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Importance of the Ramsar Site Labudovo Okno for Sustainable Tourism—Evidence from Vojvodina Province

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Abstract: The Ramsar Site Labudovo Okno (LO) is located in Vojvodina, on the left bank of the Danube. It covers an area of 3733 ha. This wet habitat is valuable for different ecosystems, among which the most important are those inhabited by rare bird species. The main natural resources are wetlands, created by the Danube in this shallow part of its flow. Thirty-seven sustainable tourism (ST) indicators were used to assess the current status and future prospects of tourist growth in the LO. For this study, a total of 625 respondents (255 tourists and 370 residents) were asked through a questionnaire to evaluate the current tourism and the impact on their satisfaction. Additionally, they showed that some resources are either misused or not used sufficiently, which has a detrimental effect on the LO. Part of the research was to determine how satisfied respondents were with ST. Although tourism in LO still has no important mass features, the respondents' satisfaction with sustainable LO tourism is present to a significant extent. This is vital for ST and the creation of local tourism strategies, because the need for greater valorization of natural and social values, as well as the establishment of the roles of all subjects of tourism development, has been noticed. Certainly, nature-based, ecotourism, scientific research, and nautical and bird-watching tourism must be the primary forms of tourist movements in the LO.

Keywords: Ramsar site; nature-based tourism; wetlands; ecotourism; protected areas



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1. Introduction

The Ramsar Site Labudovo Okno (LO) lies in the southern region of the Pannonian Plain, in southeastern Vojvodina, near the border with Romania. This locality is part of the Deliblato Sands Special Nature Reserve (DS), which represents a large floodplain of the Danube River, on its left bank. Many marsh terrains and wetlands, river banks, and canals make up this protected area. LO covers an area of 3733 ha. The settlements of Bela Crkva, Vračev Gaj, Banatska Palanka, Gaj, Šumarak, Dubovac, and Kovin are in its immediate vicinity [1,2]. Good traffic and geographic positioning as well as close proximity to important cities around define LO. The Danube and Romania are near the most notable features. The complementary natural tourist value of LO is the DS, the only sands in this part of Europe. LO has international protection status: it is an important area for birds (IBA), plants (IPA), and butterflies (PBA). In 2006, The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

states that it is an internationally important wetland. In addition to the fauna of birds, reptiles, fish, and mammals, this area is characterized by very rare examples of flora [3–5].

The population that inhabits this area of southern Banat has a rich cultural heritage. Besides Serbs, the ethnic structure consists of Romanians, Hungarians, Roma, Slovaks, and other peoples [6]. This kind of information is extremely important for the development of cultural tourism forms, in which the local population should have clearly defined roles [7].

To examine the tourism development level and the conditions for its further growth, our research included the study of ST using 37 indicators and the technique of surveying respondents. The study model was conceived using the Prism of Sustainability model (PS) [8–13]. The polling was conducted with a written and online questionnaire. The research used a random sample method, and a total of 625 respondents (370 locals and 255 guests) were surveyed.

Respondents expressed their attitudes with the help of a five-point Likert scale with the statements from the questionnaire related to ST state, the possibilities for its development, and the affect of ST on respondents' contentment.

Determining whether the sustainability aspects contribute more or less to ST in LO is one of the paper's primary research objectives. Furthermore, it is essential to look at specific sustainability indicators, since these can provide insight into both the current status of tourism and its potential for growth through the creation of new tourism products.

The main research topic is the analysis of the individual dimensions of sustainability and how they affect respondents' satisfaction with ST. This would imply that with this research, conclusions can be reached with regard to which of the dimensions of sustainability are more or less crucial for the development of tourism, and which existing factors of tourism growth need to be improved. From the analysis of the questions, the article's study objective is derived.

The main objective of the research is to envisage and study the current condition of ST, the opportunities for its development, and its impact on the satisfaction of respondents. In addition, the particular goal is to assess the degree of growth of tourism and to identify factors that may influence the direction of expansion. The obtained results can provide important information that will help in the preparation of numerous planning acts of tourism development and protection studies. It will also contribute to the constitution of proposals for the creation of specific, complementary types of tourism with the basic natural resources in the LO, i.e., that are in line with ST and nature protection [14].

In this paper, the research topic is the consideration of the present situation and possibilities for the growth of particular types of tourism in the LO, which can contribute to ST maturing. Those specific tourism forms should achieve positive ecological, sociocultural, and economic effects for all subjects in a sustainable system.

This study aims to provide a scientific contribution to the significance of including conservation areas in the tourism offer based on the principles of ST. This implies an active role of the local population and their awareness of the importance of nature protection both in the local community and among visitors, through various education programs. As a result of proper tourism development, opportunities for employment and improvement in living standards for the population would be created. For ST development in conservation areas, the key elements are acceptance and tolerance of tourists by the local population [15]. To achieve these, managers of protected areas should provide residents and visitors with information important for area protection and tourism development, encourage the growth of tourism, and provide them with the opportunity to have an impact through decisions [16].

The achieved environmental and economic benefits would add to the preservation of the heritage of the LO, both natural and cultural. Proper tourism development in LO can refinance the realized income from tourism into local sectors, whose primary activity is tourism development in the LO. Therefore, ST can be an adequate model and management system for this conservation area [15,17].

The limitations of this research are that tourism development in LO has not been examined so far, nor are there any works dealing with this topic. This encouraged the

authors to study this area, knowing that this kind of pioneering research implies the absence of a comparative analysis of the obtained data with earlier research. Therefore, this paper can be used for further research by many authors.

2. Literature Review

Today, ST development is an important point of all development goals of numerous tourism subjects [18–21] and it includes a wide range of planning benefits for all interested parties in tourism [22–24]. The growth of this kind of tourism includes the establishment of travel companies aligned with ecological principles, the preservation of nature, and the development of specific tourism forms to preserve natural values, strengthening the role of the local community and creating economic profit without negative consequences for all participants in it [25–28]. The sustainability of tourism implies the improvement of existing capacities but in a high-quality way. This would mean that the expansion of the tourism sector must have ecological, economic, and sociocultural benefits [29], which cannot be planned without a clear role of the local community and tourists. Tourism consumption is a significant source of funds [30], and ST development involves minimizing planning, development, and control costs, and maximizing benefits (e.g., environmental, economic, and sociocultural). In addition, there is the involvement of the local community and the creation of positive experiences with tourists [31,32]. The paradigm of ST development includes economic, sociocultural, and ecological dimensions [33]. It is difficult to achieve a balance between these three classical dimensions of ST without the institutional dimension of sustainability, which describes the oversight, management, and facilitation of the growth of tourism [34,35].

Within the tourist market, nature-based and responsible tourism has the fastest development, because this type of tourist movement—returning to nature—is constantly increasing in the 21st century [36–38]. Eco-destinations, protected areas, maritime areas, nature parks, rural areas and ethnic villages, mountain lodges, and eco-resorts are increasingly the subject of tourist demand [39,40].

The ST generates numerous activities aimed at achieving different results, such as economic development, strengthening tourist consumption, improving awareness about the preservation of environmental resources, and applying numerous ethical principles [41,42]. Reducing the negative impacts of tourism is one of the primary objectives of environmentally responsible travel [43]. The results of certain research indicate that “responsible tourists” show a high level of understanding the concept of environmental protection, which is a basic criterion when choosing a tourist destination. Such tourists prefer all activities aimed at ST improvement in the destination [44].

Proper monitoring of tourism development in conservation areas can contribute to the tourist attendance rate, which further affects income from tourist consumption [45,46]. Precisely, part of such income can be directed to the ecological development of the destination, which is one of the basic objectives of ST improvement, as well as the determination of the function of preserved areas in the tourism offer.

In the research by Maksin et al. [47], Sanchez et al. [48], and Stojanović [15], the control of wastewater and exhaust gases, zoning, carrying capacity, limit of acceptable changes, planned construction of infrastructure, and other measures, are specified as significant for space protection. These pieces of research are based on the fact that tourism should be developed in a planned manner in all destinations, with special emphasis on preserved areas, where tourism development should be especially controlled, with a clearly defined role of residents, visitors, and stakeholders.

Tourism growth in preserved areas is affected by various elements like the preservation of the area, the level of space utilization, occupancy capacities, the role of the locals, sociocultural variables, the tourism influence on the community’s economy, trash management, growth control, etc. [29,40,49–55]. Potential threats can include over-tourism, an increased number of tourists and residents within the restricted region and the area’s surrounding safe zone. In addition, there are other threats to the ecological, economic, and

sociocultural environment, such as air and water pollution, detrimental anthropogenic activities for the ecosystem, costs associated with reconstruction and protection, adverse social effects, economic inefficiency brought on by the emergence of uncontrolled tourism forms, and others. Precisely, it is ST that can be used as a stabilizer for numerous potential negative implications of unplanned tourism development [8,56–60].

Hussain et al. [11] studied ST in two conserved areas in India, Gharana Wetland, and Ramnagar Wildlife Sanctuary. The study employed the PS model. Using a questionnaire, four aspects of sustainability were utilized to evaluate the residents' attitudes: institutional, social, ecological, and economic. Four research hypotheses were tested by applying SEM statistical analysis. The study's findings suggest all hypotheses have been confirmed, i.e., each of the four sustainability dimensions affects residents' satisfaction with ST.

Trišić et al. [8] examined the tourism in the Nature Park "Rusanda" and how it affects the extent to which locals and tourists become satisfied. By applying the PoS model in the research, 840 respondents (both local and guests) were contacted in total using the polling technique. The outcomes of the study show that the factors that most significantly affect the condition of ST are the ecological and social aspects of sustainability. The economic and institutional dimensions of sustainability are based on indicators that point to certain interventions needed during tourism planning and development in this protected area. In addition, the main objective was to examine whether ST has an impact on the satisfaction of respondents, which this research confirmed. The most important factors in tourism evolution in protected areas are those related to the natural and social elements of the destination and the economic, ecological, and cultural aspects of tourism [61–63]. The completion of destination construction, the impact of the natural world and space on the rise in tourism, the contribution by locals to ST, and the implementation of regulatory safeguards have all received special attention. Possibilities for various specific nature-based tourism forms, enhancement of regional customs, carrying capacity, utilization of resources, and other factors are also highlighted [64,65].

Jeelani et al. [13] examined the state and perspectives of environmentally conscious tourism in the Himalayan Pahalgam, a sensitive ecosystem with a fragile resource base and limited capacities for the local population. The main goal of this research was to examine the attitude of local communities about the sustainable development of tourism, using the SUS-TAS statistical model in their research. Structured questionnaires were used to collect data, and the SUS-TAS model was used to analyze the opinions of the local community towards ST development. The results of the research indicate that representatives of the local community agree with six constructions of ST development, out of the seven surveyed. The local population expressed their understanding of ST, which has its benefits when segmenting management priorities while respecting the needs and rights of the local population [66,67]. The acceptance and tolerance of the local population towards tourists are the basic prerequisites for ST development [68–70].

This research was conceptualized using the models that have been described above. It is questionable how specific respondents, or groups of respondents, interpreted particular statements and problems concerning ST. In fact, it indicates a research gap in this article. More precisely, the issue is whether the respondents are capable of comprehending a given topic and providing a suitable response. The authors tried to overcome this research gap in the best possible way, and to reach valid results by applying this research model. One of the ways is to provide adequate instructions to respondents before filling out the questionnaire. During the online survey, we tried to achieve this with extensive instructions. Every responder was free to decline to answer a question that was less well known, or abandon participation at any time if they had any doubts about the accuracy of the response that was provided.

Another major research gap in this article is that ST in LO and its effect on respondents' satisfaction have not been examined so far. Studies are being conducted on the condition of the vegetation, fauna, and geological formations in LO. From the aforementioned, a

comparative analysis with previously published research results is not possible. This information makes this research unique compared to other studies.

3. Research Area

The locality—the protected area LO (the Ramsar Site) is located in South Banat in Vojvodina. Territorially, it belongs to the municipality of Bela Crkva. LO covers an area of 3733 ha. It stretches between $44^{\circ}48'22''$ N and $21^{\circ}18'26''$ E.

Its near surroundings include communities of Bela Crkva, Vračev Gaj, Banatska Palanka, Gaj, Šumarak, Dubovac, and Kovin. Spatially, LO covers the area of the Danube. It is located between Deliblato Sand in the north and Ram Lake in the south. The area covers the course and banks of the Danube, the small island in the Žilava and Čibukli rivers, flooded meanders of the Karaš River, the confluence of the Nera, the Ada Zavojska, the Mali Dunavac, and a narrow strip of the right bank of the Danube [71]. The position of LO on the map is shown in Figure 1.

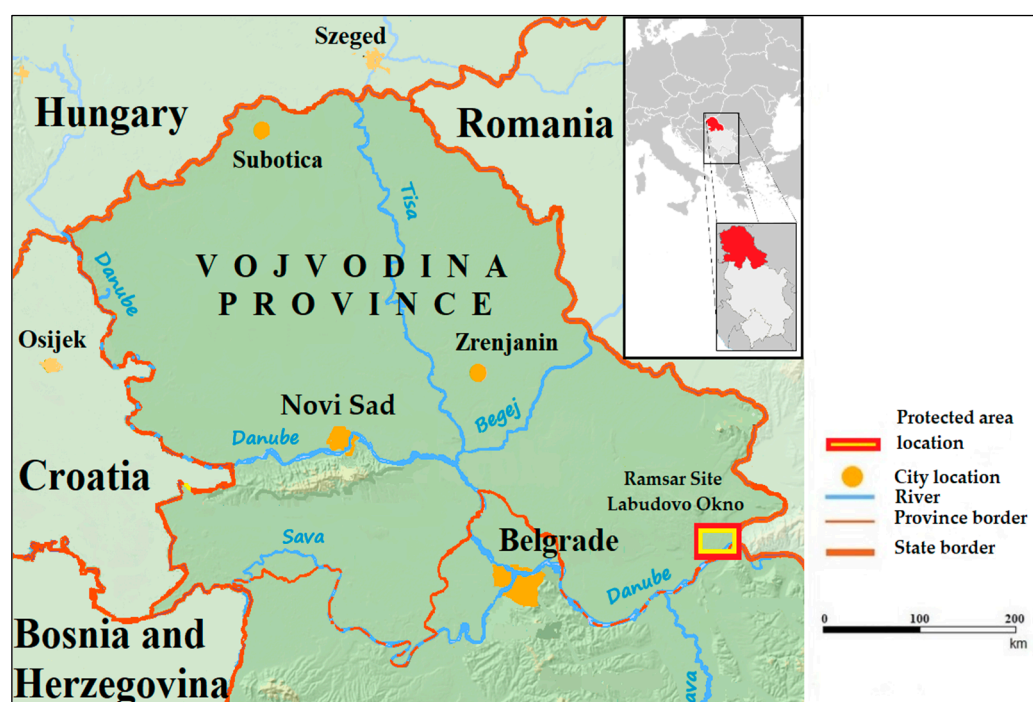


Figure 1. The LO position. Source: Trišić, I., author.

LO is located in a picturesque part of the Danube on the edge of the Pannonian Plain, situated at the most attractive location between the Ram Lake and the Deliblato Sands. The slow flow of the Danube has formed an oasis of different habitats. This protected area can be approached from the beginning of the right bank of the Danube, where the famous Ramska Fortress is located.

From the medieval Fortress of Ram (15th century) the view reaches the farthest limits of LO, and the sunset over its surface is the most beautiful sight for tourists. This Ramsar Site is displayed in Figure 2.

LO has international protection status: it is an important area for birds (IBA), plants (IPA), and butterflies (PBA), and an internationally important wetland according to The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. The IUCN classification puts LO in the IV category, which is the Habitat or Species Management Area [3].

Since the LO site is part of the DS, no valid data are available on the number of tourists visiting this protected area only. Additionally, those arriving from the right bank of the Danube can reach LO using maritime vessels. It is assumed that a disproportionately large number of scientists, researchers, and ecotourists are present in comparison to other guests.

The main activity in LO is monitoring the population and conservation of endangered birds; therefore, bird-watching tourists frequent the area. The settlements of Bela Crkva and Kovin are receptive centers, or areas where guests are accommodated. These areas have different facilities for accommodating tourists. In addition to hotels, there are also facilities for accommodation in rural areas. The development of visitor centers in LO will increase the possibility of tracking the number and type of visitors to this region.

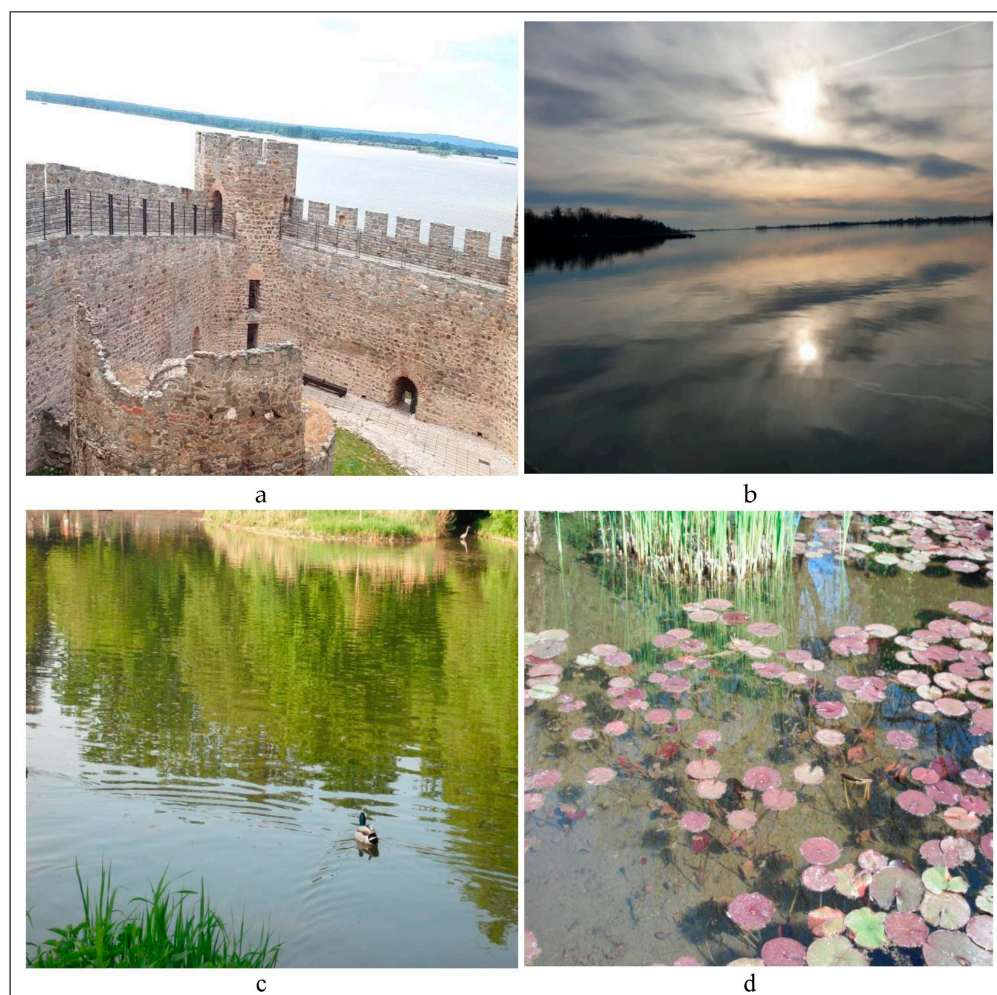


Figure 2. The appearance of the Ramsar Site, Labudovo Okno: (a) View of the protected area from Ram Fortress; (b) sunset over the Danube; (c) oasis of different habitats; and (d) biocenosis of wetland plants. Source: Štetić, S., and Trišić I., authors.

The LO was created by slowing down the flow of the Danube after the construction of the accumulation lake on Djerdap (Iron Gates). It received its name from the fact that part of the Great Marsh is inhabited by large flocks of swans every year. Water habitats consist of permanent river flows, river shallows, floodplain forests, and freshwater swamps, so different plant communities take turns in LO, from water and swamp ones to wet meadows. The most significant flora representatives are *Adonis vernalis* (IUCN—least concern, LC) and *Echinops ritro*. LO is one of the last meeting places of an increasingly rare flora of aquatic plants and endangered wetland plant species, the most important of which are *Nymphaea alba* and *Nuphar lutea* (LC). Hygrophilous forests are characterized by the presence of *Salix alba* (LC), *Populus alba* (LC), *Crataegus monogyna* (LC), *Quercus robur* (LC), *Clematis vitalba*, etc. [72,73].

This area is the most significant nesting, wintering, and migratory station of marsh birds. Fifty-five species of aquatic birds nest in LO, and they compose the majority of the list of natural rarities. Also, Labudovo Okno is the most important nesting site of *Microcarbo*

pygmaeus (LC) in Serbia and the only nesting site of *Plegadis falcinellus* (LC). Each year, the area ensures the survival of more than 20,000 individuals of wader birds, and during migrations, reproduction, and wintering, over 40,000 individuals of *Egretta garzetta* (LC), *Aythya ferina* (VU—vulnerable), and *Mergellus albellus* (LC) gather here. In this sandy bank of the Danube, the largest European colony of *Riparia riparia* (LC) can be found, with about 15,000 pairs [74].

Here is the most important wintering place (IBA) in the Balkans for *Clanga clanga* (VU), *Bucephala clangula* (LC), *Haliaeetus albicilla* (LC), and *Anser anser* (LC) (Figure 3).

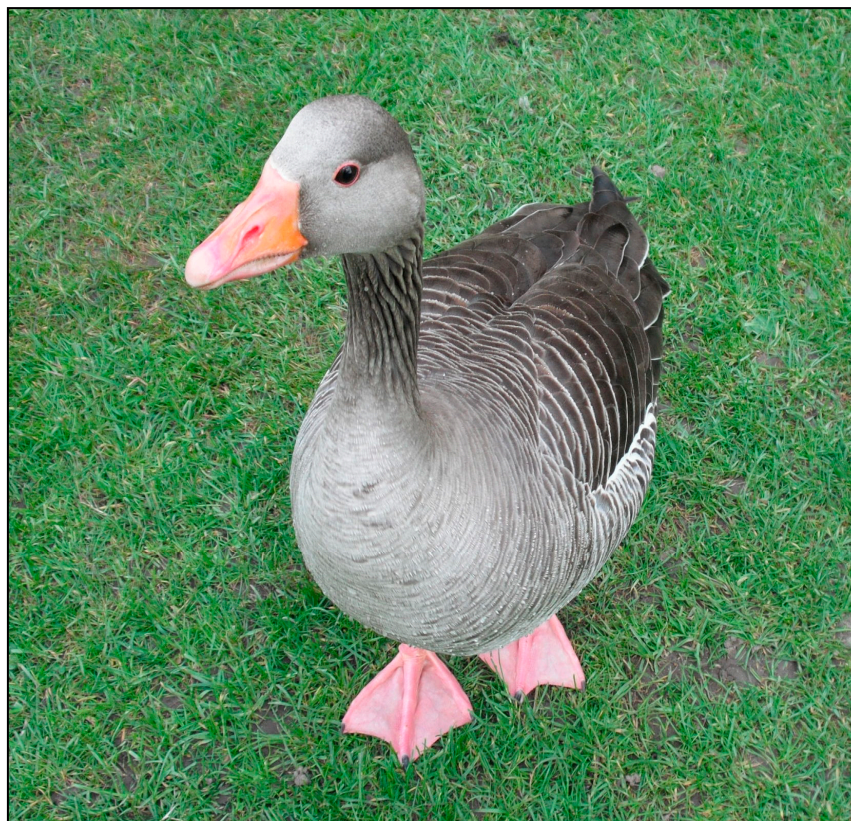


Figure 3. A rare species *Anser anser*. Source: Trišić, I., author.

The dunes and shallows of the Danube are an ideal spawning ground for many types of fish. The presence of about 50 species of fish was recorded here, the most important of which are *Cyprinus carpio* (VU), *Esox lucius* (LC), *Silurus glanis* (LC), and *Acipenser ruthenus* (VU) [1,74].

Out of 39 species of mammals, the most important is *Spalax leucodon*, from the IUCN Red List of IUCN Threatened Species. This area is their most important reproductive center in the Pannonian Plain, as well as for *Corynorhinus townsendii*, which are endangered throughout Europe, and their diet is tied to these water and wetland habitats. Marsh-swamp ecosystems are also inhabited by a permanent population of *Lutra lutra* (near threatened, NT) [74].

4. Methodology

This research is part of the overall research plan on the state of ST in the Vojvodina's natural assets, i.e., this is a continuation on the analysis of protected areas' role in the framework of ST development. The authors' study objective is to obtain more reliable scientific results through an analysis of tourism development state in every one of Vojvodina's conservation areas. The Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (APV) represents a separate geographical entity in which all 138 protected natural resources vary in the biological, ecosystem, landscape, and geological characteristics. From past and future research,

the authors want to prove that protected areas in this part of Serbia can be important ST destinations.

This research differs from the previous ones considering that it was designed based on an approach that combines qualitative and quantitative methodology. In addition, the quantitative methodology included the collection of responses from two groups of respondents: residents and visitors. This was performed to obtain more valid data on the situation and standpoint of ST growth using the comparative analysis of the given answers.

The first part of the research included qualitative research conceived on fieldwork in addition to the analysis of various written sources of data on LO. On this occasion, the degree and state of tourism in LO were determined, using 37 indicators of the state of ST. The indicators refer to the nature's condition, the level of infrastructure improvement for tourism, the level of anthropogenic influences on the environment, and opportunities for unique forms of tourism-related development such as nature-based, ecotourism, scientific research tourism, bird-watching, etc. Out of the total number of indicators (37), the last 6 indicators refer to the presence of various negative anthropogenic impacts on LO. Through indicators of ST development, significant data can be obtained that point out the state, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities for the development of specific tourism forms [28,75–77].

A quantitative approach is the basis of the second section of this study. This involves the method of using written and online questionnaires to survey participants. The respondents are residents who live near this Ramsar Site and visitors to LO. Participants were selected by the use of a random sample method. The questionnaire was completed online (with the assistance of social thematic groups or by email) and in person by polling. The reliability of the responses given in the questionnaire is ensured by the simple nature of the questions, which each individual can answer. The respondents filling in the questionnaire remain completely anonymous, so there are no elements in any part of the questionnaire that could violate the discretion of the respondents. At the same time, by answering the questions/statements, they provided their approval of the use of the research outcomes for scholarly reasons and for their publication, which is especially emphasized in the questionnaire.

The model in the second part of the study was designed according to the PS research model, based on a study of how respondents' satisfaction levels are affected by ST [8–12,78,79]. The PS research model contains a standardized questionnaire that can be used in surveying two groups of respondents about the state of ST and about what is significant; using this research model allowed us to examine the degree of influence of ST on the satisfaction of users of LO. The inclusion of other subjects of the tourism industry, such as legislators and stakeholders, will be part of the author's future studies. On that occasion, the expansion of the study area and the sample, including its structure, are planned. In addition, this research model examines the condition of ecologically responsible tourism in LO, using the ecological, economic, social, and institutional four elements of sustainability. By measuring the obtained values for each dimension, it is possible to reach the results of the individual impacts of each dimension on ST [8–11].

There are three main components to the questionnaire. The first section discusses the respondents' age, gender, and level of education, among other sociodemographic traits. There are 21 questions or statements in the second section of the questionnaire, which are divided into four categories related to sustainability. The statements relate to environmental issues about the state of the ecosystem, endangered species, anthropogenic impacts, infrastructure development, the presence and availability of local products, the presence of events, compliance with legal provisions regarding the protection of areas and species, the role of the local community in planning and controlling tourism development, and other indicators. The third part of the questionnaire includes four statements related to the level of satisfaction of respondents with environmentally conscious tourism.

The respondents grade their responses using a five-point Likert scale with the following values: 1—not completely true, 3—neutral attitude, and 5—completely true.

The research model can be seen in Figure 4.

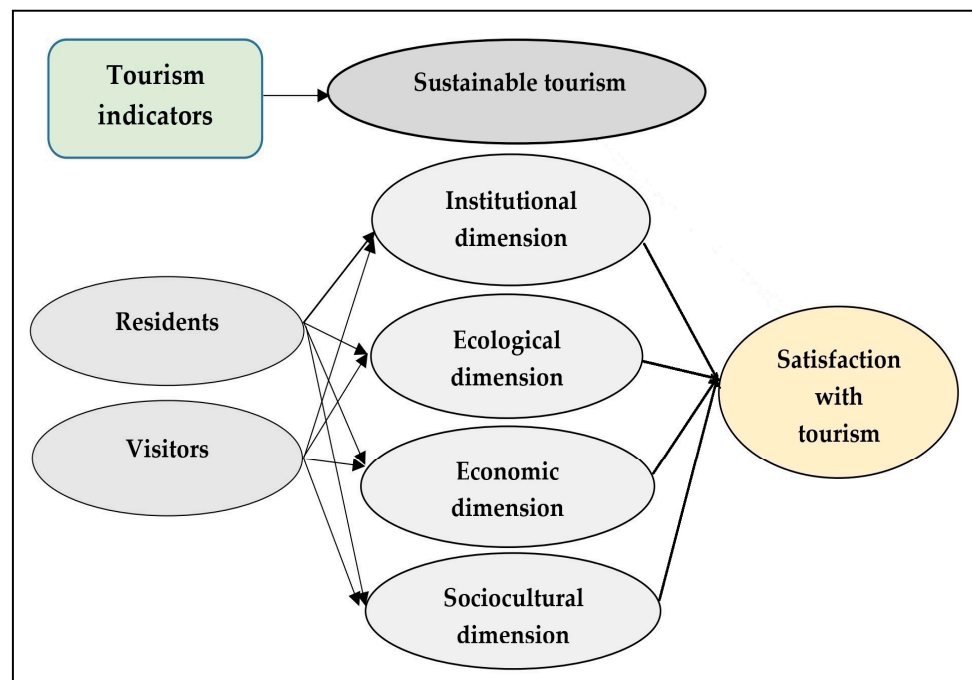


Figure 4. The conceptual model, adapted from Trišić et al. [6].

Personal control over every questionnaire guarantees the validity of the completed questionnaires. Using the statistical Cronbach Alpha coefficient SPSS v.21 software, we will determine whether the responses given in the questionnaire are valid for statistical analysis. According to Nunnally and Bernstein [80], any dimension of sustainability with a value of $\alpha > 0.60$ can be taken into consideration. The inquiry of how respondents' satisfaction is affected by ST was carried out through simple linear regression. Respondents ranked their answers to questions (statements) using a five-point Likert scale. There are twenty-one statements (questionnaires) in all. The first 17 statements in the questionnaire are grouped into four groups (four dimensions of sustainability). In this way, the value of each dimension of sustainability can be examined individually. A total of 4 statements concern the respondents' direct satisfaction with ST. This makes it possible to find out how each sustainability dimension impacts the respondents' degree of satisfaction. Its objective is to describe and quantify the relationship between two variables: X—question, predictor of independent variable (ecological, economic, sociocultural, and institutional dimensions); and Y—response, dependent variable (satisfaction of respondents with ST).

This research was conducted during the period from April to November 2023.

5. Results

To assess the level of development of ST and its perspective in LO, indicators of sustainability were determined, whose values were established by analyzing various sources of information and working in the field, by examining this protected area on site. The method of examining ST indicators can provide very significant results regarding the institutional, social, economic, and ecological values of the tourist destination [81–85]. The presentation of measured indicators can be seen in Table 1.

Indicators marked in red point to negative factors that may be a threat to the protected area.

A total of 625 individuals (370 locals and 255 tourists) were polled for this study's goals. All survey questionnaires were complete in terms of responses and were valid for analysis. A total of 36.64% of respondents (140 residents and 89 visitors) were surveyed in personal contact. The respondents to the pool were citizens of Bela Crkva, Banatska Palanka, Dubovac, and Kovin. Of all the visitors who were surveyed, 85% are domestic. Countries from which foreign visitors came (15%) are Romania, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Hungary, and others, whose portions of the total is smaller.

Table 1. Analysis of ST state.

Indicators	State
1. LO has a favorable geographical position	✓
2. LO can be reached by traffic roads	✓
3. LO has a national protection status	✓
4. LO is protected internationally	✓
5. LO has an adequate amount of integrated supporting tourism facilities	X
6. LO has accommodations and services for guests available	X
7. LO is inhabited by various species	✓
8. The local community plays an essential role in LO	X
9. Ecotourism has been developed in LO	X
10. There are sociocultural impacts of tourism in LO	X
11. There are events in LO	X
12. There are historical sites near LO	✓
13. There are educational centers in LO	X
14. There is economic profit from tourism	X
15. A visitor center has been built	X
16. Pedestrian and educational trails have been marked in LO	✓
17. There are eco trails in LO	✓
18. The carrying capacity is applied in LO	X
19. There are endemic species	✓
20. There are reintroduced species in LO	X
21. There is a possibility of excursion tourism	✓
22. There are schools in nature in LO	✓
23. There is cultural tourism near LO	✓
24. There is a possibility of developing bird-watching in the LO	✓
25. There is no waste water problem	✓
26. The LO tourism is promoted in an adequate way	X
27. Environmental benefits from the protection are visible	✓
28. Investments in LO are visible	X
29. There are hydrographic potentials in LO	✓
30. There are ethnic villages or settlements around LO	✓
31. The climate is favorable in LO	✓
1. A potential pollutant is within proximity	X
2. Natural resources are used in LO	✓
3. Domestic animals are present	✓
4. There is no contact between locals and tourists in LO	X
5. There are threatened species	✓
6. The area is surrounded by agricultural lands	✓

✓—the indicator points to the presence of a factor to a certain extent; X—indicator points to the absence of a factor.

Most of the participants (both categories) were female (57%). The average age was 37 (minimum 18, maximum 84). From the total number of participants (for both categories), the majority of them completed secondary education at 52%, 11% primary education, 33% possess college or higher education, and 4% master's or doctorate degrees.

Four sustainability dimensions are used to categorize the first seventeen statements. A five-point Likert scale was used by respondents to rank their replies to the questions. The average results of a survey conducted among residents and visitors on sustainability characteristics are displayed as they are in the questionnaire (Table 2).

Table 2. Respondents' perceptions ($n = 625$).

Items	Residents (370)		Visitors (255)	
	α	Mean	α	Mean
Dimensions				
Institutional Dimension	0.704	3.18	0.692	3.02
Trained tour guides and local community members escort visitors through the LO		2.88		3.02
Local brands are visible to visitors in LO (wineries, ethno-houses, handicrafts, local companies, etc.)		3.11		2.55
The manager's directives for the preservation of the environment and tourist activities are listened to in the LO		3.22		3.09
Information about the history of the reserve, its people, and its communities is given to visitors		3.52		3.42
Ecological dimension	0.716	3.41	0.748	3.67
Both residents and visitors play an active part in LO		4.17		4.09
Both tourists and the local population can take advantage of the amenities, services, and events offered in LO		2.09		2.93
There are tourist attractions that do not harm the environment		3.98		4.01
Economic dimension	0.710	2.99	0.693	3.28
Tourism in LO benefits the local community		2.55		3.11
In LO, tourism increases the regional economy		3.03		3.15
The local population's employment in LO is influenced by tourism		2.01		2.49
Visitors can purchase local products		3.24		3.55
The costs of domestic products are supported by tourists		4.12		4.09
Sociocultural dimension	0.744	4.15	0.697	4.02
Guests are attracted to handmade goods and crafts		4.42		4.13
Residents and visitors interact		4.11		4.01
Tourists are curious about regional customs and traditions		4.09		3.88
Tourists attend local cultural events and attractions		4.05		4.01
Historical sites attract the curiosity of visitors		4.09		4.07

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

Individual average values for the four dimensions of sustainability, for both groups of respondents, can be seen in Figure 5.

Since satisfaction has a direct connection with quality, it is undoubtedly possible to see the quality of this space through these data, which is also emphasized in this paper. The statements are presented as defined in the questionnaire (Table 3).

Regression analysis can be used to ascertain the influence of sustainability dimensions on tourism development, i.e., the impact of ST on the satisfaction of respondents [8–11,32]. All component scores, which accounted for 38% of the variations explained for residents and 31% for visitors, confirmed the prediction that they were significant indicators of satisfaction with tourism ($R_1^2 = 0.379$; $R_2^2 = 0.309$) (Table 4).

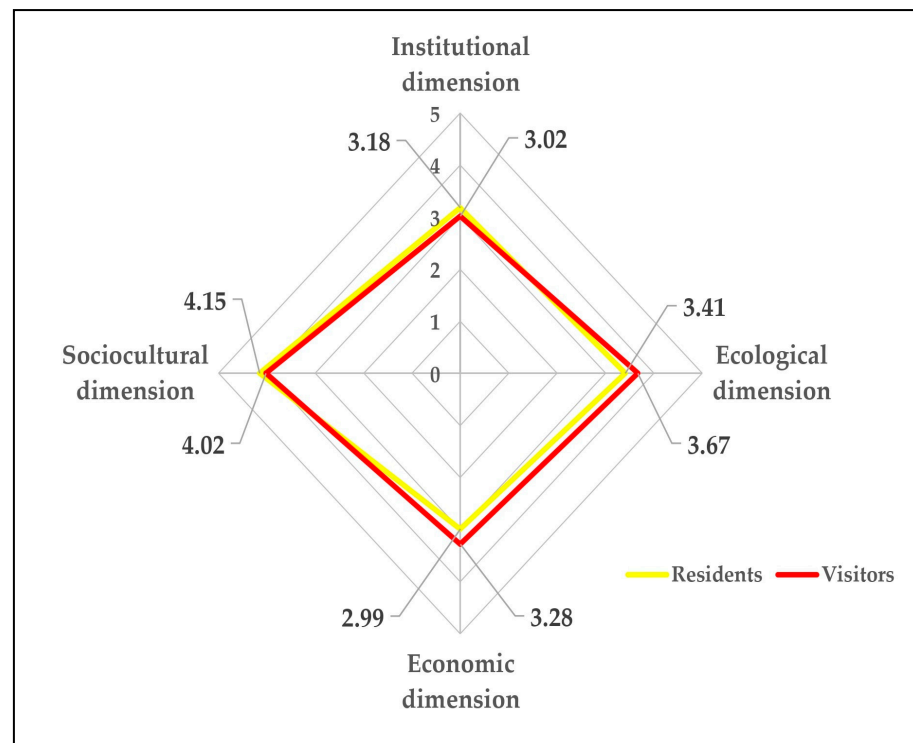


Figure 5. Presentation of the average values of sustainability dimensions.

Table 3. Satisfaction index.

Index	Residents (370)		Visitors (255)	
	α	Mean	α	Mean
		0.779	4.41	0.811
I am satisfied because tourism in the LO creates benefits for me		4.22		4.29
I am satisfied because there are opportunities for tourism development in the LO		4.55		4.18
I am satisfied because tourism makes this area famous		4.25		4.52
I am satisfied because tourism contributes to nature protection in the LO		4.61		4.44

Table 4. Regression analysis of satisfaction ($n = 625$).

Satisfaction with Dimensions	Residents		Visitors	
	β^1	p -Value	β^1	p -Value
Institutional	0.209	0.011	0.312	0.052
Ecological	0.301	0.054	0.391	0.061
Economic	0.289	0.010	0.305	0.039
Sociocultural	0.317	0.034	0.299	0.091

¹ Standardized β value used. $R_1^2 = 0.379$; $R_2^2 = 0.309$.

6. Discussion

After reviewing the information in Table 1, it can be said that 18 indicators point to the existence of factors that can positively affect ST (out of a total of 31 provided for assessment) and 4 negatives (out of 6 selected negative/red indicators). Exactly, these indicators point to a certain observed state or phenomenon in a specified space [86]. The identified factors that are present in LO are good geographical and traffic positioning, as well as close proximity

to the Danube River, Deliblato Sands, and Romania. Also, it is inhabited by different species and has national and international protection status; the historical sites are located in the vicinity of LO; the opportunities for the development of nature-based tourism are great; and many more.

Through research of the indicators related to the absence of the examined factors, it can be concluded that, in the future, this protected area's potential benefits should be enhanced in terms of the planning and development of nature-based tourism forms such as bird-watching, ecotourism, and events, in addition to strengthening the role of the local community; the branding of local products; creating local tourism offers; constructing visitor, information, and educational centers, etc. More accurately, the strengthening of these factors can lead to the consolidation of the social, ecological, economic, and institutional dimensions of ST [87,88].

When we determine the state through negative indicators, among the most significant are the use of assets from the protected area, the proximity of agricultural land, and the existence of endangered species. This indicates that during the preparation of protection study documents, these data can be the focus of analysis for finding long-term solutions to the problem. The absence of major environmental pollutants is significant from the point of view of ecology, along with the improvement and monitoring of the ecosystem's state. Planning activities should be aimed at maintaining biological diversity, which is currently one of the main natural features of LO. The importance of space quality and its constant monitoring must be taken into account. Managers must assess which dimensions are most important to users and focus on them.

Through the analysis of the results obtained by surveying respondents regarding the dimensions of ST, it can be said that the attitudes of respondents are almost identical. This indicates the relative reliability of individual responses (Table 2, Figure 3). By applying The Cronbach alpha coefficient, we can see that all dependent variables have a value of $\alpha > 0.60$, which can be accepted as reliable data for analysis according to Nunnally and Bernstein [80]. Both groups of respondents gave the highest marks to statements related to sociocultural (4.15 and 4.02) and ecological dimensions of sustainability (3.41 and 3.67). Residents rated the economic sustainability dimension as the lowest (2.99), while institutional sustainability was given the lowest marks by visitors. This points out that residents do not have significant economic benefits from the current tourism state in LO, which should be taken into account when analyzing the state and perspective of tourism development. The absence of guide services and information and visitor centers is the reason why visitors rated the institutional dimension of sustainability the lowest (3.02).

The most significant potential of LO for ST development was identified by the respondents as joint activities of visitors and residents, the existence of contents and facilities without having a negative impact on the environment, the interest and support of visitors to local products and crafts, the interest of visitors to regional events and places of historical and cultural importance, as well as how residents and guests interact. By analyzing the presented average values for four sustainability dimensions, it can be concluded that almost all claims from the sociocultural dimension of sustainability were rated relatively high by both groups of respondents ($3.88 > m > 4.42$). These kinds of data are valuable because they point to the strengths and opportunities of ST. Since nature protection in LO must be a primary activity, sociocultural values can be complementary tourism resources when developing a tourism strategy. This makes it possible to create a unique tourism offering that emphasizes nature-based tourism development.

Visitors could also have various tourist activities of a sociocultural nature at their disposal. These could be schools in nature, development of educational centers, visits and participation in events, familiarization with local crafts and gastronomy, visits to cultural and historical sites, etc.

The potential indicator rated with the lowest marks by both residents and visitors is economic factors, such as benefits for residents as a result of tourism development, while the lowest marks were given to the claim that tourism affects employment (2.01

and 2.49). These data indicate that tourism is not currently developing at a high level and that tourism-related subjects are not involved in the preparation and growth of tourism. To overcome these issues, it is necessary to encourage the local population to accept responsibility for solving the problems that exist on the terrain. In particular, it is imperative to influence the locals to accept new knowledge and skills that are necessary for the further development of LO. Their influence on properly planned tourism can lead to more substantial attendance [89], which, as a final result, affects the strengthening of the local economy [90].

If the obtained values are analyzed concerning the statements related to respondents' satisfaction with the development of tourism (Table 3), it can be concluded that both groups of respondents are satisfied with the current state and level of ST development ($4.18 > m > 4.61$). Residents were most satisfied with the claim that tourism contributes to the protection of nature in LO (4.61), while visitors expressed the highest satisfaction with the statement that tourism contributes to the beauty of LO (4.52). It can be stated that the average values of expressed satisfaction with ST are ranked relatively high, although certain individual values of the four dimensions of sustainability are very low ($\pm 2.00 \approx 2.50$). The contentment of tourists as well as locals with the development of certain tourism forms presents valuable knowledge to managers of protected areas [91,92]. Defining the tourism development identification system brings new opportunities to achieve the assigned objectives.

Using simple regression analysis, data were obtained, indicating that the aspects of institutional, ecological, economic, and sociocultural sustainability affect how satisfied people are with ST (Table 4). The ecological and sociocultural dimensions have a slightly higher impact on respondents' satisfaction.

One of the innovations of this research compared to previous ones is that this research includes an examination of the state and perspective of tourism development with the help of indicators of ST. The indicators pointed to opportunities, weaknesses and the absence of certain factors of ST development. The results obtained in this way can be compared with the evaluation of the condition by the respondents. If the results of this research are analyzed and compared with the results of previous research, mentioned in Section 2, it can be concluded that the ecological dimension of sustainability is significant for the respondents and for the development of tourism within protected areas. The reason for this is that these are destinations with a sensitive ecosystem on the one hand, and on the other hand, they offer the possibility of developing different specific forms of tourism. Also, in this and previous research works, the sociocultural dimension of sustainability was singled out as an important dimension for the development of tourism. In tourism planning, the local people play a crucial role that affects all aspects of sustainability. In contrast to earlier studies, the institutional and economic aspects of sustainability have much lower values. This may be connected to both the degree of tourism growth and the absence of certain initiatives and regulations. Tourism at a lower level of development cannot result in economic income for the population. The results of this research indicate that ST significantly affects the satisfaction of respondents, which is identical to previous research. This is an important finding in the study because it shows that even in places with lower levels of development, tourism may still make LO users satisfied. This is a significant new finding in this research. This result should be used in the preparation of national development documents, which plan the integration of protected areas as potentially significant tourism destinations of ST, into the tourist offer.

7. Conclusions

The study's objectives were to evaluate the current condition of tourism in LO and its development potential, as well as to look into how ST impacts locals' and tourists' satisfaction. The LO is a protected area in which there are different biological (species), eco-systemic, spatial, and geological characteristics. This means that nature is the primary resource for tourism development in this destination. In this study, ST in LO was examined

by applying indicators of ST. The examination of the indicators resulted in diverse and useful data, which point out that LO can be a ST destination. The respondents identified the sociocultural and ecological elements as the dimensions that currently have the most significant effects on ecologically conscious tourism. Considering every detail of LO development, gathering relevant information to achieve goals provides a solid foundation for making decisions.

If this research is compared to the authors' earlier ones, it can be concluded that the results obtained from other conservation areas in Vojvodina are relatively identical. In the previous studies, respondents have particularly highlighted the significance of the sociocultural and ecological sustainability aspects. What distinguishes this research from the previous ones is that in this study, the respondents pointed out a high degree of satisfaction with ST, even though it is neither sufficiently developed nor massive in size. Also, LO as a tourist destination is not sufficiently promoted. Although not all sustainability dimensions were assessed with equal marks, the result concerning respondents' satisfaction with ST points to the existence of unused potential. However, with constant improvements in the survey questionnaires and their introduction in the polling process and systems, the obtained results indicate a qualitative change for the better.

A significant segment of the LO's tourism planning should be marketing activities and promotional tools. Using a carefully considered mix of marketing and promotion, it is possible to achieve the orientation of tourist demand towards this potential tourist destination. Concerning the promotional tools utilized by conservation areas to convey their messages, these tools can be categorized into three main groups: owned channels (such as websites), channels not owned but (maybe) managed by communication specialists from protected areas (e.g., social networking sites), and external message senders like vloggers or journalists. It is essential to recognize the significance of online instruments not only from the perspectives of websites of the national parks, but also from the municipalities or local authorities or the DMOs for communicating with tourists, residents, and even other types of stakeholders. Research in a Romanian context revealed that, at best, websites provide links for locals and tourists, rarely for business owners, and never for specific demographics such as the elderly or young people, with limited options for citizens to complete administrative procedures exclusively online [93]. Other owned tools could be tourism apps created for the promoted area. For successful tourism apps, prioritizing user-friendly interfaces with fast, customized information is essential. Simplified designs, user guides, and accessible menus boost user satisfaction, encouraging regular use and supporting eco-friendly tourism by meeting customer expectations and fostering environmental awareness [94].

National legislators, experts, managers of this conservation area, residents, educational institutions, and representatives of other entities can use the results of this research when passing various legal regulations, management acts, and studies of tourism protection and development both locally and nationally. The main management objectives should be based on the identification of strengths, chances, opportunities, and weaknesses of the progress of ST forms in LO. By analyzing the outcomes of the measurement indicators and the replies from locals and guest, certain bases for the development of responsible and nature-based tourism can be identified. In addition to these tourism forms, cultural forms and events could further enhance the value of the tourism offer. It is significant to point out that local community plays a crucial role, and without it, planning activities cannot be implemented.

The limitations that have existed in this research are the existence of a certain doubt that the respondents identified certain potential for tourism development in LO with the natural and social potential of DS, in which LO is an integral part. There was a problem with considering the LO site as a separate conservation area. That is why the questionnaire had to be formulated very precisely so that there was no identification with the values of DS.

The authors will direct their future research towards examining the possibility of intensifying the creation of different marketing forms aimed at a more effective promotion

of the natural and social values of this locality. In addition, the authors will carry out a comparative analysis with the results of similar research on ST in conservation areas from countries in the region. In this way, a unique picture of the state, needs, and more efficient ecological and tourist treatment can be constituted [95,96]. In addition, future research will be aimed at establishing a balance of all aspects of the quality of tourism development in conservation areas. Besides the satisfaction of tourists and visitors, the satisfaction of the local tourism industry, the quality of the local population life as well as the environmental quality will be studied through the positive and negative impacts of tourism on the environment [97].

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