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Institutional, Ecological, Economic, and Socio-Cultural Sustainability—Evidence from Ponjavica Nature Park

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Abstract: The Nature Park Ponjavica (NP) is the habitat of strictly protected plant and animal species, located in AP Vojvodina, in southern Banat (Northern Serbia). The area of the park covers 302.96 ha. Protection zones I, II, and III have been established in the protected area of the NP. The NP includes the middle course of the Ponjavica River, which has preserved characteristics of watercourses of plain areas and coastal remains of wetland habitats. The most valuable area of this park in terms of protection is an island with an area of slightly less than 1 hectare. According to the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature), the NP is classified as the fourth category—Habitat and species management area. The good geographical position of NP is one of its main characteristics. The NP can be a destination where specific forms of tourism can be developed, such as ecotourism, nature-based tourism, birdwatching, scientific and research tourism, etc. Numerous historical sites represent a significant potential for the development of cultural tourism. The research examined the influence of institutional, economic, ecological, and socio-cultural sustainability on the respondents' satisfaction. The quantitative methodology in this research included a questionnaire as a survey instrument for respondents. A total of 547 residents were surveyed. The results of the research indicate that there is considerable satisfaction among residents with sustainable tourism. The results of the research can help in the development of numerous tourism development strategies in which the wetland is the primary resource.

Keywords: residents and visitors satisfaction; special nature reserve; prism of sustainability; protected natural asset

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1. Introduction

The Nature Park Ponjavica (NP) is in southern Banat (Northern Serbia). The area of the park covers 302.96 ha. The first, second, and third protection zones have been established in the protected area of the NP. The area of the protection zone around the NP covers 678.57 ha. The NP includes the middle course of the Ponjavica River, which has preserved characteristics of watercourses of plain areas and coastal remains of wetland habitats. In terms of protection, the most valuable area of this park is an island with an area of slightly

less than 1 ha. The settlements of Omoljica, Banatski Brestovac, and Pančevo are in the vicinity of the NP [1,2]. The geographical value of this area is increased by the proximity of the Deliblato Sands, the Danube, the Tamish River, and Romania. The development of sustainable tourism in the NP has the main objectives of protecting, arranging, and developing original features and units for the preservation of native characteristics, identity, and diversity, together with the affirmation of all natural and cultural values [3,4]. Geographically and touristically, this area belongs to the Middle Danube region [5,6]. Key tourism products with specific tourism forms can be ecotourism, bird-watching fishing, educational tourism, scientific research, recreational, and excursion tourism. The proximity of the waterway of the Danube River is very important for the further development of tourism. Additionally, many of the activities that take place in the surrounding settlements are outstanding examples of cultural values [3,4]. The natural value of the NP consists of very rare species of fish, reptiles, insects, birds, and mammals. The area is inhabited by various types of plants, some of which are very rare and endangered [7]. The population living around the NP has an essential cultural heritage. The different ethnic composition of the population is a significant prerequisite for the development of cultural tourism forms [8].

The authors chose this protected area as the subject of sustainable tourism research because the NP has important natural and social characteristics. These characteristics enabled some types of tourism to flourish, but not to the full extent or in a way that was sufficiently sustainable. As there is an assumption that visitors are content to select protected areas as their travel destination [9,10], the authors decided to look at the current situation and perspectives of tourism development in this protected area. The study's findings might offer specific recommendations and inspiration for developing a tourism destination with a delicate ecosystem, making it a crucial subject for further study. The examination of sustainable tourism in protected areas can be undertaken precisely through the four basic dimensions of sustainability: the institutional; ecological; economic; and socio-cultural dimensions [11–13].

The main objective of this research is to overview the condition of tourism and the possibilities for the development of sustainable tourism forms by measuring the impact on the satisfaction of users of the NP area. The results of the research can be used to constitute important guidelines for tourism development strategies [14], which have the protection of this nature park and its natural values as primary goals [15,16]. In addition, the development of sustainable tourism forms should exist on cultural values [17–19]. The specific objective of this research is a direct consideration of the potential of the NP that can serve as basic resources and resource bases for the development of various tourism forms [20]. Such a resource base consists of infrastructure, flora, fauna, management processes, legal provisions, the role of the local population, tourists, their needs, and activities [21,22], as well as the proposed measures aimed at improving all the values mentioned above.

2. Literature Review

Developing tourism in specific destinations with sensitive ecosystems, such as protected areas, requires standards as well as additional management measures in nature protection and in tourism development itself. This stems from the complex essence of such units [23–25]. Protected areas should be more sensitive to the negative impacts of tourism development, which is why the necessity of applying visitor management techniques is particularly evident here [26–28].

Numerous tourist activities can result in different impacts on the geographical and biological characteristics of protected areas [29–32]. The construction of tourism infrastructure, which also includes accommodation facilities, tourist-educational paths, and roads, supports tourism development on one hand, but on the other, it threatens the protected area. The aforementioned factors result in the devastation of resources, consumption of energy, destruction of habitats, extinction of flora and fauna, and geological changes [33].

Also, the type of habitat and the degree of its sensitivity to disturbance influence the overall extent of some impact from tourism [29]. From all the above stated, sustainable tourism can represent a significant form of tourism planning and development, which will primarily aim to protect space and its integrity [34]. In addition, with the help of sustainable tourism development, the roles of all actors in the tourism economy can be clearly defined, including the state and its apparatus, stakeholders, visitors, and the local community [35].

Sustainable tourism of protected areas includes several ecological, socio-cultural, and economic dimensions, which are also known as the so-called triple approach [29,36].

The management of tourism development in protected areas should be a basic activity in the management of destinations that strive for the status of sustainability, especially in attractive localities, where the protection and preservation of natural and cultural heritage must be ensured [36]. The planning and management of tourism is especially evident in preserved areas, considering their specificity compared to other tourist destinations (variety of biodiversity, habitats, and ecosystems).

Protected areas can be drivers of sustainability and lifestyle changes at local, regional, and national levels. If we want to have positive outcomes, it is necessary to prepare a sustainable tourism strategy and accompanying action plan based on it. Drawing up such a plan is a complex task necessary for tourism development in every protected area [37]. Protected area management refers to the surveillance of human activities that take place in a protected area, whereby some activities may be restricted or prohibited. To preserve the environment, we must take an active role in all activities that occur in these locations. Sustainable tourism evolution can be beneficial for the protected area in many ways, such as [38,39]:

- A factor in the protection of natural resources. That is, the problem of nature preservation can also be viewed from the perspective of sustainable development [40];
- Multiple benefits for protected areas and contemporary man. It helps modern, post-industrial man to imagine what nature and life looked like before industrialization and generally in man's destructive action. In other words, the sustainable development of protected areas helps people understand what kind of relationship they should have with nature, i.e., with the environment [41,42];
- A factor of importance for protected nature, where we primarily think of the category of obtaining various benefits from which economic profits can be secured by charging for tourist services. It depends on the type and degree of permitted activities in the protected area, which again depends on the nature protection policy of the country that creates it [43];
- A factor of importance for the domicile population. It helps to aim the immaterial towards intensifying the role of tourists and representatives of local communities;
- Educational component of protected nature facilities that encourage environmental education of children and adults [44].

Tourism is considered one of the key strategies for promoting ecological preservation and socio-economic development of local communities that inhabit the area around protected natural resources. The concept of sustainable tourism development refers to various forms of tourism in protected areas, such as ecotourism, bird watching, local community tourism, and adventure tourism. The primary task is the evaluation of the main success and failure factors of tourism management and its contribution to biodiversity preservation [45].

Research by Muñoz et al. [46] included the application of quantitative and qualitative methodology. The subject of the research was the analysis of spatial natural values in two protected areas in Norway—the Jotunheimen National Park and Utledalen Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The objective of the research was to determine the most significant attractive natural factors that represent an important potential of sustainable tourism. The analysis of the responses (377 respondents) yielded significant results that highlight those factors that are related to ecology and nature protection. The research results indicated that the most important factors stand out as follows: the importance of flora and fauna; unpolluted water; untouched nature; space important for ecological

activities and recreation; and other factors. The scientific contribution is reflected in the provision of guidelines and models for examining sustainable tourism development in other protected areas of the world.

The basis of sustainable development consists of ecological, social, and economic sustainability. To achieve these objectives, many scientists believe that tourism represents a "bridge" that connects preservation and development [47]. Traditionally, the paradigm of sustainable tourism development includes three dimensions: economic; socio-cultural; and ecological dimension [48]. Huayhuaca et al. [49] pointed out that it is necessary to include the institutional dimension of sustainability for the examination of sustainable travel within a protected area. This dimension includes management, promotion, and intermediary activities. In this way, through the examination of sustainable tourism in protected areas, a clearer picture and cross-section of the situation can be obtained. Critical policies and suggestions for additional development can be established based on this [50].

The research by Cottrell et al. [51] aimed to examine the impact of sustainable tourism development on visitors in two protected areas in Germany. The research methodology was designed to examine ecological, economic, socio-cultural, and institutional sustainability to the satisfaction of the local population. The research results indicate the importance of ecological and socio-cultural sustainability to the respondents. They assessed these two sustainability factors as the most important for tourism development in the two examined protected areas, which represents important research results. The proposed tourism improvement measures have served as planning strategies for the development of tourism in numerous countries.

Trišić et al. [52] examined sustainable tourism in the special nature reserve Titelski Breg, with the concept of sustainable tourism based on four dimensions of sustainability. Each of the dimensions was examined separately by measuring the state of sustainable tourism from the perspective of the users of this protected area. The research results highlighted the importance of the ecological and socio-cultural values of this destination for the development of sustainable tourism forms. Also, the analysis of the obtained values indicates that more significant measures and activities of stakeholders and government organizations are needed to use the potential for tourism development in the best way, but with a special emphasis.

Various instruments are utilized to measure visitor motivation, such as the Multi-attraction Tourist Motivation Scale developed by Božić et al. [5], which incorporates components from existing literature alongside their own contributions, featuring a 5-point Likert scale to evaluate reasons for selecting multi-attraction tourist destinations, containing 28 items assessing both push and pull motives.

In the research context of Sremska Kamenica, Vasiljevic et al. [53] emphasized the importance of identifying push and pull factors to aid decision-makers in prioritizing activities and improving visitor satisfaction, considering socio-demographic differences. These factors may vary based on visitors' characteristics, and understanding differences and majority views is key to enhancing visitor satisfaction and encouraging repeated visits.

A questionnaire designed to assess visitor satisfaction or explore tourist motivation in geotourism experiences includes questions about respondents' attitudes toward travel, their perceptions of local communities during the visit, their daily habits, and their attitudes toward nature and the environment [54].

The papers served the authors in constituting the objectives and methods of research in this article. Sustainable tourism in this protected area is viewed from the perspective of four dimensions of sustainability. Compared to earlier research, this research has been improved for the structure of the sample, which consists of two groups of respondents. Also, four groups of questions (dimensions of sustainability) were expanded with more significant statements to reach more reliable research results.

3. Research Area

The protected area of the NP is situated on the southern edge of the Pančevo Depression, that is, in the southernmost part of the Banat (Northern Serbia). It stretches for about 9 km between Omoljica and Banatski Brestovac, with a northwest–southeast direction. The village Omoljica is in the northwest of the NP, and Banatski Brestovac is in the southeast. The area of the park covers 302.96 ha [1,2]. First, second, and third protection zones have been established in the protected area of the NP. The NP includes the middle course of the Ponjavica River, which has preserved characteristics of watercourses of plain areas and coastal remains of wetland habitats. An island that is just a little less than one hectare in size is the park's most valuable protected area [1,3].

According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the NP is classified as the fourth category—Habitat and Species Management Area.

The NP area extends from 44°42′48″ to 44°45′36″ N and from 20°43′15″ to 20°49′34″ E [1–3]. The favorable geographical position is characterized by the proximity of major cities in Serbia, the proximity of Romania, and the main traffic corridors with which it is connected to the countries of the region. The position of the NP can be seen in Figure 1.

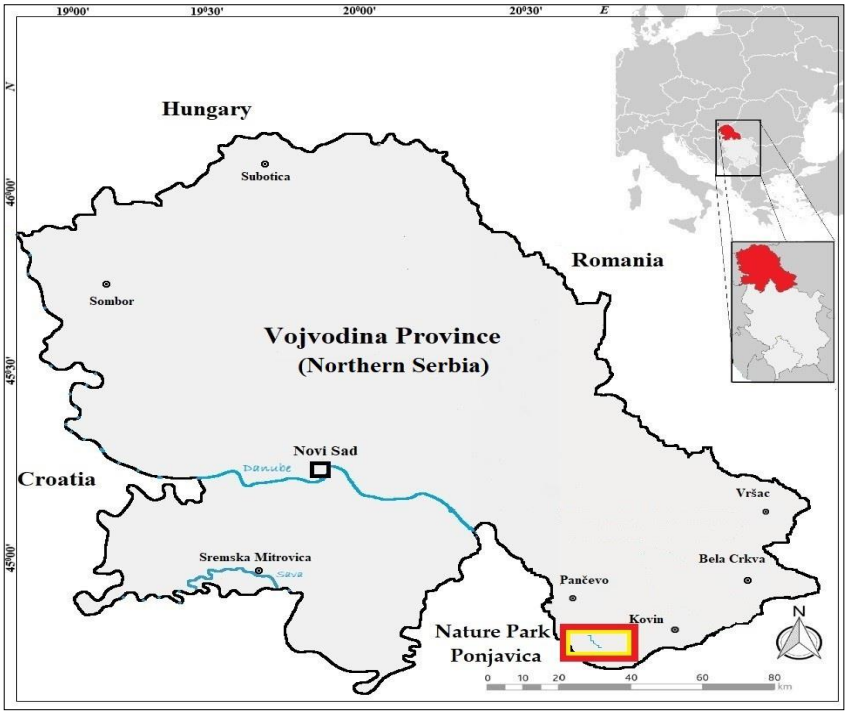

Figure 1. The Nature Park Ponjavica location. Source: Trišić, I., author.

From a geological point of view, the NP is characterized by various forms of relief and soil composition. The most significant are alluvial soil, sand dunes, and clay. Observed geomorphologically, the NP belongs to two units: alluvial plain and loess terrace, which gives it a special value [1,3,4]. Among the more important plant species inhabiting the NP area are *Potamogeton pusillus*, *Carex acuta*, *Scirpus lacustris* subsp. *tabernaemontani*, *Zannichellia palustris*, *Potamogeton pusillus*, *Salvinia natans*, *Zannichellia palustris*, *Carex acuta*, and *Scirpus lacustris* subsp. *tabernaemontani*. As the most important representatives of the fauna, the following stand out: *Formica balcanina*; *Carassius carassius*; *Pelophylax kl. esculenta*; *Pelophylax lessonae*; *Pelophylax ridibundus*; *Emys orbicularis;* and *Natrix natrix*. The most important bird representatives are *Egretta garzetta*, *Nycticorax nycticorax*, *Ardeola ralloides*, *Chlidonias hybrida*, *Tachubaptus ruficollis*, *Podiceps cristatus*, *Aythya nyroca*, *Anas platyrhynchos*, *Cygnus olor*, *Anas clypeata*, *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*, *Acrocephalus palustris*, *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*, *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*, *Remiz pendulinus*, etc. In addition to ornithofauna, the NP area is also inhabited by significant representatives of mammals: *Erinaceus concolor*;

Neomys anomalus; *Crocidura leucodon*; *Arvicola amphibius*; *Mustela nivalis*; *Martes foina*; *Meles meles*; *Vulpes vulpes*; *Lutra lutra;* and other species that need protection [1,3,4].

The most significant value of this protected area is the Ponjavica River, namely its middle course with a length of 7.2 km. After flowing through the NP, this river flows into the Danube. The Ponjavica River has influenced the geomorphological, geological, and hydrological characteristics, as well as the flora and fauna of this protected area. Concerning different conditions throughout the year, the uniform water level formed a pond ecosystem, unique in this part of the country. The landscape of the NP can be seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Nature Park Ponjavica. Source: Trišić, I., author.

The cultural value of this protected area consists of two settlements, Omoljica and Banatski Brestovac. These communities are dominated by eighteenth-century baroque country architecture. Omoljica, a very old settlement, has the most potential in the municipality of Pančevo in terms of growing rural tourism. Excavations discovered at the site of today's settlement indicate that it dates to the Neolithic period. Also, there are stone monuments from the Bronze Age, from the period from 1500 to 1000 BC. The Pančevo Museum displays the archaeological artifacts that were discovered here and are adorned with traditional Pannonian decorations. The oldest house in the village is the Military and Border Building from 1766, where the headquarters of the 12th Banat Regiment was located. There is information that Vuk Karadžić, a 19th-century reformer of the Serbian language and orthography, also stayed there. Near Omoljica, a source of thermo mineral water rich in phosphorus, with a temperature of 37.5 °C, was discovered [3]. In addition to the historical heritage, the ethno-social heritage is also significant, which includes folklore, national costume, domestic handicrafts, original folk Melos, gastronomy, and customs of the population that inhabits this area.

4. Methodology

This additional study is an extension of the author's earlier work. The authors' long-term objective is to investigate the circumstances and viewpoints surrounding the growth of sustainable tourism in Vojvodina's protected areas. It was planned to obtain significant scientific results that can indicate the function that protected areas can have in the sustainable tourism of Vojvodina Province. To achieve more reliable scientific results, the authors plan to include as many of these areas as possible in the research area and to create results that can have wider scientific significance by combining different scientific methods and comparative analyses. Therefore, the identical research methodology (PoS) was applied in this study. What distinguishes this research from the previous ones is a more significant expansion of the questionnaire, through which the respondents were surveyed. To reach more reliable results using a comparative analysis of the respondents' perception, the respondents' structure consisted of two groups.

The research was conceived on the survey of respondents using a questionnaire (quantitative research method). The content of the questionnaire and the method of analysis and presentation of the obtained results were determined according to the research that served to define the method (Prism of Sustainability—PoS) and the questions that were arranged into four groups. These groups of questions are four main elements/dimensions of sustainable tourism: institutional (ID); ecological (EcD); economic (ED); and the socio-cultural dimension (SD) [51,52,55–57].

The research model applied in this article can be seen in Figure 3.

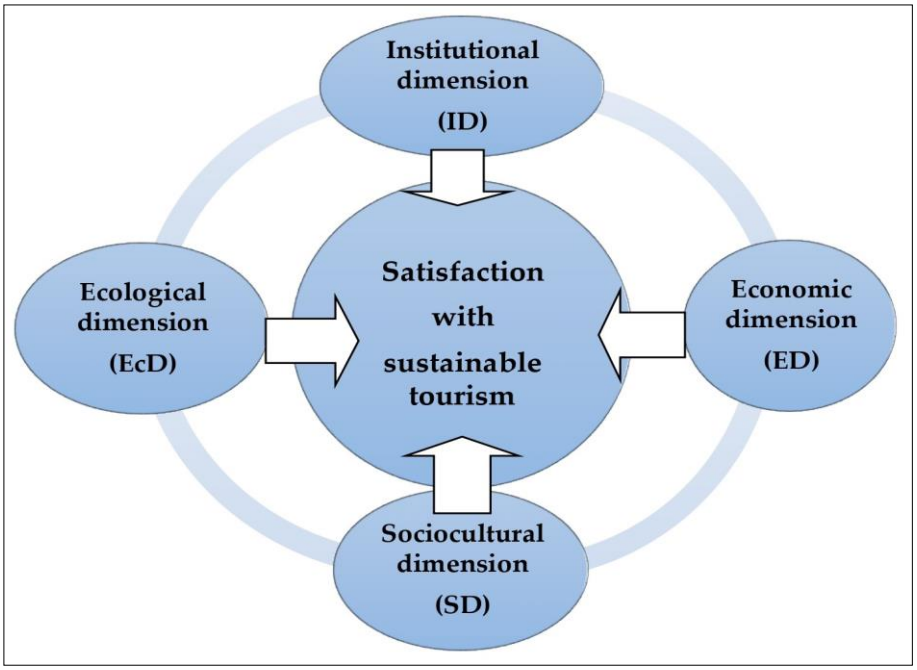

Figure 3. The Research Model. Source: Trišić, I., author.

This research model was designed according to research on sustainable tourism in other protected areas of the world or in Serbia [51,52,55–57]. To explore sustainable tourism in this protected area, the survey's questions were modified. The claims were grouped into four dimensions of sustainability, as shown in Figure 3. Within the dimensions, factors such as nature protection, the role of protection in the creation of various activities, infrastructure, the role of the local community, the promotion of natural and cultural values, opportunities for the development of various tourism forms, and other factors were examined. All these factors were grouped into four separate dimensions. The data collection and analysis procedure aimed to examine the values of each of the dimensions separately. In this way, it

is possible to obtain data on the importance and impact of each dimension, especially on the situation and perspectives of sustainable tourism development in the NP.

A questionnaire was used as an instrument. The questionnaire contained statements and questions about the current state and future directions of sustainable tourism as well as the impact of sustainability factors on respondents' satisfaction. The questionnaire was made up of socio-demographic questions related to gender, age structure, and education degree. Filling in the questionnaire was completely anonymous. Respondents agreed that the research results could be used for scientific research purposes. The questionnaire contained three parts. The first part consisted of socio-demographic questions related to gender, age structure, and level of education. The second part of the questionnaire contained 36 statements/questions, which were grouped into four groups/dimensions. The third part of the questionnaire contained four questions related to respondents' satisfaction with sustainable tourism.

Respondents were surveyed through personal contact, a visit to the NP, and online with the help of thematic groups. All respondents were selected by random sampling. The answers were ranked using a five-point Likert scale, in which 1 meant completely disagree, 3—neither agree nor disagree and 5—completely agree [58,59]. The completed questionnaires were subjected to a validity check. Each completed questionnaire was checked separately. The reliability of the given answers was examined using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, as part of statistical processing and data analysis. According to Cortina [60], Nunnally and Bernstein [61], and Stojanović et al. [62], all values greater than or equal to 0.60 ($\alpha \geq 0.60$) can be accepted for analysis as reliable. After determining the individual average values of the sustainability dimensions, the authors examined the impact of each of the sustainability dimensions on the respondents' satisfaction. This procedure included simple linear regression as part of statistical processing and data analysis [55–57].

By using the scientific method PoS (Prism of Sustainability), answers to the important research questions in this article can be given. One of them is related to the biggest impact on the state of sustainable tourism. The primary research objective of this study was to find out how respondents' satisfaction with sustainable tourism is affected by sustainability attributes. The measurement results obtained in this way can be used to define strengths, opportunities, and threats for the development of certain sustainable tourism forms. Also, the examination analysis of satisfaction with certain phenomena can be vital for the establishment of further sustainability guidelines [14–16].

Wishing the survey results to have greater scientific importance, the authors chose representatives of the local community and visitors to the NP as the target group. The survey of residents was carried out in the settlements of Omoljica and Banatski Brestovac. After surveying and checking the validity of the completed questionnaires, it is stated that a total of 547 answers (310 residents and 237 visitors) were valid for analysis. Out of the 310 residents that were polled in total, 174 were surveyed in person, and 136 were surveyed online. Of the total number of visitors (237), 78 were surveyed in personal contact, and 159 were surveyed online. This means that a total of 252 respondents (residents and visitors) were surveyed in personal contact, while a total of 295 respondents (residents and visitors) were surveyed online.

When creating the questionnaire for the online survey technique, guidelines for completing it were included under the primary title. It was indicated there that the respondent must have visited the protected area that was the subject of the research. Visitors in personal contact were certainly surveyed in the protected area during the visit.

The sorted data were processed, subject to validation, analyzed, and presented using statistical and analytical programs (SPSS v25) and tables. After the collected and processed data, the authors presented the obtained values tabularly and graphically.

This research was conducted in two periods. The first part of the research covered the period from May to November 2023. The second research period was in March and April 2024.

5. Results

For this research, a total of 568 respondents were surveyed. After checking each completed questionnaire, it was established that 547 questionnaires were correctly filled out, which is valid for further statistical processing and analysis. Of that number, 310 surveyed respondents were members of the local community (residents). A total of 67% of the polled residents were from Omoljica, while 33% of them were from Banatski Brestovac. Of the residents surveyed, 56% were surveyed by personal contact. The rest were surveyed using an online questionnaire. A total of 237 respondents were visitors. Out of the total number of surveyed guests, 13% were foreign citizens. The countries of the foreign visitors' origin were Montenegro, Romania, Hungary, Croatia, and Macedonia.

By analyzing the results of all respondents, it can be concluded that the majority of respondents were female, 59% residents and 57.4% visitors. The average age of the respondents was 37 (from 18 to 85). The average age of visitors was 34, compared to 38 for locals. Out of the total number of residents, most of them completed high school, 66%, a total of 9%—primary school, 17%—college or university, and 8% of respondents completed post-graduate studies. Among all the visitors, most of them had completed high school, 63%, a total of 7%—primary school, 20%—college or university, and 10% of respondents completed post-graduate studies.

The statistical data processing included the analysis of the respondents' answers, which were grouped into 4 dimensions of sustainability: ID, EcD, ED, and SD, with a total of 36 statements. The reliability of the obtained average values of the given answers was examined with Cronbach's Alpha. The obtained values for each statement and dimension of sustainability are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Responses shown by the sustainability dimensions (n = 547).

Items	Residents (n = 310)		Visitors (n = 237)	
Dimensions/Groups	**α**	**Mean**	**α**	**Mean**
ID	**0.810**	**3.39**	**0.794**	**3.49**
There is a visitor center in the NP		2.55		2.02
There are ethical codes in the NP		3.47		3.92
There are expert guides and instructors in the NP		3.43		3.59
Educational schools are organized in the NP		2.96		3.64
Residents are involved in protection and management activities		3.84		4.01
Residents are involved in promotional activities		4.03		4.11
International protection statuses are applied in the NP		2.99		3.04
There is space zoning in the NP		3.13		2.78
Visitors can familiarize themselves with the basic legal regulations related to the protection in the NP		4.11		4.33
EcD	**0.779**	**3.92**	**0.813**	**3.86**
There is no waste dump in the protected area		4.09		3.88
There is no waste water in the protected area		4.22		3.87
There is no agricultural land as a potential polluter around the protected area		3.98		3.79
Fishing is controlled in the NP		4.11		4.54
Devastation of resources (land, trees) is prevented in the NP		4.31		3.87
There are activities of visitors and residents to protect the area in the NP		4.17		4.39
There are hiking trails in the NP		4.49		4.68
NP is not in the vicinity of larger factory facilities as potential polluters		3.12		3.54
Tourist facilities have been built in the NP		2.79		2.22

Table 1. *Cont.*

Items	Residents (n = 310)		Visitors (n = 237)	
Dimensions/Groups	**α**	**Mean**	**α**	**Mean**
ED	**0.802**	**3.38**	**0.821**	**3.63**
Residents are employed in the NP		2.12		3.03
Residents sell their homemade products to visitors		4.11		4.42
Residents have the opportunity to show off their crafts		3.15		3.81
Visitors are ready to pay the price of domestic products		4.33		4.09
There are donations for the protection of nature and species in the NP		3.09		3.14
Tourism in the NP creates material benefits for residents		4.07		3.56
Tourism in the NP boosts the local economy		2.95		3.36
Material investments are visible in NP		3.24		3.59
SD	**0.793**	**3.70**	**0.747**	**3.59**
Visitors are in contact with residents		4.15		4.27
Visitors are interested in local events		4.32		4.03
Residents present the ways of producing domestic products to visitors		3.09		2.59
Residents present local customs to visitors		2.64		2.68
Residents and visitors are educated about the importance of tourism development in the NP		3.47		3.12
There are various forms of tourist activities in the NP		3.59		3.33
Visitors and residents support nature-based tourism		4.69		4.42
Residents educate visitors about the importance of protecting the NP		4.13		4.20
Residents educate visitors about local culture		2.75		3.15
Visitors visit historical sites		4.14		4.09
Items measured on a 5-point Likert agreement scale α—Cronbach Alpha Reliability				

The obtained values for the dimensions of sustainability can also be shown graphically in Figure 4.

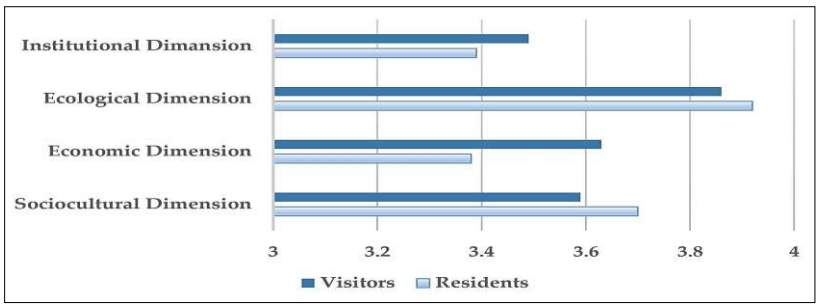

Figure 4. Presentation of values of sustainability dimensions. Source: Trišić, I., author.

After determining the average values of sustainability dimensions and checking the reliability of the obtained values of investigated variables, the statistical analysis included the analysis of the impact of sustainability dimensions on the respondents' satisfaction. By using simple linear regression as part of statistical data processing, the individual impacts of each dimension of sustainability on the satisfaction of respondents can be measured [57,58,62]. The values obtained after the analysis of respondents' answers regarding satisfaction with sustainable tourism in the NP are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Scale items for the satisfaction index (n = 547).

Index	Residents (n = 310)		Visitors (n = 237)	
	α	Mean	α	Mean
	0.817	**3.86**	**0.902**	**3.87**
I am satisfied that there is an opportunity for different forms of tourism in the NP		4.14		4.27
I am satisfied because the NP is promoted through tourism		3.88		4.03
I am satisfied that tourism contributes to the protection of the NP		4.13		4.29
I am satisfied with the state of tourism in this protected area		3.29		2.88

By applying regression analysis, the influence level of four dimensions on respondents' satisfaction with sustainable tourism [62] was measured. Table 3 shows assumptions about respondents' level of satisfaction with sustainable tourism, where there is an assumption of 36% for residents and 34% for visitors ($R_1^2 = 0.358$; $R_2^2 = 0.337$) (Table 3).

Table 3. Regression analysis of satisfactions (n = 547).

Tourism Satisfaction	Residents		Visitors	
	β [1]	*p*-Value	β [1]	*p*-Value
ID	0.259	0.110	0.394	0.103
EcD	0.311	0.105	0.289	0.111
ED	0.302	0.120	0.344	0.109
SD	0.305	0.121	0.396	0.289

[1.] Standardised β value used. $R_1^2 = 0.358$; $R_2^2 = 0.337$.

6. Discussion

A total of 36 statements were divided into four sustainability dimensions, and thus, they were examined separately. Regarding each statement, respondents expressed their perceived attitude on a five-point Likert scale. Using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, whether the answers and obtained values of sustainability dimensions could be considered reliable for statistical analysis was determined. According to Cortina [60], Nunnally and Bernstein [61], and Stojanović et al. [62], all values equal to or greater than 0.60 ($\alpha \geq 0.60$) can be accepted as reliable for an analysis. As the obtained α values ranged from 0.747 to 0.821, they can be statistically considered as reliable. By analyzing all the individual sustainability dimensions, it can be concluded that all values were above the average, i.e., higher than the average value on the Likert scale. The least evaluated dimensions among residents were ID and ED. For visitors, the dimensions ID and SD had the smallest values. In addition, in female visitors, ED also had a lower value. Analyzing such a result, we can conclude that institutional and economic factors of tourism development are the least represented in the NP. This would mean that these factors are not sufficiently utilized. The absence of a visitor center, the absence of educational centers and schools, as well as international protection statuses, were recognized by the residents as the most significant weaknesses of the ID. Also, visitors rated as the weakest exactly those factors identified by residents. The absence of spatial zoning in the NP was highlighted as important, too. When developing tourism development strategies, special attention should be directed towards improving these identified weaknesses of tourism development [63–65]. Opportunities for visits of different target groups could be created by introducing schools and educational centers, where the local population could have its own special role [66,67]. Also, the construction of a visitor center would support tourism development in the NP [68,69]. The visitors singled out space zoning as a significant factor because it would directly limit destructive activities on the environment. The promotion of area protection and tourism were recognized as strengths of sustainability by both groups of respondents. Acquaintance with legal regulations concerning this nature park protection was a significant activity for both

groups of respondents. This is a good prerequisite for the implementation of national and international statuses and area protection regimes [70,71].

With regard to ED, residents identified the absence of jobs, the insufficient impact of tourism on the local economy, and the absence of donations for the protection of nature and species in the NP as the lowest-rated factors. Precisely these factors were singled out by the visitors as the lowest-rated values, too. Proper tourism development would affect the mass of visits to the NP. Over time, this would certainly affect the increase in jobs for residents in the NP [72–74]. This was also confirmed by the fact that a wide range of local products is available to visitors in the NP and that visitors are interested and ready to pay an appropriate price for them. The proof of this was the highly rated factors that relate to these activities by both groups of respondents. When planning the development of tourism in the NP, special attention should be directed towards strengthening the role of residents in the promotion of local products and the educational activities of visitors. EcD was identified by both groups of respondents as the most significant dimension of sustainable tourism in the NP. Very important activities were those aimed at the protection of areas and species. The lack of tourist facilities was assessed as a significant factor. During the development of tourism in the NP, the facilities of rural and ethnic houses can be of special importance. Representatives of the local community can make their households available for the development of eco and rural tourism. Along with this, local domestic products could also be successfully marketed to visitors. Both groups of respondents identified the control of using resources and fishing as important and present activities, which certainly contribute to the improvement in area and species protections. The development of tourism in the NP should be based on planning nature-based and scientific tourism forms because the protection of the NP is of primary importance [75,76]. Control of the agricultural land that surrounds this nature park should be a primary activity when finalizing tourism development strategies. In addition to having an ecological function, the construction of tourist facilities such as eco-resorts, visitor centers, and others, would be directly related to strengthening ID sustainability.

According to the answers of both groups of respondents, another important dimension was SD. Constant intensification of interaction between residents and visitors was of particular significance to the respondents. This can be achieved by joint engagements in numerous activities within the NP [77,78]. Educating visitors about the importance of protecting space and species in the NP, local culture, customs, crafts, and cultural–historical heritage should be the most important activities towards strengthening SD sustainable tourism [79–82]. This opens the possibility for the development of various complementary tourism activities such as events, cultural, gastronomic, educational, and other forms of tourism with ethnocultural elements [82–84].

If the values related to satisfaction with sustainable tourism development are analyzed, it can be concluded that both groups of respondents were satisfied with the potential for sustainable tourism development in the NP. By simple linear regression as part of the statistical analysis of respondents' answers and analyzing the impact of sustainability dimensions (ID, EsD, ED, and SD) on respondents, it can be concluded that there were significant influences on respondents' satisfaction with sustainable tourism even though a significant number of tourism development factors were not sufficiently manifested or used.

If these research results are compared with earlier research, it can be concluded that EcD and SD of sustainability were recognized as the dimensions with the greatest impact on sustainable tourism. Factors contributing to ID and ED sustainability must be identified by institutions and stakeholders involved in tourism development planning [85,86]. In addition, these factors must be significantly improved. For the improvement in these two dimensions of sustainability, an important fact is that there are conditions, which are also identified as consistent. The absence of significant funding and donations aimed at improving sustainable tourism in the NP was recognized as a constant problem. Marketing activities aimed at promoting specific forms of nature-based tourism could be one of the

ways to secure finances [87–90]. State bodies and local community representatives should have a key role [91,92]. In addition to the above-mentioned, the results of this research showed that sustainability dimensions have a significant impact on the satisfaction of both groups of respondents ($0.103 > p > 0.289$), which coincides with earlier research on sustainable tourism in other protected areas in Vojvodina. The most significant remarks were that there were conditions for the development of various tourism forms in the NP and that tourism, in a certain way and in its current state, contributed to the protection of this nature park.

Comparing the results of sustainable tourism research in protected areas in the world, it can be concluded that sustainability ID was recognized as the dimension with the most significant share regarding sustainable tourism. This can represent an important guideline when planning tourism in the NP because it can be assumed that this pillar of sustainability is crucial for strengthening other factors of sustainable tourism in protected areas.

The NP and its environs are located on two geomorphological units: an alluvial plain and a loess terrace. The NP and its surroundings are located on two geomorphological units: an alluvial plain and a loess terrace. However, most of it is situated on the Danube's alluvial plain. Special attention when studying the potential for the development of sustainable tourism in this protected area should be focused on geological values. The geological structure of this protected area is dominated by quaternary sediments, represented by marsh, deluvial, alluvial, and aeolian formations. The alluvial plains that were created under the influence of the Danube River have a significant value in the development of geotourism and scientific research tourism in this nature park. It is a low and hilly area, the main characteristic of which is that it is made up of two terraces, higher and lower alluvial terraces. Both terraces are slightly inclined towards the Danube. The protected part of the Ponjavica River is in a depression that was formed on a part of the alluvial plain. This is where the river formed its course. The relief of this protected area belongs to the alluvial and fluvial forms. The absolute height of the terrain where Nature Park Ponjavica is located is about 70 m [1]. Aeolian sands, sandy loess, loess, and loess soils form an integral part of the sand–loess landscape that encircles this protected area. These sediments are eolian formations that were deposited on land or in relatively shallow water during the continental period. This soil composition was particularly affected by Deliblatska Peščara, which is in the immediate vicinity of this protected area [3]. The aforementioned values are significant for the growth of geotourism, which can be complementary to the creation of sustainable tourism offer, where Nature Park Ponjavica can have a big impact. Future research by the authors will focus on how these principles were integrated into the creation of the tourist offer.

7. Conclusions

Prior study indicates that networking is one of the most crucial aspects of developing protected areas. Above all, funds are needed for the protection of natural values, the development of the area as a whole, as well as for the promotion of the protection of natural and cultural heritage, and cultural–historical inheritance. Financial support could come from the ecological, scientific-research, developmental, educational, and cultural–historical functions as well as from their collaboration to promote responsible tourism.

It is necessary to establish a clear basis for the complete management of this protected area. The local community plays the main role in creating an active development policy. In the desire to develop tourism, the local community often forgets the role of special business activities that need to be carried out, namely *planning*, *organizing*, *managing human resources*, *leading*, *and controlling*.

The fact is that these business activities in protected areas must be carried out following sustainable tourism development. In the example of the NP, we saw a great desire of the local community for sustainable development and their inability to realize it. The initiated planning for tourism development in the NP has not been fully implemented, which led to

certain problems in the implementation of other activities. This was reflected in inadequate and insufficiently built infrastructure for the needs of sustainable development of the area.

First, insufficient traffic infrastructure prevents unhindered access to the NP. As we know, traffic enables the discovery of certain areas that have potential conditions and opportunities for tourism development. The connection of potential destinations, the arrival of tourists, and tourism development as an activity are ensured only through the construction of the traffic network. Protected areas, natural beauties, and cultural and historical landmarks remain unknown if tourists cannot reach them quickly and efficiently. The local community must take care of the fact that the NP lacks a good traffic connection with the contracting zones.

A particular issue in the NP was the lack of jobs, which could be seen in the responses of both, residents and visitors. The local population, as well as visitors, identified the lack of jobs, the insufficient impact of tourism on the local economy, and the absence of donations for the protection of nature and species in the NP as the lowest-rated factors concerning ED. Therefore, special attention should be focused on strengthening the role of the local population and the promotion of local products that create economic benefits for them.

Protected areas represent the potential for changing the way of life not only at the local level but also more widely. Therefore, it is inevitable to establish a management team that will plan and implement all human activities that take place in the protected area. Their active role will contribute to limiting or completely banning negative activities with the aim of sustainable tourism development [93].

During our discussion with the NP management, we discovered that funding was the main obstacle to more rapid tourism development. The absence of funding and donations aimed at improving sustainable tourism in the NP affects not only the present but also the future development of sustainable tourism.

Therefore, it is very important to introduce new products to the NP that can be offered to tourists. This requires innovation, i.e., innovation processes that should be carried out by the local community. On that occasion, it should be kept in mind that new products in protected areas are limited by the need for sustainability and the principles of protection. A modified version of an already-existing product can also be regarded as a new one. If the population understands their role in this process, we can discuss a well-designed management team. Otherwise, tourism will continue to develop sporadically without clear visions [94,95].

If the obtained results are analyzed, it can be concluded that natural factors are key in planning tourism and managing the protected area. Harmonizing tourism with natural principles is vital. With more and more travelers choosing to visit natural areas, it is vital that we devote close attention to reducing the negative impact of tourism on the environment. The primary components of sustainable tourism in the Nature Park Ponjavica are the unique landforms, wetlands, flora, fauna, and cultural legacy of the local population living around the protected area. Planning sustainable tourism requires putting into effect the laws that control both tourism and environmental preservation. The ecological and socio-cultural dimensions of sustainability were rated as the most important dimensions. Strengthening the role of residents in the tourism development strategy can have a positive impact on the institutional and economic dimensions of sustainability. When the linkages between these four sustainability dimensions remain intact, a high-quality tourist location can have mass popularity. The final effect is undoubtedly higher tourism expenditures and revenue, which may once more be directed to infrastructure development and environmental preservation with the support of planning procedures.

The study's findings suggested that this protected region is suitable for some specific types of tourism. These included excursions and nature-based tourism, ecotourism, bird watching, and cultural tourism. Planning for tourism should give special consideration to geotourism because of its unique qualities regarding relief. Apart from its scientific dimension, geotourism may attract people from a variety of backgrounds. The establishment of educational centers ought to be connected to this protected area's geological diversity.

A unique educational and cultural importance may also arise from the development of schools in nature.

For example, the potential for the development of specific tourism forms in the NP has not been examined so far, and it may present new or modified products the tourism market will accept.

The resources used for tourism development in the NP are not unlimited, but they are threatened with exhaustion if tourism is not developed on the principles of sustainability. As a result, local government must cope with the inevitable necessity to manage the resources in a very sensible manner [96,97].

Since the potential for the growth of specific forms of tourism in the NP has not been thoroughly examined, one of the research's limitations is the inability to apply a comparative analysis of the findings with those of past studies on sustainable tourism. Thus far, the analysis has focused mostly on variables that may have a significant impact on the growth of types of tourism, like fishing, ecotourism, adventure travel, and some types of cultural tourism. Unfortunately, their direct contribution to the status of sustainable tourism has not been thoroughly investigated.

The main goal of tourism development in the NP is the implementation of harmonized and limited tourism that can enable the provision of funds for the protection of natural values, the improvement in the area, and the promotion of the protection of natural and cultural heritage and cultural–historical inheritance. Defining clear goals and achieving the results of the tourism development of this protected area is not possible without the active role of local community representatives. Their role is important in educational, management, and promotional activities

Taking into consideration the exceptional importance of managing tourism development in protected areas, the authors of this paper will devote special research to this issue by comparing tourism development in areas with different degrees of protection.

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