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# Economic and Socio-Cultural Development Dimension—Two Lake-Protected Areas' Sustainability: A Case of Hungary and Serbia

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**Abstract:** The Balaton Uplands National Park (BUNP) and Palić Nature Park (PNP) have significant tourism potential for the development of specific tourism forms. These lake destinations offer not just natural features but also a developed infrastructure and a variety of events that are important to the ethno-social values of the local population. In this paper, the sociocultural and economic aspects of these locations are studied. Researching these two dimensions of sustainable tourism development (STuD) is important for tourism planning, growth, and control of STuD. This article's research focuses on socio-cultural and economic elements that are critical to the growth of tourism (ToD). They are analyzed through revenue, employment, visitor spending, cultural and culinary marketing, events, and other aspects of this eco-sensitive tourist attraction. The study's noteworthy findings demonstrate the importance of economic and socio-cultural elements for ToD and their substantial influence on the institutional and environmental aspects of sustainability. The quantitative method involved surveying visitors to these two protected areas. A total of 810 visitors participated in this research. Respondents expressed the importance of these two sustainability groups. Also, the results of the research indicate that economic and socio-cultural factors influence the respondents' satisfaction to a significant extent. The research findings may be significant in the creation of plans for the growth of tourism.

**Keywords:** sustainable tourism; Prism of Sustainability; visitor satisfaction; protected areas



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## 1. Introduction

The Balaton Uplands National Park (BUNP) and Palić Nature Park (PNP) can be tourist destinations with a complementary tourist character. This means that these protected areas (PAes) have significant natural and socio-cultural values, which can influence the development of natural and cultural forms of tourism. Several dimensions of sustainability (DoSs) can be used to study sustainable tourism development (STuD) [1,2]. In addition to the ecological and institutional dimensions, the economic and socio-cultural aspects of sustainable tourism (STo) are also important [3–5]. By examining the economic and

socio-cultural aspects of tourism development (ToD) in PAes, the state and prospects for the growth of different forms of tourism can be analyzed [6,7]. If certain forms of tourism achieve positive ecological, economic, institutional, and socio-cultural impacts, it can be said that there is a basis for STuD [8,9].

The main research problems relate to the tourism development system in which many goals of tourism growth are achieved with a tendency to achieve positive results. The most important expected results are ecological, socio-cultural, economic, and institutional. By fulfilling these development goals, conditions for the sustainable use of the destination can be created. STuD in the PAe should be studied as a set of activities carried out by managers for the protection of sensitive areas. The main management goals should be the improvement of environmental principles, the satisfaction of tourists, communities and local economies and ensuring the highest income from tourism for the sustainable growth of the industry [10,11].

The obtained results of this research may have special scientific significance for all entities that have an important role in the protection of areas [12–14]. That role can be manifested through the planning of ToD and the adoption of various laws regarding the relationship between visitors and residents in these tourist destinations, in which ecological principles are important [15–17]. Also, the results of the research can contribute to the strategic planning of ToD, both at the national and international levels [18,19].

This study aims to ascertain whether the socio-cultural and economic features of the STo have an impact on respondents' pleasure as visitors to these PAes. The specific aim is to identify which of the factors most influence the current state of tourism and future tourism development. In particular, the economic and socio-cultural potentials were analyzed to achieve research objectives that may have an important function in StuD. These forms of tourism are based on economic and socio-cultural values. By analyzing these values, it can be concluded whether DoSs can affect the state of the STo [11,12].

Data were collected from visitors who visited these two protected areas. Both groups of respondents expressed their views on the economic and socio-cultural potential of the STuD. Also, using statistical analysis of the research, the level of influence of these two DoSs on their satisfaction with the STuD was measured. The comparative analysis of the results obtained made it possible to compare the values from two different protected areas in which the lake is the primary resource for the development of tourism.

## 2. Literature Review

Tourism is described as an economic and non-productive activity [20]. The study of STo in tourist destinations, such as these protected areas, can be carried out by examining the DoSs and its impact on visitors [21,22]. Tourism can have different impacts on the elements of a destination [23]. New jobs, shopping in the destination to purchase local goods, paying entrance fees, participating in educational programs, visiting educational centers and schools in the natural environment, and so on are all ways of finding out the economic side of STo [24–26]. Along with economic sustainability, it is important to develop socio-cultural values in the destination. These include cultural factors, educational goals, health impacts on users of the space, cultural exchange and tolerance, development of religious tourism, events, nurturing customs, production of local products, etc. [27–31]. Tourists find branded goods with a connection to nature particularly appealing [32]. The most important positive impact of tourism is the education of both visitors and the local population [33–35]. By visiting protected areas, tourists can learn about the natural and anthropogenic values of the destination. On that occasion, educational disciplines such as biology, history, geography, and others are important [36–38]. Through educational

programs, it is possible to increase the attractiveness of the area [39,40]. Getting to know nature and local culture is an important goal of the development of tourism in PAes [41].

Tourism can impact a large number of new jobs, both in the public and private sectors of the economy, through the employment of the local population [42]. The level of labor intensity in the many activities that comprise the tourism economy reflects the significance of generating employment in the tourism sector [43,44]. Increased tourist activity and consumption by both domestic and foreign visitors undoubtedly create the conditions for more locals to be employed in the tourism sector [45,46]. Jobs in the tourism sector that involve working directly with visitors are crucial, such as in hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, retail of local products, educators in PAes, etc. [47–49]. To improve the benefits for the local community from tourism, it is necessary to establish a broad connection between the authorities, residents, and visitors [50]. The local community must be involved in the implementation and control of ToD, through setting goals and developing an STo strategy [51]. In order for tourists' experiences to be genuine and an accurate reflection of the local way of life, community members must help. The local community can have multiple economic and socio-cultural benefits from the ToD, through the positive impacts of tourism on the destination [52,53].

From the aspect of the socio-cultural impacts of tourism, the positive changes taking place in the domain of cultural and social heritage receive the greatest attention. In fact, it can be stated that the initiators of these changes are the economic benefits that directly influence the positive attitudes of the local community. Positive impacts of tourism on local cultural heritage and elements of tradition can be explored as impacts on heritage, language, religion, folk art, customs, food, and the local population [54]. This can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Tourism impact on certain socio-cultural elements of destination.

| Impact | Result |
| --- | --- |
| Heritage | Improving the quality of all cultural institutions; directing attention to the protection of the local community and the entire public sector. |
| Language | There is a great interest in protecting the traditional local language and culture. |
| Religion | Increasing respect for local religion by tourists and vice versa. |
| Local arts | Intensive development of new markets for domestic crafts, artistic, and creative forms. |
| Customs | An increase in the transfer of customs to other regions. |
| Local population | Population increases with the arrival of people to live and work in a certain destination; any depopulation is excluded in tourism-developed areas. |
| Cuisine | Encourage local restaurants and food vendors to diversify their offerings and innovate; more investment in food-related infrastructure such as restaurants, markets, and food festivals; encourage sustainable practices and facilitate cultural exchanges. |

Source: Adapted from Swarbrooke [54].

The significance of the PAe for the growth of the tourism offer was investigated in a study by Cottrell et al. [55]. That tourist offer included four important DoSs that form the pillar of STo. As a significant dimension of sustainability, the authors singled out the ecological and institutional dimensions. The obtained research data can help in defining the main strategic goals of tourism in PAes.

The impact of sustainability factors on respondents' satisfaction was studied by Asmelash and Kumar [56]. The research included economic, ecological, sociocultural, and institutional aspects of a tourism destination, where nature is the primary resource in planning activities. After the analysis of the obtained research results, the concluding considerations highlight the importance of the socio-cultural and institutional DoSs. These should be priority areas in the strategic planning of tourism and the positioning of this

destination in the tourist offer. The ecological values of the destination must have a primary impact on the subjects in tourism planning.

Research by Stojanović et al. [57] referred to the examination of the state of STo in a PAe. The methodological approach is based on defining two research variables and examining their values. These are the basic segments of STo: natural and socio-cultural factors. The research revealed that STo's ecological and socio-cultural principles are the most important for tourism participants. Also, it was concluded that STo significantly contributes to the satisfaction of tourists and locals.

The research indicated previously is based on evaluating the level of tourism in popular tourist destinations; the places with the greatest importance are those that have a delicate ecosystem and its fundamental components. Potentials for the growth of different types of tourism can be discovered by assessing the status of tourism and the variables that may affect the development of STo. Since these locations are home to unique and endangered species, any prospective tourism must be based on the natural environment.

Within the previously described study, four fundamental sustainability aspects or pillars were used to study and analyze tourism in protected areas. These include ecological, economic, socio-cultural, and institutional dimensions. Ecological and socio-cultural DoSs have been singled out in previous research as important DoSs. The research also revealed that the growth of tourism in protected regions can be strongly influenced by socio-cultural and economic dimensions. The development of other aspects of sustainability may be restricted by a lack of funding and by locals not actively participating in the planning and management of tourism growth. This may directly impact organizations and the environment. That raises concerns about the advancement of STo. It is crucial to conduct a thorough analysis of the economic and socio-cultural aspects of the potential for the growth of STo in the PAes.

The economic benefits of tourism have been identified as the main development objectives in many studies published worldwide. There are many such effects. They can be seen in the growth of infrastructure, the creation of new jobs, the bolstering of regional and national economies, the promotion of regional culture and local products, and other financial gains [56,57]. As a result of all social activities and tourism, the environment in which people live is changing daily and losing its essential characteristics. Environmental degradation is defined as any alteration in the environment that has a negative impact on the activities of both living and non-living nature [58]. At the same time, the quality of the environment influences the growth and competitiveness of tourism. The survival of many species, including all life on Earth, is in jeopardy due to the worldwide issues of pollution and environmental degradation that exist today [59]. Even though people have been altering the environment since the dawn of agriculture, the current state of change is the most significant in global history. In all these changes, tourism plays a very important role. In order to satisfy the constantly growing demands of tourists, entire ecosystems and biodiversity are frequently severely damaged [60].

The expansion of tourism and its negative impacts are mostly reflected in the unplanned construction of tourist industry facilities. The consequence is the occupation of large areas of land and often the disruption of ambient natural units and habitats, which affect population migrations and representatives of fauna [61]. Along with unplanned receptive construction, tourism has a major negative influence on the air, water, and other environmental components due to pollution from hazardous exhaust gases. They undoubtedly cause significant climate change, such as global warming or an increase in the average global temperature, which will cause a number of natural changes, most of which will be devastating for all life on Earth [62]. Along with air deterioration, sewage, industrial wastewater, different sediments, and agricultural chemical preparations that enter streams

through the soil are also major sources of water contamination [63]. The impacts of tourism on water are multiple, because tourism as an economic branch is its major consumer. Agriculture, industry, waste, and sewage all contribute to the pollution of land, marine, and underground water. Degradation of the ozone layer, the greenhouse effect, acid rain, water pollution, coastal area degradation, deforestation, environmental impacts on urban and mountain centers, impacts on flora and fauna, and much more are among the many types and forms of environmental degradation to which tourism undoubtedly contributes [64].

For the reasons listed above, it is essential to increase the protected areas where tourism can grow without having an adverse effect on the ecosystem. Nature-based tourism is one of the positive types of tourism, where visitors, residents, and protected area management must all actively participate [65].

The main research question in this article is to determine the state and perspective of the StuD in the two PAes, with the support of the analysis of economic and socio-cultural tourism factors of these destinations. Also, it is significant to examine the possibilities of individual aspects of these DoSs for the development of special forms of tourism, to constitute unique ideas and proposals for the creation of a tourist product [66,67]. That is why it was crucial to determine the importance of economic, cultural, and ethno-social elements such as events, the local cuisine, domestic crafts, traditional music, customs, costumes, the role of residents in the ToD, the impact of tourism on employment, and others [68,69].

This analysis differs from earlier studies because it carefully explores the effects of sustainability characteristics on respondents' satisfaction as well as the economic and socio-cultural implications of the STuD. All individual values of aspects that can offer crucial criteria for establishing STo in these PAes are measured in this study.

The author's previous research was directed towards examining STo in the PAes of Vojvodina. Examining the ecological, economic, sociocultural, and institutional aspects of sustainability allowed researchers to understand the STo better. The results of this study highlighted the importance of the economic and the socio-cultural dimensions of two PAes. As there are assumptions that the economic and socio-cultural dimensions can play a driving role in the STo, economic and socio-cultural factors are extensively examined in this article. The obtained results can have a significant scientific contribution because a comparative analysis of sustainability in two different PAes was carried out.

## 3. Research Areas

Lake Balaton is located in the western part of Hungary [70]. The lake was formed about 20,000 years ago from several smaller bodies of water. Wetlands around the lake were a significant problem for the local population until the 19th century, hampering local trade and transport. The lake has a total area of 673 $km^2$ and is relatively shallow, with a depth between 4 and 12.2 m [71]. Lake water today represents an important resource for the development of tourism and water sports. Many domestic and international tourists visit this tourist destination, with over 100,000 visitors per year [72]. On the northern side of Lake Balaton is the small lake Kis-Balaton, which is part of the Ramsar Convention. Kis-Balaton Lake is an important wetland and habitat for a large number of endangered and rare species of flora and fauna. This lake is part of the BUNP, which was established in 1997 and covers a total area of 56,997 hectares [73]. This protected area has an international category of protection: UNESCO Geopark, NATURA 2000, and IBA, while according to the IUCN, it belongs to the II category—National Park. The Republic of Hungary has 10 national parks, covering an area of over 4,366,497 $km^2$ [70–73].

The PNP is located in the northern part of Vojvodina, near the Serbian and Hungarian borders [74]. The PAe covers an area of 725.71 ha. The main potential of this PAe is the

lake of the same name with an area of 5.6 km$^2$ [75,76]. The water and mud of the lake have certain healing properties [77,78]. The lake belongs to the group of shallow and salty lakes, was created by the action of the winds, and is 8 km long [75,76]. The average depth of the lake today is 1.5 to 2 m. Due to the favorable water temperatures, the swimming season lasts throughout the summer. The transparency of the water in the lake is very low, ranging from 20 to 100 cm. A protection zone of 986.65 ha has been established around the PAe [74,75]. A significant value is the good traffic connection with cities in Serbia and the region, which affects the good geographical position of the PNP. This protected area is visited by over 30,000 visitors per year (domestic and foreign). In Serbia, this represents a significant number of visitors. In addition to the above, the population that inhabits the cities and settlements near the PNP is characterized by a rich ethnic diversity. Serbs, Hungarians, Slovaks, Romanians, Croats, Roma, and other peoples live here, forming a unique ethnic community with a rich cultural heritage [79]. These socio-cultural aspects of ToD can be of great importance when planning and developing sustainable forms of tourism with a complementary character [80]. These include cuisine, customs, domestic crafts, domestic products, events, cultural institutions, traditional music, and others. The proximity of major cities in Serbia and in the region represents an important tourism-geographical potential [79]. There are five national parks in the Republic of Serbia, covering more than 97,000 hectares. Two areas are now being considered for national park protection.

The locations of the Balaton Uplands National Park and Palić Nature Park can be seen in Figure 1.


**Figure 1.** Locations of the Balaton Uplands National Park and Palić Nature Park. Source: Trišić, I., author.

According to the IUCN, this PAe belongs to Category IV—*Habitat and Species Management Area*. The international protection status of the PNP is obtained by entering the list of important areas for birds—IBA and plants—IPA. It is part of NATURA 2000 [81].

The potential of health tourism is reflected in the possibility of treatment in the Palić SPA and more recently in the application of modern methods in health tourism through wellness and SPA programs. The water of the lake is to a certain extent salty, which gives it a medicinal character, important for the development of health tourism [82–84]. The medicinal mud of the lake completes the health significance [85–88]. It is suitable for the treatment of rheumatic and skin diseases, gynecological problems, nerve inflammation, and many other health problems.

It is necessary to enhance both areas' social and economic conditions. The socio-economic characteristics of the population inhabiting these areas are very rich. They are distinguished by their diverse traditions, crafts and skills in making local products,

language, culture, customs, cuisine, original folk melodies, the way houses are built, and other characteristics. It is obvious that all this can represent important complementary tourist development motives, which have not been used to any significant extent so far. The development of sustainable tourism can greatly improve the financial condition of the local population. By analyzing the aforementioned literature that studies the investigated protected areas, it can be concluded that both areas are located in regions that have a multifunctional economic purpose. Around both protected areas, the primary activity is agriculture. This is understandable because this part of Europe is part of the former Pannonian Sea. This vast body of water has vanished, leaving behind fertile land that is currently used by both nations to produce agricultural crops. In addition, intensive and extensive animal husbandry is present around both protected areas. As there are larger cities in the vicinity, the presence of industry and traffic can also be noted, while tourism in both areas is developed as a tertiary sector of the economy. The population living next to these PAes is characterized by a very diverse ethnic structure. Representatives of local communities have a rich cultural heritage that can be part of the integral tourist offer of this region. The local community does not receive sufficient employment opportunities through many forms of tourism such as wellness and SPA tourism, trips, and sports tourism. Event and educational tourism can have a great economic impact on providing economic benefits for the local community. By promoting well-planned tourism, different categories of visitors can be attracted. Unlike the protected area of BUNP, there is a smaller number of tourist infrastructure facilities in PNP. These are tourist accommodation facilities that are not large enough to accommodate larger tourism.

Activities that can impact economic sustainability include the rental of sporting goods and infrastructure for the demands of nautical tourism, the collection of taxes and admission fees, and the need for increased numbers of visitors in addition to the integration of events, health, and sports tourism in the tourism offer. Securing revenue may also depend on the collection of transport ecological fees. Significant potential for job creation in the tourism industry is highlighted by research into the economic elements of tourism development [12–14]. Until now, this potential has been used for the development of recreational and health tourism, in which the role of residents was at a very low level. Local businesses and crafts can benefit from the growth of several types of tourism, including events, wine tourism, scientific-research tourism, culture, and educational tourism. Their increased involvement in the tourist industry is a crucial long-term endeavor.

## 4. Materials and Methods

This study is a continuation of research into sustainable tourism in the protected areas of Vojvodina and surrounding countries. The authors examined in detail the economic and socio-cultural dimensions of sustainable tourism. By considering these two pillars of sustainable tourism in detail, reliable data can be obtained on how to best use the economic and social potential without negatively affecting the ecology of the destination [89]. The authors selected two protected areas where the lake is the primary tourist resource. That is why tourists who visit these destinations prefer nature-based tourism, water sports, trips, hiking, and ecotourism. Due to the difference in the area of the protected area and the lake, the construction of tourist infrastructure, ecosystems, and legal regulations, the same number and structure of visitors is not possible. From the aforementioned, the authors examined the impact of sustainable tourism on the satisfaction of a very different structure of visitors. The authors intended to determine whether the impact of sustainable tourism on visitors depends on the structure of the protected area.

This paper applied the PoS research paradigm to analyze the socio-cultural and economic aspects of tourism development. It is the Prism of Sustainability model, which

is designed to examine certain potentials that are grouped into variables (dimensions of sustainability). The authors chose the PoS research model because it allows for the examination of various factors that can contribute to the development of tourism in destinations. The factors examined are grouped into variables (dimensions), which enables their detailed analysis. Each factor can have a greater or lesser impact on the state of tourism. As such, this research model can identify these impacts. In this article, the economic and socio-cultural aspects are explored. The survey consisted of two lake-protected areas where specific tourism activities are now being conducted. The authors have chosen to examine the economic and socio-cultural dimensions of sustainable tourism, in order to reach the most reliable scientific results with a detailed examination of these factors.

This study adopted quantitative techniques, with the aim of collecting data through surveying respondents. A questionnaire is the research tool utilized in this study. The research model is structured according to the research models of Cottrell and Raadik [4], Stojanović et al. [57], and Trišić et al. [21]. Defining the research method in this article follows the research of Cottrell et al. [55], Asmelash and Kumar [56], and Stojanović et al. [57]. According to these studies, the main research variables were conceived, the values of which should be examined using questionnaires and surveys as a tool. According to that research, the items in the questionnaire for this research were formed.

The research questionnaire is divided into several parts. The first part contains the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents (gender, age structure, and level of education). The second part contains a total of 28 items, which are divided into two dimensions of sustainability. The third part of the questionnaire contains four items related to respondents' satisfaction with sustainable tourism. The economic dimension of sustainability includes employment of the local population, tourist consumption in the destination, purchase of domestic and local products, collection of entrance fees and taxes, registration fees for education, per diems for guides, tourism infrastructure and facilities, and other factors. The socio-cultural dimension includes factors related to local products and the promotion of local culture, the role of the local population in the development of tourism, and the attitude towards visitors, as well as other factors.

The survey was conducted via social networks (online). The electronic questionnaire was placed within thematic social groups and applications. Members of the groups or visitors to those groups could fill in the questionnaire (online) independently and voluntarily. On that occasion, the method of random sampling was used. Respondents who visited the protected areas under investigation could fill out the questionnaire voluntarily. By filling out the questionnaire, the respondents gave their consent to ensure that the results could be used for research purposes. Filling in the questionnaire was completely anonymous because the questionnaire does not contain the personal data of the respondents. The research was conducted in two stages during 2024. The first stage was realized from May to the end of July, while the second stage was realized from the beginning of September to the end of November. The survey was conducted side by side for both protected areas at the same time.

The presentation of the research model in this article can be seen in Figure 2.

Participants in the survey ranked their answers to the questions on a five-point Likert scale. On this scale, response number 1 indicates complete disagreement, while a response number 5 indicates complete agreement with the item [2,21,89]. The correctness of the completed questionnaires was carried out individually for each questionnaire. The validity of the given answers was tested with Cronbach's alpha within the SPSS v.25 software [90,91]. According to Cortina [92] and Nunnally and Bernstein [93], the assumption was used that any value $\alpha \geq 0.60$ can be accepted for analysis as a reliable value. The individual impact of the dimensions of sustainability on the respondents' satisfaction with sustainable tourism

was examined by applying a simple linear regression to the independent variable, within the framework of statistical data processing.

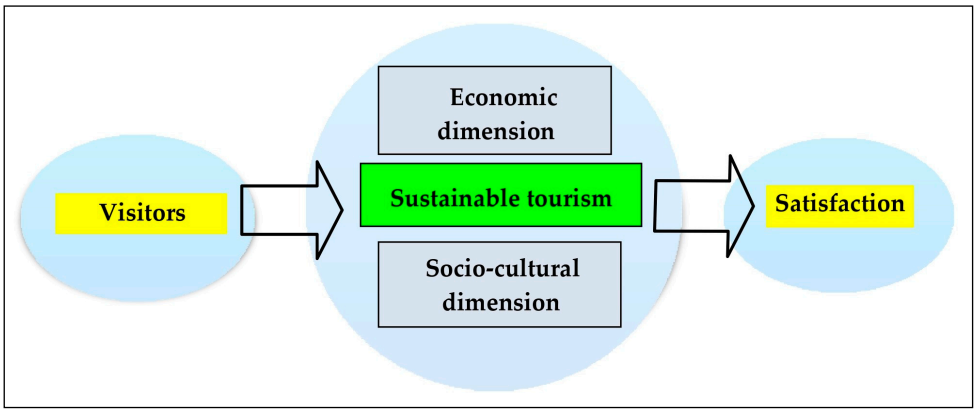


**Figure 2.** Presentation of the research model. Source: Trišić, I., author.

## 5. Results

Once the surveying process was finished, the completed questionnaires were checked to make sure all the questions were answered accurately and that they were suitable for statistical analysis. A total of 810 visitors were surveyed (450 visitors in Hungary and 360 visitors in Vojvodina). If the structure of respondents is analyzed according to the place from which visitors come, it can be concluded that 60% of foreign visitors were surveyed in Hungary. A total of 40% of foreign visitors were surveyed in Vojvodina. The countries from which the visitors come are Hungary (18%), Croatia (16%), North Macedonia (14%), Montenegro (13%), Romania (11%), Switzerland (10%), Austria (9%), and others.

All respondents were between the ages of 18 and 78 years. The average age of the respondents was 45 years. The age structure of the respondents is as follows: from 18 to 24 years (14%), 25–34 (21%), 35–44 (29%), 45–54 (20%), 55–64 (12%), and over 65 (4%). A total of 16% of respondents had primary education. In total, 45% of the respondents had a secondary education, while 24% had a higher or high-school education, and 15% of the respondents have a master's or doctorate degree. Out of the total number of respondents, 52% were women.

After statistical processing of the data with SPSS software v.25 (IBM, Armonk, NY, USA), an analysis of the average values for each dimension of sustainability and all items that were distributed in the two investigated variables/dimensions was performed. All items were used in the form in which they appear in the questionnaire. The obtained values can be shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Average values of sustainability items (n = 810).

| Items | PNP (n = 360) | | | BUNP (n = 450) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Dimensions** | **AVE** | **α** | **Mean** | **AVE** | **α** | **Mean** |
| **Economic** | | **0.777** | **3.69** | | **0.811** | **4.13** |
| There are facilities for the accommodation of tourists | 0.61 | | 3.66 | 0.64 | | 4.09 |
| There are restaurants with national cuisine | 0.69 | | 4.01 | 0.58 | | 4.11 |
| There are educational centers | 0.77 | | 3.17 | 0.74 | | 4.09 |
| Residents are employed in the area | 0.53 | | 3.21 | 0.78 | | 4.10 |

**Table 2.** *Cont.*

| Items | PNP (n = 360) | | | BUNP (n = 450) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Dimensions** | **AVE** | **α** | **Mean** | **AVE** | **α** | **Mean** |
| In the area, there are shops with local products | 0.73 | | 3.86 | 0.64 | | 3.88 |
| Visitors to the area support the charging of entrance fees | 0.64 | | 3.12 | 0.79 | | 4.07 |
| There are souvenirs | 0.59 | | 4.22 | 0.68 | | 4.31 |
| Local transport operates to the area | 0.64 | | 4.13 | 0.72 | | 4.21 |
| There are roads to the area | 0.83 | | 4.01 | 0.79 | | 4.17 |
| There are sports facilities and fields | 0.64 | | 3.22 | 0.71 | | 4.05 |
| Water sports equipment can be rented | 0.66 | | 3.81 | 0.77 | | 3.96 |
| Hiking and trim trails have been built in the area | 0.79 | | 4.24 | 0.82 | | 4.31 |
| There is a visitor/tourist center for tourists | 0.72 | | 2.64 | 0.79 | | 4.21 |
| There is a tourist organization to provide important information | 0.78 | | 4.14 | 0.85 | | 4.22 |
| In the area, there is an opportunity for the development of various forms of tourism | 0.64 | | 4.26 | 0.79 | | 4.25 |
| The nature protection is promoted | 0.69 | | 4.01 | 0.88 | | 4.12 |
| Residents are employed as local guides | 0.77 | | 3.03 | 0.74 | | 3.98 |
| **Socio-cultural** | | **0.802** | **3.48** | | **0.786** | **3.71** |
| There are cultural institutions | 0.86 | | 3.45 | 0.57 | | 3.92 |
| There are local events | 0.79 | | 4.02 | 0.64 | | 4.09 |
| There is interaction with the locals | 0.78 | | 3.41 | 0.74 | | 3.89 |
| Residents educate visitors about local culture | 0.64 | | 3.41 | 0.82 | | 3.39 |
| Residents are hospitable to visitors | 0.69 | | 3.47 | 0.78 | | 4.01 |
| Visitors can learn about local cuisine | 0.81 | | 3.12 | 0.62 | | 3.08 |
| There is a promotion of local music | 0.88 | | 3.62 | 0.74 | | 3.41 |
| There is a local customs | 0.69 | | 3.21 | 0.77 | | 3.29 |
| There is a promotion of area protection | 0.82 | | 4.02 | 0.86 | | 4.11 |
| Local ethnic accommodation is available to visitors | 0.68 | | 3.41 | 0.71 | | 3.87 |
| Visitors can learn about local crafts | 0.86 | | 3.14 | 0.72 | | 3.73 |

Items measured on a 5-point Likert agreement scale; α—Cronbach alpha reliability.

Analyzing the data in the last tabular presentation, it can be concluded that the overall values of both dimensions of sustainability have a coefficient $\alpha > 0.60$, so it can be considered that all values are valid for statistical analysis. Also, if the AVE values are analyzed, the same conclusion is reached.

Table 3 shows the results related to the survey of respondents' satisfaction with STo. The items in Table 3 correspond to the evaluation of respondents' satisfaction with sustainable tourism and are a fundamental component of the survey questionnaire.

After determining the average values for questions related to respondents' satisfaction with the state of tourism in these PAes, a simple linear regression was applied in order to determine the degree of impact of Sto on respondents' satisfaction. The assumption is that there is 35% satisfaction for PNP ($R_1^2 = 0.348$) and 32% for BUNP ($R_1^2 = 0.319$). This can be shown in Table 4.

**Table 3.** Satisfaction of visitors with sustainable tourism.

| Index | PNP (n = 360) | | | BUNP (n = 450) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Standardized Factor Loading | $\alpha$ | Mean | Standardized Factor Loading | $\alpha$ | Mean |
| | | **0.718** | **3.94** | | **0.811** | **4.14** |
| I am satisfied because tourism creates benefits for the area, residents, and visitors | 0.67 | | 4.11 | 0.68 | | 4.17 |
| I am satisfied with tourism in the protected area | 0.82 | | 3.49 | 0.80 | | 3.71 |
| I am satisfied with the overall economic opportunities | 0.73 | | 3.64 | 0.62 | | 3.84 |
| Cultural attractions and events make me satisfied | 0.70 | | 3.41 | 0.58 | | 3.68 |

**Table 4.** Regression analysis on respondents' satisfaction.

| Index | PNP | | BUNP | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | $\beta$ [1] | *p*-Value | $\beta$ [1] | *p*-Value |
| Economic dimension | 0.111 | 0.063 | 0.189 | 0.022 |
| Socio-cultural dimension | 0.177 | 0.152 | 0.272 | 0.109 |

[1] Standardized $\beta$ value used; $R_1^2 = 0.348$; $R_2^2 = 0.319$.

## 6. Discussion

Two protected areas were chosen for sustainable tourism research to compare the collected data and produce the most accurate findings. These two research destinations differ in their size and tourism volume. Common to both researched areas are wetlands as the basic potential for the development of nature-based tourism [94,95]. If the individual values for both dimensions of sustainability are analyzed, it can be concluded that the obtained results for Balaton Lake have significantly higher average values (mean). This can be related to the fact that this tourist destination has been more significantly implemented in the tourist offer and is visited by a larger number of tourists than before. The economic dimension for both examined areas has slightly higher values (3.69 and 4.13) in relation to the socio-cultural DoSs (3.48 and 3.71). The visitors singled out the importance of local crafts, products, accommodation facilities, and the promotion of local culture as the most important economic factors. In addition, the respondents pointed out that the presence of infrastructure is important for the development of nature-based tourism and activities that improve the ecological values of protected areas. This information is important for the development of local tourism development strategies and advanced management

processes [96,97]. As the most important socio-cultural factors, respondents singled out the value of the role of the local population in planning the development of tourism, local events, educational activities, improvement of existing forms of tourism, customs, cuisine, folk melos, and other values.

If the displayed values for items related to visitor satisfaction are analyzed (Table 3), it can be concluded that the respondents in both investigated protected areas are satisfied because there are opportunities to improve the state of tourism in these destinations. The values that had the greatest impact on the respondents' satisfaction are the items that indicate that the development of tourism creates different benefits for all subjects in tourism (4.11 and 4.17) and the possibility for economic opportunities (3.64 and 3.84). As with the presentation of the values of the dimensions of sustainability, also with respect to the respondents' satisfaction, slightly higher average values are also present in the examination of sustainable tourism in BUMP. This can be related to the degree of development of the destination and the finances invested in the growth of sustainable tourism. The significance of this research lies in the fact that this indicator, which was derived from a comparison analysis, can be crucial for developing strategy and planning documents pertaining to tourism growth in other PAes.

Although individual items have relatively different values, they are certainly above average. This points to the conclusion that for the respondents of both PAes, the existence of economic and socio-cultural potentials for the development of SuT is important. By applying a simple regression analysis, the influence of the examined DoSs on the satisfaction of residents with STo can be examined. If the values shown in the last table are analyzed, it can be concluded that the economic and socio-cultural DoSs have a significant impact on the respondents' satisfaction with STo ($0.022 > p > 0.152$). Using regression analysis, it was determined that SuT of PAes has a significant impact on visitor satisfaction, which is the main research question in this article.

By analyzing the values of the examined sustainability dimensions for both PAes, it can be concluded that the existence of economic and socio-cultural factors is important for the development of a destination. The obtained values can indicate the state of sustainable tourism. If these results are compared with the results of previous research, it can be concluded that, in addition to the ecological and institutional dimensions, these two dimensions are equally important for the examination of sustainable tourism in PAes.

What distinguishes this research from the previous ones is that in this article special attention was focused on the analysis of the economic and socio-cultural aspects of the ToD. Economic and socio-cultural tourism factors examined in detail in the PAes can have a great impact on the strengthening of ecological activities. Through tourism, visitors' and residents' awareness of the importance of protecting nature, flora, and fauna is strengthened. This can also contribute to the development of various environmental actions. More mass tourism creates the need to strengthen institutions. If tourism in the PAe develops in the direction of the economy, ecology, institutions, and socio-culture, it can be viewed from the aspect of the STo.

Similar research on sustainable tourism in protected areas has been conducted in numerous countries around the world. The goal of all research was to examine the importance of tourism development for a certain area, economy, and local population [1–8]. In these studies, responsible tourism is characterized as sustainable tourism. Such tourism should achieve positive impacts on the ecology, population, economy, and institutions. In the research that served in the conception of this research model, the tourism of protected areas was examined through four dimensions of sustainability. The results of the research indicate the exceptional importance of ecological and socio-cultural sustainability for the local population, visitors, and managers. Improvements in the preservation of ecosystems, geological

formations, socio-cultural values, and—above all—the local population's contribution to the sustainable growth of tourism are all examples of this. The planning of tourism development in protected areas, which ought to be centered on nature-based tourism, is impossible without the participation of local community representatives. Among the conclusions of the research on sustainable tourism, it is emphasized that protected areas, due to their attractiveness, can be important destinations where sustainable forms of tourism can be planned and developed, without negative impacts on the environment.

The inability to examine the realized finances based on support from the government and ministries was one of the research's primary limitations. Although important financial projects related to the development of infrastructure and tourism in PAes are being implemented, residents and visitors do not have such information. In the context of the previously mentioned, the authors intend to focus their future research on analyzing the implementation of several capital projects that may directly affect the growth of STo in the PAes. The ecological and institutional components of sustainability—the other two aspects of STo—will also be thoroughly examined by the authors. This approach facilitates the creation of more dependable scientific outcomes concerning the feasibility of various STo concepts and the development of a distinctive tourism program.

The study's intended scientific contribution could be described as the possible use of these research findings to investigate STo in other national or international protected areas. The fact that the research's discovery may assist in the creation of strategic initiatives for the ToD plan and the identification of types of tourism in these areas further supports the scientific value of the study. Since the primary purpose of these PAes is environmental conservation, the types of tourism that take place there also need to have an ecological foundation. The results of this research can be used by managers of other protected areas when developing tourism development strategies and when managing protected areas.

## 7. Conclusions

The growth of the tourism industry has increased the need for more efficient management of tourism development in different destinations. The growth of tourism has various positive and negative impacts [98–102]. The influences of tourism are manifested in the local economy, local population, and landscape. The main positive economic and socio-cultural effects of tourism relate to the income of the local population, the effect on the national income, employment, the strengthening of the local economy and infrastructure, etc. [103–105]. Also, tourism can contribute to the protection of space, conservation, and revaluation of the socio-cultural and natural environment. However, tourism can also bring various problems such as excessive economic dependence on tourism and deterioration of the ecological quality of the destination, change or loss of local identity and values. This article examines the impacts of the economic and socio-cultural dimensions of sustainability on the state of tourism in a protected area. Economic and socio-cultural dimensions were selected as the basis for examining the state and perspective of STo in these PAes. The tourism system is changing due to the impact of numerous external and social factors. This points to the fact that changes in trends in society affect processes in tourism.

The most important economic impacts of tourism can be described as support for the development of remote and peripheral areas, employment opportunities (especially for women and marginalized groups), increase in living standards, increase in investments in new types of business, development of small businesses in local ownership and diversification of the economy, and the creation of economic prerequisites for the protection and preservation of natural and cultural heritage [106,107].

The socio-cultural impacts of tourism are increasing the level of local participation in tourism-related events, strengthening cultural values and traditions within the destination,

eliminating ethnic and cultural prejudices, encouraging local pride and civic activism, and exposure to new ideas through globalization [108–110].

The analysis of the research results suggests that tourism planning in PAes should focus on zoning, site development, accommodation capacity, density of tourism development, presentation of cultural, historical and natural tourist values, and provision of infrastructure, including roads, trade, facilities, and events. Tourism planning should be essential for the sustainability of a destination. Planning must encourage the conservation of the resources on which tourism depends, as well as improve the quality of life of local residents.

By analyzing the results of the research in this article, it can be concluded that the visitors of the protected area are significantly satisfied with sustainable tourism. It is influenced by the construction of tourism infrastructure, the possibility of developing different forms of tourism, the control of the impact of tourism on the environment, the establishment of a protection regime, the satisfaction of the local population and visitors, and other aspects. Investment in tourism within the protected areas should be aimed at strengthening specific forms of tourism. As the basic natural resources of these areas are wetlands and landscapes, the forms of tourism must be harmonized with them [111–113]. Cultural forms of tourism can have a complementary character. With nature-based forms of tourism, cultural forms of tourism can create an authentic tourism offer.

In previous studies that served to define the research model, the results indicate the importance of the ecological and socio-cultural dimensions of sustainability. The economic dimension of sustainability did not have a significant contribution to sustainable tourism, except for the examined destinations where tourism is developed at a higher level. The feature of mass tourism is present in these destinations. A significant absence of visitors results in lower economic income from tourism. This is not the case with developed destinations where tourism is not properly planned and controlled. It is evident that these destinations lack economic sustainability. In these areas, economic sustainability is exclusively linked to tourist traffic and tourist consumption. This is one of the results of this research that distinguishes this study from previous research. Also, the results of this research indicate the presence of significant potential for the development of ecotourism, sports, scientific research, educational, health, and cultural tourism. These are the possibilities that can be included in the planning process of tourism development. As such, they can contribute significant economic benefits to the local population and the local economy. The statement is subject to the PAes strengthening of sustainability's socio-cultural component, which will accelerate economic sustainability. This causal relationship is a significant result of this research. If this result is compared with previous research, it can be concluded that the ecological and institutional dimensions of sustainability influenced the economic and socio-cultural dimensions of sustainability.

Through the examination of the outcomes related to the impact of STo on the satisfaction of the local population and tourists, it can be said that the economic and socio-cultural factors of sustainability have a significant impact on satisfaction. The economic dimension of sustainability is manifested through the increase in jobs for the local population, the availability of local products, the collection of entrance fees and taxes, the payment of registration fees for education, the collection of rental equipment, the rental of guides, and other activities.

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