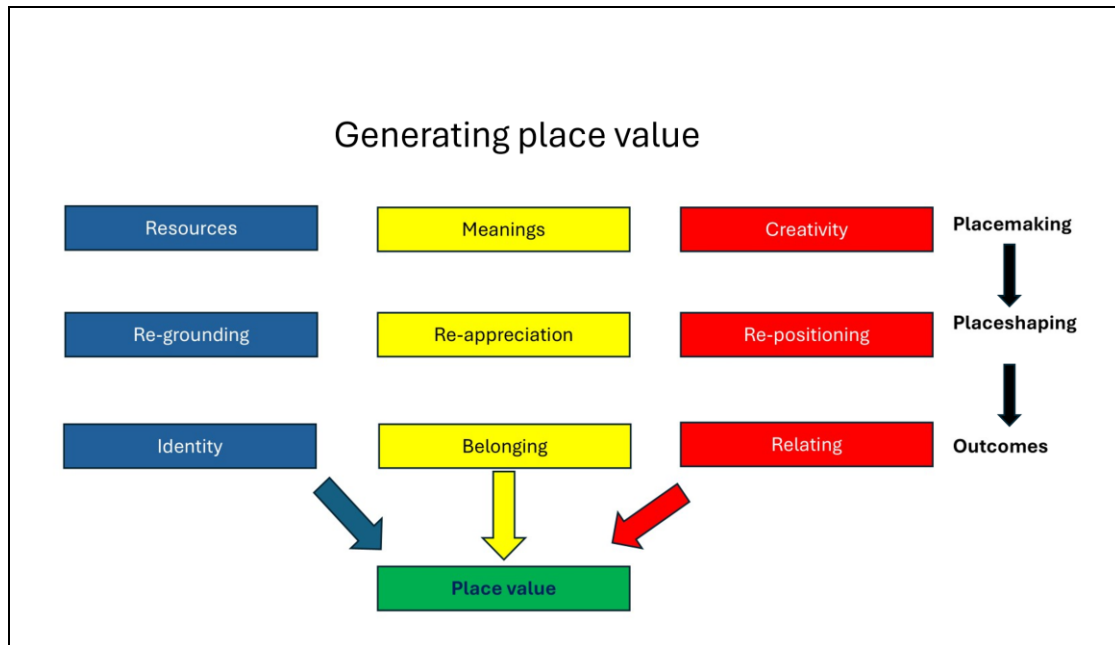
In this way, the placemaking process incorporates the concrete space corresponding to tangible and intangible resources, lived space that generates meanings, and the conceived space of creativity (Richards, 2020). However, activation and integration of these different spaces become crucial, particularly in terms of regenerative processes. We need to move away from the urban/rural dichotomy into a more dynamic conceptualisation of the rural as a hybrid space. In this context, the placeshaping concept of Horlings (2016) is a useful addition to Richards’ placemaking model (*Figure 1*). By applying Horlings’ processes that derived from sustainability theory, we can transform the basic elements of placemaking into a holistic model that can create positive outcomes in terms of identity formation, creating a sense of belonging and allowing locals to relate to others. In this way, we can generate place value that is rooted in the locality but capable of relating to the outside world in order to sustain itself.

For rural places, this means developing hybrid identities that enable belonging in traditional rural society as well as the contemporary spaces of innovation and change, and relating to outsiders in a way that creates new possibilities for the community.

Creative tourism can be a useful conduit for maximising place value, because it enables rural communities to capitalise on the resources they have to realise their own position in the world, as well as developing new relationships with outsiders interested in their identity and ways of being in the world.

We can identify examples of these kinds of place-based business models through the work of the Crocus Project. In the Cross-Border Living Labs developed by the project, cultural and creative tourism are being used as tools to increase the place value of border regions through placemaking and placeshaping processes.

Figure 1. Generating place value through placemaking and placeshaping processes



Source: own editing

8. Cross-border Living Labs: Hungary — Slovenia

The CCT links across the Hungarian—Slovenian border are being developed in the Zala (HU) and Pomurske (SLO) regions. The Zala region has been subject to depopulation in recent decades, with the population falling from almost 320,000 in 1980 to 270,000 today.

Marton et al. (2021) have previously noted the lack of cross-border tourism collaboration between Hungary and Slovenia, hampered by poor accessibility and recent decline in cross-border mobility. The Living Lab is therefore focussing on building cross-border links through tourism, highlighting cultural and creative resources. These include events such as the Wine and Dumpling Festival Nagykanizsa, that aim revive and pass on the gastronomic traditions of the region, thereby increasing the touristic attractiveness of Nagykanizsa. The Bogračfest in Lendava, Slovenia, features a traditional Slovenian one-pot stew with beef, game, pork, and potatoes. Visitors can join in the cooking as a form of creative tourism. Attracting more gastronomic tourists is important as the region has an underdeveloped offer. New establishments have opened recently, offering trendy dishes. Many restaurants now aim to source local ingredients, including suppliers from across the border.

Research for the Living Lab shows that visitors are attracted to hiking trails, waterside attractions, castles, and arts and crafts. The importance of tourist activities and levels of satisfaction are generally high on the Slovenian side of the border, but notably lower in Hungary (Table 1). This indicates that there is much work to be done in terms of rural tourism development, particularly across the border. New initiatives being undertaken, such as the development of the gastronomic offer, should help to stimulate more cross-border tourism. However, as Richards and Onderwater (2026) note, there are potential

challenges emerging for the development of cross-border rural tourism, not just in Hungary and Slovenia, but across Europe as a whole.

Table 1. Importance of and satisfaction with activities and attractions in Pomurske and Zala. Scores on 1 (low) to 5 (high) scale (Source – Crocus surveys)

	Pomurske, Slovenia (n=27)		Zala, Hungary (n=21)	
	Importance	Satisfaction	Importance	Satisfaction
Hiking trail	4.37	4.22	4.42	3.54
Cycle routes	4.41	4.00	4.65	3.19
Lakeside, waterside	4.37	3.85	4.42	3.42
Museum	4.19	3.78	3.92	3.31
Castle, mansion	4.26	4.04	3.92	3.27
Adventure park, experience park	4.19	4.15	4.00	3.54
Nature trail (educational path)	4.00	4.04	4.08	3.62
Bath/spa	4.15	4.15	4.50	3.96
Arboretum	3.93	3.89	4.00	3.19
Church, chapel	3.96	4.17	3.65	3.42
House of crafts	4.22	3.96	3.81	3.62
Cultural centre	4.33	4.07	4.08	3.81

Source: own editing

9. Challenges: The rise of rural populism

We have to recognise that the new impulses affecting the rural are not always positive ones. As Mamonova & Franquesa (2020) point out, right-wing populism is growing in Europe as a result of economic hardship, social polarisation, neoliberal economic policies, and erosion of the welfare state. In rural areas, farms, jobs and people disappear. Many argue that EU policies are destroying the countryside. “CAP criticism has also been central to rural support for far-right parties [...] (and) rural people have revolted against the hegemony of urban elites and neoliberal values” (Mamonova & Franquesa, 2020). Populist parties also exalt nationalism, displacing “experiences of dispossession and disenfranchisement onto the imagined nation”.

It is no accident that the Italian right-wing government promotes ‘Made in Italy’ food through local biodiversity, quality, ties with place and ‘peasantness’. This has been recently

linked to intangible heritage through the listing of “Italian cooking, between sustainability and biocultural diversity” (UNESCO World Heritage Convention, 2026). However, rather than benefiting small Italian farmers, this approach to stimulating gastronomy arguably benefits mostly multinational corporations and supermarket chains.

Paradoxically, this intensification of agriculture also depends on the very migratory flows that populists despise. Food production is supported by vast flows of seasonal labour, including 500,000 migrants working in Italy's agricultural sector, of whom 40% are irregular workers. In France, the shortage of seasonal workforce is estimated at 200,000. Germany is estimated to need 300,000 seasonal workers to help with fruit and vegetable harvests, in particular for white asparagus.

The populists who decry the influx of seasonal workers and permanent migrants to rural areas also forget the role of these incomers in addressing the challenges of rural areas.

In recent decades, the countryside in Europe has been reanimated by the arrival of refugees from the Middle East. In the German village of Mannheim, the population dropped for years due to an expanding mine pit and aging population. The government revived the village by resettling Syrian refugees there.

Research in Japan has shown that incomers can breathe new life into dying rural communities. In many cases, these incomers bring skills that are attached to the urban world, in particular an understanding of urban markets and taste. But they often adopt the knowledge related to the rural places they settle in, producing the kind of hybrid embedding essential for effective generation of place value. The challenges for rural areas in terms of accessibility, employment, and innovation are therefore great, but not insurmountable. Tourism is a vital part of this puzzle, as it brings new impulses, ideas, and resources from outside, as well as a mobile and constantly refreshed market for the tangible and intangible heritage of the rural.

10. Conclusions

The transformation of the countryside is forcing a re-valuation of rural areas. Depopulation and challenges of accessibility are emptying villages and creating new spaces for tourism development. These spaces are being filled with new tourism experiences and with incomers from the city, creating new challenges of embedding and valorizing these new impulses.

Recent research shows a corresponding rise in experiences that harness intangible heritage. This provides the basis for new business models utilising storytelling, creative activities, events, and gastronomy. The Crocus Project, analysing rural cultural and creative tourism, has identified placemaking and placeshaping processes as fruitful pathways for future rural tourism development.

In structuring a combined placemaking/placeshaping approach, the elements of the placemaking model developed by Richards (2020) are activated by placeshaping processes grounded in sustainability theory (Horlings, 2016). By linking resources and meanings

through creativity, processes of re-grounding, re-appreciation, and re-positioning can help rural areas to effectively develop cultural and creative tourism experiences that will generate economic, social, and cultural value.

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A MODEL OF COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM FOR SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Community-based tourism (CBT) presents both opportunities and challenges for holistic community development, especially in rural areas, where initiatives are urgently needed to create opportunities for all. CBT has been promoted as one of the poverty-reduction strategies that could improve the sustainability of marginalised regions and communities. The contribution of this paper is to propose a comprehensive CBT model for sustainable rural development, based on qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of 24 participants drawn from Nqileni village in South Africa's Eastern Cape province. The respondents were asked about the development of tourism in the area. The results showed that community members considered their involvement in tourism development initiatives to be of utmost importance. Moreover, community members indicated that sustainable tourism was creating socioeconomic benefits by preserving the village's environmental and cultural integrity.

Keywords: community-based tourism, community-based tourism model, community participation, sustainable rural development, sustainable tourism development

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KÖZÖSSÉGI ALAPÚ TURIZMUSMODELL A FENNTARTHATÓ VIDÉKFEJLŐDÉSÉRT

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ABSZTRAKT

A közösségi alapú turizmus (CBT) egyaránt jelent lehetőségeket és kihívásokat a holisztikus közösségfejlesztés számára, különösen a vidéki térségekben, ahol sürgősen szükség van olyan kezdeményezésekre, amelyek mindenki számára lehetőségeket teremtenek. A CBT a szegénységcsökkentési stratégiák egyikeként lett népszerű, mint olyan, ami javíthatja a marginalizált régiók és közösségek fenntarthatóságát. Jelen tanulmány jelentősége abban áll, hogy átfogó, közösségi alapú turisztikai modellt javasol a fenntartható vidékfejlesztés érdekében. Dél-Afrika Kelet-Fokföld tartományában található Nqileni faluból származó, célzottan kiválasztott 24 résztvevővel készített, félig strukturált interjúk során gyűjtött kvalitatív adatokon alapul a kutatás. A válaszadókat a térség turizmusának fejlődéséről kérdezték. Az eredmények azt mutatták, hogy a közösség tagjai rendkívül fontosnak tartották a részvételüket a turizmusfejlesztési kezdeményezésekben. Ezen felül a közösség tagjai jelezték, hogy a fenntartható turizmus társadalmi-gazdasági előnyöket teremt a falu környezeti és kulturális integritásának megőrzése révén.

Kulcsszavak: közösségi alapú turizmus, közösségi alapú turizmusmodell, közösségi részvétel, fenntartható vidékfejlesztés, fenntartható turizmusfejlesztés

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1. Introduction

Recent scholarship emphasises community-based tourism (CBT) as a sustainable tourism model that operationalises sustainability principles in tourism development (Lo, 2022). The evolution of CBT has been regarded as a critical milestone in the tourism sector, supporting the broader agenda of sustainable development to strengthen the overall value of tourism (Wall, 2018). Complementary developments have highlighted the importance of community involvement and the protection of natural resources. The interdependence between CBT and the tourism industry underscores the pursuit of sustainable tourism, which seeks to maintain equilibrium across economic, sociocultural, and environmental domains.

Furthermore, the notion of appropriateness in tourism implies that experiences in natural environments should remain tranquil, immersive, and foster meaningful interaction with minimal adverse effects (Lo, 2022). However, many local authorities encounter barriers in implementing sustainability measures, primarily due to insufficient expertise and limited capacity (Harrison & Schipani, 2007). Within this framework, sustainable tourism aims to optimise the use of constructed and natural assets, which are vital to the growth of the tourism industry, while simultaneously conserving biodiversity and sustaining essential ecological systems (Lo, 2022).

CBT has also been conceptualised as a form of community-driven tourism planning (Lo, 2022). In contrast to mass tourism, it fosters greater awareness among visitors and offers insights into the everyday lives of host communities (Oosterhof, 2018; Lo, 2022). With the rise of CBT enterprises, particularly in rural settings, there is a growing need to refine the understanding of sustainability within the tourism sector.

Alongside the design of CBT initiatives, a variety of tourism products are now marketed to visitors (Murphy, 2012). Sustainable tourism, in this regard, encompasses safeguarding ecosystems, protecting cultural heritage, and ensuring long-term residential liveability (Harrison & Schipani, 2007). The successful implementation of CBT relies on social capital, which functions as a core resource, involving a wide range of actors such as governments, destination management organisations (DMOs), non-governmental entities, local and regional tourism organisations, communities, and other tourism-related agencies (Simpson, 2008). Collectively, these stakeholders assume central roles in coordinating, managing, and advancing CBT ventures.

One example of such stakeholders are DMOs, which can be entities at any level responsible for promoting a recognisable tourism destination. Beyond DMOs, local distinctiveness, social networks, and the accumulated knowledge of both policymakers and indigenous or local communities significantly contribute to the establishment of CBT enterprises. These factors also stimulate entrepreneurial awareness, encouraging investment in tourism-related small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in rural contexts. The effectiveness of such ventures often depends on the degree of collaboration across various levels of government, including district and national authorities, in ensuring coherent governance and collective action.

In rural destinations, tourism activities commonly integrate the natural landscape as part of the overall attraction (Ngonya, 2015). Within this context, CBT is used to describe a wide range of tourism approaches, but it most frequently refers to models emphasising community participation (Setokoe, 2019). The central objective is to deliver benefits to local populations, particularly in developing regions, by providing opportunities for cultural exchange and environmental learning (Wall, 2018). In many rural areas, activities associated with rural tourism are effectively framed as CBT initiatives (Ngonya, 2015). Organisational structures within rural tourism development are increasingly considered critical, with rural tourism being recognised as a strategy for revitalising rural economies (Gannon et al., 2017). Furthermore, rural tourism is closely tied to ecotourism and plays a vital role in positioning these regions as tourist destinations (Gannon et al., 2017). Empirical research has shown that even a single rural destination has the potential to sustain or even increase tourist arrivals. A distinguishing feature of rural tourism is its reliance on locally initiated projects, locally driven management, and cultural heritage rooted in the surrounding environment (Gannon et al., 2017). For tourism practices to be classified as rural tourism, they must reflect core rural characteristics, including small settlements, low population density, agricultural economies, and traditional social structures (Gannon et al., 2017).

The main objective of the following study was to develop a comprehensive model of community-based tourism that would foster sustainable rural development in Nqileni village. With this end in mind, the authors formulated the following research question:

- To what extent can the development of community-based tourism serve as a catalyst for sustainable rural development in Nqileni Village?

The research question was then used to put forward the research objective:

- To examine how sustainable rural development can be achieved through the development and implementation of community-based tourism initiatives in Nqileni Village.

2. Literature review

2.1. The perspective of CBT

To contextualise the CBT concept, it is necessary to outline prior research in the field before examining sustainable development, CBT, and capacity-building for sustainable rural tourism. Earlier studies underscore the crucial role of village communities in facilitating rural CBT activities (Rindrasih, 2018). Evidence from this body of work indicates that the long-term viability of rural CBT relies heavily on community support for local tourism initiatives. According to recent studies, indigenous populations represent the cornerstone of sustainable tourism enterprises and their involvement in rural tourism development is indispensable (Husen et al., 2025). Furthermore, numerous authors emphasise the importance of adequate financial allocations for local community participation in implementing tourism development projects (Lucchetti & Font, 2013;

Tolkach & King, 2015). These findings reiterate that prioritising local engagement is particularly critical when addressing tourism project funding and resource distribution (Lucchetti & Font, 2013). Recent studies emphasise that the participation of whole communities in CBT including residents, management committees, community leaders, business actors, and government stakeholders is integral to successful implementation (Rindrasih, 2018). Likewise, research highlights discrepancies between theoretical CBT frameworks and their practical application, stressing the importance of substantial community contributions in translating CBT development plans into practice (Mayaka et al., 2018; Husen et al., 2025).

2.2. Sustainable development and CBT

The concept of sustainability has been closely associated with various development activities (Jones et al., 2016). Although the name itself has been present in the literature for the last four decades, the underlying notion, as noted by Du Pisani (2006: 83), existed many centuries before its promulgation in the late twentieth century:

“The roots of the concept of sustainability can be traced to ancient times, but population growth, increase in consumption after the Industrial Revolution, and the danger that the crucial resources such as wood, coal and oil could be depleted boosted awareness of the need to use resources in a sustainable way. Fears that present and future generations might not be able to maintain their living standards stimulated the mode of thinking that would eventually inform discourses which prepared the way for the emergence and global adoption of sustainable development.”

Discussions related to sustainable development have been associated with a growing interest following the publication in the early 1980s of the ‘World Conservation Strategy’ (International Union of Nature and Natural Resources of 1980) and the Brundtland Commission’s landmark publication ‘Our Common Future’ (World Commission on Environment and Development [WCED] of 1987) (Jones et al., 2016; Barkemeyer et al., 2014). This interest has reflected a growing concern about a range of social, environmental, and economic challenges at various spatial and temporal scales including the pressure placed on natural resources by the continued growth in population and urbanisation, climate change, loss of natural habitats, and water stress and scarcity of water resources in some areas of the world (Jones et al., 2016).

The importance of sustainable development is a reflection of the search for solutions aimed at redressing the effects of ecological crises resulting from massive exploitation of resources and the continuous degradation of the environment due to problems mentioned above (Jones et al., 2016). This objective is captured by the definition formulated by the Brundtland Commission: “development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987: 43).

The advocacy of sustainability in accordance with the Brundtland Commission report serves as the foundation for contemporary global frameworks, such as the 2030 Agenda

for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (UNWTO, 2024). Despite its global recognition, operationalising sustainable development presents significant challenges. Scholarship suggests that sustainable tourism, in particular, is sometimes conceptualised too narrowly, limiting its ability to encapsulate the comprehensive principles of sustainability (Husen et al., 2025). Rural communities typically depend on diverse livelihood strategies shaped by natural resources, geographic characteristics, and cultural traditions, such as agriculture, livestock production, small-scale industries, hospitality enterprises, and financial services. Given that many of these activities compete for limited land and resources, integrated planning and coordinated management are essential for sustaining rural livelihoods (Priatmoko et al., 2025).

Tourism has progressively been transformed from traditional initiatives into innovative approaches that emphasise ecotourism, pro-poor tourism, and CBT (Husen et al., 2025). CBT is distinguished by its community-driven governance of tourism operations and fair distribution of benefits (Husen et al., 2025). Beyond its economic function, CBT acts as a social organising mechanism and mitigates the adverse consequences of mass tourism in developing regions (Rindrasih, 2018). Designed to generate collective advantages, CBT initiatives aim to stimulate local economies, alleviate poverty, safeguard cultural and ecological assets, and provide high-quality experiences for visitors (Rindrasih, 2018; UNWTO, 2023).

Tourism further generates strong intersectoral linkages and multiplier effects, offering significant opportunities for underdeveloped rural areas (Priatmoko et al., 2025; Husen et al., 2025). While development planners prioritise sustainability-oriented strategies, destination marketers highlight attributes that strengthen destination appeal, including tranquil settings, recreational opportunities, cultural events, hospitality, scenic beauty, and biodiversity. Active community participation is indispensable for ensuring the longevity of tourism destinations (Tosun, 2000). Local residents' involvement not only enhances governance but also supports empowerment and increases economic benefits from tourism and natural resource management (UNWTO, 2024). By granting communities ownership or access rights to tourism resources, CBT ensures more equitable distribution of benefits among local stakeholders (Husen et al., 2025; Rindrasih, 2018).

2.3. Capacity building for sustainable rural tourism development

Independent, community-led CBT projects are relatively uncommon, especially during their formative phases, and typically depend on external assistance (Rindrasih, 2018). External collaborators may provide resources, expertise, or promotional support without assuming ownership of ventures (Husen et al., 2025). CBT initiatives can originate from either local or external actors, with the government frequently playing a pivotal enabling role (UNWTO, 2023). *Table 1* presents theoretical elements of community-based tourism models from past studies.

Table 1. Theoretical elements underlying the CBT model

Authors	Theoretical concepts of CBT models
Ahmad & Abu Talib (2015)	Community participation, empowerment, and local ownership
Simpson (2008)	Transparent governance structures, skill enhancement, and stakeholder collaboration between local communities, government, and private entities
Tosun (2000); Simpson (2008)	Ladders of engagement ranging from tokenistic consultation to full empowerment
Waligo et al. (2015)	Governance perspectives and benefit-sharing mechanisms
Tosun (2000)	Power asymmetries and institutional constraints
Scheyvens & Biddulph (2018)	Active citizenship

Source: own editing

Capacity building is increasingly acknowledged as a critical mechanism for addressing development challenges in rural contexts (Rindrasih, 2018; Priatmoko et al., 2025). It refers to efforts aimed at enhancing communities' ability to achieve shared objectives through the development of human capital, mobilisation of resources, and strengthening of social capital, thereby enabling collective problem-solving to sustain or improve community well-being (UNWTO, 2024). In order to ensure that capacity-building initiatives yield lasting results, donor priorities must be aligned with community aspirations, ensure program sustainability, and foster conducive learning environments (Husen et al., 2025).

Internal community dynamics, including competing interests, existing networks, and political structures, must also be carefully considered to prevent conflict and encourage broad participation (Setokoe, 2019). A central objective of CBT should be to educate local communities about sustainable tourism principles, ensuring that these initiatives leave a lasting legacy of development and empowerment (UNWTO, 2023).

3. Research design and methods

3.1. Research locale

Nqileni village is situated in the Mbhashe Local Municipality of South Africa's Eastern Cape province (Figure 1). It is one of four villages that make up the Xhora Mouth Administrative Area on the Wild Coast (Bulungula Incubator, 2025). It is located in the northeastern part of the Amathole District Municipality, its main administrative office situated in Dutywa (IDP, 2023). *Statistics South Africa* characterises the village as a rural settlement inhabited by a small population, with low levels of economic activity, high levels of illiteracy, where the overwhelming majority are members of the previously disadvantaged population of South Africa.

Figure 1. The location of Nqileni Village in South Africa



Source: Google Maps (2025)

Nqileni village is characterised by the highest unemployment rate (42%) in Eastern Cape, and an even higher illiteracy rate of 60% (IDP, 2023). The area's economy relies on agriculture, tourism, community service, construction, and trade (Setokoe & Ramukumba, 2019). Severely degraded gravel roads exacerbate the village's isolation, which hinders access to schools, clinics, and markets. These structural deficits mean that tourism, while being an important source of income, is neither sufficient nor uniformly feasible as a poverty-reduction strategy. As a result, livelihood strategies remain diversified across subsistence agriculture, small-scale trading, remittances, and NGO-led programs (Bulungula Incubator, 2025). Governance and development in Nqileni are therefore negotiated through a mix of traditional leadership, local government (ward structures), and active civil society actors (e.g., Bulungula Incubator), whose interventions focus on health, education, skills training, and small-enterprise development to mitigate the deeper service-delivery and economic deficits (Bulungula Incubator, 2025).

Tourism in Nqileni is notable for its community-owned, small-scale, low-impact model rather than mass commercial development. The Bulungula Lodge and local homestay programmes are the village's principal attractions: undeveloped Wild Coast beaches and estuaries, guided coastal hikes, cultural immersion (traditional rondavel stays, Xhosa music and craft workshops), and volunteer/educational placements products that emphasise authenticity and community benefit (Bulungula Incubator, 2025). Tourists are drawn primarily by the natural scenery and remoteness of the Wild Coast, and the opportunity for cultural immersion and ethically minded, community-benefiting experiences; these demand-side motives make Nqileni attractive to backpackers, domestic travellers, and specialist volunteers/researchers rather than to mass-market beach tourists (Bulungula Incubator, 2025).

The geographical and socio-economic background of Nqileni village provides the rationale for the study. The socio-economic shortcomings indicated above highlight the

village's need for development initiatives that can enable sustainable utilisation of the area's natural and socio-cultural endowments. To overcome the developmental challenges characterising the area, the Bulungula Lodge was established in 2004. This is a 100% community-owned and managed tourism entity that enabled real development in the village. Following the establishment of the lodge and the subsequent development of tourism, entrepreneurial initiatives undertaken by members of the Nqileni village community began to mushroom with the aim of serving tourists visiting the area. This gave rise to an entrepreneurial culture that improved the livelihoods of community members through income generated by visitors coming to the lodge. In addition to the entrepreneurship borne from activities relating to tourism, a communal approach to the running and management of tourism activities was undertaken to allow stakeholders (community members) to give input and receive reports on their shared interest – the Bulungula Lodge.

The establishment of the Bulungula Lodge led to the birth of the Bulungula Incubator; a non-governmental organisation (NGO) founded with the goal of changing the developmental complexion of the area. Its core mandate was born out the village's shortcomings that included efforts to improve access to healthcare and drinking water, roads, schools, electricity, and sanitation (Bulungula Incubator, 2025).

The Bulungula Incubator has launched a number of initiatives in the areas of education, health and nutrition, sustainable livelihoods, and youth development. As a result of these initiatives, the village now boasts early child development centres and a high school (Bulungula College, a first in the area); has improved access to quality healthcare and nutrition (Bulungula Health Point and school nutrition programme); has gained local employment opportunities (development of a farmer development programme and 400 local jobs through a partnership with the Independent Development Trust); and has strengthened its social cohesion through a programme designed to encourage residents to engage in creativity, self-expression, healthy living and respect for the environment (Bulungula Incubator, 2025). It is notable that whilst tourism has brought much relief to the village, its full potential has been seriously limited by the poor road infrastructure.

3.2. Research design

The study is based on qualitative data collected from a non-probability, purposive sample of 24 respondents (residents, business and community leadership) drawn from Nqileni village using semi-structured interviews designed to elicit information about the role of community-based tourism in developing rural areas. Data were collected through the engagement of community leadership and the general population of the village. The interviews continued until no new information was provided by the respondents, which suggested a point of saturation had been reached.

Interviews were conducted in the language of the local community (Xhosa). Participants in the study signed a consent form and were informed of their right to withdraw at any given point. Recorded interviews, lasting from 13 to 20 minutes, were

transcribed and then translated into English. Prior to the analysis of the data, the transcripts and voice recordings (for those who could not read) were made available to the respondents in order to give them an opportunity to check their answers and provide further clarifications if necessary.

The collected data were subjected to thematic-interpretive analysis according to the principles outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006). At the onset of the study, all interview questions were checked by a qualitative statistician to ensure they were relevant and valid with respect to the research question. Such an undertaking afforded the data relevance and validity while minimising potential contamination to the study. This enabled the commencement of coding and analysis using a qualitative software program, NVIVO version 14. This was followed by the creation of codes formulated from participants' responses. A code-recode method was further employed to confirm that all interview content was relevantly named, thereby ensuring that only key codes were retained. The concerted formulation of codes enabled the creation of themes that were aligned to the interview questions and research questions. These are the themes that will be discussed in the following section.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Demographic information about the respondents

The sample of respondents included five community leaders and nineteen residents of Nqileni village (Tables 2 and 3). Four community leaders had spent all their lives in Nqileni village, and one had lived there since 2007. All of them held positions of authority and responsibility. The majority of the remaining respondents were also lifelong residents of Nqileni village, with a few having moved to the village in recent years through marriage and other social constructs. Thirteen respondents in this group were engaged in different forms of engagement in both the formal and informal economy, such as employment at the Bulungula Lodge, service positions, entrepreneurial activities and local tourism, while six were unemployed (although they derived some income from shareholding in Bulungula Lodge).

Table 2. Representatives of the community leadership of Nqileni village

Respondent	Age	Place of residence	Length of residence	Role
1	50–59	Nqileni	Whole life	Headman
3	30–39	Nqileni	Whole life	Ward committee member
6	40–49	Nqileni	Whole life	Ward councillor
7	30–39	Nqileni	Whole life	Manager of the Bulungula Lodge
24	30–39	Dutywa	Since 2007	Local economic development officer for Mbashe Local Municipality

Source: own editing

Table 3. Representatives of the general population of Nqileni village

Respondent	Age	Place of residence	Length of residence	Role
2	40–49	Nqileni	Unknown	Unemployed
4	20–29	Bulungula	Whole life	Canoeing
5	50–59	Nqileni	Whole life	Unemployed
8	40–49	Bulungula	Whole life	Help in the kitchen
9	40–49	Nqileni	Whole life	Unemployed
10	30–39	Nqileni	Whole life	Unemployed
11	30–39	Nqileni	Whole life	Employee of Bulungula lodge (horseback riding guide)
12	20–29	Nqileni	Whole life	Manager
13	30–39	Nqileni	25 years	Cleaner
14	40–49	Nqileni	6 years	Chef
15	40–49	Nqileni	Whole life	Help in the kitchen
16	30–39	Nqileni	Whole life	Security guard during the day
17	60+	Nqileni	Since 2008	Unemployed
18	50–59	Xhora	Since 1979	Unemployed
19	20–29	Nqileni – seaside	1 year	Legal sdvisor
20	20–29	Nqileni	Since 1991	Receptionist
21	20–29	Nqileni	25 years	Entrepreneur; owner and manager of Ilanga Fire Restaurant
22	20–29	Nqileni	Since 2010	Tour guide
23	50–59	Nqileni	Whole life	Security guard

Source: own editing

4.2 Themes generated

4.2.1. Community participation

The respondents emphasised that community involvement in tourism development initiatives was very important. In their opinion, such participation should be placed at the core of decision-making processes and should occur without undue influence from external stakeholders. They also stressed the significance of active citizenship and transparency throughout the participation process, noting that these were essential to ensure that project objectives were aligned with community priorities and produced sustainable development outcomes. The following comments illustrate the general views summarised above:

“I think the community members should be involved, as this place belongs to the community. The ward councilor cannot do anything or make decisions without involving the community members. So yes, they should be involved when decisions are taken because they are community members, and decisions taken will affect them the most” (Respondent #6).

“It is important for members to involve themselves because there is income coming

through tourism initiatives in our village, and the community members benefit from these tourism development initiatives. Community members' establishment of businesses has been a key factor in community participation in the development of Nqileni village. Indeed, members are given a role to participate in the tourism industry” (Respondent #3).

“Community members need to be involved in the development of the community because such developments bring about change in the form of facilities such as clinics and schools, which we did not have in the past” (Respondent #24).

“Community participation provides an opportunity for the community to become self-reliant using their skills to create opportunity for themselves instead of relying on government for jobs and grants” (Respondent #9).

According to the interviewees, decision-making in tourism development should not be left to political leaders alone but rather must include community members because the outcomes directly affect them. This view is consistent with Nuttavuthisit et al. (2015), who argue that local participation in development initiatives enhances efficiency, accountability, and transparency in resource use, while also strengthening ownership and commitment among residents. Similarly, Murphy (2012) argues that without genuine involvement of those most affected, development lacks both legitimacy and sustainability.

The belief that tourism initiatives generate income for local households and provide opportunities for community-owned businesses aligns with Muganda et al.'s (2013) understanding of participation. They describe participation as encompassing the planning, decision-making, implementation, and management of initiatives to ensure that benefits accrue to all community members. This is consistent with Uysal et al. (2012), who argue that community participation in tourism helps fulfil the sector's goal of fostering a tourism economy that enhances residents' quality of life through employment creation and other social, economic, and environmental benefits (Jeon et al., 2016).

The respondents also linked involvement in tourism to broader community development outcomes, such as improved access to schools and clinics, which they had lacked in the past. Previous studies have shown that community participation contributes to sustainable tourism development by ensuring that locals derive positive and balanced benefits, thereby increasing their tolerance and support for tourism (Tosun, 2000; Telfer & Sharpley, 2016). In this sense, community engagement is not only about economic gain but also about fostering long-term social improvements and resilience.

Finally, opinions expressed during the interviews confirm recent research showing that adequate financial support is vital for ensuring local engagement in tourism projects (Lucchetti & Font, 2013; Tolkach & King, 2015). Prioritising financial allocations that empower local communities in project funding and resource distribution is central to successful implementation (Lucchetti & Font, 2013). This aligns with recent evidence that whole community involvement including residents, leaders, committees, businesses, and government stakeholders, is essential for the effective realisation of community-based tourism (Rindrasih, 2018).

4.2.2. Active citizenship

Development initiatives are instrumental in driving transformation within communities. For meaningful improvements to be realised, sustained development is required. Accordingly, community members need to adopt proactive roles in shaping their socio-economic conditions. Such engagement is critical, as it cultivates a collective vision that motivates citizens to actively contribute to local advancement. The importance of such engagement is exemplified by the establishment of the Bulungula lodge, which consolidated the community's resolve to pursue collective action through its contribution to community development initiatives and income-generating activities within the area. Consequently, residents' participation in development processes enhances self-reliance and fosters sustainability, thereby mitigating dependence on state-provided welfare mechanisms (such as social grants). The following comments illustrate the general views summarised above:

"Community members can take initiative of tourism development projects and could also work together at the lodge. We have a responsibility of working together, but we also wish that the government can assist" (Respondent #11).

"It is important for the members of Nqileni to be involved because such programmes will help them, as well as future generations" (Respondent #8).

"It is important for members to involve themselves because there is income coming through and their family members benefit" (Respondent #2).

"That is the crown of everything. Without that, nothing can happen. If there's no participation then we're back the beggar situation where we just put hands out, and the handouts, and that to me is a no-no. It's a total participation of everybody, is so important" (Respondent #17).

The interviewees were convinced that community members could take ownership of tourism development projects, including collaborative work at local lodges, while also recognising the need for government support. This aligns with research indicating that active citizenship is critical in shaping development outcomes, such as Abiona & Bello (2013), who point to the importance of mobilising and integrating local communities into initiatives that transform their surroundings into more developed and sustainable environments.

The involvement of Nqileni residents in tourism projects was further regarded as essential not only for current benefits but also for inter-generational equity, ensuring that future generations may also experience improved well-being. This view is consistent with Budeanu et al. (2016) who argue that development must pursue a "balanced use" of resources, enabling tourism to serve all stakeholders equitably through active engagement in local development initiatives.

The interviewees believed that community involvement secures tangible economic benefits, particularly through income generation. This perspective is supported by the findings of Tosun (2000), who argues that local participation is indispensable for ensuring the resilience and longevity of tourism destinations. Active engagement enhances local

governance structures while simultaneously supporting empowerment and providing broader socio-economic benefits through sustainable tourism and resource management (UNWTO, 2024).

Finally, there was agreement among the respondents that without meaningful participation, communities risk dependency on handouts, which undermines self-sufficiency. This reinforces the importance of total community engagement in tourism development as a pathway to independence and long-term sustainability, echoing scholarly consensus on the necessity of local ownership for inclusive development outcomes.

4.2.3. Importance of capacity building

The interviews reveal the significance of capacity building to advance and sustain development initiatives, particularly skills development, training and knowledge generation, which were identified as key drivers of sustainable tourism development and related community-based initiatives. Another aspect mentioned by the respondents was the need for an effective dissemination of information concerning development projects, which empowers community members by enabling them to better understand ongoing initiatives. Such processes not only enhance transparency but also contribute to improving the overall quality of life within the community. The following comments illustrate the general views summarised above:

“People need to be equipped with the right skills to have a better life. This is important because most community members do not have enough development knowledge” (Respondent #12).

“One thing I think is important is that someone with expertise in tourism and development projects should come and teach us more about them so we can follow the trend” (Respondent #22).

“We also provide training to local people in order for them to participate in the management of the Bulungula Trust” (Respondent #7).

“Our only shot at winning the war against poverty is ensuring that community members are trained in areas that will give them skills that enable them to do for themselves” (Respondent #5).

The respondents emphasised the need to equip community members with the necessary skills and knowledge to enhance their quality of life, highlighting the limited development expertise currently available within the community. This perspective aligns with research findings highlighting the role of capacity building in sustaining development. According to Budeanu et al. (2016), a community’s survival and long-term sustainability depend on its capacity to adapt, which requires not only a reassessment of core values but also their application through social institutions, processes, and individual agency.

Similarly, Aref et al. (2009) point out that communities must obtain knowledge and competencies that empower them to act in ways that maximise the benefits of development. This has led to a strong focus on developing tourism-related skills in rural

contexts as a means of revitalising socio-economic conditions and fostering prosperity within local communities (Sharpley, 2002; Sango, 2014).

Such priorities are consistent with broader national strategies, as demonstrated by the South African government's Human Resource Development Strategy, which underscores the significance of strengthening the skills base within the tourism sector to drive growth (NTSS, 2011). Recent studies further confirm that capacity building remains a crucial approach for addressing rural development challenges and promoting sustainable outcomes in tourism (Rindrasih, 2018; Priatmoko et al., 2025).

4.2.4. Independent participation in development

The community provides a unique perspective on the importance of local participation in rural development, particularly within the framework of community-based tourism. This viewpoint is reflected in accounts of the community's engagement with opportunities generated by tourism-led initiatives in Nqileni village. The interviewees described their involvement in various developmental activities, including the construction of infrastructure such as roads and water systems, the establishment of enterprises serving both tourists and local residents, and the provision of additional social amenities.

The respondents also drew attention to participatory mechanisms that facilitate consultation and community input. When development projects are introduced, every individual's opinion is considered, reflecting a deliberate commitment to inclusivity in decision-making. This approach is operationalised through forums that allow members to participate actively, such as community meetings and discussions on tourism-related projects. Following these engagements, responsibilities and tasks are allocated among community members, often with financial compensation for individuals or households, depending on budgetary resources. This structured form of participation ensures that involvement is substantive and rewarding, thereby fostering both ownership and accountability. The following comments illustrate the general views summarised above:

"The establishment of businesses by members of the community has been a key factor to community participation in the development of Nqileni village" (Respondent #19).

"And having genuine meetings where there is an ability to shift your understanding of things. It's not just an information session. It's (Indistinct) giving the community an opportunity to have a say so in what it is" (Respondent #4).

"Indeed, members are given a role. Tourism is mostly beneficial to us as it is a driving force behind Nqileni village development. We have been knocking at the door of the government, but in vain" (Respondent #13).

"The establishment of businesses by members of the community has been a key factor to community participation in the development of Nqileni village" (Respondent #21).

This last view aligns with the vision of South Africa's National Development Plan (NDP, 2011), which seeks to provide rural areas with expanded opportunities to participate in economic, social, and political life. The above opinions are also consistent with the idea that tourism development fosters a symbiotic relationship with sustainable development, as it

has the transformative power to reshape how communities organise their livelihoods and engage in collective growth.

The fact of *“having genuine meetings where there is an ability to shift your understanding of things [...] giving the community an opportunity to have a say”* (Respondent #18) highlights the importance of inclusive decision-making processes, which is consistent with the findings of Abiona and Bello (2013), who argue that meaningful community involvement in tourism extends beyond labour provision, encouraging entrepreneurship and fostering ownership of development initiatives. This view is also present in South Africa’s policy (DEAT, 1996), which emphasises efforts to empower communities so that they can participate in tourism not only as workers but also as entrepreneurs and decision-makers.

The role of tourism as a catalyst for local development is particularly crucial in situations where state support is limited. As noted by Uysal et al. (2012) and Jeon et al. (2016), the core objective of tourism development is to create a tourism economy that enhances community well-being through job creation, entrepreneurial opportunities, and the provision of social and environmental benefits.

4.2.5. Transparency in the nomination process of local community involvement in tourism development

Given that opportunities in rural settings are limited, it is essential that development initiatives are guided by transparent and ethical practices. The interviewees agreed that community leaders play a key role in safeguarding transparency in the process of selecting individuals to participate in tourism development to ensure that it serves the collective interests of the community and secures shared benefits from tourism initiatives.

This process is regulated by a constitution drafted by community members, which guarantees fairness, equality, and democratic participation. As highlighted during the interviews, the nomination procedures are intentionally structured to be transparent and free from discrimination. The following comments illustrate the general views summarised above:

“For example, about what I had said earlier. If there is a job vacancy, the community come together for a selection process and choose fairly who will work on that project” (Respondent #10).

“They do try to create awareness, especially our ward councillor. I’m assuming you saw him yesterday when we had a meeting with him about the prospect of having electricity in our village. Though he is fairly new in that position, but he is promising” (Respondent #14).

“No decision is ever taken without the community deliberating on it” (Respondent #20).

The selection process was generally considered to be fair and inclusive, as exemplified by the following comment: *“We promote equality, hence if 20 people are desirable in a project, the community will select 10 females and 10 males to show that everyone here is equal. So, we do not promote discrimination; we are all people, and we are the same”* (Respondent #16).

Such an approach aligns with research findings suggesting that participatory development strategies lead to more equitable opportunities for local populations, ultimately enhancing community tolerance and support for tourism activities (Tosun, 2000; Telfer & Sharpley, 2016).

The role of leadership structures in ensuring fairness and inclusivity was also emphasised, as shown in the following comments:

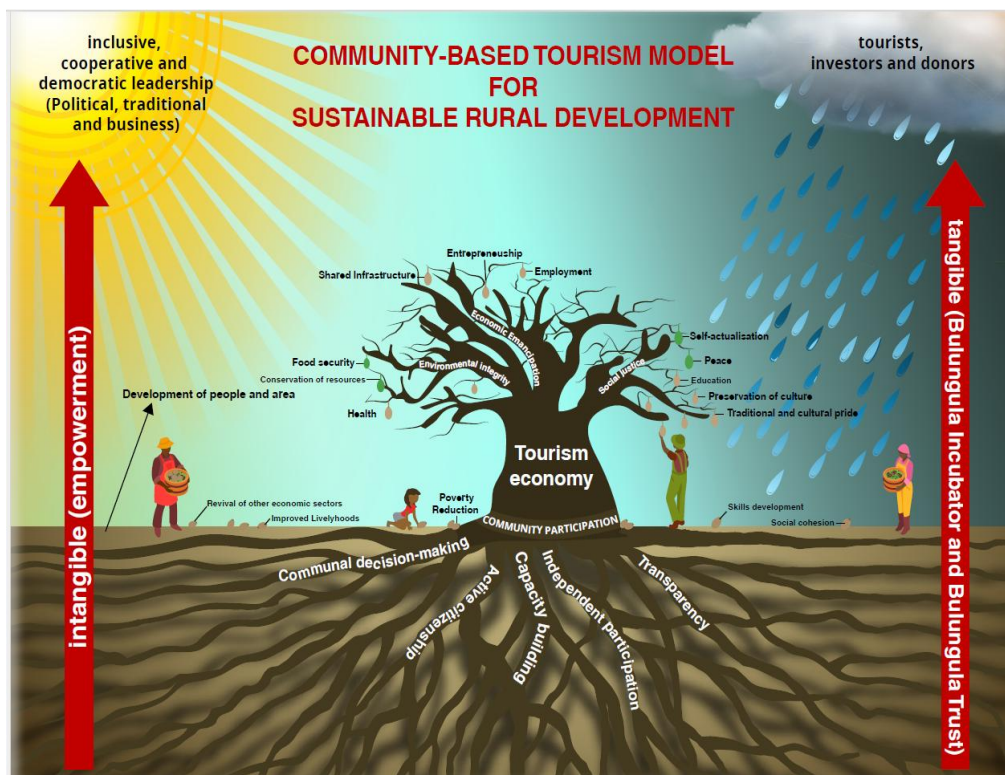
“The community places responsibility of choosing on the shoulders of our leadership committee, as it constitutes the diversity of the community and not just the connected” (Respondent #15).

“Often, we as the leadership put matters to a vote in terms of the community’s involvement in development initiatives within the village” (Respondent #1).

The above views demonstrate how community leadership operationalises participatory governance, ensuring inclusivity and representation in decision-making processes. This aligns with the observations of Nuttavuthisit et al. (2015), who suggested that participatory approaches enhance efficiency, accountability, and transparency in resource allocation, while strengthening ownership and commitment among local people in tourism development.

The views expressed by the interviewees along with insights from the literature were used to propose a model of community-based tourism that could serve as a framework for promoting sustainable rural development (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Community-based tourism model for sustainable rural development



Source: own construct

Sustainable rural development through tourism should be grounded in principles that guarantee meaningful community participation in local development processes. These principles encompass involvement in collective decision-making, active citizenship, capacity building, autonomous engagement, and transparency, which together constitute the foundational roots of the proposed model. This perspective aligns with Nuttavuthisit et al. (2015), who argue that community participation in development-related decision-making enhances efficiency, accountability, and transparency in resource use while fostering local ownership and commitment. When combined with capacity building, active participation and transparency enable comprehensive community engagement in tourism-related economic activities. The resulting tourism economy is expected to yield benefits such as poverty reduction, improved living conditions, and environmental stewardship, thereby supporting economic emancipation, social justice, and ecological sustainability. These claims are corroborated by Angelkova et al. (2012), who found that revenues from tourism and related employment contribute to raising community living standards, particularly through reliance on local goods and services, alongside increased interest in preserving natural and cultural resources, including traditions, heritage sites, and local customs. Collectively, economic emancipation, social justice, and environmental integrity create conditions that further generate community benefits such as entrepreneurship, food security, employment, peace, cultural preservation, resource conservation, and the sharing of local infrastructure.

The tourism sector's ability to generate foreign exchange, attract international investment, enhance tax revenues, and create employment opportunities has positioned it as a central driver of macroeconomic growth in many developing countries (Torres & Momsen, 2004). If community-based tourism in Nqileni village is to reach its developmental potential, it requires access to tourist markets, investors, and donor support. However, these goals can only be achieved if the authenticity of the destination as a unique selling point is preserved. With strong and inclusive leadership, coupled with a steady inflow of tourists, investors, and donors, the necessary conditions can be created for community-driven development. Such an enabling environment facilitates active community participation in sustainable tourism initiatives, contributing to the establishment of a resilient tourism economy. This economy, in turn, can secure economic emancipation, promote social justice, and safeguard environmental resources, ultimately advancing the long-term goal of sustainable rural development in Nqileni village.

5. Comparison of existing CBT models and the proposed model

Existing CBT models have consistently emphasised the centrality of community participation, empowerment, and local ownership as prerequisites for equitable and sustainable tourism development (Ahmad & Abu Talib, 2015). In this respect, the CBT model proposed on the basis of the Nqileni experience CBT model aligns with earlier frameworks by identifying community involvement and capacity building as foundational elements of successful CBT initiatives. Like traditional CBT models, it acknowledges that effective

tourism development depends on transparent governance structures, skill enhancement, and stakeholder collaboration between local communities, government, and private entities (Simpson, 2008). However, the Nqileni model distinguishes itself by operationalising these elements through a metaphorical tree structure that links foundational inputs (roots) to outcomes (branches), presenting a more pragmatic, process-oriented roadmap for community empowerment.

Earlier CBT models, particularly those by Tosun (2000) and Simpson (2008), tended to categorise participation alongside typologies or “ladders” of engagement, ranging from tokenistic consultation to full empowerment. These frameworks provided valuable analytical tools for diagnosing community involvement but often remained conceptual. Subsequent research has expanded these typologies to include governance perspectives and benefit-sharing mechanisms (Waligo et al., 2015). The Nqileni model complements this work by translating participatory ideals into actionable mechanisms such as transparent nomination processes, democratic leadership selection, and codified community constitutions to prevent elite capture and ensure equitable representation. Whereas earlier models highlighted power asymmetries and institutional constraints (Tosun, 2000), the Nqileni model offers practical governance solutions that address these long-standing limitations at the community level.

Furthermore, the Nqileni model introduces a stronger behavioural dimension by conceptualising active citizenship as a necessary condition for sustainable CBT outcomes. Unlike previous models that focused primarily on structural enablers of participation, this model integrates agency and entrepreneurship as key drivers of community resilience. It assumes that communities must be participants in tourism and proactive agents in generating and managing tourism-related enterprises (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018). The model's emphasis on linking local capacity with market access through attracting tourists, donors, and investors positions it as both a governance and an economic model. This dual focus differentiates it from earlier frameworks, which often stopped short of detailing market mechanisms or long-term financial sustainability strategies (Ahmad & Abu Talib, 2015).

Nevertheless, while the Nqileni CBT model advances practical applicability, it remains limited by its single-case empirical grounding. Earlier models, such as Simpson's (2008) community benefit tourism initiative framework, derived insights from multiple contexts and thus offered greater generalisability. The strength of the Nqileni model lies in its contextual depth and actionable clarity, but its external validity across diverse socio-political and cultural environments requires further testing. Future research should therefore apply and adapt the model across multiple community settings to assess its transferability and robustness. By bridging theoretical constructs from prior CBT frameworks with grounded, implementable strategies, the Nqileni model represents a meaningful evolution in community tourism scholarship, shifting the discourse from abstract participation to operational empowerment.

6. Possible applications of the proposed model

Drawing on the findings of the study in Nqileni village, the proposed model could be applied to other rural contexts globally to promote sustainable rural development through tourism taking into account the following recommendations:

Sustainable rural development is inherently complex and requires leadership that is inclusive, collaborative, and democratic. It is therefore necessary that individuals appointed to leadership roles in tourism-related projects and initiatives should be chosen through democratic and inclusive processes. Moreover, leadership should reflect a fair representation of political, traditional, and business sectors to ensure that the voices of all community stakeholders are heard. Such a balanced representation will foster appropriate strategies for community participation in tourism, thereby enhancing sustainable rural development.

The establishment of inclusive leadership should create the foundation for all the interrelated components of the model (symbolised as the roots of the tree) to function cohesively in supporting community-based tourism and sustainable rural development. Central to this process is the active involvement of the local community, which requires deliberate efforts to build capacity and empower community members. Equipped with relevant skills, local community members can meaningfully contribute to development initiatives, including decision-making processes spanning planning, implementation, and management. This approach fosters transparency, independence, and opportunities for entrepreneurship and other empowerment-related activities.

When communities actively engage in tourism development and a consistent flow of tourists, investors, and donors is secured, a viable tourism economy (represented as the stem of the tree in the model) can be established in rural areas. Such an economy can allow rural communities to benefit directly from tourism while leveraging its multiplier effects, such as investment in infrastructure, property, and enterprises extending beyond tourism. This sustainable economy then promotes economic integrity, emancipation, and social justice (depicted as the branches of the tree). Ultimately, these structures produce tangible benefits including entrepreneurship, food security, resource conservation, shared infrastructure, employment creation, education, peace, cultural preservation, health improvements, and pride in traditions. All these outcomes rest on the foundation of fair and inclusive community participation.

Although the value of the proposed CBT model for sustainable rural development is clear, it is equally important to recognise the challenges that may impede its successful implementation. Key challenges include:

- Divergent visions among community leadership groups (traditional, political, and business), which may hinder progress.
- The necessity of consistent tourist inflows and adequate infrastructure, which may be difficult to achieve in remote areas, thereby limiting the viability of a tourism-based economy.
- Limited access to financial resources within rural communities, making external

funding through investors or donors essential yet difficult to secure.

- Issues of elitism, exclusivity, and unequal benefit distribution, which can lead to dissent and obstruct the implementation of the model.

For rural communities to effectively implement the proposed model and achieve sustainable outcomes, development must yield both tangible and intangible benefits for local people. In Nqileni village, this is evident in community empowerment initiatives such as the establishment of the Bulungula Trust and the Bulungula Incubator, which support community-driven projects and sustainable growth. These examples illustrate the types of benefits that rural communities can realise if the model is applied effectively, though each locality may adapt the approach to suit its unique developmental needs.

7. Conclusion

This study proposes a new model of community-based tourism for sustainable rural development. The model, in addition to relying on insights from the existing CBT literature, includes new dimensions that are supposed to ensure community participation and beneficiation in the tourism industry in rural areas. The proposed model adds to the existing knowledge about community participation in community-based tourism, specifically in rural areas, to ensure sustainable rural development. It could be used by planners for assessing the status of communities' involvement in tourism development and to determine initiatives that will enhance sustainable rural development through tourism initiatives. The model's ability to contribute to sustainable rural development through tourism depends on a delicate balance between various stakeholders. The key requirement is full community participation in tourism activities, supported by leadership that values community involvement in development initiatives. Any implementation of the model is likely to encounter challenges, and stakeholders must work together to overcome these challenges as they arise. This will ensure that the tangible and intangible benefits identified in the model accrue to community members.

This article is based on the premise that although community-based tourism has been frequently advocated for the benefit of local communities, there have been few directives on how this might be achieved in practice. The model proposed on the basis of the Nqileni experience assumes a shift from the community's consultative role towards inclusive participation in tourism. Stakeholders can use the model to improve their involvement in tourism development in the community of concern.

The study demonstrates that sustainable rural development is not merely the outcome of tourism growth but rather an inclusive process in which residents are active decision-makers, beneficiaries, and custodians of development. Through their involvement in planning, management, and entrepreneurial activities linked to tourism, Nqileni residents have fostered economic and social transformation evident in creating local enterprises, improving access to basic services, and enhancing social cohesion. In other words, the success of sustainable rural development through CBT depends on the involvement of empowered local communities equipped with the necessary skills, resources, and

institutional support to manage tourism initiatives independently and equitably. In doing so, CBT becomes a vehicle for poverty alleviation and economic diversification and a means of reinforcing cultural integrity, environmental stewardship, and self-reliant governance, thereby validating the proposed model as a viable framework for rural transformation in Nqileni and comparable contexts.

8. Study limitations and issues of generalisation beyond the South African context

While the study provides valuable insights into community-based tourism as a mechanism for promoting sustainable rural development in South Africa, its broader applicability beyond the local context is limited for several reasons.

First of all, the study was conducted in Nqileni village in the Eastern Cape, a rural community shaped by communal land ownership, traditional leadership, and a historically disadvantaged socio-economic background. These contextual features are unique to South Africa's governance and rural development framework, influencing community participation and tourism management. The model's applicability may be reduced in regions where property rights, governance systems, or community structures differ, such as in parts of Asia, Latin America, or Europe. The community's reliance on traditional leadership and collaborative social structures makes the model context-dependent, requiring significant adaptation before implementation in other socio-political or cultural settings.

Another limitation stems from the influence of South Africa's specific institutional and policy environment, which is powerfully shaped by post-apartheid transformation agendas and community empowerment frameworks. Policies such as the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) and decentralisation initiatives have created enabling conditions for CBT that may not exist in other national contexts. In countries with centralised tourism governance, less developed civil society networks, or limited community autonomy, replicating the South African CBT model could prove challenging. Moreover, partnerships with NGOs and external donors, which contributed to the success of the Bulungula Lodge and Nqileni's CBT initiatives, may not be replicable in resource-constrained regions. Thus, while the study's conceptual model offers valuable guidance, it should be interpreted as a framework that is adaptable rather than universally transferable.

Lastly, the study's relevance is also limited by its temporal context as it only provides a snapshot of CBT dynamics and does not capture evolving challenges or sustainability trends that have appeared after 2023. Global tourism volatility, economic shifts, or crises can significantly alter tourism-dependent community livelihoods, potentially undermining the stability of the proposed model. Similarly, no consideration is given to cross-cultural market dynamics, such as varying tourist motivations, expectations, and perceptions of authenticity, which certainly restricts the applicability of the findings in international tourism markets.

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TOURISM ENTREPRENEURSHIP'S ROLE IN THE ECONOMIC AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH OF EMERGING ECONOMIES: ECONOMETRIC APPROACH (CASE STUDY OF ALGERIA, 1998–2024)

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the contribution of tourism entrepreneurship to sustainable development in developing economies, with a specific focus on Algeria. From a statistical point of view, constructing an index to measure sustainable development is challenging. Although the human development index (HDI) and global sustainable development index (SDG) remain the most relevant benchmarking tools, this study—given the Algerian context—focuses on the impacts on investment, unemployment, and value-added creation. Using a vector error correction model (VECM), we examined the causal relationships between tourism entrepreneurship and sustainable development through key variables: investment in the tourism sector, tourism incomes, and unemployment. Obtained results indicate a positive and significant impact in long-term relationship, with weak contribution, both investment, and tourism receipts improving SDG. However, elasticities are minimal. In short-term relationship, there are mixed and sometimes counterintuitive signs. Unemployment hurts, but past unemployment appears to help SDG (possibly a statistical artifact). Overall, the study supports a modest positive role for tourism entrepreneurship, but model limitations reduce confidence. Despite its positive contribution to Algeria's economic growth, tourism entrepreneurship still accounts for only a small share of the economy—averaging less than 2%—particularly following the COVID-19 crisis. This underscores the need for a long-term strategic overhaul to address the structural issues hindering investment in this sector.

Keywords: Algeria, developing countries, sustainable development, tourism entrepreneurship

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A TURISZTIKAI VÁLLALKOZÁSOK SZEREPE A FEJLŐDŐ ORSZÁGOK GAZDASÁGI ÉS FENNTARTHATÓ NÖVEKEDÉSÉBEN: ÖKONOMETRIKUS MEGKÖZELÍTÉS (ALGÉRIAI ESETTANULMÁNY, 1998–2024)

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ABSZTRAKT

A tanulmány a turisztikai vállalkozói tevékenység fenntartható fejlődéshez való hozzájárulását vizsgálja a fejlődő gazdaságokban, különös tekintettel Algériára. Statisztikai szempontból a fenntartható fejlődés mérésére szolgáló index kidolgozása kihívást jelent. Noha az emberi fejlettségi index (HDI) és a globális fenntartható fejlődési index (SDG) továbbra is a legrelevánsabb összehasonlító eszköz, a tanulmány – az algériai kontextust figyelembe véve – a beruházásokra, a munkanélküliségre és a hozzáadott érték teremtésére gyakorolt hatásokra összpontosít. Vektorhibakorrekciós modell (VECM) alkalmazásával vizsgáltuk az idegenforgalmi vállalkozói tevékenység és a fenntartható fejlődés közötti ok-okozati összefüggéseket a következő kulcsváltozók segítségével: az idegenforgalmi szektorba történő beruházások, az idegenforgalmi bevételek és a munkanélküliség. A kapott eredmények hosszú távon pozitív és szignifikáns hatást jeleznek, de a hozzájárulás gyenge: mind a beruházások, az idegenforgalmi bevételek javítják ugyan az SDG-t, az elaszticitások mégis csekély mértékűek. Rövid távon vegyes, és néha a várttal ellentétes jelek figyelhetők meg. A munkanélküliség negatív hatással bír, de a múltbeli munkanélküliség úgy tűnik, elősegíti az SDG-t (lehetséges, hogy ez statisztikai torzítás). Összességében a tanulmány alátámasztja az idegenforgalmi vállalkozói tevékenység mérsékelt pozitív szerepét, de a modell korlátai csökkentik a konfidenciát. Annak ellenére, hogy az idegenforgalmi vállalkozások pozitívan járulnak hozzá Algéria gazdasági növekedéséhez, a gazdaságban még mindig csak alacsony arányt képviselnek – átlagosan kevesebb mint 2%-ot –, különösen a COVID-19-válságot követően. Ez rávilágít arra, hogy hosszú távú stratégiai átalakításra van szükség az ágazatba történő beruházásokat gátló strukturális problémák megoldása érdekében.

Kulcsszavak: Algéria, fejlődő országok, fenntartható fejlődés, turisztikai vállalkozás

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1. Introduction

Between January and June 2025, some 690 million tourists traveled internationally, as stated by UN Tourism. This represents an estimated increase of 33 million travelers compared to the same period in 2024, generating a profit of around \$1.9 trillion. UN Tourism's forecasts, which predict 3-5% growth in international arrivals for 2026, remain unchanged, as data from various countries on international tourism receipts revealed significant tourism spending in early 2025 (WTO, 2025). As a result, the tourism sector remains one of the fastest-growing industries worldwide. Its energy and strength help to stimulate and secure opportunities for profit generation and job creation, while ensuring the preservation of cultural heritage and the environment in tourist destinations around the world (Tang & Tan, 2015). According to Booking.com's recent report, 'Travel and Sustainable Development 2025' (Heiny, 2025), tourists are increasingly concerned about contributing to the economies of the places they visit. A large proportion of these individuals (73%) want to support entrepreneurs and companies whose tourism-related profits are reinvested in the local community, while 77% of those surveyed aspire to have authentic experiences that are representative of the local culture during their travels. With this in mind, sustainable development is another concern that must be taken seriously in the various strategies for developing tourism entrepreneurship. The recognition of tourism as a potential tool for sustainable development was formalized on the international stage in the United Nations Millennium Development Goals declaration in 2000, and after the World Summit on Sustainable Development (UN, 2002) this role became an integral part of the implementation program (Tepelus, 2008).

For the past twenty years, and in light of its proven benefits, entrepreneurship has captured Algeria's focus – a shift mirrored across the globe. The State's commitment to developing this sector is evident in the implementation of a strategy (Master Plan for Tourism Development – SADT – Horizon 2030) adopted by the Government Council in 2008. This strategy outlines the goals to be met, with investment serving as a major source of wealth, jobs, and growth. Entrepreneurship is one of the most important factors for a growing economy, as its significance in economic research and policy is largely due to the benefits it brings to the economy and society. Entrepreneurship may not have a direct impact on economic expansion, but it can accelerate it through a large population of enterprising individuals. This conclusion was demonstrated in research conducted by GEM (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor), which suggested a model for comparing several countries on different social and cultural aspects (GEM, 2025). This program has shown that in places where entrepreneurship is strong, the share of GDP generated by entrepreneurial initiatives increases every year (Vellas, 2011). Algeria, with its historical, natural and cultural riches, has invaluable tourism potential. Consequently, tourism entrepreneurship can play a crucial role in the country's economic development.

Tourism in Algeria is a rapidly growing industry, despite security and infrastructure challenges. The main tourist attractions include:

- Archaeological sites such as Djemila, Timgad and Tipaza, which promote historical and urban tourism;
- The Algerian Sahara with its dunes and oases, which promote safaris and Saharan tourism;
- The Mediterranean coast with its beaches and breathtaking landscapes, promoting seaside, rural, and cultural tourism.

Although tourism currently accounts for an average of 10% of economic activity worldwide (International Tourism Highlights, 2024), in Algeria its contribution does not exceed 3 to 4% of GDP. This predicament is a result of the security situation in the 1990s, which gave Algeria a bad reputation overseas. Furthermore, the Dutch disease appears to be another factor contributing to this sector's lag. Nonetheless, Algeria has recently taken a number of steps to capitalize on its tourism resources, which are just as significant as its oil resources. A true revolution in tourism entrepreneurship resulted from the 1980 shift in tourism policy, which opened the door for private projects (Benslimanr & Semaoune, 2020).

Tourism has grown significantly over the last decade, with a rate of 25%. However, for many developing countries, the contribution of this sector is limited to bringing in foreign currency and improving foreign exchange reserves (Kouri, 2015). For this reason, its impact on the environment and sustainable development raises several issues. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) is currently working with the United Nations as part of a United Nations Environment Program to mitigate the negative effects and encourage initiatives that promote sustainable development in nations. However, tourism, due to its crosscutting nature and its role in shaping territories, is one of the sectors best suited to implementing sustainable development in line with other policies on land use planning, infrastructure, and social responsibility, while ensuring its long-term development (Livandovschi & Manolica, 2017). In order to further the struggle against poverty and hunger, equality, respect for human rights, health, and education, the tourist sector in Algeria and all other developing nations is anticipated to improve North–South ties. This thinking is based on the fact that the vast majority of tourists come from developed countries, with 40% of international trips taking place in a developing country. Tourism revenues reflect this dynamic, with developing countries experiencing a much greater increase in revenues than high-income ones (those with a GDP–PPP of over US\$12,475) over the last two decades (UNWTO Tourism Highlights, 2015).

This overview leads us to consider the impact that the development of tourism entrepreneurship can have on sustainable development in Algeria. In this study, we will attempt to measure this impact using time series econometrics. To do so, we start from the hypothesis that tourism entrepreneurship contributes to the improvement of the national economy in various ways, including the creation of added value and its impact on employment and investment.

2. Literature review

According to Komppula (2014), tourism entrepreneurship can be defined as the process by which individuals identify and exploit local opportunities to create distinctive tourism experiences, often within small or medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). In the same way, it is defined as all activities created by individuals or companies that provide products or services related to travel and leisure. This type of entrepreneurship is characterized by its capacity for innovation and its adaptability to market fluctuations. Tourism entrepreneurs are often local actors who create businesses ranging from hotels and restaurants to leisure activities and transport services, as explained by Schneider & Treisch (2019).

Tourism entrepreneurship is particularly relevant in the context of sustainable development. Tourism businesses can generate jobs, revitalize local economies and promote environmental conservation. The idea of sustainable development has been a major concern for the global economy for around a century and has been part of the global development agenda since the 1980s. According to a UNWTO study, the tourism sector contributes nearly 10% of global GDP and provides millions of jobs. However, for this contribution to be sustainable, it is essential that entrepreneurs adopt practices that respect the environment and local communities. The World Tourism Organization considers sustainable tourism to be tourism that takes into account current and future economic, social and environmental impacts (World Tourism Organization, 2018).

Economically, Reinhold et al. (2017) argue that tourism entrepreneurship promotes job creation and diversification of income sources. By offering unique products and services, tourism businesses can attract visitor flows, which stimulates local economies. Research has shown that entrepreneurial initiatives focused on sustainable tourism can strengthen the economic resilience of destinations (Bramwell & Lane, 2011).

Socially, several authors confirm the key role that tourism entrepreneurship can play in empowering local communities (Adamopoulos & Thalassinou, 2020). By involving local actors in the decision-making process and allowing them to benefit from the economic spin-offs, these initiatives help to strengthen the social fabric and preserve local cultures (González-Rodríguez et al., 2020). In addition, the development of micro-enterprises promotes social ties and better intercultural understanding between visitors and residents (Aslan, 2014).

The environmental aspect of tourism entrepreneurship is also fundamental (Brida & Risso, 2010). Businesses that adopt sustainable practices, such as the use of renewable resources and waste management, can contribute to the preservation of natural resources (Fletcher, 2019). For example, businesses dedicated to ecotourism play a dual role in promoting tourism while actively participating in environmental conservation (Weaver, 2006).

A review of the empirical literature seems to corroborate the hypothesis that there is a strong connection between tourism entrepreneurship and sustainable development. A study conducted by P. Pablo-Romero & Molina (2013), which reviewed more than 80 empirical studies, showed that, all other things being equal. Two-thirds of the econometric

studies examined highlight a univocal relationship between tourism (revenue generated) and GDP growth, regardless of the method used, and an additional one-fifth even suggest a biunivocal relationship between the two aggregates. Mario Holzner, for his part, studied the case of 134 countries in an effort to raise a question regarding the relationship between growth (GDP per capita) and reliance on the tourism sector. He showed that the most effective model is that of a country with an intermediate level of reliance on tourism, whose investments are primarily directed toward network infrastructure that benefits the tourism sector as well as other manufacturing sectors (Moleiro, 2020).

Despite the acknowledged potential of tourism entrepreneurship to help sustainable development globally, few empirical studies have examined the relationship between tourism entrepreneurship and sustainable development in the Algerian context. Although the economic, social, and environmental aspects of tourist entrepreneurship in developing economies have been thoroughly studied in the literature (Komppula, 2014; Reinhold et al., 2017; González-Rodríguez et al., 2020), Algeria has received less attention. The majority of the research on Algerian tourism is descriptive, concentrating on possible effects rather than quantifiable ones. Furthermore, despite Algeria's recent attempts to grow the tourism industry and its adoption of the SADT 2030 master plan, no study has yet used time series econometrics to evaluate the causal relationship between tourism entrepreneurship and sustainable development indicators.

3. Research methods

3.1. Overview of tourism entrepreneurship in Algeria

From the foregoing, we can conclude that one of the cornerstones of the tourism industry, tourism entrepreneurship, ought to be recognized as an independent economic actor. It stimulates the creation and sale of tourism products and services, while promoting innovation, employment and, to a lesser extent, the attractiveness of regions (Roudi et al., 2019). Although studies on entrepreneurship are rather rare, the employment rate linked to entrepreneurship is low. Researchers note that the image of budding entrepreneurs is not solely guided by the desire to maximize profit. This conceptual thinking motivates an approach to entrepreneurship that includes values and cultural aspects as factors for success in addition to development, business, and growth.

Algeria has a wealth of cultural riches, with its dialects and ruins. It is the second most important site in the world, after Italy, in terms of Roman remains. It also has seven UNESCO World Heritage sites, including the ruins of Tipaza, Tiggirt, Guelma, Timgad, and Djemila. Its diverse natural environment offers opportunities for seaside tourism (1,200 km of coastline), Saharan and hiking tourism, city tourism, business tourism, and health and wellness tourism – more than 200 thermal springs (Bouacha & Lalaoui, 2018). However, these significant assets and resources remain unexploited or poorly exploited.

The process of creating tourism businesses by private actors has continued unabated since 1980. In 2024, there were approximately 1,557 hotels with a capacity of 143,811 beds,

26 thermal establishments and 4,489 travel and tourism agencies, according to the Algerian Agency for Investment Development and Promotion (AAPI). This trend is continuing at a slow pace due to bureaucratic, financial and land-related obstacles to entrepreneurship (red tape, mainly concerning building permits and travel agency licenses, access to land, which is subject to speculation, and difficulties in accessing bank financing). Thus, we are witnessing a dynamic of business creation of all kinds following the encouragement of private investment through legislation and various business creation schemes (e.g., ANDI, NESDA, ANSEJ, CALPI, CNAC). The economic fabric has thus become an agglomeration of heterogeneous businesses belonging to several sectors, including tourism, which remains relatively secondary (Chouam & Mohamed Belkacem, 2016), as Table 1 illustrates.

Table 1. Investment projects declared by sector of activity

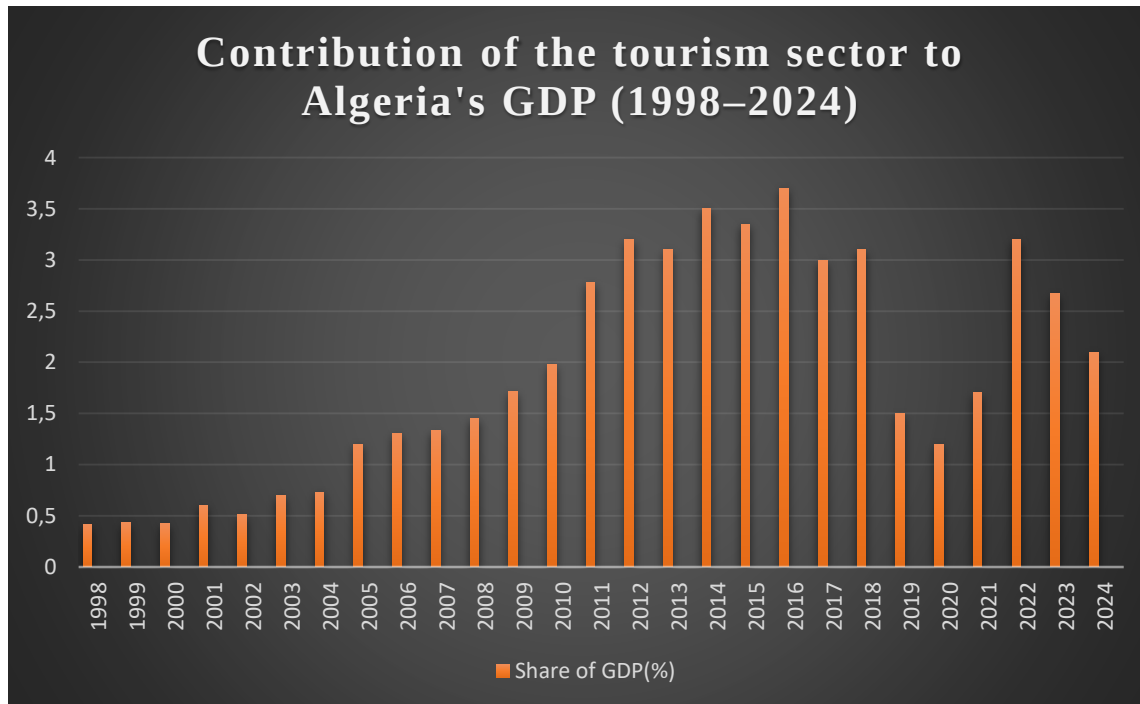
	Number of projects	Rate	Amount Millions of DA	Rate	Number of jobs	Rate
Agriculture	1 437	2.36%	341 134	2.23%	56 905	4.65%
BTPH	11 473	18.83%	1 409 676	9.20%	238 368	19.48%
Industry	13 587	22.30%	9 065 273	59.17%	560 065	45.78%
Health	1 217	2.00%	268 814	1.75%	28 785	2.35%
Transport	26 019	42.71%	1 063 087	6.94%	141 514	11.57%
Tourism	1 238	2.03%	1 327 593	8.67%	74 190	6.06%
Services	5 945	9.76%	1 845 681	12.05%	123 638	10.11%
Total	1 437	2.36%	341 134	2.23%	56 905	4.65%

Source: AAPI (2024)

This situation has prevented the sector from developing at a steady pace, despite the efforts made by the government, as illustrated in Figure 1.

The graph indicates that, prior to 2010, tourism's contribution to the Algerian economy was very low, generally less than 1% in the early years, with slow growth until the 2010s, when tourism accounted for around 2% to 3.5% of GDP according to broad international data (including direct and indirect contributions) for the period 2010-2014. This significant share can be explained by the inclusion of all economic impacts (jobs, taxes, domestic spending). After 2014, the trend started to decline or stabilize at around 3.5%–3.7%, showing rather slow growth in tourism compared to the economy as a whole. The available data show a sharp decline in 2020 and 2021, with tourism's share falling to around 1.7% as a result of the global shock to international travel. Official Algerian statistics highlighted by the ministry indicate a direct contribution of around ~2% of GDP in 2023-2024, significantly lower than in pre-pandemic years. The figures of ~2-3% often come from a broader measure (WTTC) that includes indirect and induced effects. The figures of ~2% mostly cited for 2023-24 correspond to the strict direct contribution of tourism (direct added value).

Figure 1. Share of tourism sector in GDP (%) (1998–2024)



Source: Authors' elaboration based on Open Data for Africa and Statista

Algeria remains an economy largely dominated by hydrocarbons and domestic consumption, which reduces the relative share of tourism in GDP even when the sector is growing. The obstacles remain structural: infrastructure, visas, international marketing, and regional competition (Morocco, Tunisia). In 2022, the contribution of the crafts and tourism sector to GDP was estimated at over 350 billion DA, a significant amount in terms of wealth creation at the national level. This also translates into more than 1.18 million jobs created in crafts and tourism-related trades, demonstrating the impact of local economic actors. The craft/trade sector is often an important form of tourism entrepreneurship in areas with a strong cultural identity (markets, local craft production, and heritage-related services). SMEs in the tourism sector (hotels, agencies, guides, cultural, and craft services) play a structuring role in the development of Algerian tourism; the private sector consistently represented the largest share with around 80–82% throughout the entire period, as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Hotel and catering industry added value (Million DA) (1998–2024)

	Private		Public		Total	
	AV	(%)	AV	(%)	AV	(%)
1998	44.2	78.50	12.1	21.49	56.3	100
1999	48	78.04	13.5	21.95	61.5	100
2000	52.7	78.65	14.3	21.34	67	100
2001	56.8	79.10	15	20.89	71.8	100
2002	61.5	79.45	15.9	20.54	77.4	100
2003	66.7	79.88	16.8	20.11	83.5	100

2004	72.5	79.93	18.2	20.06	90.7	100
2005	79.7	80.34	19.5	19.65	99.2	100
2006	85.1	80.74	20.3	19.26	105.4	100
2007	92.6	80.31	22.7	19.68	115.3	100
2008	100.5	80.65	24.1	19.34	124.6	100
2009	106.8	80.60	25.7	19.39	132.5	100
2010	118.5	81.33	27.2	18.66	145.7	100
2011	128.3	85.07	22.5	14.92	150.8	100
2012	138.9	81.41	31.7	18.58	170.6	100
2013	152.1	81.16	35.3	18.83	187.4	100
2014	164.2	81.81	36.5	18.18	200.7	100
2015	172.3	80.99	40.4	19.01	212.78	100
2016	192.4	80.07	47.9	19.93	240.39	100
2017	219.1	81.35	50.2	18.65	269.38	100
2018	235.3	80.57	56.7	19.43	292.15	100
2019	201	81.36	46.1	18.65	247.1	100
2020	172.2	80.88	40.7	19.1	212.9	100
2021	197	77.98	55.6	22.01	252.6	100
2022	224.8	81.95	71.5	18.04	396.3	100
2023	355.7	82.26	76.7	17.73	432.4	100
2024	388	82.50	82.3	17.49	470.3	100

Source: Authors' elaboration based on Office National des Statistiques, Direction Générale des Douanes, and UN Tourism

The theoretical study shows that these businesses contribute to:

- job creation,
- expanding tourist accommodation capacity,
- promoting local resources.

These SMEs have seen an increase of more than 50% in the number of tourist establishments, indicating a rise in entrepreneurship in the sector.

Furthermore, the development of the tourism sector is no longer a matter of choice, but rather a matter of urgency, and the challenge is being addressed in the SDAT plan. Tourism entrepreneurship in Algeria, although historically weak compared to hydrocarbons, is experiencing dynamic growth, reaching around 3.8% of GDP and 7.5% of employment in 2024–2025. Supported by Coface and land reforms, this increase is being driven by domestic tourism and an increase in foreign visitors, with more than 8,400 projects registered to develop infrastructure. Thus, the change in the situation in recent years leads us to raise the question of the contribution of this sector, which we consider promising, to the improvement of the national economy. For this reason, we will use time series econometrics to measure this impact.

3.2. Examining the relationship between tourism entrepreneurship and economic development in Algeria

In this section, we use the most recent developments in time series econometrics to investigate the causal relationships between Algeria's sustainable development and tourism entrepreneurship. This approach will be applied in five stages inside a VECM modelling framework: Unit root testing, Lag length selection for VAR in levels, Johansen cointegration tests, VECM estimation, and diagnostic checking.

Before using statistical tests of stationarity (the KPSS test; Kwiatkowski et al., 1992) and/or non-stationarity (the ADF and PP tests; Phillips & Perron, 1988), we shall first discuss the database. The stationarity hypothesis can be evaluated using the first test, and the unit root hypothesis can be tested using the second two tests. This allows us to differentiate between non-stationary series, stationary series, and series for which there is insufficient information in the data. (Kwiatkowski et al., 1992).

The first crucial step is to define the variables for our model to capture the three pillars of sustainable development (economic, social, and environmental):

- Tourism variable (explanatory): INV, private investment in tourism infrastructure characterizing the tourism entrepreneurship and tourism incomes (RT); this is a standard proxy for measuring tourism activity.

- Economic Variable (explanatory): unemployment and tourism incomes (UNEMP).

- Control Variable (endogenous): the overall sustainable development index (SDG), which takes into account:

1. The economic pillar: It assesses competitiveness and economic freedom. It incorporates indicators such as macroeconomic performance, innovation, labor market efficiency, GDP per capita, and freedom to conduct business.

2. The social pillar: This measures well-being and equity. It includes the poverty rate, life expectancy, educational attainment, health status, and access to basic services (water, sanitation).

3. The environmental pillar: This assesses the health of ecosystems and the impact of human activity. It is based on indicators such as CO₂ emissions, air and water quality, waste management, biodiversity, and ecological footprint.

This study is based on the assumption that there is a long-term, steady-state relationship between sustainable development and its fundamental determinants, primarily tourism entrepreneurship, which amounts to formulating a linear version of our econometric model as follows:

$$SDG_t = \beta_0 + \beta_1 INV_t + \beta_2 RT_t + \beta_3 UNEMP_t + t + \varepsilon_t$$

This study covers the period from 1998 to 2024. Our database was compiled using data from several sources, including the World Bank, the Ministry of Land Use Planning, Tourism and Handicrafts, and the ONS. However, we regretfully have to restrict our time series to the years 1998–2024 because the sustainable development index was not created until 2000.

Collecting the data needed to estimate the model presented numerous challenges. The first challenge concerns the sample size, which is limited, because the sustainable development index was not performed until 2000. As there were many gaps in the time series of the selected variables, painstaking work was necessary to build a database. Although insufficient, it provides us with insights into the effect that tourism entrepreneurship may have on sustainable development in a developing economy, referring to the Algerian case. We are also aware that the number of variables selected is insufficient, but given the size of the sample, we cannot select more variables as recommended by econometric modelling. With a small sample, a VECM with more than four variables becomes over parametrized, leading to unreliable cointegration tests, unstable coefficients, and poor forecasts.

4. Research results

4.1. Presentation of stationarity test results

According to *Table 3*, all tests yielded the same result: Comparison of the calculated values with the critical values indicates that all series are non-stationary at level. Similar tests on the first differences of these series indicate that they are stationary, so we can deduce that the series are integrated of order 1, $I(1)$.

Table 3. Results of stationarity tests for the selected variables

Variables	ADF		PP		KPSS	
	Level	1st Diff	Level	1st Diff	Level	1st Diff
SDG	-2.6789 (0.0922)	-3.8208 (0.0086)	-2.9918 (0.9918)	-3.8208 (0.0086)	0.627751	0.216240
RT	-1.9758 (0.2946)	-4.9060 (0.007)	-1.9523 (0.3041)	-4.9166 0.007	0.635576	0.131116
INV	-3.3618 1.000	-4.553 0.0016	-2.9918 (1.000)	-4.7750 0.001	0.443717	0.053121
UNEMP	-1.1295 0.6876	-4.1714 0.0039	-1.1580 0.6750	-4.1497 0.0041	0.475739	0.438415

Source: Authors' elaboration using Eviews software. V12

4.2. Optimal lag length selection

In the following step, we should ascertain the optimal number of lags (P) for the VAR model at level before beginning this test. *Table 4* provides a summary of the test results. A review of the table shows that most reporting criteria allow for maximum lags of one lag. We therefore favor a VAR.

Table 4. Lag length selection. Endogenous variables: SDG RT INV UNEMP. Exogenous variables: C.
Date: 05/24/26. Time: 18:00. Sample: 2000 2024. Included observations: 22.

Lag	LogL	LR	FPE	AIC	SC
0	-847.7602	NA	5.00e+28	77.43275	77.63112
1	-773.0801	115.4148*	2.49e+26	72.09819*	73.09005*
2	-752.6001	24.20366	1.97e+26*	71.69092	73.47626
3	-731.8183	17.00331	2.10e+26	71.25621	73.83503

*Indicates lag order selected by the criterion

Source: Authors' elaboration using Eviews software. V12

4.3. Cointegration tests

We have conducted our study of the long-term relationship using the Johansen process, which is more appropriate when there are several real variables in the same model (Johansen, 1988). Furthermore, unlike other methods, this technique has the advantage of not only providing a cointegration test, but also identifying the number of cointegration relationships (Hoang, 2017). The Johansen test consists of two sub-tests: the trace test and the maximum eigenvalue test (Tables 5 and 6).

Table 5. Trace test results. Unrestricted cointegration rank test (Trace)

Hypothesized no. of CE(s)	Eigenvalue	Trace statistic	0.05 Critical Value	Prob.**
None *	0.818263	65.44370	47.85613	0.0005
At most 1	0.438108	26.22425	29.79707	0.1221
At most 2	0.380275	12.96601	15.49471	0.1161
At most 3	0.081727	1.960999	3.841466	0.1614

Trace test indicates 1 cointegrating eqn(s) at the 0.05 level. *Denotes rejection of the hypothesis at the 0.05 level. **MacKinnon-Haug-Michelis (1999) p-values.

Source: Authors' elaboration using Eviews software. V12

Table 6. Maximum Eigenvalue test results. Unrestricted cointegration rank test (Maximum Eigenvalue)

Hypothesized no. of CE(s)	Eigenvalue	Max-Eigen statistic	0.05 Critical Value
None *	0.818263	39.21945	27.58434
At most 1	0.438108	13.25823	21.13162
At most 2	0.380275	11.00502	14.26460
At most 3	0.081727	1.960999	3.841466

Max-eigenvalue test indicates 1 cointegrating eqn(s) at the 0.05 level. *Denotes rejection of the hypothesis at the 0.05 level.

**MacKinnon-Haug-Michelis (1999) p-values.

Source: Authors' elaboration using Eviews software. V12

Based on Johansen's trace statistic, we reject, at the 5% significance level, the null hypothesis H_0 of no cointegration relationship ($r = 0$) against the alternative hypothesis H_1 ($r > 0$) because ($\lambda_{trace=65.44370}$) is greater than the critical value read in the table below (47.85613). We then move to the fourth row of the table, where we test the null hypothesis ($r = 1$) against ($r > 1$). We see that the rank of the matrix is equal to 1 since ($\lambda_{trace=1.960999}$) is less than the critical value read in the table (3.841466). Consequently, we accept the hypothesis of one cointegration relationship for a threshold of 5%.

4.4. Identification of the cointegration relationship

The method developed by Johansen & Juselius (1990) will allow us to assess the true impact of exogenous variables on the endogenous variable in the long-term relationship, so we are considering estimating a VECM model after highlighting the uniqueness of the cointegration relationship linking the Sustainable Development Index to its fundamentals (Table 7).

Table 7. Vector Error correction estimates. Date: 05/24/26 Time: 21:52.
Sample (adjusted): 2003 2024. Included observations: 22 after adjustments.
Standard errors in () & t-statistics in []

Cointegrating Eq	CointEq1			
SDG(-1)	1.000000			
INV(-1)	-5.85E-03 (1.5E-03) [4.00179]			
RT(-1)	-2.79E-02 (7.5E-03) [3.71369]			
UNEMP(-1)	0.629200 (0.16802) [3.74469]			
C	-88.23419			
Error Correction	D(SDG)	D(INV)	D(RT)	D(UNEMP)
CointEq1	-0.203707 (0.06215) [-3.27793]	104222.4 (39509.4) [2.63791]	29141761 (1.3E+07) [2.30489]	0.368130 (0.26941) [1.36644]
D(SDG(-1))	-0.157535 (0.21375) [-0.73700]	20365.58 (135894.) [0.14986]	27672827 (4.3E+07) [0.63634]	-0.193450 (0.92664) [-0.20876]
D(SDG(-2))	-0.378405 (0.19393) [-1.95127]	-151398.6 (123292.) [-1.22797]	-15973633 (3.9E+07) [-0.40486]	1.189222 (0.84071) [1.41455]
D(INV(-1))	5.70E-07 (7.5E-07) [0.75614]	-1.210588 (0.47886) [-2.52804]	-342.4623 (153.242) [-2.23478]	-1.72E-06 (3.3E-06) [-0.52815]

D(INV(-2))	-3.20E-08 (5.9E-07) [-0.05394]	-0.168446 (0.37681) [-0.44703]	-239.2006 (120.584) [-1.98368]	-2.19E-07 (2.6E-06) [-0.08519]
D(RT(-1))	5.33E-09 (2.0E-09) [2.66957]	-0.003146 (0.00127) [-2.47775]	-1.366936 (0.40632) [-3.36419]	-1.17E-08 (8.7E-09) [-1.34947]
D(RT(-2))	1.69E-09 (2.0E-09) [0.84467]	-0.001256 (0.00127) [-0.98687]	-1.602334 (0.40719) [-3.93506]	6.86E-09 (8.7E-09) [0.79085]
D(UNEMP(-1))	0.225265 (0.09320) [2.41708]	-111990.3 (59251.2) [-1.89009]	-70875634 (1.9E+07) [-3.73796]	-0.106784 (0.40402) [-0.26430]
D(UNEMP(-2))	0.083210 (0.07947) [1.04706]	-91378.76 (50523.8) [-1.80863]	-50971594 (1.6E+07) [-3.15259]	0.233557 (0.34451) [0.67793]
C	0.601232 (0.16664) [3.60796]	184881.4 (105944.) [1.74509]	-24258230 (3.4E+07) [-0.71552]	-0.599284 (0.72241) [-0.82956]
R-squared	0.707987	0.693589	0.645987	0.621322
Adj. R-squared	0.488977	0.463781	0.380477	0.337313
Sum sq. resids	1.531484	6.19E+11	6.34E+16	28.78205
S. E. equation	0.357244	227122.2	72681675	1.548710
F-statistic	3.232671	3.018119	2.433006	2.187687
Log likelihood	-1.903786	-295.8805	-422.7844	-34.17245
Akaike AIC	1.082162	27.80732	39.34403	4.015677
Schwarz SC	1.578091	28.30325	39.83996	4.511606
Mean dependent	0.278531	144987.6	4437727.	-0.559091
S. D. dependent	0.499741	310161.8	92341354	1.902463
Determinant resid covariance (dof adj.)	3.72E+25			
Determinant resid covariance	3.29E+24			
Log likelihood	-745.8486			
Akaike information criterion	71.80442			
Schwarz criterion	73.98651			

Source: Authors' elaboration using Eviews software. V12

The long-term relationship resulting from the cointegration relationship can therefore be expressed as follows:

$$SDG = 5.85e-03*INV + 2.78e-02*RT - 0.629*UNEMP + 88.23$$

Based on the obtained results on long-term cointegration equilibrium, we find that, overall, the coefficient of determination is reliable ($R^2=0.707987$) and it reflects the significant explanation of sustainable development by selected variables, namely

unemployment in the tourism sector, incomes generated by tourism, and investment in the tourism sector.

The VECM long-term relationship reveals that private tourism investment (INV) has a positive but very weak long-term effect on sustainable development in Algeria, with a coefficient of 0.00585. Despite the positive and significant impact, one million DZD increase in private tourism investment raises the SDG index by only 0.00585 units over the long run.

Tourism receipts (RT) have a positive and statistically significant long-term effect on sustainable development in Algeria, with a coefficient of 0.0279—approximately 4.8 times larger than that of tourism investment (INV). Economically, this means that a one million DZD increase in tourism revenues improves the overall SDG index by 0.0279 units. Operating tourism thus contributes more to sustainable development than does investment itself, as revenues generate tax income for the state, employment earnings for households, and demand for local suppliers. However, the effect's absolute magnitude is still small, indicating that tourism receipts may be concentrated in a small number of regions (such as coastal areas, Algiers, and Tassili), that redistribution mechanisms toward the social and environmental pillars are weak, and that the import content of tourism consumption is probably high, limiting local multiplier effects.

Unemployment (UNEMP) has a strong negative long-term effect on sustainable development in Algeria, with a coefficient of -0.6292 . Economically, this means that a 1 percentage point increase in unemployment reduces the SDG index by 0.63 units—a large and detrimental impact. Unemployment thus appears as a major structural barrier to sustainable development. High unemployment undermines the economic pillar through lower GDP per capita, reduced innovation, and labor market inefficiency; weakens the social pillar by increasing poverty, worsening health outcomes, and reducing access to basic services; and indirectly harms the environmental pillar, as unemployed populations may overuse natural resources such as firewood or engage in informal hunting and land clearing.

We can say, in general, that the impact is positive but with weak contribution. Both investment and tourism receipts improve SDG, but elasticities are very small. This is due to the small selected sample (only 22 observation). This could be considered a study limitation. The deduced short-term relationship is given by:

$$\Delta \text{SDG} = -0.378 * D(\text{SDG}(-2)) + 5.33\text{E-}09 * D(\text{RT}(-1)) + 0.225 * D(\text{UNEMP}(-1)) + 0.601$$

In the short term, only the SDG index itself adjusts toward equilibrium. Tourism variables (INV, RT) are not responsive to sustainable development imbalances. This suggests policy incoherence: When SDG deviates from target, tourism investment and receipts do not react to help restore balance.

4.5. Diagnostic checking

Verification of the residuals' homoscedasticity, autocorrelation, and normality is necessary for the validation and robustness tests for our estimated model. The following tests are

employed to confirm these attributes: The Breusch-Godfrey, Jarque-Bera, and Breusch-Pagan-Godfrey tests.

4.5.1. Residuals autocorrelation test

Both tests confirm that there is insufficient evidence to detect serial correlation in the residuals, insofar as F-statistic p-value = 0.5269 is greater than 0.05, and Obs*R-squared p-value = 0.3646 is greater than 0.05 (Table 8).

Table 8. Residual autocorrelation test

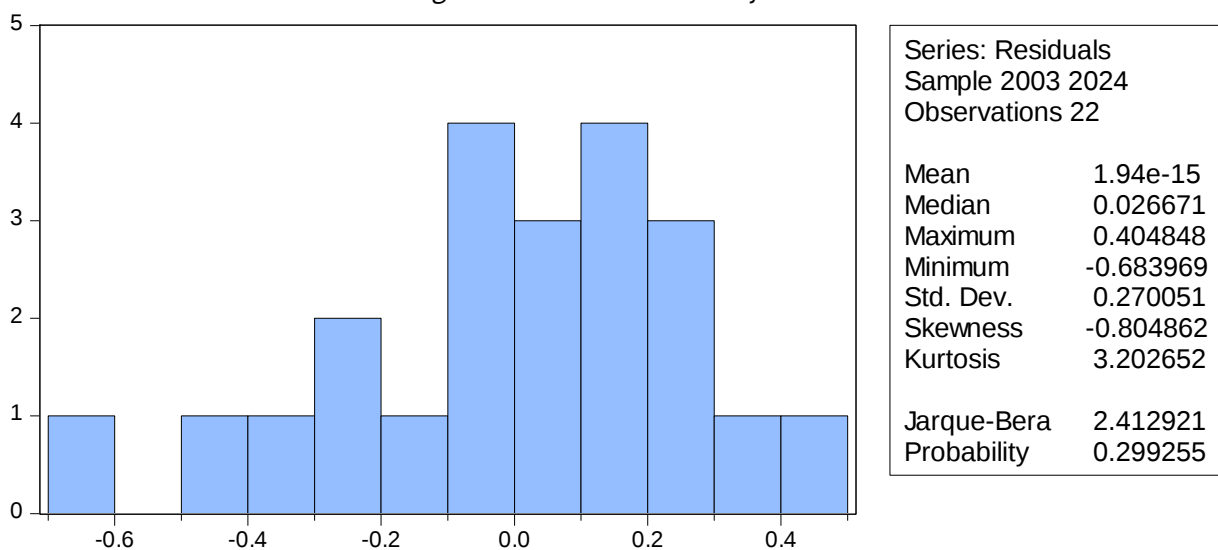
Breusch-Godfrey Serial Correlation LM Test			
F-statistic	0.426999	Prob. F(1,11)	0.5269
Obs*R-squared	0.822086	Prob. Chi-Square(1)	0.3646

Source: Authors' elaboration using Eviews software

4.5.2. Normality test

We cannot reject the null hypothesis of normality of the residuals as long as the Jarque-Bera p-value = 0.299255 greater than 0.05, so we conclude that the residuals are normally distributed (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Residuals normality test



Source: Authors' elaboration using Eviews software

4.5.3. Heteroscedasticity test

The null hypothesis is consistently not rejected by any of the three tests. The variance of the residuals is constant or homoscedastic. Heteroscedasticity is not evident.

Table 9. Residual heteroscedasticity test

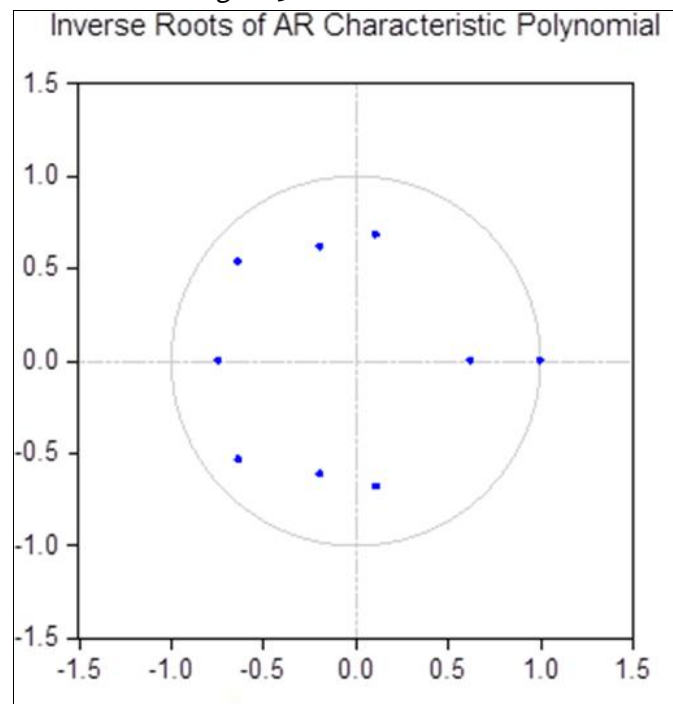
Heteroscedasticity Test: Breusch-Pagan-Godfrey			
F-statistic	0.307457	Prob. F(12,9)	0.9697
Obs*R-squared	6.396532	Prob. Chi-Square(12)	0.8948
Scaled explained SS	2.095934	Prob. Chi-Square(12)	0.9992

Source: Authors' elaboration using Eviews software

4.5.4. Robustness test

The inverse roots lie within the unit circle, and all the moduli are less than 1, which indicates the absence of the unit root. The estimated VECM(1.1) is therefore stationary, and the model is perfectly stable; thus, the used variables form a stationary dynamic system.

Figure 3. Robustness test



Source: Authors' elaboration using Eviews software

5. Conclusions

The econometric study shows that tourism entrepreneurship has a positive impact on sustainable development (SDG) in Algeria, suggesting that tourism and entrepreneurship share common goals of socio-economic development at the global and local levels, social inclusion, and protection of cultural and environmental heritage. The premise that tourism entrepreneurship significantly and favorably affects sustainable development and economic growth in Algeria is supported by the model estimation findings. Although currently limited (not exceeding an annual average of 3-4% of GDP) and generating approximately USD 1.6 billion in direct revenue from visitors in 2023, it indicates significant

economic activity of tourism businesses in Algeria. The development of this promising sector requires investment in infrastructure and a long-term strategy aimed at promoting tourism. In addition, the obtained results indicate an impact that extends to other variables that are positively correlated with the development of tourism entrepreneurship, including tourism incomes and employment in the tourism sector. The findings of this study also reveal a bitter reality: despite the positive impact of tourism entrepreneurship and the government's willingness to boost this sector, the various strategies adopted by Algeria to promote the development of tourism have revealed their shortcomings, even their failures. This observation clearly highlights the insignificant position attributed to the tourism sector, particularly after the health crisis of 2019. Indeed, the socialist-inspired development model adopted in Algeria after gaining its independence can explain the low weight of tourism. The aim of this model was to establish an integrated economy capable of meeting the needs of the population, with a crucial role assigned to industrializing industries. The prosperous hydrocarbon situation has led Algeria to neglect international tourism as a source of foreign income at a time when its coffers are full thanks to oil revenues. Available studies and analyses highlight several constraints that still limit the impact of tourism entrepreneurship on economic growth in Algeria:

- limited financing for tourism SMEs,
- lack of adequate infrastructure,
- insufficient vocational training and digitalization of the sector,
- administrative complexity and investment conditions.

These factors are hindering the rapid expansion of tourism entrepreneurship and its direct impact on economic development in Algeria.

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HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT MATURITY AND EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION IN HOTELS: EVIDENCE FROM MOROCCO AND HUNGARY

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ABSTRACT

Human resource management (HRM) is crucial to hotel competitiveness; nevertheless, there is limited understanding of how managers in various contexts integrate practices into cohesive systems that influence employee motivation, satisfaction, and commitment. This qualitative multi-case study assesses HRM procedures in nine four- and five-star hotels in Morocco and Hungary via semi-structured interviews with general and HR managers. The analysis aligns with Deci and Ryan’s self-determination theory. Findings show that high-maturity hotels, especially international chains, deploy integrated “bundles” of formal HR systems and relational practices, while smaller independent hotels operate more fragmented, owner-driven models. The research provides a practical HRM maturity continuum for hospitality and suggests that aligning HR practices with brand positioning and employee psychological needs can strengthen motivation, commitment, and service quality in emerging and transitional hotel markets.

Keywords: commitment, hotels, HR practices, motivation, satisfaction

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AZ EMBERIERŐFORRÁS-MENEDZSMENT ÉRETTSÉGI SZINTJE ÉS SZÁLLODAI MUNKAVÁLLALÓI MOTIVÁCIÓ: MAROKKÓI ÉS MAGYAR PÉLDÁK

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ABSZTRAKT

A humánerőforrás-menedzsment (HRM) kulcsfontosságú a szállodák versenyképessége szempontjából, ugyanakkor korlátozottak az ismeretek arról, hogy a vezetők különböző kontextusokban miként integrálják a gyakorlatokat olyan koherens rendszerekbe, amelyek befolyásolják a munkavállalói motivációt, elégedettséget és elköteleződést. A tanulmány kvalitatív esettanulmányokra épül, kilenc marokkói és magyarországi, négy- és ötcsillagos szálloda HRM-folyamatait vizsgálja szállodaigazgatókkal és HR-vezetőkkel készült félig strukturált interjúk segítségével. Az elemzés Deci és Ryan önmeghatározás-elméletére épül. Eredményeink szerint a magas „érettségű” szállodák – különösen a nemzetközi láncok – integrált, formális HR-rendszereket és kapcsolatorientált gyakorlatokat alkalmaznak, míg a kisebb, független szállodák széttagoltabb, tulajdonos által vezérelt modellek szerint működnek. A kutatás egy HRM-érettségi kontinuumot vázol fel a szállodaipar számára, és rámutat, hogy a HR-gyakorlatoknak a márkapozicionálással és a munkavállalói pszichológiai szükségletekkel való összehangolása erősítheti a motivációt, az elkötelezettséget és a szolgáltatásminőséget a feltörekvő és átmeneti fázisban lévő szállodák piacán.

Kulcsszavak: elkötelezettség, szállodaipar, humánerőforrás-menedzsment, motiváció, elégedettség

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1. Introduction

Human resource management (HRM) is central to hotel competitiveness because service quality depends on employees' motivation, satisfaction, and willingness to go the extra mile (Domínguez-Falcón et al., 2016). Persistent turnover, labour shortages, and intense customer contact make effective HR practices a strategic rather than purely administrative issue (Chandran & Abukhalifeh, 2021). In emerging and transitional markets, resource constraints and owner-driven short-termism can further limit investment in people despite managers recognising its importance (Agbodo-Otinpong, 2015). Prior studies link core HR practices such as training, rewards, participation, and supportive leadership to positive employee and organisational outcomes in hospitality and show that HR systems are most powerful when internally consistent, mutually reinforcing, and aligned with business strategy (Plessis et al., 2016; Khassawneh & Mohammad, 2021). However, much of this work is quantitative, focuses on single countries or chains, and treats HR practices as isolated variables rather than broader configurations that vary by context (Boxall & Macky, 2009; McGinley et al., 2021).

This study responds with a qualitative multi-case analysis of HRM in four- and five-star hotels in Morocco and Hungary. Morocco represents a developing hospitality market where international chains coexist with locally owned establishments. The sample includes four chain hotels and one boutique hotel, allowing comparison between standardised corporate systems (including HR) and more informal, relationship-based approaches (Chandad & Rochdane, 2025). Hungary offers a contrasting Central European context, with chain-affiliated urban five-star hotels and independent regional properties, in which formal HR processes are limited and owner influence is strong, consistent with evidence that Hungarian SMEs often lack dedicated HR specialists and rely on informal, owner-led HR practices (Finna & Krajcsák, 2011). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with general managers and HR managers in nine hotels (five in Morocco and four in Hungary), focusing on recognition and rewards, training and careers, communication and employee voice, working conditions and well-being, empowerment and participation, and the strategic integration of HR. These domains draw on HRM and motivation research and map onto the self-determination theory (SDT) needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which predict high-quality work motivation and well-being across settings (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Olafsen & Deci, 2020).

Guided by this framework, the study addresses three research questions:

- How is information about career opportunities, organisational strategy, and performance expectations communicated between hotel management and employees?
- Which human resource management practices most strongly shape employees' motivation, job satisfaction, and organisational commitment?
- To what extent, and through which mechanisms, are employees empowered to share their opinions and ideas and to participate in decision-making processes within the hotel?

2. Literature review

2.1. Strategic human resource management in hospitality

In the hospitality sector, strategic human resource management (SHRM) is described as a key mechanism for aligning people practices with organisational objectives and service demands. SHRM typically involves coordinated recruitment, training, performance recognition, and career development systems that aim to improve service quality and long-term performance (Agbodo-Otinpong, 2015; Eshete & Birbirssa, 2024). Digitalisation further shapes SHRM in hotels, as modern technology and data-driven HR tools support more efficient communication, monitoring, and decision-making, helping firms respond to competitive market pressures (Radović et al., 2025).

2.2. Employee motivation

Camilleri et al. (2024) highlight employee motivation as central to service delivery in hospitality, as motivated staff are more likely to show discretionary effort, responsiveness, and pro-service behaviours. Both intrinsic factors (autonomy, meaningful tasks, career opportunities) and extrinsic drivers (fair pay, formal recognition) shape motivation in hotels, while low wages, unstable contracts, and limited training reduce morale and productivity, underscoring the vulnerability of hospitality jobs to unfavourable conditions (Al-Badarneh & Malkawi, 2025). Practices such as personalised recognition, supportive and transformational leadership and visible pathways for development are associated with stronger engagement. self-determination theory (SDT) explains these effects through the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which are strengthened when HR practices empower employees, build skills, and foster supportive relationships (Akbudak, 2024; Camilleri et al., 2024). Herzberg et al.'s (1959) motivator-hygiene theory further distinguishes hygiene factors (pay, supervision, working conditions) that prevent dissatisfaction from motivators (recognition, achievement, responsibility, growth) that drive positive motivation, clarifying why improving basic conditions alone often fails to produce highly motivated employees in hospitality. In hospitality specifically, irregular and often unpredictable shifts, high emotional labour demands, and persistently high turnover rates create conditions that erode motivation if not actively countered by supportive HR practices, making motivation-focused investment a retention necessity rather than a discretionary add-on (Michael & Fotiadis, 2022)

2.3. Employee satisfaction

Job satisfaction is widely recognised as a key outcome for both employee retention and service performance in hotels. Transparent internal communication, fair and competitive compensation, and ongoing opportunities for skills development are frequently identified as important factors influencing satisfaction (Debreceeni et al., 2025; Saito et al., 2025), while respectful treatment, realistic promotion opportunities, and supportive working conditions further shape employees' perceptions of their jobs (Duarte & Silva, 2023).

Across various contexts, structured training, supportive work environments, and clear alignment between roles and the hotel's mission are associated with higher satisfaction and lower turnover intentions (Nwokorie, 2021). Based on SDT, studies show that satisfaction increases when needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met through participation in decision-making, constructive feedback, and teamwork (Camilleri et al., 2024). However, many empowerment studies treat empowerment as a formal managerial practice rather than examining whether employees actually feel psychologically 'safe' enough to exercise autonomy in decision-making.

In hotel settings, occupational well-being initiatives that support employees' psychological health and work-life balance, together with supportive management and opportunities for growth, are associated with higher motivation and more positive employee attitudes (Ali et al., 2025). These working conditions are consistently associated with higher turnover intentions in the hospitality sector, underscoring the need to integrate work-life balance considerations into HRM systems (Deery & Jago, 2015). Even though employee well-being has received growing attention in hospitality research, the literature continues to emphasise operational and physical dimensions of well-being more strongly than psychological and emotional support mechanisms.

2.4. Employee commitment

Meyer and Allen's (1991) three-component model frames commitment as affective (emotional attachment), continuance (cost-based), and normative (obligation-based). This framework has been widely applied in hospitality to explain why employees remain with their organisations for emotional, economic, or moral reasons. Hotels that involve employees in decision-making, communicate career pathways clearly, and maintain consistent internal communication tend to report stronger commitment and lower attrition (Ji & Han, 2021; Ghani et al., 2022). Existing studies frequently acknowledge the importance of communication in employee management but rarely conceptualise communication itself as a strategic HR mechanism through which organisational goals, career opportunities, and performance expectations become meaningful to employees.

Research comparing luxury chains and smaller hotels indicates that large, branded properties frequently rely on standardised appraisal systems and comprehensive benefits to sustain loyalty, whereas smaller hotels place more emphasis on personalised development, close-knit teams, and a strong sense of belonging (Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2019). The provision of high-quality service can result in the satisfaction of both hotel employees and guests (Németh, 2025).

The reviewed literature directly informs this study's three research questions. Communication practices and their role in transmitting career and performance information underpin RQ1; the interplay between formal rewards, intrinsic drivers, and sector-specific pressures underpins RQ2; and the literature on empowerment and voice provides the basis for RQ3. By synthesising these strands through SDT across two national

contexts, the study extends existing knowledge beyond single-country quantitative designs.

3. Methodology

The study investigates how managerial practices in human resource management (HRM) shape employee motivation, satisfaction, and commitment in high-quality hotels in Morocco and Hungary. A qualitative multiple-case design was adopted, using semi-structured interviews with HR managers and senior hotel managers to obtain in-depth insights into HR practices, communication processes, and empowerment initiatives. This approach is suitable for exploring complex, context-dependent managerial practices that cannot be fully captured through standardised questionnaires.

In line with the exploratory aims, a purposive sampling strategy was adopted to select four- and five-star hotels that were recognised locally for service quality and professionalised management. The intention was not to obtain a statistically representative sample, but to capture variation in HRM maturity across contrasting organisational forms (chain versus independent, urban versus regional, luxury versus resort) in two hospitality markets. This logic of case selection reflects the view that rich, information-intensive cases are well suited for examining how HRM practices are bundled in different hotel contexts, rather than for estimating population-level effects.

The participating hotels included luxury chains, international, boutique, wellness, resort, and independent 4- and 5-star properties in Morocco and Hungary, where interviews were conducted with HR managers, general managers, and management assistants between October 2025 and January 2026. The selected hotels vary in size, location, and classification, and are all high-quality properties; their characteristics are summarised in *Table 1*. Selection criteria prioritised properties with established reputations for service excellence, ensuring that the sample reflected both the standardised practices of multinational chains and the flexibility of boutique operations.

The participating hotels were chosen according to three criteria: operation in the four- or five-star segment, an established reputation for service excellence in their region, and the availability of managers directly responsible for HR-related decisions. This design introduces a comparative perspective between Morocco and Hungary, but it does not aim to disentangle country-level effects from organisational-level effects statistically. National context is therefore treated as a background condition that shapes how individual hotels design and implement HRM systems, rather than as a variable that can be isolated from ownership, size, and location.

Table 1. Characteristics of participating hotels

Identification	Classification	Size	Main features
Hotel 1 (MA)	4-star (chain)	≈ 174 rooms	Business hotel with meeting facilities and suites
Hotel 2 (MA)	5-star (chain)	≈ 100 rooms	Seaside luxury chain with event and leisure facilities
Hotel 3 (MA)	5-star (chain)	≈ 255 rooms	Luxury chain with modern amenities for high-profile guests
Hotel 4 (MA)	5-star (boutique)	<50 rooms	Boutique hotel with minimalist design and upscale amenities
Hotel 5 (MA)	5-star (chain)	≈ 255 rooms	Luxury chain combining modern elegance with traditional design
Hotel 6 (HU)	5-star (wellness)	≈ 83 rooms	Wellness hotel with personalised programmes, medical check-ups, and spa
Hotel 7 (HU)	5-star (reconstructed)	≈ 100 rooms	Restored historic hotel with classic interiors, small spa, and waterfront access
Hotel 8 (HU)	4-star (resort)	≈ 260 rooms	Resort with pools, wellness/sport areas, activities and family services
Hotel 9 (HU)	4-star (countryside)	≈ 127 rooms	Modern wellness hotel with clean-lined interiors, compact spa area, and easy access to local thermal baths

Source: own editing

As the study aims to explore a managerial perspective, it focuses on general managers and HR managers because they design and coordinate the HR policies and practices that employees experience daily. While this perspective is important for understanding how HRM systems are intended to function, it also has limitations, as managers may present their organisations in a favourable light and their views may only partially reflect those of frontline employees. To mitigate this risk, accounts were compared across hotels and ownership types, and we explicitly acknowledge the absence of direct employee data as a limitation and an avenue for future research.

Interviews were conducted in private and lasted 40-60 minutes. Three interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim; the remaining six were documented through detailed notes taken during the session. A semi-structured interview guide was used, organised around HR practices that the literature identifies as key drivers of employee motivation, satisfaction, and commitment in hospitality: recruitment and selection, recognition and reward, training and development, feedback and communication, and well-being and work-life balance. Open-ended questions and follow-up probes were used to allow respondents to elaborate on specific initiatives, perceived outcomes, and contextual constraints. Interviews were analysed manually through deductive thematic analysis. Following established guidance on thematic analysis, we first familiarised ourselves with the transcripts and notes, then generated parent codes related to recognition and

rewards, training and development, communication and employee voice, working conditions and well-being, empowerment and participation, and the strategic integration of HR. Within each parent code, emergent subcodes were developed from the data (e.g., formal training programmes, career opportunities, etc., as sub-codes for training and development). These codes were iteratively grouped into broader themes and organised in a case-by-theme matrix that facilitated comparisons between Moroccan and Hungarian hotels and between chain and independent properties. Coding was conducted by the primary researcher, with a selection of coded segments reviewed by a second researcher to ensure interpretive consistency. The development of themes was guided by the theoretical framework of SDT. The interviews addressed the following research questions:

- RQ1: How is information about career opportunities, organisational strategy, and performance expectations communicated between hotel management and employees?
- RQ2: Which human resource management practices most strongly shape employees' motivation, job satisfaction, and organisational commitment?
- RQ3: To what extent, and through which mechanisms, are employees empowered to share their opinions and ideas and to participate in decision-making processes within the hotel?

4. Results

This section presents the results of a thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with human resource and hotel managers from four and five-star hotels in Morocco and Hungary. The analysis explores how HR practices shape employee motivation, satisfaction, and commitment in two national hospitality contexts, and how managers perceive their contribution to organisational effectiveness.

The Moroccan sample included four international chain hotels and one locally owned boutique hotel, providing insights across different organisational structures within a developing hospitality market. The Hungarian sample ranged from established five-star properties to independent regional hotels.

Interviews in both countries followed a semi-structured approach focused on recognition, empowerment, and well-being. Six main themes emerged consistently across both national contexts:

1. recognition and rewards systems
2. training and career development
3. communication, feedback, and employee voice
4. working conditions and well-being
5. empowerment and participation
6. strategic integration of HR practices.

4.1. Recognition and reward system

Systematic reward systems promote perceived fairness and transparency, while interpersonal appreciation addresses deeper social and psychological needs. In Morocco, all four chain hotels use formal recognition programmes (annual awards, employee-of-the-month schemes, appraisal-linked incentives), whereas the boutique relies mainly on spontaneous acknowledgement and symbolic gestures.

In Hungary, recognition is also a key driver of morale, but systems vary in sophistication. One five-star wellness hotel combines annual evaluations, day-to-day praise, and peer-voted end-of-year awards (e.g., “Guests’ Favourite”, “Hero of Flexibility”), using guest feedback and weekly department-head meetings to highlight exemplary behaviour. Another five-star hotel runs an employee-of-the-month scheme tied to service charge distribution and upselling commissions, directly linking recognition to revenue and service quality. The countryside hotel relies mainly on guest questionnaires, naming staff, and a basic employee of the month benefit, with the incoming GM acknowledging that broader structures do not yet exist. Across both contexts, managers see recognition as central to morale, pride, and reduced turnover intentions, blending structured rewards with everyday appreciation.

4.2. Training and career development

Moroccan participants considered training essential for service quality and motivation. Chain hotels use standardised corporate learning frameworks, e-learning, and formal progression pathways, sometimes including international rotation and leadership development tracks, while the boutique relies more on mentoring and cross-functional exposure. The wellness hotel makes continuous learning part of its brand, offering English courses, communication training, and support for medically oriented staff to attend external programmes.

Another five-star property invests in language training and guest journey workshops while developing an in-house revenue manager, illustrating targeted “key role” development rather than broad-based investment. Several Hungarian managers cultivate internal labour markets by advertising all vacancies internally and developing “number two” successors for each department, including a potential successor to the general manager, to ensure continuity and visible career paths. In contrast, the countryside hotel reports no promotion opportunities and has only budgeted, not yet delivered, staff training, highlighting the structural constraints facing small independents.

Overall, training is a shared priority but with notable resource and scope differences. Moroccan chains emphasise standardised international curricula and regional support, reflecting their integration into global brand systems, while Hungarian hotels, facing post-pandemic labour shortages, prioritise succession planning and internal labour markets.

4.3. Communication, feedback, and employee voice

Transparent communication and consistent feedback are common priorities in Morocco. Chain hotels use formal systems such as annual appraisals, digital dashboards, and engagement surveys, while the boutique relies on daily briefings and open-door interaction; managers also note younger staff prefer continuous feedback to periodic reviews. These patterns show that communication acts as both managerial control and motivational resource: formal systems institutionalise fairness and documentation, while informal exchanges sustain immediacy, trust, and psychological safety.

In Hungary, practices range from relational, everyday feedback to emerging formal tools like satisfaction surveys. The wellness hotel integrates feedback through informal conversations, one-to-ones, departmental meetings, and an annual loyalty survey, while another hotel has introduced yearly employee surveys whose anonymised results are synthesised by the general manager and shared in quarterly staff meetings, alongside a canteen suggestion box. Yet several interviewees stress that hierarchy and “old era” attitudes (“shut up, do your job”) limit psychological safety; employees hesitate to approach senior leaders, and their voice is often confined to issues such as pay or staff food.

Taken together, Moroccan hotels appear more advanced in digital engagement tools and survey infrastructure, reflecting stronger corporate investment in standardised HR systems, whereas Hungarian properties rely more on relational, face-to-face mechanisms but acknowledge hierarchical barriers to genuine voice.

4.4. Working conditions and employee well-being

All five Moroccan managers viewed well-being as integral to satisfaction and performance. Chain hotels run company-wide programmes covering health insurance, on-site meals, and structured rest-breaks, while the boutique emphasises relational well-being, flexibility, and empathetic scheduling around personal circumstances; managers also acknowledge workload peaks and long shifts as persistent pressures.

Hungarian managers likewise see well-being as central but describe a mix of basic provisions, health-oriented initiatives, and gaps. The health-focused wellness hotel offers on-site medical consultations, discounted tests and treatments, regular movement activities (e.g., Pilates, Nordic walking), and tailored daily meals, whereas other properties provide warm meals, uniforms, laundry, staff use of spa/fitness areas, and reduced-rate medical checks via local partners. Work schedules show both constraints and partial flexibility. In one countryside hotel, employees choose compressed 12-hour shifts to secure longer time off, while in luxury hotels, some back-office staff use occasional home office days, but front-line roles remain fully on site. Mental-health-specific support is largely absent, with interviewees noting past norms that treated psychological well-being as private and current initiatives focusing mainly on physical health, benefits, and work-life balance.

Overall, well-being practices indicate shared commitment but different emphases: Moroccan hotels prioritise foundational benefits and relational empathy, whereas Hungarian properties, especially the wellness hotel, integrate wellness into brand identity through medical partnerships and movement programmes. In both contexts, long, irregular hours remain a structural challenge, and mental-health support is underdeveloped, reflecting industry norms that prioritise physical over psychosocial care.

4.5. Empowerment and participation

In Morocco, patterns vary by structure: chain hotels retain hierarchy but delegate limited decision-making to supervisors, especially for guest service adjustments within set budgets, whereas the boutique's flat hierarchy grants frontline staff broader discretion; managers agree that this enhances responsiveness, confidence, and ownership.

In Hungary, empowerment practices are emerging but constrained by traditional hierarchies. Some hotels solicit ideas through team meetings, suggestion boxes, and informal conversations, stressing trust and a climate where goals and weaknesses can be discussed, yet employees seldom join major decisions, and formal shared decision mechanisms are weak, particularly in smaller or newly opened hotels.

Overall, empowerment in both countries involves gradual expansion of autonomy within boundaries set by hierarchy and leadership culture: Moroccan chains delegate guest service decisions, while Hungarian properties experiment with idea boxes and conflict resolution protocols. Structural features such as flat hierarchies and budget discretion enable empowerment, but its effect hinges on leadership attitudes and psychological safety, so participative management often remains aspirational, especially in independent properties.

4.6. Strategic integration of HR practices

Managers in both countries increasingly described HR in strategic terms, but the level of integration varied within and across hotels.

In Morocco, interviewees framed HRM as a strategic partner contributing directly to service quality. Chain hotel managers highlighted HR metrics such as training hours, turnover rates, and engagement scores in performance dashboards, while the boutique manager portrayed HR as a “cultural architect” focused on teamwork and loyalty. Large chains relied more on data-driven HR analytics, whereas smaller establishments sought strategic impact mainly through culture and cohesion, supporting the idea that performance improves when people practices align with organisational objectives.

In Hungary, HRM was likewise treated as a strategic lever, though links to business strategy differed. The wellness hotel aligned language training, communication workshops, and tailored health programmes with its positioning as a five-star, health-centred establishment, while the recently reconstructed five-star hotel embedded HR in financial strategy by investing in key talent (e.g., an internal revenue manager), building

successors, and tying up-selling rewards to revenue and profit. By contrast, the countryside hotel showed low HR maturity: the GM reported almost no systems for appraisal, voice or career progression and described an owner mentality where employees should be “grateful” for their jobs, whereas retrospective accounts from the former HR led hotel illustrated how vision and mission workshops and internal labour market policies could still link HR to organisational direction in traditional settings.

Strategic HR integration thus shows the widest variation across the cases. Leading hotels in both countries align HR practices with brand positioning, guest experience, and financial performance. Moroccan chains achieve this through HR analytics and dashboards, whereas Hungarian hotels through employer branding and development of key roles, while independent and newly opened hotels struggle to embed HR strategically and often follow owner-centred, transactional models.

Overall, the level of strategic HR integration appears to depend more on organisational size, resources, and managerial orientation than on national context alone. *Table 2* summarises common patterns and distinguishing features across the six themes in Moroccan and Hungarian hotels.

Table 2. Common patterns and distinguishing features across the six themes in Moroccan and Hungarian hotels

Theme area	Common pattern (MA & HU)	Distinguishing features (MA)	Distinguishing features (HU)
Recognition	Universal motivator linked to morale and lower turnover	Structured programmes in chains; relationship-based gestures in the boutique	Peer-voted awards in the wellness hotel; revenue-linked commissions in upscale hotels; limited, informal recognition in the countryside hotel
Training	Core HR investment for service quality and competitiveness	Global curricula, international rotations and mentoring in chains; mentoring and cross-functional exposure in the boutique	Brand-linked language training, succession planning and key-role development; resource-constrained training in the countryside hotel
Communication	Transparency and feedback valued; younger staff favour continuous feedback	Mix of formal reviews, digital dashboards, engagement surveys and informal dialogue	Reliance on face-to-face communication and university-partnered surveys, with hierarchical barriers limiting open dialogue

Well-being	Seen as linked to satisfaction and performance	Policy driven benefits in chains; empathy-based scheduling in the boutique; insurance and meals	Medical partnerships, wellness activities and compressed shifts for flexibility, alongside gaps in mental-health support
Empowerment	Autonomy expanding gradually; effectiveness depends on leadership and culture	Controlled autonomy in chains; wider discretion in the boutique; some budget authority	Idea boxes and conflict resolution protocols with limited uptake; structural limits in independent hotels
Strategic HR	Integral when aligned with organisational goals	HR analytics and metrics in chains; cultural stewardship and team loyalty in the boutique	Employer branding and health centred positioning in the wellness hotel; revenue-manager and upselling focus in the reconstructed hotel; low HR maturity and a “grateful employee” mentality in the countryside hotel

Source: own editing

5. Discussion

The thematic results unveil how hotels in Morocco and Hungary design their HR practices and what distinguishes more and less advanced approaches to people management. The six themes identified align with Deci and Ryan's SDT (2000), which emphasises autonomy, competence, and relatedness as essential psychological needs driving intrinsic motivation. Recognition and rewards enhance competence and relatedness, training builds competence, and empowerment supports autonomy. This section interprets the findings through the lens of HRM maturity and provides responses to the three research questions. The presentation of the results reflects the comparisons of the hotel types involved in the study: chain and independent, urban five-star properties and a countryside hotel to show how context, ownership, and managerial philosophy shape HR systems.

5.1. Differences in HRM maturity across the two countries

Table 2 shows that Moroccan chains and the two Hungarian five-star properties exhibit high HRM maturity, with strong practices across all six themes, whereas the Hungarian resort and countryside hotels show more partial, emerging patterns. In the chains and top-tier Hungarian hotels, HR is treated as a strategic partner, with engagement surveys, dashboards, and HR indicators “always linked to our business targets”. By contrast, the countryside GM describes a

legacy mindset where employees should be “grateful to work for us”, showing how ownership and location constrain the institutionalisation of strategic HR. This gradient supports arguments that chain vs. independent, urban vs. rural, and upscale vs. standard settings shape the extent to which HR systems are formalised and integrated with business strategy, while also revealing that even in low-maturity settings, individual managers may hold people-centred values but face resource constraints and entrenched attitudes.

5.2. Communication of strategy, careers, and performance expectations (RQ1)

Across the sample, the sophistication of communication practices mirrors the overall HRM maturity of each property. In high-maturity hotels, communication is a deliberate, structured act: investments like the decision to “invest a lot of money into one person... to do the revenue management on long term for us” signal to staff which careers the organisation values, while dashboards and surveys make performance expectations tangible in daily operations. Career opportunities are communicated through equally deliberate means: high-maturity hotels advertise all vacancies internally, develop ‘number two’ successors for each department, and offer formal progression pathways including international rotations and leadership development tracks, making career pathways visible and institutionalised rather than implicit. In low-maturity settings, by contrast, the countryside GM’s acknowledgement that “outside of hotel chains, HR activities receive practically no emphasis” reflects an absence of systematic communication: information about long-term goals or career opportunities is rarely formalised and tends to be transmitted informally, if at all. The contrast reveals that communication maturity and HRM maturity are not merely correlated; rather, communication is the mechanism through which strategic intent either reaches employees or remains confined to management. The findings extend Meyer and Allen’s (1991) framework by demonstrating that communication itself is a critical mediating mechanism. Career systems and developmental opportunities only strengthen attachment when they are made visible, credible, and institutionally embedded through communication practices.

5.3. HRM practices shaping motivation, satisfaction, and commitment (RQ2)

5.3.1. *Balancing formal systems and human connection*

Across both countries, the strongest hotels combine formal HR systems with relational, everyday practices rather than relying on one or the other. For instance, Moroccan chains operate annual performance awards and appraisal-linked bonuses, yet managers also insist that “authentic day-to-day appreciation” is crucial for morale. Similarly, the Hungarian wellness hotel has structured end-of-year awards but emphasises “continuous feedback and recognition based on the daily work, and the feedback of guests”, treating mistakes as “a chance to learn and enhance skills”.

This pattern aligns with Herzberg’s motivator-hygiene theory and SDT: formal rewards and benefits provide fairness and security, while interpersonal recognition, mentoring, and supportive communication satisfy deeper needs for competence and relatedness. The

contribution is to show, in a hospitality context, that high engagement appears where formal systems are not purely bureaucratic but are animated by personal attention, storytelling in meetings, and visible role-modelling by managers.

5.3.2. Well-being as more than perks

All hotels recognise the importance of well-being but operationalise it differently. Moroccan chains offer “company-wide well-being programmes encompassing health insurance, on-site meals, and structured rest break policies”, whereas the Moroccan boutique and several Hungarian hotels stress flexibility and empathy in scheduling as a way of caring for people. The Hungarian wellness hotel goes further, providing annual medical consultations, discounted laboratory tests, movement activities (e.g., Pilates, Nordic walking), and tailored meals for staff, clearly linking its internal well-being offer to its external health-focused brand. Yet support specific for mental health- remains limited. One former HR manager recalls that “back then, nobody cared about mental well-being... it was said that this is for home”, and even in more advanced cases, well-being is still framed mainly in physical or benefit terms. This suggests that hospitality HRM is moving from basic security (meals, insurance, shifts) toward more holistic well-being, but has not fully integrated psychological and emotional dimensions, a gap that the study makes visible and that future practice can address. The results support the findings of the study Ali et al. (2025), while also identifying an important implementation gap. The evidence suggests that well-being initiatives in hospitality are most effective when they move beyond transactional employee benefits and become integrated into broader organisational cultures of support, communication, and development. In this sense, HRM maturity appears closely connected to the extent to which employee well-being is treated not merely as an operational necessity, but as a strategic and relational component of organisational sustainability and employee retention.

5.4. Employee empowerment, voice, and participation in decision-making (RQ3)

Empowerment and participation are the most uneven themes, especially in Hungary. Moroccan chains grant “limited decision-making authority to supervisors [...] within set budgets,” while the boutique allows frontline staff wider discretion because of its flat hierarchy. In Hungary, managers declare open doors, install idea boxes, and one GM runs quarterly all staff meetings with anonymous questions, yet employees still mainly complain about “staff food” and “salary” and fear approaching top management. These findings extend SDT by showing that formal channels for autonomy are insufficient if psychological safety and historical norms (“shut up, do your job”) are not addressed. Across cases, empowerment appears as a staged process: it begins as controlled autonomy (small decisions, suggestion schemes) and only becomes meaningful when line managers consistently invite ideas, mediate conflicts fairly, and model a “voice-friendly” culture. The countryside hotel illustrates the starting point of this trajectory, with “no such processes”

for employee opinions or decision-making, despite the GM’s personal belief in work-life balance and professional development. The findings align well with Deci and Ryan’s (2000) SDT, and further suggest that HRM maturity in hospitality can be understood partly through the extent to which organisational structures and leadership practices enable autonomy, competence, and relatedness in everyday work.

5.5. Implications of the emerging patterns to theory

The current study contributes to hospitality HRM literature by showing that effective people management depends not simply on the existence of HR practices, but on how strategically integrated, consistently communicated, and relationally embedded those practices are within hotels. The study also extends existing research by identifying communication and psychological safety as key mechanisms through which HR practices become meaningful and effective. In addition, the research highlights that HRM maturity varies more strongly according to ownership structure, managerial philosophy, and organisational resources than national context alone. Methodologically, the qualitative multi-case design adds depth to hospitality HRM research by revealing how formal systems and relational leadership practices interact in everyday hotel operations.

To synthesise the main cross-case patterns, *Table 3* summarises the key dimensions, common patterns, and implications of the findings.

Table 3. Summary of discussion insights

Dimension	Key pattern across cases	Main implications from this study
HRM maturity levels	Hotels form a continuum from highly developed (Moroccan chains, Hotel 6 (HU), Hotel 7 (HU)) to emerging (Hotel 9 (HU)), with Hotel 8 (HU) in the middle.	HR maturity is strongly shaped by ownership and context (chain vs. independent, urban vs. countryside), and even “low maturity” hotels may have managers who are personally committed to better HR but lack systems.
Formal systems and human connection	Strongest hotels combine structured programmes (awards, appraisals, surveys) with daily, interpersonal recognition and support.	Effective motivation in hotels depends on integrating formal rewards with genuine everyday appreciation and coaching, not relying on procedures alone.
Empowerment and voice	Empowerment is the most uneven theme; formal channels (idea boxes, open doors, limited discretion) exist, but fear and “old era” hierarchies reduce real voice.	Building psychological safety and developing participative leadership are critical if employee voice is to move beyond complaints about pay or food.

Well-being focus	All hotels value well-being, but most focus on physical security and benefits (meals, insurance, shifts); only a few move towards holistic health (medical checks, movement programmes).	Hospitality HRM is still early in addressing mental-health and psychosocial aspects of well-being, pointing to a clear area for improvement and further research.
Strategic integration of HR	High-maturity hotels use HR metrics and targeted investments (e.g. revenue-manager training, rotation schemes) to support business goals and brand positioning.	The cases demonstrate concrete ways HR can act as a strategic partner, while smaller hotels rely more on culture and cohesion as their route to competitive advantage.

Source: own editing

6. Conclusion and limitations

6.1. Theoretical and practical implications

Taken together, the nine hotels form a continuum of HRM development rather than a simple split between good and bad practice. At one end, Moroccan chains and the two Hungarian five-star properties show strategically aligned HR systems where recognition, training, voice, well-being, empowerment, and strategy reinforce each other. In the middle, the resort hotel has strong legacy systems in recognition, development, and well-being but only partial empowerment, while the countryside Hungarian hotel represents an early stage with limited formal training, feedback, voice, and strategic HR structures. Mapping cases along this continuum provides hotel HR leaders with a practical tool to diagnose their maturity level and decide where to invest next, and illustrates for researchers how classic HRM theories play out differently across chain vs boutique, urban vs regional, and high-star vs recently upgraded hotels. Theoretically, the findings extend self-determination theory and Meyer and Allen's commitment framework by demonstrating that neither autonomy, competence, and relatedness nor affective and normative commitment are fixed outcomes of individual practices; rather, they emerge from the coherence and maturity of the broader HR system in which those practices are embedded.

6.2. Limitations

The study has several limitations. First, the small, purposive sample of four- and five-star hotels in two countries limits the generalisability of the findings to other regions, hotel categories, or tourism sectors. Second, data come mainly from general and HR managers, so the results reflect managerial views; frontline employees might assess the same practices differently, and future studies will focus on employees' perspectives. Third, the qualitative, cross-sectional design captures perceptions at one point in time and cannot show how HRM changes across seasons, crises, or leadership transitions. Finally, the

analysis focuses on a predefined set of HR practices (recognition, training, communication, well-being, empowerment, and strategic integration), while other domains, such as recruitment, job design, and work-family policies, were not examined in depth.

Future research should address these limitations by collecting employee-level data to assess whether frontline staff perceive the same practices as managers reported, and by extending the sample across additional national contexts and hotel categories.

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AUTHENTIC GASTRONOMIC EXPERIENCE AND LOCAL PRACTICE PRESERVATION: CHEESE AND KAYMAK TASTING AS EXPERIENTIAL TOURISM IN TYROL

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ABSTRACT

The research aims to identify the key experiential dimensions influencing tourist satisfaction, loyalty and destination recommendation. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to tourists participating in cheese-making workshops and farm visits. Factor analysis revealed four dimensions: gastro loyalty, cheese workshops, sustainability governance and farm interaction. The findings indicate that hands-on participation in traditional dairy production, interaction with local producers and animals and clearly communicated sustainability practices significantly enhance tourists' understanding of local gastronomic culture and overall experience. The study emphasizes the role of authentic, farm-based gastronomic experiences in strengthening sustainable rural tourism development.

Keywords: authentic food tourism, cheese and kaymak degustation experiences, farm-based tourism, gastronomic tourism, local food culture

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HITELES GASZTRONÓMIAI ÉLMÉNY ÉS A HELYI HAGYOMÁNYOK MEGŐRZÉSE: SAJT- ÉS KAJMAK-KÓSTOLÁS, MINT ÉLMÉNYTURIZMUS TIROLBAN

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ABSZTRAKT

A kutatás célja azoknak a legfontosabb élménybeli dimenzióknak a feltárása, amelyek befolyásolják a turisták elégedettségét, hűségét és az úti cél ajánlását. Az adatokat strukturált kérdőív segítségével gyűjtöttük össze, amelyet sajtőkészítő műhelyeket felkereső és farmlátogatásokon részt vevő turisták töltöttek ki. A faktoranalízis négy dimenziót tárt fel: gasztronómiai hűség, sajtőkészítő műhelyek, a fenntarthatóság irányítása és a gazdaságokkal való interakció. Az eredmények arra utalnak, hogy a hagyományos tejtermék-előállításban való aktív részvétel, a helyi termelőkkel és állatokkal való interakció, valamint a fenntarthatósági gyakorlatok egyértelmű kommunikálása jelentősen javítja a turisták helyi gasztronómiai kultúrával kapcsolatos megértését és általános élményét. A tanulmány hangsúlyozza az autentikus, gazdaságokon alapuló gasztronómiai élmények szerepét a fenntartható falusi turizmus fejlesztésének erősítésében.

Kulcsszavak: autentikus gasztronómiai turizmus, sajt- és kajmak-kóstoló programok, farmturizmus, gasztronómiai turizmus, helyi étkezési kultúra

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1. Introduction

Gastronomy tourism in Alpine regions allows visitors to engage with farm life, traditional practices and local culinary heritage. In Tyrol, small and medium farms use gastronomy tourism to diversify income while preserving landscapes and cultural identity (Verduna et al., 2020; Hurdawaty et al., 2025). Local products, especially cheeses and dairy specialties, combined with workshops and tastings, enhance visitor satisfaction and support social and economic sustainability (Sthapit et al., 2023). Tourist motivations are linked to authenticity, cultural value and experiential uniqueness, positioning local gastronomy as a key driver of destination attractiveness and loyalty (Obradović et al., 2023; Angelakis et al., 2022).

Sustainable practices preserve rural landscapes and link food production with tourism experiences. Cheese embodies a “taste of place” shaped by nature, traditional methods and heritage, adding experiential value through farm visits and tastings (Pamukçu et al., 2021). Tyrol illustrates integration of traditional production into agritourism, enhancing authenticity and rural development. Workshops and tastings strengthen engagement, reduce seasonality and support local economies (Yaşar & Gümrükçü, 2022; Kokkranikal & Carabelli, 2024; Kalenjuk Pivarski et al., 2024). Authentic local products increase destination attractiveness and encourage revisit intentions (Bassi et al., 2021).

Traditional dairy supports cultural and social sustainability through community involvement, while authenticity includes production, setting, storytelling and tourist participation (Rodrigues et al., 2023; Kovalenko et al., 2023). Young consumers perceive mountain products as sustainable, traditional and healthy (Bonadonna et al., 2022; Dimassi et al., 2025). Cheese quality depends on seasonal grazing and influences sensory characteristics (Lonardi & Unterpertinger, 2022). Challenges include skills, service quality and infrastructure, while multifunctional rural tourism integrates agriculture, culture and education to enhance visitor satisfaction and economic sustainability (Wallnöfer et al., 2024).

2. Literature review

Gastronomy tourism enables visitors to engage with local culture through food, workshops, farm visits, markets and events, supporting heritage, rural life and landscape preservation (Yaşar & Gümrükçü, 2022). Farm-based tourism promotes socio-economic benefits, environmental stewardship and rural livelihoods, often reinforced by quality and sustainability certifications (Knežević et al., 2025; Stalmirska, 2024). In Tyrol and other Alpine regions, gastronomy tourism integrates farm activities, cheese production, tastings and participatory experiences, enhancing economic viability, cultural preservation and destination authenticity (He et al., 2021; Grillini et al., 2025). As suggested by Hurdawaty et al. (2025), authenticity in local food experiences contributes to memorable tourism experiences and positively affects tourist’s behavioral intentions, including revisit intention and destination loyalty. H1 assumes that satisfaction with authentic, high-quality and educational farm-based cheese and kaymak degustation experiences strengthens tourist’s

understanding of local food culture and fosters loyalty through positive word-of-mouth, recommendation and revisit intention.

Rural tourism relies on farm diversification and local engagement, linking gastronomy to sustainable practices, biodiversity and small-scale farm support (Dixit & Prayag, 2022). It strengthens environmental responsibility, visitor satisfaction and cultural identity, even though over-commercialization may threaten authenticity (Yaşar & Gümrükçü, 2022; Grillini et al., 2023; Byrne & Zabetakis, 2023).

Food culture motivates travel and shapes experiences through authenticity, tradition and local connection, while erosion of authenticity weakens destination identity. Mountain landscapes provide cultural ecosystem services but face pressures from land-use change, climate, population growth and recreation, requiring sustainable management (Đerčan et al., 2023; Rana et al., 2024). H3 assumes that transparent communication of sustainable farming and ecological production practices increases tourists' trust, positive destination evaluation and perceived suitability of the gastronomic tourism model for application in other destinations. Studies indicate that sustainability communication influences behavioral intentions through perceived credibility and destination commitment (Bhattacharyya et al., 2024). In addition, transparency in communicating sustainability practices helps reduce uncertainty and strengthens tourists' overall evaluation of a destination, contributing to more positive attitudes toward sustainable tourism models (Tölkes, 2020).

Tourists seek authentic, immersive experiences. Local food strengthens emotional attachment, heritage preservation and destination attractiveness (Beltramo et al., 2024; Duglio et al., 2022). H2 claims that hands-on participation in cheese-making workshops enables experiential learning and strengthens perceived authenticity by allowing direct engagement with traditional dairy production processes. According to Vujko et al. (2025), authenticity in gastronomic tourism is experiential in nature, as it emerges through direct engagement with local production practices, where tourists actively participate rather than passively observe. Alpine destinations like Tyrol build identity on landscapes, rural lifestyles and traditions, making sustainable, experience-oriented products essential. Slow tourism promotes ethical, immersive and educational travel. Food venues support authenticity, local identity and experiential value, linking slow tourism and slow food movements (Baimoratova et al., 2023; Fusté-Forné et al., 2021). In Tyrol, farm-based experiences like cheese workshops, tastings and culinary activities foster engagement with traditional production, culture and sustainability (Huang et al., 2023; Brdar, 2021). H4 presumes that direct interaction with producers, animals and the farm environment enhances authenticity perceptions, emotional connection and positive attitudes toward the local community and destination. Studies highlight that hands-on engagement and social interaction with farmers contribute to deeper understanding of rural lifestyles and strengthen emotional bonds between visitors and the local community (Wu et al., 2023).

3. Research methods

This study follows a post-positivist epistemology, which considers tourists' perceptions of slow tourism and slow food practices, including engagement with local gastronomy, farm-based activities, sustainability governance and community interaction, as measurable and modelable, while acknowledging that full objectivity is unattainable. Knowledge is probabilistic and theory-informed, aiming to identify stable patterns through empirical investigation. Accordingly, a quantitative, survey-based design was adopted to explore visitor experiences in rural and gastronomic tourism.

Data were collected in December 2025 via an online questionnaire on Google Prolific. The final sample included $N = 423$ respondents with a balanced gender distribution (51.8% male, 48.2% female) and broad age representation (36-45, 26-35, 46-55). Most respondents had secondary or higher education, including university and postgraduate degrees and comprised both domestic and international visitors. This indicates that the survey captured a diverse sample of visitors to Tyrol.

The survey included 29 items, of which 16 were retained and grouped into four latent dimensions via exploratory factor analysis: (F1) Gastro loyalty, (F2) Cheese workshops, (F3) Sustainability governance, (F4) Farm interaction, each with four items capturing experiential, cultural and sustainability constructs.

Factor 1: Gastro loyalty items measure satisfaction with local food quality, educational programs, gastronomic identity and intention to recommend the destination, reflecting emotional attachment and behavioral loyalty.

Factor 2: Cheese workshops items assess participatory learning, skill acquisition, instructor expertise and traditional souvenir crafting, highlighting hands-on engagement with local food heritage.

Factor 3: Sustainability governance items capture perceptions of sustainability practices, ecological farming, clarity of information and perceived transferability of practices, emphasizing institutional and communicative aspects of slow tourism.

Factor 4: Farm interaction items measure direct engagement with producers, animals, farm environment, host hospitality and authentic connection with the community, reflecting social and relational components of rural tourism.

The dataset's suitability for factor analysis was confirmed via $KMO = 0.901$ and Bartlett's Test: Approx. $\chi^2 = 8498.299$, $df = 435$, $p < 0.001$. Maximum Likelihood extraction with eigenvalues > 1 retained four factors explaining 46.41% of variance, with varimax rotation yielding a balanced factor distribution. Items loaded coherently: Gastro loyalty on satisfaction and recommendation; Cheese workshops on participatory learning; Farm interaction on social and experiential engagement; Sustainability governance on ecological awareness and practices. These results confirm the reliability and conceptual coherence of the factors, providing a robust empirical basis for analyzing gastronomic, social and sustainability dimensions of farm-based tourism in Tyrol.

4. Research results

The demographic profile of tourists participating in gastronomic and farm-based experiences in Tyrol (N = 423) indicates a heterogeneous and balanced sample across gender, age, education and country of origin, providing a reliable foundation for the analysis of visitor experiences and engagement in gastronomic and rural tourism activities (Table 1–4). Gender distribution was nearly equal, with 51.8% male (n = 219) and 48.2% female (n = 204). Respondents represented a wide range of age groups, including 36-45 years (25.3%), 26-35 years (23.6%), 46-55 years (21.7%), 56-65 years (14.9%), 18-25 years (8.3%) and 66 years and above (6.1%). Educational attainment was relatively high, with 43.5% holding a college or university degree, 25.8% holding an MSc or PhD degree, 25.1% having completed high school and 5.7% reporting elementary education as their highest level of education. The sample included both domestic and international visitors. Germany accounted for the largest share of respondents (38.8%), followed by Austria (21.0%), the Netherlands (15.1%), Switzerland (9.9%), Italy (8.7%) and the United Kingdom (6.4%). Overall, the demographic characteristics suggest that the survey captured a diverse group of participants across key socio-demographic categories.

Table 1. Gender composition of the respondents

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Male	219	51.8	51.8	51.8
Female	204	48.2	48.2	100.0
Total	423	100.0	100.0	

Source: Authors' data

Table 2. Age composition of the respondents

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
18-25	35	8.3	8.3	8.3
26-35	100	23.6	23.6	31.9
36-45	107	25.3	25.3	57.2
46-55	92	21.7	21.7	79.0
56-65	63	14.9	14.9	93.9
Over 66	26	6.1	6.1	100.0
Total	423	100.0	100.0	

Source: Authors' data

Table 3. Educational composition of the respondents

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Elementary school	24	5.7	5.7	5.7
High school	106	25.1	25.1	30.7
College/Faculty	184	43.5	43.5	74.2
MSc/PhD	109	25.8	25.8	100.0
Total	423	100.0	100.0	

Source: Authors' data

Table 4. Origin of the respondents

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Germany	164	38.8	38.8	38.8
Austria	89	21.0	21.0	59.8
Netherlands	64	15.1	15.1	74.9
Italy	37	8.7	8.7	83.7
Switzerland	42	9.9	9.9	93.6
UK	27	6.4	6.4	100.0
Total	423	100.0	100.0	

Source: Authors' data

Table 5 shows the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. The KMO = 0.901 indicates excellent sampling adequacy, confirming that the variables' correlation structure is highly suitable for factor analysis. Bartlett's Test is significant (Approx. $\chi^2 = 8498.299$, $df = 435$, $p < 0.001$), showing the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix and that meaningful relationships exist among items. Together, these results confirm the dataset's appropriateness for factor analysis and support the identification of distinct dimensions related to tourists' gastronomic experiences, sustainability perceptions and farm-based interactions.

Table 5. KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	.901	
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	8498,299
	df	435
	Sig.	.000

Source: Authors' data

Table 6 presents the results of factor analysis using the Maximum Likelihood extraction method, illustrating the total variance explained by the extracted factors. Based on the criterion of eigenvalues greater than 1, four factors were retained, together explaining 47.75% of the total variance. The first factor accounts for 21.66%, while the second, third, fourth and factors contribute 8.99%, 8.75%, and 8.35%, respectively, indicating that each factor meaningfully explains visitors' perceptions and experiences. Varimax rotation redistributed variance more evenly across factors (7.96-10.08%), enhancing interpretability and confirming the stability and coherence of the extracted dimensions. Overall, the results suggest a meaningful four-factor structure that captures multiple dimensions of visitors' perceptions and experiences related to gastronomic and farm-based tourism in Tyrol and provides a basis for subsequent analyses.

Table 6. Total Variance Explained (Maximum Likelihood Extraction)

Factor	Initial Eigenvalue	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Extracted Variance (%)	Cumulative Extracted %	Rotated Variance (%)	Cumulative Rotated %
1	6.499	21.664	21.664	19.90	19.906	10.075	10.075
2	2.698	8.994	30.659	7.252	27.158	10.004	20.079
3	2.625	8.750	39.408	6.861	34.019	9.935	30.014
4	2.503	8.345	47.753	6.074	40.093	8.429	38.443

Source: Authors' data

The rotated factor matrix in Table 7 shows a clear and theoretically consistent grouping of variables into four factors: Gastro loyalty, Cheese workshops, Farm interaction and Sustainability governance. Varimax rotation produced a well-defined structure with high loadings on respective factors and minimal cross-loadings, enhancing interpretability and reliability. Gastro loyalty is defined by food appreciation, gastronomic understanding, overall satisfaction and recommendation intention, reflecting the role of high-quality local food and educational components in shaping emotional attachment and loyalty. Cheese workshops is characterized by workshop engagement, skill acquisition, instructor expertise and souvenir crafting, highlighting hands-on, educational experiences. Farm interaction emphasizes interaction with producers, host hospitality, contact with animals and community connection, capturing social and emotional dimensions of farm-based tourism. Sustainability governance is defined by sustainable production, ecological promotion, transparent sustainability information and perceived transferability to other destinations, underscoring tourists' awareness and appreciation of environmentally responsible practices. Overall, the matrix confirms the coherence and robustness of the four-factor model, providing a solid foundation for hypothesis testing and further analysis of gastronomic, social and sustainability-oriented dimensions in Tyrol.

Table 7. Rotated Factor Matrix

	Factors			
	Gastro loyalty	Cheese workshops	Farm interaction	Sustainability governance
Workshop engagement	.121	.702	.087	.061
New skills	.117	.709	.123	.090
Instructor expertise	.118	.724	.099	.074
Souvenir crafting	.135	.642	.077	.131
Producer insight	.088	.130	.683	.060
Host hospitality	.124	.092	.674	.110
Animal interaction	.153	.129	.715	.076
Community connection	.052	.104	.720	.059
Sustainable production	.088	.109	.060	.638
Ecological promotion	.057	-.027	.055	.695
Sustainability information	.033	.034	.058	.662
Model transfer	.119	.118	.083	.647

Quality satisfaction	.665	.050	.064	.067
Food appreciation	.726	.136	.088	.124
Gastro understanding	.708	.180	.082	.109
Recommendation intention	.713	.183	.123	.141

Source: Authors' data

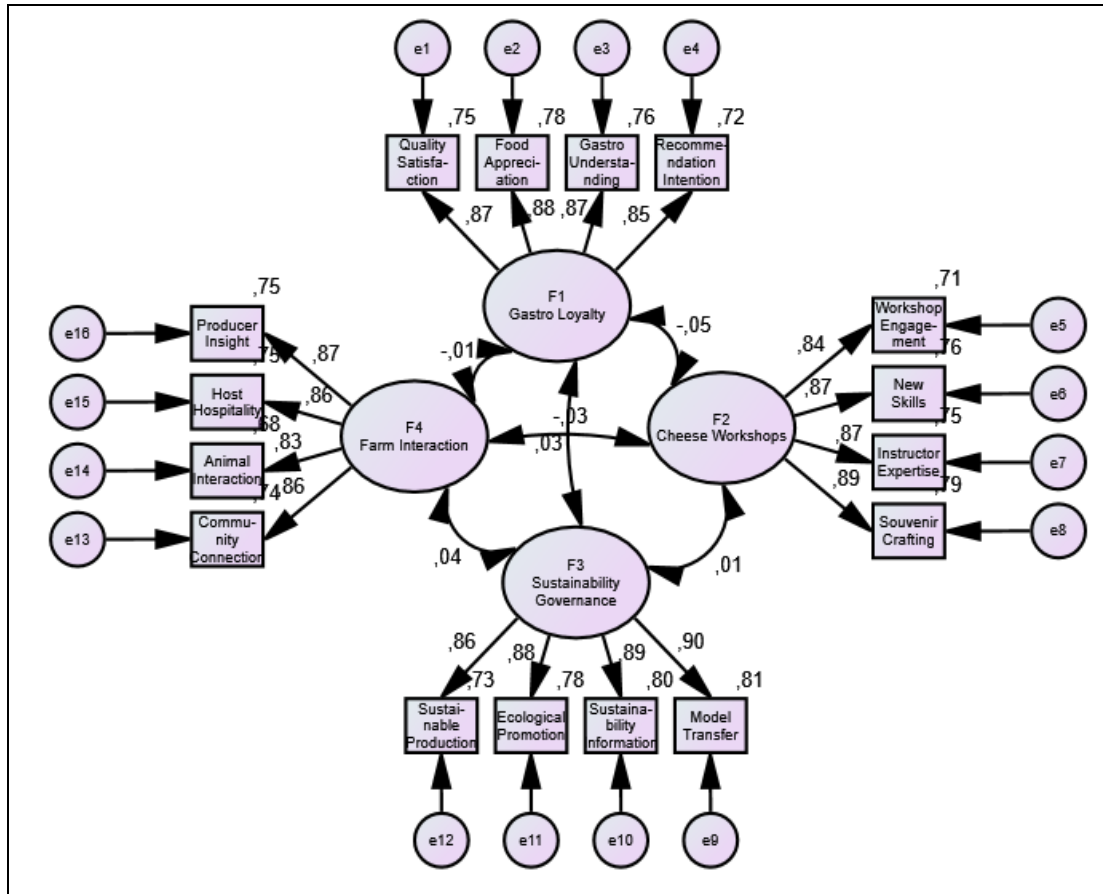
Gastro loyalty (Factor 1) indicates high tourist satisfaction with food quality and educational programs. Participation in workshops and tasting authentic local products enhanced appreciation of Tyrolean culinary heritage, authenticity and sustainable practices, particularly due to the rarity of such foods in modern markets. Experiencing homemade cheese and kaymak, a traditional Balkan dairy product, combined with production observation and interaction with locals, strengthened cognitive and emotional engagement with rural life. These sensory, educational and social experiences increased overall satisfaction, emotional attachment and destination recommendation, confirming H1 and demonstrating that farm-based gastronomy strengthens visitor loyalty and long-term destination competitiveness.

Cheese workshops (Factor 2) revealed high satisfaction with informative and engaging cheese-making activities. Hands-on participation strengthened social interaction, connection with local residents and appreciation of traditional skills, particularly among urban visitors. Workshops supported cultural preservation, personal involvement and experiential learning, while instructor expertise and self-made souvenirs enhanced authenticity. These results confirm H2, highlighting participatory cheese-making as a key driver of authentic gastronomic experiences.

Sustainability governance (Factor 3) shows that tourists perceive local cheese and kaymak production as a sustainable tourism model that supports environmental responsibility, local economies and resource preservation. Farms clearly communicate ecological practices, confirming Tyrol as a model of good practice and supporting H3. Direct participation strengthened emotional engagement and the perceived value of sustainability, while findings indicate that successful replication requires education, governance and careful planning.

Farm interaction (Factor 4) indicates high visitor satisfaction with authentic insight into local life through participation in daily routines and traditions. Direct host interaction created lasting memories, valued more than material souvenirs, while hospitality and knowledge sharing proved essential for positive experiences. These interactions enhance authenticity, visitor satisfaction and long-term destination competitiveness.

Figure 1. Structural model of experiential tourism dimensions and their interrelationships



Source: Authors' data

The results in Figure 1 indicate an excellent overall model fit. The chi-square test is non-significant ($\chi^2 = 103.348$, $df = 98$, $p = .336$), with a χ^2/df ratio of 1.055, suggesting minimal discrepancy between the model and the observed data. Absolute fit indices confirm this result, with low RMR (.009) and high GFI (.970) and AGFI (.959). Incremental fit indices further demonstrate outstanding performance (CFI = .999, TLI = .999, IFI = .999, NFI = .980), indicating that the proposed model substantially outperforms the independence model. Parsimony-adjusted indices (PNFI = .801, PCFI = .816) show that strong fit is achieved without unnecessary model complexity. The RMSEA value is exceptionally low (.011; 90% CI: .000-.029; PCLOSE = 1.000), reflecting a very close approximation to the population covariance matrix.

All latent constructs exhibit strong internal consistency, with composite reliability values well above conventional thresholds. The average variance extracted for each construct exceeds recommended cut-off values, indicating that the latent variables account for a substantial share of variance in their measures relative to measurement error. These results provide clear support for the convergent validity of the measurement model and confirm its adequacy for subsequent structural analysis (Table 8).

Table 8. Composite Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
F1	0.924	0.752
F2	0.925	0.753
F3	0.934	0.780
F4	0.916	0.731

Source: Authors' data

Interpretation (Fornell-Larcker): Discriminant validity is supported because, for every construct, $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$ (diagonal) is substantially larger than the absolute value of inter-construct correlations in the corresponding row/column. Here, $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$ values are ~ 0.855 - 0.883 , while correlations are extremely small ($|r| \leq 0.05$), indicating very strong separation among constructs under the Fornell–Larcker rule (Table 9).

Table 9. Fornell-Larcker criterion

	F1	F2	F3	F4
F1	0.867	-0.050	-0.030	-0.010
F2	-0.050	0.868	0.010	0.030
F3	-0.030	0.010	0.883	-0.030
F4	-0.010	0.030	-0.030	0.855

Source: Authors' data

The heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratios indicate a very high level of discriminant validity among the latent constructs. All HTMT values are substantially below the conservative threshold of 0.85, suggesting that the constructs are empirically distinct and do not exhibit problematic overlap. The extremely low HTMT coefficients further confirm that the latent dimensions capture conceptually and statistically independent aspects of the measured phenomenon (Table 10).

Table 10. HTMT Ratios

	F1	F2	F3	F4
F1	—	0.058	0.050	0.032
F2	0.058	—	0.031	0.037
F3	0.050	0.031	—	0.047
F4	0.032	0.037	0.047	—

Source: Authors' data

5. Discussion

The findings confirm that farm-based gastronomic experiences in Tyrol represent far more than a complementary tourism activity. They constitute a mechanism for preserving local traditions, strengthening cultural identity and creating meaningful interactions between visitors and host communities. The high levels of visitor satisfaction indicate that

contemporary tourists increasingly seek participatory and educational experiences rather than passive consumption of local food. By engaging directly in cheese and kaymak (a traditional fermented milk) production, visitors become active participants in local culture, gaining a deeper understanding of traditional knowledge, production processes and rural ways of life. Such experiences contribute to the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage while enhancing the attractiveness and competitiveness of rural destinations. This is supported by the findings of Beltramo et al. (2024), who demonstrated that the preservation and promotion of local food heritage play a crucial role in maintaining cultural authenticity, reinforcing regional identity and increasing the attractiveness of mountain tourism destinations.

The results support previous studies emphasizing that authentic gastronomic experiences can strengthen tourists' emotional connection with a destination and increase the perceived value of their visit (Žrnić et al., 2021). In the case of Tyrol, gastronomy functions as a bridge between tourism and local culture, transforming traditional agricultural practices into valuable tourism resources without compromising their authenticity. The interaction between visitors and local producers emerged as a particularly important element of the experience, demonstrating that personal contact and storytelling significantly enrich tourism products and differentiate them from standardized commercial offerings, as highlighted by Hurdawaty et al. (2025).

Tyrol provides an outstanding example of how rural destinations can successfully integrate gastronomy, agriculture, cultural heritage and tourism into a coherent and sustainable development model. The destination demonstrates that local food products can become strategic tourism assets when supported by quality interpretation, visitor participation and community involvement. Consequently, the Tyrolean model offers valuable lessons for numerous rural destinations possessing similar natural, agricultural and cultural resources. Mountainous regions, traditional farming communities and destinations with strong gastronomic identities can adapt and replicate many elements of this approach to diversify their tourism offer, increase local income and strengthen the preservation of traditional practices, confirming the conclusions of Đerčan et al. (2023) regarding the contribution of farm tourism to sustainable rural development.

However, the successful implementation of such experiences is not without challenges. One of the primary risks is the potential commercialization of local traditions. As tourism demand increases, there is a possibility that authentic practices may be modified primarily to satisfy visitor expectations, leading to the gradual loss of their original cultural significance. Excessive tourism development may also place pressure on local communities, agricultural resources and rural landscapes, potentially threatening the very authenticity that attracts visitors. Furthermore, small rural communities often face limitations related to infrastructure, accommodation capacity, transportation accessibility and the lack of professional tourism skills among local residents.

Despite these challenges, the evidence from Tyrol suggests that the benefits substantially outweigh the potential drawbacks when tourism development is carefully

planned and managed. The destination illustrates how experiential gastronomy can simultaneously contribute to economic development, cultural preservation, community empowerment and visitor satisfaction. Therefore, Tyrol should be viewed not only as a successful tourism destination but also as a benchmark model for rural areas seeking to transform local gastronomic heritage into a sustainable and competitive tourism product. Rural destinations endowed with comparable natural landscapes, traditional food production practices and strong cultural identities can draw inspiration from the Tyrolean approach and adapt its principles to their own contexts, thereby enhancing destination attractiveness while preserving the authenticity of local heritage for future generations.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated farm-based gastronomic tourism in Tyrol, with a focus on cheese and kaymak workshops, local food tasting and direct interaction with rural hosts. The results strongly confirm that experiential gastronomy represents a central pillar of contemporary rural tourism development, where authenticity, participation and cultural immersion function as key determinants of tourist satisfaction and loyalty. These findings are in line with previous research emphasizing that food-based experiences in rural and mountain destinations significantly enhance destination image, emotional engagement and revisit intentions through co-creation of value and direct engagement with local culture.

The identified dimensions, Gastro Loyalty, Cheese Workshops, Sustainability Governance and Farm Interaction, validate existing theoretical perspectives on experiential and sustainable tourism. In particular, the results reinforce the argument that experiential learning, authentic food production and host-guest interaction are interdependent mechanisms that jointly shape perceived authenticity and destination competitiveness in rural contexts.

The findings indicate that rural destinations aiming to develop similar models must prioritize structured host education, interpretation skills and sustainable service design, alongside investment in rural infrastructure and accommodation capacity. Equally important is the establishment of destination governance mechanisms that ensure coordination between farmers, tourism providers and local authorities, enabling consistent quality and long-term sustainability of gastronomic offerings.

Despite these contributions, the study is limited by its single-destination focus, which restricts generalizability. Additionally, the cross-sectional nature of the analysis does not capture long-term behavioral outcomes such as actual revisit behavior or the durability of loyalty over time. Future research should therefore adopt comparative multi-destination designs and longitudinal approaches to better understand how experiential gastronomic tourism influences long-term tourist behavior and destination resilience.

Overall, Tyrol represents a benchmark model for rural gastronomic tourism development, demonstrating that when authenticity, sustainability and experiential learning are systematically integrated, rural destinations can simultaneously strengthen

cultural preservation, increase economic benefits and enhance global competitiveness. This positions farm-based gastronomy not merely as a supplementary tourism product, but as a strategic development tool for rural regions with similar natural and cultural resources.

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LEVERAGING RURAL HORSE RACING EVENTS FOR LOCAL DEVELOPMENT: EXAMINING REPEAT VISITATION AND SOCIAL VALUE

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ABSTRACT

Rural events generate numerous socio-economic benefits for communities and contribute to local economic growth and development. However, to fully realise these benefits, systematic and strategic leveraging should be prioritised in event planning and management. This study aimed to assess the potential of rural sporting events to serve as vehicles for local development. A positivist research paradigm was employed, and quantitative research methods were applied to collect questionnaire surveys (n=248) from event attendees at a rural horse racing festival. The IBM SPSS software was used to analyse the data. Key findings revealed that the annual event attracts many repeat visitors, whose main motivations for attendance are the horse race, the fashion show, and socialising. The event was viewed as a crucial tool for job creation, attracting investors and boosting the economy, thus revitalising the small rural town in which it is hosted. The local government is challenged to harness these benefits by developing a strategy to optimise them.

Keywords: event leveraging, local economic development, rural events, South Africa, sport tourism

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VIDÉKI LOVASVERSENYEK A HELYI FEJLESZTÉS SZOLGÁLATÁBAN: AZ ISMÉTELT LÁTOGATÁSOK ÉS A TÁRSADALMI ÉRTÉK VIZSGÁLATA

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ABSZTRAKT

A vidéki rendezvények számos társadalmi-gazdasági hasznót hoznak a közösségek számára, és hozzájárulnak a helyi gazdasági növekedéshez és fejlődéshez. Ahhoz azonban, hogy ezeket az előnyöket teljes mértékben ki lehessen aknázni, a rendezvénytervezés és -szervezés során kiemelt figyelmet kell fordítani a szisztematikus és stratégiai hasznosításra. E tanulmány célja az volt, hogy felmérje a vidéki sporteseményeknek a helyi fejlesztés előmozdításában rejlő potenciálját. A vizsgálat során pozitívista kutatási paradigmát alkalmaztunk, és kvantitatív kutatási módszerekkel kérdőíves felmérést (n=248) végeztünk egy vidéki lovasverseny-fesztivál résztvevői körében. Az adatok elemzéséhez az IBM SPSS szoftvert használtuk. A legfontosabb eredményekből kiderült, hogy az éves rendezvény sok visszatérő látogatót vonz, akik számára a részvétel fő motivációi a lovasverseny, a divatbemutató és a társasági élet. A rendezvényt a munkahelyteremtés, a befektetők vonzása és a gazdaság fellendítése szempontjából kulcsfontosságú eszköznek tekintették, amely így új életre kelti azt a kis vidéki várost, ahol megrendezésre kerül az esemény. A helyi önkormányzat előtt az a feladat áll, hogy stratégiát dolgozzon ki ezeknek az előnyöknek az optimalizálására.

Kulcsszavak: rendezvények hasznosítása, helyi gazdaságfejlesztés, vidéki rendezvények, Dél-afrikai Köztársaság, sportturizmus

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1. Introduction

There has been increasing focus on tourism events as a form of economic development strategy in both Global North and South contexts (Knott et al., 2015; Kruger & Saayman, 2016; Nyikana, 2017). This is because the primary objective of events is typically economic, with the expectation that they will stimulate or develop the local economy by attracting foreign investment, new ventures, or increased tourist spending (Thomson et al., 2019; Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2020). Similarly, socio-cultural advantages can also arise from tourism events, such as improved infrastructure and amenities, increased tourist numbers, as well as marketing and branding opportunities, amongst others (Damster, 2005; Thomson et al., 2013). According to Potwarka & Snelgrove (2017), numerous benefits are proposed by those advocating for the regular hosting of tourism events, including increased local business spending, job creation, heightened tourism, enhanced destination image and notoriety, legacy facilities and programmes, and strengthened community pride and socialisation.

Antchak et al. (2021) suggest that one of the key motivations for regular events hosting is their ability to foster lasting connections between individuals and groups within community settings. These events stimulate the local economy in various ways, particularly through the visitors they attract to host towns (Ferreira et al., 2022; Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2024). According to Connell et al. (2015), another important aspect of events is their ability to boost tourism demand during the traditional off-peak periods of tourism consumption. In this way, events can offset the losses typically experienced during quieter times, as they draw more visitors to the destination (Nyikana et al., 2014).

Recently, festivals and sporting events have gained popularity, especially in rural settings, due to these benefits (Bazzanella et al., 2023; Slabbert et al., 2009). The authors argue that such festivals serve as bridge-builders, preserve traditions, and promote rural economic renewal, while also fostering a sense of coherence for both local residents and visitors. These rural areas are often characterised by poor communities, limited infrastructure, and minimal economic activity, making such festivals even more significant.

In this study, we posit that these festivals can serve as critical levers for rural local economic development. In this regard, the research seeks to assess the potential of rural sporting events to contribute to socio-economic development and growth in rural areas. This paper argues that there is an information gap regarding rural events, and thus, the potential of these events to contribute to local economic development is often understated. As underscored by Tzoumaka et al. (2022), the analysis of sporting events has largely been neglected in the context of small rural destinations whose unique socio-economic dynamics are in need of visitors to these events. They argue that the lack of empirical evidence on the impacts of sporting events in rural contexts delays development in these areas. This is in spite of the fact that rural sporting events may have a higher propensity to contribute to direct economic impacts on the local economy and serve as better-suited products for sustainable tourism development in these areas. Thus, the main research question for the study was

What is the socio-economic impact of rural sporting events on local economic development in rural areas, and to what extent is this impact empirically understood and documented?

The first part of the article presents a literature review on sport tourism, rural festival leveraging, and experience co-creation. This is followed by a description and justification of the methodology employed in this study. The findings are then presented, followed by a discussion, with the conclusion drawn from the study's results.

2. Literature review

2.1. Overview of sports tourism

According to Ziakas (2023), the sports tourism sector has gained significant momentum over the last two decades, emerging as a popular driver for economic development and diversification worldwide. Sports tourism can be defined as trips taken for leisure (non-commercial) purposes to participate in or observe sports activities that occur outside one's place of habitual residence and may or may not involve competition (Jiménez-García et al., 2020). This form of tourism has experienced exponential growth in the last two decades and offers an all-encompassing experience, drawing millions of tourists to destinations globally (Bazzanella et al., 2023; Chersulich Tomino et al., 2020; Cho et al., 2019; Langarita & Cazcarro, 2022; Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2024).

Ziakas (2023) suggests that many urban destinations aim to grow their economies through the regular hosting of sporting events, thereby contributing to the sustainable socio-economic development of these destinations. Acha-Anyi (2023) also observes how these destinations view sporting events, as part of sports tourism, as a vital tool for enhancing visitor experiences and communicating brand messages about the destination. Nyikana and Tichaawa (2024) argue that in developing countries, sports tourism events serve as a strategic vehicle for socio-economic development. They highlight that such events contribute to improved infrastructure, job creation, marketing, and branding, as well as increasing the number of visitors and tourists to local areas. Importantly, these events often encourage visitation to local areas by tourists who might not have otherwise visited (Mchunu et al., 2021; Nyikana et al., 2014; Tzoumaka et al., 2022). At the local level, Jeong & Kim (2020) emphasise the significance of sporting events in the lives of communities, providing recreational and entertainment opportunities while offering a unique experience for visitors to feel as though they are participating in an authentically indigenous activity. The uniqueness of sporting events fosters a blend of local community members and visitors, enabling them to co-create their experiences.

2.2. Sports tourism and experience co-creation

Sporting events have become a core strategy in city development plans and are no longer merely a complementary activity (Langarita & Cazcarro, 2022; Mchunu et al., 2021; Tzoumaka et al., 2022). As a result, they are increasingly recognised for providing truly

memorable experiences for attendees (Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2023). Many destinations are actively seeking to host events that deliver memorable experiences, achieved by incorporating more participative and interactive activities during the event (Campos et al., 2015). This suggests that the event attendee plays a crucial role in shaping long-lasting memories, as they are directly involved in creating their experiences at each moment of the event (Campos et al., 2015; Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2023). Therefore, event and festival attendees act as co-creators of their own experiences, influencing their perceptions and memories of the festival, and, to some extent, the destination as a whole. In the context of this study, we argue that co-creation theory is vital for identifying festival activities that engage the interests, attention, and imagination of attendees. Understanding these activities enables event organisers to better comprehend co-creation in the context of the Berlin November Festival, which should inform management and marketing strategies and practices for the sustainable development and management of the event.

2.3. Rural events and leveraging in context

Akama (2011) emphasises that rural events bring the local community together, and as such, they can be leveraged to ensure community involvement in making the event a success. This involvement can take various forms, such as local employment policies, business promotion, decentralised decision-making, local governance on specific development-related issues, and other activities that support the interests of citizens. According to Saayman & Rossouw (2011), events and festivals have played a critical role in South Africa's cultural and socio-economic development trajectory. They highlight that these events provide crucial support to thousands of livelihoods and make key contributions to the local economic development of many areas, especially rural ones. From a rural perspective, festivals are an essential vehicle for achieving socio-economic development (Mema, 2010; Radicchi, 2013; Tzoumaka et al., 2022). This is because rural areas are typically characterised by low-income neighbourhoods, chronic poverty, and a lack of basic services (Phori et al., 2024). Events, and the strategic leveraging of them, are therefore viewed as important tools to strengthen the economies of these areas while improving the social standard of living for citizens (Hjalager & Kwiatkowski, 2018; Langarita & Cazcarro, 2022; Nkunzi, 2024). Nkunzi (2024) argues that sporting events and rural festivals generate new revenue streams, increase visitor numbers to rural areas, and promote sustainable practices. Importantly, these festivals can stimulate economic growth, create entrepreneurial opportunities for youth and women, improve the overall viability of rural communities, provide educational platforms for green consumerism, and ultimately enhance livelihoods (Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2024).

Apleni & Henama (2020) emphasise that rural events can be leveraged to attract the municipality's interest in the host area. Municipal engagement in event planning not only enhances the region's reputation but also supports event management (Potwarka et al., 2020). The involvement of the municipality promotes infrastructure development in rural areas and the implementation of new policies that ensure the sustainability of the rural

tourism industry through sporting events (Potwarka et al., 2020). As a result, rural events will expand rapidly, as they are recognised for motivating communities to collaborate with the tourism industry and other stakeholders to ensure their success (Mahon & Hyyryläinen, 2019).

Leveraging rural events can also help promote local attractions. This can be achieved by advertising events in conjunction with tourist attractions, so visitors are aware of what the area offers beyond the event itself (Hayduk, 2019). The multiplier effect of tourism should be considered, as events that attract large numbers of attendees from various locations can promote tourism growth (Ziakas, 2023). This, in turn, will expose previously unknown local attractions, boost tourism in the area, and encourage entrepreneurship. Since entrepreneurship is often linked to long-term economic growth, wealth creation, and social advancement (Hayduk, 2019), leveraging rural events for these outcomes is highly beneficial. Moreover, as entrepreneurial traits and dispositions tend to be enduring over time, it may be valuable to cultivate them in the local population of the rural event host area (Cope, 2005).

Based on the above literature, the authors put forward the theoretical expectation that festival attendees are driven by specific motivations to attend an event. These motivations can be pull or push factors but are largely linked to the experiences (expected experiences for first-time attendees) with the event in previous attendances. The experiences are co-created between all the attendees and therefore will influence how they perceive the socio-economic and environmental implications of the event on the destination. Thus, the motivations and experiences with the event may influence how attendees view the impacts of the festival on the destination.

3. Methods

3.1. Research context

This study was conducted in the small town of Berlin, located in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. Established in 1857 by Carl Pape and German settlers, the town is situated approximately 20 km east of Qonce (formerly King Williams Town) and was named after the German city of Berlin (Raper, 1987). The Berlin November Horse Racing event takes place annually in this town and has become a significant cultural and sporting festival, attracting thousands of participants each year. It has grown into one of the premier events in the country, offering a unique opportunity to share and experience the pride and strength of this rural showcase (Berlin November, 2024). Over a three-day weekend, the event celebrates indigenous horse racing, featuring the province's top jockeys and heritage. It also includes various activities such as music festivals, fashion shows, food festivals, traditional arts, and cultural displays, creating a truly memorable experience for attendees (Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism Agency, 2019).

3.2. Design and approach

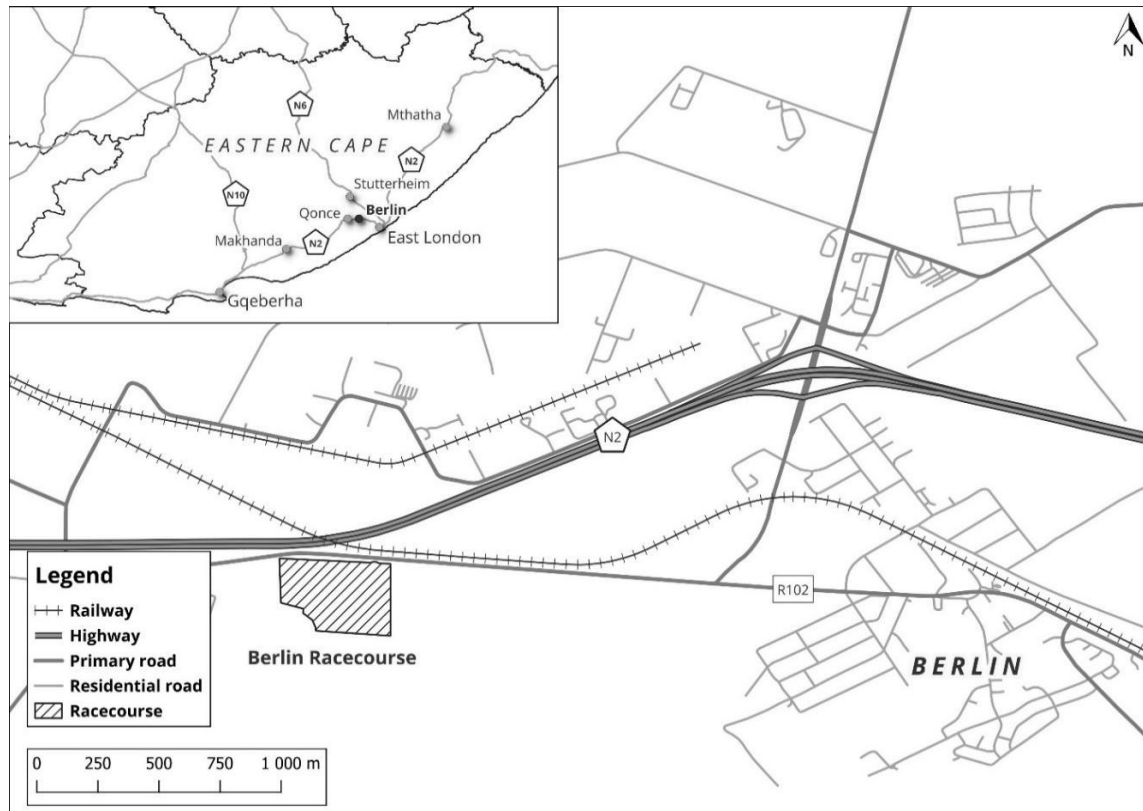
This study was conducted using a positivist research philosophy and a quantitative research design. Given the dearth of research on rural festivals generally, the researchers gleaned through the literature for the most commonly addressed themes for event studies (Samhere, 2017; Nkunzi, 2024) in order to design the research instrument. The instrument was modelled and adapted against these, in line with the objectives of the study. A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure the motivations to attend the festival, the festival experiences as well as general socio-economic and environmental perceptions of the festival.

The sample population consisted of attendees at the Berlin November Horse Racing Festival. The festival attracts approximately 30,000 attendees annually. Using this estimated attendance and a sample size calculator, a sample size of $n=270$ was determined, with a 90% confidence level and a 10% margin of error. A spatially based, systematic sampling method was employed to target potential respondents. This sampling technique is commonly used in situations involving highly temporary populations (e.g., sporting events and crime scenes or accidents) (De Vos et al., 2005). The systematic sampling method involves selecting every n th member of the population, with the first respondent chosen randomly and every n th subject selected thereafter. The researcher must predetermine the n th interval before data collection. In this study, fieldworkers were stationed in different areas of the horse racing track (*Figure 1*), and the first respondent was randomly selected. Every 5th respondent passing by was then approached for participation, and this process was repeated until all survey questionnaires were completed. A total of 248 surveys were collected during the data collection period.

3.3. Analysis of results

These were captured and analysed using IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Simple descriptive statistics and frequencies were used to present the findings. Respondents were presented with a series of statements on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 'Strongly Disagree', 'Disagree', 'Neutral', 'Agree', to 'Strongly Agree'. To analyse the findings, some categories on the scale ('strongly disagree' and 'disagree', as well as 'strongly agree' and 'agree') were combined to represent a single percentage of either agreement or disagreement. This approach allows for a clearer interpretation of the overall sentiment of the respondents.

Figure 1. Map of Berlin, Eastern Cape Province



Source: Authors' editing

3.4. Socio-demographic profiles of attendees

A summary of the demographic profiles of the event attendees surveyed in this study is provided in *Table 1*. The plurality of attendees were young, falling between the ages of 31-40 years (39.1%), followed by those between 25-30 years (21.4%). These findings suggest that the majority of attendees at rural sporting events are relatively young to middle-aged adults, which may reflect the physically active nature of sporting events that tend to attract younger demographics. Besides these, the older age groupings (i.e. 41-50 years and 51 years and above) collectively accounted for 27.8% of respondents, while the youngest cohort (18-24 years) represented 11.7%, indicating a moderate spread across age groups with a clear concentration in the economically active middle-age bracket. In terms of educational background, the findings reveal that there were diverse educational backgrounds, with the largest group holding a post-high school professional certificate (26.6%), closely followed by those with a high school-leaving certificate (25%). This suggests that the majority of attendees had attained at least a secondary level of education, pointing to a moderately educated visitor profile. Notably, those with undergraduate and postgraduate degrees collectively accounted for 38.4% of the sample, indicating a significant presence of highly educated attendees, while those with no formal education or only primary schooling represented a small minority at 10%, reflecting the broad appeal of the event across different educational backgrounds.

In terms of employment status, the plurality of respondents were employed full-time, comprising 44% of the sample, followed by the self-employed at 21%, which together suggest that most attendees had a stable source of income and thus the financial means to participate in and spend at the event. The presence of unemployed respondents at 16% is noteworthy in the context of a rural sporting event, as it may reflect the local community's participation and the event's accessibility to economically vulnerable groups. Students and part-time employees collectively accounted for 16.6% of the sample, while retired individuals represented the smallest proportion at 2.4%, further reinforcing the earlier finding that the event predominantly attracted younger to middle-aged, economically active individuals. Collectively, these demographic findings show an interconnected picture of the typical attendee at rural sporting events in South Africa. There is a logical link between the prevalence of the young to middle-aged attendees with the employment profile, as these tend to be individuals who are established or growing in their careers. This economic activity likely affords attendees the disposable income necessary to travel to and spend at a rural sporting event, which has positive implications for the event's potential contribution to local economic development.

This visitor profile suggests that the event attracts a relatively affluent and educated visitor base, which may translate into higher spending patterns at the event and in the surrounding rural community. However, the 16% unemployment rate among respondents adds an important nuance, suggesting that the event also draws participation from economically marginalised individuals, possibly from the local rural community itself. This highlights the event's inclusive character and underscores its potential as a tool for broad-based local economic development, reaching beyond just economically active visitors to engage vulnerable community members as well.

Table 1. Demographic profiles of respondents

Demographic item	Percentage of total
Gender	
Female	50.0
Male	46.8
Prefer not to say	2.0
Non-binary	1.2
Age	
18-24 years	11.7
25-30 years	21.4
31-40 years	39.1
41-50 years	14.1
51 years and above	13.7
Highest level of education obtained	
Post-high school professional certificate	26.6
High school-leaving certificate	25.0
Undergraduate degree	20.2

Postgraduate degree	18.2
No formal education	6.0
Primary schooling completed	4.0
Employment status	
Employed full time	44.0
Self-employed	21.0
Unemployed	16.0
Employed part-time	8.5
Student	8.1
Retired	2.4
Province of residence	
Eastern Cape	82.4
Gauteng	5.6
Western Cape	4.8
KwaZulu-Natal	2.4
North-West	2.4
Limpopo	0.8
Free State	0.8
Northern Cape	0.4
Mpumalanga	0.4

Source: Authors' data

4. Results

4.1. Average spending and previous attendance at the event

In exploring the potential of the event to contribute to local economic development goals within its rural setting, it was essential to assess first-time versus repeat attendance. Existing studies suggest that the question of previous attendance achieves two primary objectives (Nyikana et al., 2014). Firstly, it allows researchers to appreciate that attendees who are returning for a second or subsequent time have a clear idea of what to expect. These repeat visitors can make comparisons and provide valuable feedback on both the event and the destination, which can inform improvements and future planning. Secondly, the ability of the event and destination to leave a lasting impression on newcomers is crucial in converting first-time attendees into repeat visitors, both to the event and possibly to the destination as a whole.

As shown in Table 2, a significant majority of attendees were repeat visitors to the event (69.4%), with 12.9% having attended once before and 56.5% attending multiple times. This demonstrates the event's strong retention rate, indicative of its appeal and the satisfaction of returning attendees. A notable proportion of attendees (30.6%) were first-time visitors, highlighting the opportunity to convert them into repeat attendees in the future. Their potential return depends largely on their overall satisfaction with both the event and, to some extent, the destination.

Table 2. Previous attendance

Previous attendance	Percentage of total
This is the first time	30.6
Once before	12.9
2-5 times before	43.6
6-9 times before	12.9

Source: Authors' data

As a follow-up to this question, attendees were asked to indicate the amount of money they were spending at the event in South African Rands. The results showed a range of spending amounts, but the average spend was calculated at ZAR 3,362.36 (equivalent to USD 181.96 and EUR 166.59). The difference between the highest and lowest amount spent at the festival prompted the researchers to conduct a test of normality. To this end, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests of normality were conducted. These tests are commonly used in event studies to assess whether the average spending follows a normal distribution or if it is skewed, as illustrated in Figure 2 below. The sentiment was that, generally speaking, events of this nature can be a mixture of high spenders and budget spenders, and as such, an average amount should be calculated. This would allow for an estimation of the economic potential of the festival through spending calculations. However, the average amount may not be a reflection of the actual reality, as the high spenders (who can be a minority of the attendees) may skew the average amount from the reality of the majority of spenders. A test of normality enables the researchers to check for any discrepancies with the average amount calculated in this regard (Table 3).

Table 3. Test of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov*			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Q5	.367	228	<.001	.286	228	<.001

*Lilliefors Significance Correction. Source: Authors' data

The test of normality suggests that if the Sig. value of the Shapiro-Wilk Test and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test is greater than 0.05, the data is normally distributed, and if it is below 0.05, then the data significantly deviates from a normal distribution. In this study, these tests indicated that the average amount spent at the event does not follow a normal distribution and is, in fact, skewed, $D(228) = 0.28$, $p = 0.001$. This skewness could be attributed to the event's diverse audience, which, while largely rural and attracting low-income spenders, includes designated VIP sections that are priced significantly higher.

For instance, access to the Prime Lounge VIP section costs an average of ZAR 2,200 (USD 122.90 and EUR 111.09). The inclusion of multiple activities such as a fashion show, food festival, music festival, and other memorable experiences further explains the variance in spending. Attendees who partake in all the activities will likely spend more than

those who attend solely for the horse race as spectators. This wide range of spending behaviour likely contributes to the skewness observed in the data.

4.2. Reasons for attending the event

The next section of the survey aimed to identify the key reasons that influenced attendance at the event. This was tied to the various aspects of the event mentioned earlier, as some attendees may have been more interested in certain aspects than others. Respondents were presented with a series of statements on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 'Strongly Disagree', 'Disagree', 'Neutral', 'Agree', to 'Strongly Agree'.

For the purpose of analysing the findings, some categories on the scale ('strongly disagree' and 'disagree', as well as 'strongly agree' and 'agree') were combined to represent a single percentage of either agreement or disagreement. This approach allows for a clearer interpretation of the overall sentiment of the respondents.

The first statement related to the purpose of enjoying live sports (horse racing) as a driver for attending the festival. The findings suggest that this was a significant purpose, as an overwhelming majority of respondents (71.8%) indicated that they were motivated by the horse racing on offer to attend [with a mean of 2.04 and a standard deviation of 1.643]. Regarding the purpose to enjoy the fashion show during the festival, most attendees (65.7%) also considered this an important reason, with a mean of 2.28 and a standard deviation of 1.674. Additionally, there were other notable reasons linked to the enjoyment of the music and food available at the festival (51.2%), although these were less influential compared to other reasons, with a mean of 2.01, as shown in *Table 4*.

Table 4. Reasons for attendance at the Berlin November Festival

Reasons for attending the Berlin Festival	SD	D	N	A	SA	M	STD D
I attended for the enjoyment of live sports (horse racing)	4.4	8.5	15.4	10.9	60.9	2.04	1.64
I attended for the enjoyment of the fashion show	9.7	9.7	15	10.5	55.2	2.28	1.67
I attended for the enjoyment of music and food aspects	24.6	8.5	15.8	10.1	41.1	2.01	1.55

Note: SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree; N = Neutral; A = Agree; SA = Strongly Agree; M = Mean; STD D = Standard deviation. Source: Authors' data

4.3. Festival attendees' experiences with the event

Beyond the above reasons, the attendees were asked to rate their experiences with the event as seen in *Table 5*. Memorable festival experiences are a good predictor and influencer of repeat visitation to a destination and an event. The findings in this regard revealed that generally, positive sentiments were expressed regarding the opportunity to engage with the athletes (56.9%). However, notable negative experiences were observed regarding the event providing a truly unforgettable experience (56.9%), and the possibility

of a surprise live performance from famous artists (22.6%). The relatively high dissatisfaction regarding the event providing a truly unforgettable experience may be attributed to the gap between attendee expectations and the actual event delivery. Rural sporting events, particularly those seeking to grow their profile, may struggle with limited resources and infrastructure to create the kind of immersive, high-quality experience that attendees have come to expect from larger, well-established urban events. This expectation gap could be further compounded by the increasing influence of social media, where attendees are constantly exposed to highlights of premium sporting events globally, inadvertently raising their experiential benchmarks beyond what a rural event can realistically deliver at its current stage of development. For the attendees, the most important experience was that of the festival providing an atmosphere for relaxation (81.5%). Overall, the festival is noted to provide positive experiences for the attendees, endearing itself as a truly memorable festival based on the experiences enjoyed by the attendees.

Table 5. Attendee experiences at the festival

Experiences of attending the Berlin Festival	SD	D	N	A	SA	M	STD D
There were opportunities to engage with the athletes	15.7	8.9	18.6	8.1	48.8	2.31	1.66
The event provided an unforgettable experience	48.8	8.1	18.6	8.9	15.7	2.11	1.60
Surprise live performances (e.g., music performances)	56.0	8.1	13.3	8.9	13.7	2.07	1.59
There are more opportunities for socio-cultural exchange, socialising and networking	63.7	5.6	10.4	8.1	12.1	2.05	1.67
Berlin November creates an atmosphere of relaxation	6.9	1.6	10.1	31.9	49.6	4.16	1.12

Note: SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree; N = Neutral; A = Agree; SA = Strongly Agree; M = Mean; STD D = Standard deviation. Source: Authors' data

4.4. Perceived impacts of the Berlin November Festival

The next part of this section focused on determining the perceived socio-economic and environmental (ecological) impacts of the festival on the local economy. Table 5 presents the perceived socio-economic and environmental impacts of the Berlin November Festival. A majority of attendees (69.3%) felt that the festival created opportunities for socio-cultural exchange, socialising, and networking. This was in line with the general observations on the importance of events as platforms for socialising and fostering socio-cultural exchanges (Nyikana et al., 2014). On another positive note, the vast majority of attendees (88.3%) opined that the festival created employment opportunities for local community members, with a positive mean of 4.27 and a standard deviation of 1.128. Similarly, there

were positive views expressed regarding the festival's ability to create investment opportunities for local businesses (86.3%). It was unsurprising, therefore, to find that the majority of attendees (84.3%) also felt that the festival provided a significant boost to the local economy of Berlin. These findings are consistent with those of Ngumbela (2023), who argues that the festival contributes significantly to economic development and women empowerment through entrepreneurship opportunities and economic growth. The sheer volume of spectators, estimated to be approximately 30,000 every year points towards increased spending in the local economy and enhancing the opportunities for local businesses (Ngumbela, 2023).

Strong positive sentiments were also reported on the festival's role in infrastructural development in the Berlin area, with a large majority of attendees (73.5%) expressing this view. Similarly, an overwhelming majority (84.3%) believed that the festival was crucial in creating trading and business opportunities for local businesses, supported by a mean of 4.17 and a standard deviation of 1.115. In the existing literature on festivals and community development, Acha-Anyi (2023) and the Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism Agency (2019) have suggested that festivals play a major role in redeveloping and repositioning regions. In this study, highly positive sentiments were noted regarding the role of Berlin November in helping redevelop the region, with a mean of 4.14 and a standard deviation of 1.162. However, concerns were raised by attendees regarding the festival's impact on the standard of living and the cost of goods and services for locals. Most attendees (72.9%) felt that the festival increased these aspects, potentially burdening the local community (Table 6).

Table 6. Perceived impacts of the Berlin November Festival

Impacts of the Berlin Festival	SD	D	N	A	SA	M	STD D
Socio-economic impacts of the festival							
Berlin November creates employment opportunities for locals	8.1	0.8	2.8	33.1	55.2	4.27	1.12
Berlin November creates investment opportunities for local businesses	8.1	0.4	5.2	37.5	48.8	4.19	1.11
Berlin November boosts the local economy	6.0	2.0	7.7	33.5	50.8	4.21	1.08
Berlin November contributes to infrastructural development	11.3	5.6	9.7	33.5	39.9	3.85	1.31
Berlin November creates trading opportunities for local businesses	6.9	2.4	6.5	35.5	48.8	4.17	1.11
Berlin November can help redevelop the region	7.3	3.2	8.1	31.5	50.0	4.14	1.16

Berlin November increases the standard of living of locals	8.9	5.2	12.9	29.8	43.1	3.93	1.25
Berlin November creates opportunities for socio-cultural exchanges and networking	6.9	2.4	7.3	30.2	53.2	4.21	1.13
Inspires unemployed youth in Berlin to explore opportunities presented by tourism	9.3	0.8	5.2	33.5	51.2	4.17	1.18
Berlin November markets Eastern Cape and Berlin to tourists	6.5	2.0	5.2	31.0	55.2	4.27	1.09
Berlin November promotes local tourist attractions (including cultural and heritage sites)	6.9	0.8	7.7	30.6	54.0	4.24	1.10
Environmental impacts of the festival							
Berlin November is an environmentally friendly event	6.5	1.6	10.1	34.7	47.2	4.15	1.09
Berlin November raises environmental awareness	6.5	4.0	14.5	32.7	42.3	4.00	1.14
Berlin November promotes the conservation and preservation of the natural environment	7.3	4.0	16.1	30.2	42.3	3.96	1.18

Note: SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree; N = Neutral; A = Agree; SA = Strongly Agree; M = Mean; STD D = Standard deviation. Source: Authors' data

One of the most highly ranked impacts of Berlin November in this study was the opportunities it continues to create for socio-cultural exchange and networking for businesses. This was identified as one of the festival's greatest benefits to the local business community, with a high mean score of 4.21 and a standard deviation of 1.132. This is especially significant considering Hayduk's (2019) emphasis on the importance of leveraging festivals to foster business development opportunities. This was also linked to the festival's impact in inspiring unemployed youth to capitalise on tourism opportunities. Many attendees believed that the festival plays a crucial role in motivating youth to explore entrepreneurial opportunities, with a positive mean score of 4.17 and a standard deviation of 1.187.

Knott et al. (2015) have argued that festivals and events can play a vital role in the marketing and branding of destinations. In this study, the festival's role in effectively

marketing and branding Berlin, and the Eastern Cape province at large, received positive ratings, with a mean score of 4.27. Similarly, the festival's promotion of local tourist attractions and sites was positively rated, with a mean score of 4.24. This is particularly important in the context of this study, as many of these local attractions are cultural and heritage sites that play a significant role in the history of rural areas in the province.

5. Discussion

Sporting events have grown to become important components of destination development and economic growth over the past few decades. From an urban destination perspective, such events have been integrated as central elements of destination management and development plans, particularly in the areas of urban regeneration, infrastructural development, employment creation, and destination branding. In recent years, rural areas have also shown a growing interest in regularly staging sporting events, with an increasing tendency to use them as platforms for local economic development, aimed at revitalising struggling economies that traditionally relied heavily on agriculture and similar industries (Phori et al., 2024; Radicchi, 2013; Saayman & Rossouw, 2011). However, in developing countries like South Africa, the hosting of these events and festivals remains sporadic, with little strategic planning for the optimal maximisation of these platforms to achieve sustainable local development goals (Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2024). As a result, the obvious benefits of these events for rural areas appear to be coincidental, opportunistic, and uncoordinated, with the events often leveraging themselves. This study sought to assess the potential of rural sporting events to serve as vehicles for local development, using a popular horse racing and fashion show festival as a case study.

The study found that, from a socio-demographic perspective, a significant portion of festival attendees were female, although there was a close split with male attendees. Many of these attendees were relatively young, aged between 18 and 40 years, and were well educated. As expected, most were employed full-time, part-time, or self-employed, with the majority being from the Eastern Cape province. Given that most attendees were local and lived relatively close to the festival (mostly within the host province), one would expect a lower propensity for additional spending on items such as food and accommodation. However, the findings suggested that there was indeed notable spending due to attendance at the event. In terms of previous attendance, many attendees were repeat visitors to the festival and the small town of Berlin, though there were also a significant number of first-time visitors as well. One of the most striking findings was the average amount spent at the festival, with ZAR 3,362.36 being the average, which, in the context of rural festivals, is considered high. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests for normality confirmed that this spending amount was skewed and did not follow a normal distribution. While various factors could explain this skewness, the most logical explanation appeared to be the presence of VIP sections, which are typically highly priced, along with the products and services offered in those sections. For instance, tickets for the

Prime Lounge VIP in the latest edition of the festival were priced at EUR 111.09 or USD 122.90 (ZAR 2,200). When considering such amounts, along with additional spending on food, drinks, and other products, the average spending could easily increase, as observed in the findings.

In terms of the main motivations driving attendance at the festival, key factors included the horse racing, fashion show, music, and the quality of food on offer. Other attendees felt that the opportunity to engage with athletes (specifically jockeys from rural areas) and the festival's ability to provide a truly unforgettable experience were significant motivators for their attendance. One unique aspect of this festival is its emphasis on rural development. The horse racing is traditional and rooted in indigenous heritage, with many of the horses and jockeys coming from rural areas around the town and province, rather than from well-known breeders and stables. The attraction for festival attendees in engaging with these 'athletes' could be linked to a passion for rural youth empowerment. Additionally, attendees highlighted several positive socio-economic aspects linked to the festival's impacts. Many felt that the festival creates employment opportunities for local people and brings about investment opportunities for local businesses. Consequently, there is a general sentiment that the festival makes a significant contribution to the local economy and provides a platform for local businesses. Attendees also felt that the festival was important for the redevelopment of the region, aligning with the organisers' view that Berlin November has become a signature event capable of boosting and developing the rural areas of the province.

The study also found that the festival plays a crucial role in creating a platform for socio-cultural exchanges and networking opportunities for businesses. These networking opportunities, in turn, enable unemployed youth to explore tourism-related opportunities. Additionally, the festival is vital for marketing and branding the area to tourists. According to Berlin November (2024), marketing and branding are key to the festival's development, aligning with the goal of positioning Berlin and the Eastern Cape province as desirable destinations for domestic and regional tourists. The festival has brought many tourists to the small rural town, who may not have visited otherwise. Similarly, the province has benefitted, as people from across the country and neighbouring Southern African countries attend the festival. Many attendees noted that the festival promotes local attractions, particularly cultural and heritage sites, which are significant in the history of rural areas in the province. Finally, attendees expressed positive views regarding the festival's minimal negative environmental impact. They felt that it was organised in an environmentally friendly manner, raising environmental awareness and promoting the conservation and preservation of the natural environment.

It is evident that the Berlin November festival has great potential to foster lasting connections between visitors and the local community of Berlin. Similarly, the festival has demonstrated its potential to stimulate the local economy and boost tourism demand in the small rural town and its surroundings. In this way, the struggling rural economy can be revived through the festival and other events, ensuring sustainable local economic

development. However, for this to be achieved, an effective leveraging strategy for the festival's benefits must be developed and implemented. Reflecting on the theoretical framework of sport tourism and experience co-creation, the study argues that the festival offers unique features that leave lasting memories among attendees. As a result, many attendees return annually and continue to contribute to the local economy based on their previous satisfaction with the festival and the destination's offerings. Event organisers should therefore focus on promoting the specific aspects that attract attendees and incorporate these into the festival's marketing strategy. Additionally, unique aspects of the festival and the destination, especially the cultural and heritage attractions, should be integrated into the festival's marketing plans. This approach would leverage the festival beyond the event itself, extending its benefits to the local economy. We argue that to maximise the benefits for the local economy, systematic and strategic leveraging plans should be prioritised in the festival's planning and management. Such a strategic approach would facilitate the development of event-driven initiatives aimed at the purposeful rejuvenation of rural areas.

This study makes a modest contribution to events literature, by bringing focus to the often-neglected aspect of sporting events in rural regions. Considering the positive impacts highlighted, and the clear potential for these events to contribute to the rejuvenation of ailing rural economies, more empirical research is needed on the effective leveraging strategies for events in this regard. This study serves as a departure point for more such studies, particularly those that can assess these festivals from a multi-stakeholder perspective. From a managerial point of view, the study findings can serve as a guide for managers and regional planners in working out the most effective economic strategies for the growth and development of their respective rural economies. Similarly, others can look at how the potential of these events can contribute to diversifying and complementing their local economic development activities. While this study may be useful for other rural areas, we challenge them to explore not only the short-term, but also the longer-term implications of events such as these. The argument in this regard is that they should strive to minimise the negative impacts, whilst optimising the positive benefits from such events, with a longer-term view of transforming their towns into tourist attractions with an events-driven approach to development.

6. Conclusion

This study assessed the potential of rural sporting events as a catalyst for local development, using a major festival hosted in a rural setting as a case study. The research was prompted by the noticeable neglect of rural festivals in existing literature and the broader lack of assessment regarding the role of such events in fostering local development. The central argument was that, without understanding the impact of rural sporting events on local development, event organisers, policy-makers, and other relevant authorities may lack the appropriate investment models for rural areas. More importantly,

the absence of knowledge about the associated benefits and impacts of these festivals on local communities could result in a lack of clarity in devising effective leveraging strategies.

The findings revealed that rural sporting events generally have positive impacts on the contexts in which they are hosted. From a rural economic development perspective, these events play a significant role in creating employment, attracting investment, and contributing to marketing and branding efforts, among other tangible benefits. Essentially, the study highlighted that festivals like the Berlin November offer rural areas potential revitalisation strategies in terms of economic, socio-cultural, environmental, and destination branding components. The responsibility now lies with relevant stakeholders to ensure they invest in rural sporting events as a key pillar of their development policies and strategies for these areas.

That said, the study was limited to analysing the role of rural sporting events from the perspective of festival attendees, which may have constrained the results. Future research should adopt a qualitative approach, engaging a wider range of stakeholders for a more comprehensive assessment of the festival's impacts. Additionally, there have been growing concerns about the risks to animal welfare linked to events such as horse racing. This could impact the image of the event in future and may result in changes in the overall organisation of the event, to perhaps exclude the aspect of horse racing. This would have an implication for the conclusions and recommendations made above. Finally, the study only presents a simple descriptive analysis of the findings. No further testing was conducted, which may limit the understanding of the relationships between the different variables. However, the aim of the study was to gain a general idea of the motivations, experiences, and perceived impacts of the festival with a view to gauging the possibilities of the festival as a catalyst for local development in the rural setting it is hosted in.

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