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Titel: Participatory Planning for the Implementation of Sustainable Tourism in Rural Regions

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SDG-Kategorie[3]:

- ☐ **SDG 1**: **Armut** in all ihren Formen und überall beenden
- ☐ **SDG 2**: Den **Hunger** beenden, **Ernährungssicherheit** und eine bessere **Ernährung** erreichen und eine nachhaltige **Landwirtschaft** fördern
- ☐ **SDG 3**: Ein **gesundes Leben** für alle Menschen jeden Alters gewährleisten und ihr Wohlergehen fördern
- ☐ **SDG 4**: Inklusive, gleichberechtigte und hochwertige **Bildung** gewährleisten und Möglichkeiten **lebenslangen Lernens** für alle fördern
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- ☒ **SDG 11**: **Städte und Siedlungen** inklusiv, sicher, widerstandsfähig und nachhaltig gestalten
- ☐ **SDG 12**: Nachhaltige **Konsum- und Produktionsmuster** sicherstellen
- ☐ **SDG 13**: Umgehend Maßnahmen zur **Bekämpfung des Klimawandels** und seiner Auswirkungen ergreifen
- ☐ **SDG 14**: **Ozeane, Meere und Meeresressourcen** im Sinne nachhaltiger Entwicklung erhalten und nachhaltig nutzen
- ☐ **SDG 15**: **Landökosysteme** schützen, wiederherstellen und ihre nachhaltige Nutzung fördern, **Wälder** nachhaltig bewirtschaften, Wüstenbildung bekämpfen, Bodendegradation beenden und umkehren und dem Verlust der **biologischen Vielfalt** ein Ende setzen
- ☐ **SDG 16**: **Friedliche und inklusive Gesellschaften** für eine nachhaltige Entwicklung fördern, allen Menschen **Zugang zur Justiz** ermöglichen und leistungsfähige, rechenschaftspflichtige und inklusive **Institutionen** auf allen Ebenen aufbauen
- ☒ **SDG 17**: **Umsetzungsmittel stärken** und die Globale Partnerschaft für nachhaltige Entwicklung mit neuem Leben erfüllen

Haupt-SDG der Arbeit: SDG11

3-5 Keywords[4]: participatory planning, stakeholder involvement, rural tourism, policy development

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[2] Die Angabe ist optional und soll Interessentinnen und Interessenten dazu dienen, mit dem Autor/der Autorin in Kontakt zu treten.

[3] Welchen der 17 SDGs kann diese Arbeit zugeordnet werden? Es sind alle Ziele anzugeben, zu denen die Forschungsarbeit einen wesentlichen Bezug herstellt sowie jenes Haupt-SDG, das von der Arbeit am meisten betroffen ist.

[4] Zentrale Begriffe zur inhaltlichen Erfassung der wesentlichen behandelten Aspekte.

Doctoral Dissertation

Participatory Planning for the Implementation of Sustainable Tourism in Rural Regions

submitted by

Alice Wanner, M.A.

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the academic degree

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Affidavit

I hereby declare that I have authored this dissertation independently, and that I have not used any assistance other than that which is permitted. The work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise. All ideas taken in wording or in basic content from unpublished sources or from published literature are duly identified and cited, and the precise references included. Any contribution from colleagues is explicitly stated in the authorship statement of the published papers.

I further declare that this dissertation has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in the same or a similar form, to any other educational institution as part of the requirements for an academic degree.

I hereby confirm that I am familiar with the standards of Scientific Integrity and with the guidelines of Good Scientific Practice, and that this work fully complies with these standards and guidelines.

Vienna, 31 May 2022   Alice WANNER *(manu propria)*

Acknowledgements

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Publications that comprise the main part of this cumulative dissertation

Paper 1:

Wanner, A., Seier, G., & Pröbstl-Haider, U. (2020). Policies related to sustainable tourism – An assessment and comparison of European policies, frameworks and plans. *Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism*, *29*, 100275. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jort.2019.100275 (published)

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Paper 3:

Wanner, A., Pröbstl-Haider, U., & Feilhammer, M. (2021). The future of Alpine pastures – Agricultural or tourism development? Experiences from the German Alps. *Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism*, *35*, 100405. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jort.2021.100405 (published)

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Abstract

Globally, many initiatives are set up to make tourism a more sustainable industry in which the positive developments it can contribute outweigh its negative impacts on environment and society. International and national policies have incorporated this plan and are calling for greater participatory approaches in tourism planning and development. This research investigates the demands policies place on sustainable tourism development at regional and local levels and focusses on the importance given to stakeholder involvement and the barriers which currently block participatory planning at the destination level and thus are also hindering sustainable development. The selected methodological approach based on action research along with stakeholder focus groups, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews was applied to ensure that the obtained results were relevant to fostering tourism planning now and in future. A disconnect in understanding between national and European level policy and local implementation was found. Poor communication, lack of accountability and stark differences in stakeholder awareness levels on the topic of sustainability often prevent successful participatory planning and thus also hindering sustainable development in tourism. While stakeholders are needed to ensure the results of planning processes reflect current and specific regional needs, conflicts of interest and low awareness continue to be central barriers to the participatory process. Action research showed that participatory processes can be conducted even with large stakeholder groups but must take the time to address different levels of awareness and conflicts of interest. Barriers can be overcome by applying efficient participatory methodology, including manuals and guidelines and allowing for feedback loops within the development process of sustainable tourism strategies. Incorporating communication strategies and setting focal points to ensure that all participants can contribute meaningfully to the planning process are further factors of success when bridging the gap between policies and local level implementation.

Keywords: participatory planning, stakeholder involvement, sustainable tourism, tourism policy, rural tourism

Kurzfassung

Weltweit lassen sich Initiativen erkennen, die versuchen den Tourismus nachhaltiger zu gestalten und dafür zu sorgen, dass die positiven Wirkungen für Umwelt und Gesellschaft überwiegen. Die internationale und nationale Politik unterstützt diesen Weg und fordert partizipative Ansätze in der Tourismusplanung und -entwicklung. Diese Dissertation untersucht die Anforderungen, die die Politik an eine nachhaltige Tourismusentwicklung auf regionaler und lokaler Ebene stellt, und konzentriert sich auf die Bedeutung der Beteiligungsprozesse auf Destinationsebene. Durch die gewählten Untersuchungsmethoden wie Aktionsforschung, Fokusgruppen, Fragebögen und Leitfaden gestützte Interviews wurde sichergestellt, dass die Resultate auch in der Praxis anwendbar sind. Die Ergebnisse zeigten eine Diskrepanz zwischen der Tourismuspolitik auf nationaler und europäischer Ebene und der lokalen Umsetzung vor Ort. In der Praxis verhindern häufig mangelnde Kommunikation, fehlende Verantwortung und Unterschiede im Bewusstsein der Akteure für die Nachhaltigkeit verhindern eine erfolgreiche partizipative Planung und damit auch eine nachhaltige Entwicklung im Tourismus. Zwar werden lokale Akteure involviert, um sicherzustellen, dass die Planung die aktuellen und spezifischen regionalen Bedürfnisse berücksichtigt, doch verhindern vielfach bestehende Interessenskonflikte und ein geringes Bewusstsein zum Planungsinhalt eine nachhaltige Entwicklung. Die Forschungsergebnisse zeigen weiterhin, dass partizipative Planung auch mit großen Stakeholder-Gruppen durchführbar ist. Man muss jedoch Zeit einplanen um den unterschiedlichen Wissensstand und mögliche Interessenskonflikte einzugehen zu können. Solche Barrieren können durch effiziente partizipative Methoden, Arbeitshilfen und geplanten Feedbackschleifen als Teil des Entwicklungsprozesses nachhaltigerer Tourismusstrategien überwunden werden. Weitere Erfolgsfaktoren zur Überbrückung der Defizite zwischen Politik und Implementierung sind die Einbeziehung von Kommunikationsstrategien und die Konzentration auf lokal relevante Ziele, die sicherstellen, dass alle Beteiligten einen sinnvollen Beitrag zum Planungsprozess leisten können.

Keywords: Partizipative Planung, Stakeholder, nachhaltiger Tourismus, Tourismuspolitik, ländlicher Tourismus

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1. Introduction

There is a plan for tourism. A plan to make tourism a more sustainable sector. The labor intensity and reliance on natural resources have brought the sector into focus for international organizations and national governments alike. Tourism can be perceived as a positive tool for economic and regional development (Ashley et al., 2001; Rein & Strasdas, 2017). However, it is also accompanied by words of warning and caution on the lack of sustainable tourism development approaches and the dangers this can have for nature and society (Schulz et al., 2021).

Tourism is a very carbon intensive industry and accounts for 8% of all global greenhouse gas emissions (Lenzen et al., 2018). The greatest percentage of these contributions are attributed to transport emission and are influenced by distance and mode of transportation (Neger et al., 2021). Tourism can also be responsible for the destruction of habitats and loss of biodiversity through large scale infrastructure projects and developments, which may ultimately lead to uneven wealth distributions, gentrification and precarious employment situations (Rein & Strasdas, 2017; Steinecke, 2011). However, with adequate strategies, tourism can also become a source of improvement for the regional economy, provide high-quality employment and training to increase livelihood locally or even reduce disparities and increase quality of life and expand infrastructure which benefits locals as well as tourists (Rein & Strasdas, 2017; Schulz et al., 2021; Steinecke, 2011). Tourism can contribute towards upholding cultural heritage such as dances, festivals and craftsmanship, but simultaneously must avoid commodification to remain authentic (Kim et al., 2019) and create a greater sense of regional identity (Neumeier & Pollermann, 2014). Additionally, it can also drive local nature conservation efforts (Arnberger et al., 2012; Imran et al., 2014; Schulz et al., 2021).

Therefore, the plan is for tourism to enhance its positive impacts by contributing to regional development in a manner which will benefit local populations and regions. Thus international, national and regional development policies should reflect these aims and goals for the tourism sector. At the highest levels, the United Nations (UN) works through the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), a UN agency working specifically on global development of responsible, sustainable and accessible tourism (UNWTO, 2021a). With the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2016 at Habitat III, the UN has also connected sustainable development to clear indicators. The European Union's (EU) work is slightly subtler, as tourism is not an official competence field and thus its development officially lies with the member states. However, they too have developed tourism policies and the European Tourism Indicator System (ETIS) to link sustainable goals with collectable data (European Commission, 2016).

These policies and guidelines strongly recommend bottom-up approaches in planning. Involving local stakeholders in tourism development to ensure that regional needs are met and interest represented are a core element of how social sustainability is understood by the UN and EU (European Commission, 2010; United Nations, 2015). Participation in planning and development are called on to

encourage greater ownership and improved acceptance of tourism planning outcomes (Hartley & Wood, 2005).

Europe already boasts a well-developed tourism sector, well situated in the international market. However, these developments are generally concentrated in specific regions in western and southern areas of the continent (Pröbstl-Haider, Wanner, et al., 2021). In central and south-east Europe, there are many rural regions interested in developing tourism based on their unique natural and cultural heritage. Strengthening rural regions is part of the EU strategy to diversify tourism across the continent (European Commission, 2010).

There is a clear and shared vision by the UN and the EU, that tourism can and must become not only more environmentally sustainable but economically and socially as well (European Commission, 2010; UNWTO, 2021b). The policies see tourism as a tool to overcome social and regional inequalities. The literature strongly supports the idea that tourism is an instrument for development in rural areas (Ashley et al., 2001; Rein & Strasdas, 2017). This includes goals such as investing in generating employment opportunities that are more than seasonal positions, greater gender balance, improved infrastructure, avoiding overtourism, ensuring resource efficiency, renewable energy and of course nature conservation, to name but a few (Balsalobre-Lorente & Leitão, 2020; Rein & Strasdas, 2017; Surugiu & Surugiu, 2015). Nonetheless, the greater the development of tourism, the greater the emissions, thus also increasing the carbon footprint in the region (Balsalobre-Lorente & Leitão, 2020; Lenzen et al., 2018), an important aspect to consider as tourism is not only a contributor to climate change, but also greatly impacted by it (Pröbstl-Haider, Mostegl, & Damm, 2021).

Tourism can have many benefits specifically for rural regions. Rural tourism is a tool for economic diversification through this and by joining local stakeholders into a strong destination network, it may even function as a pull factor to prevent further emigration (Baković, 2020; Cvijanovic & Gajic, 2021). Rural regions oftentimes rely on nature-based activities and cultural landscapes to develop tourism products, and so conservation aspects of social and environmental sustainability are especially important to them as the basis on which they build tourism (Pröbstl-Haider, Mostegl, & Damm, 2021). The list of what is to be achieved is long, and rightly so. International organizations have provided policy and indicators for the tourism sector, yet struggles with their implementation in rural areas persist. There is an urgency to sustainable development that the industry does not seem to be reacting to, even though they are in a prime position to contribute to nature conservation and climate change mitigation. Therefore, this cumulative dissertation is dedicated to investigating how the implementation of sustainable tourism can be achieved; with a special focus given to rural destinations. To achieve this, the general aims and goals of sustainable tourism must be considered.

Although the policies and organizations often use terms such as *sustainable*, *sustainable tourism*, and *rural tourism*, the terminology is often fuzzy and lacks concise and clear description. Therefore, to lay a common foundation of terminology, the following definitions are used to form a common understanding of sustainable rural tourism:

"*Rural tourism is a type of tourism activity in which the visitor's experience is related to a wide range of products generally linked to nature-based activities, agriculture, rural lifestyle / culture, angling and sightseeing*" (UNWTO, 2019, p. 34). This definition continues by elaborating that rural tourism activities occur in non-urban areas which are characterized by a low population density, landscapes dominated by agriculture and forestry and communities with traditional social structures and lifestyles.

In agreement with Rein and Strasdas (2017) as well as Bandi Tanner and Müller (2019), sustainable tourism is increasingly seen as more of a direction of development than a static condition which is concluded with its achievement. There is, therefore, no simple state of sustainable tourism, but a recurring strive to improve and develop rural tourism to continuously become more sustainable. The UNWTO states that sustainable tourism should:

"1. Make optimal use of environmental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity.

2. Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance.

3. Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation." (UNWTO, 2021c).

Indirect implications of tourism in regards to environmental sustainability include the sensibilization of people for sustainability – appreciating an idyllic landscape, cultural individuality and diversity, high recreational quality, and even landscape preservation through agriculture (Bandi Tanner & Müller, 2019).

Sustainable rural tourism is therefore a form of tourism activity taking place in areas of low population density, which respect and conserve both the traditional social structures and lifestyles as well as the agricultural and forestry landscapes which define the host communities, while ensuring long-term and fair economic conditions and benefits for all stakeholders. Management is the core of sustainable tourism, which is responsible for anchoring economic, ecological and social aspects of sustainable development into tourism strategies, destination management, policy development, stakeholder involvement processes and implementation (BTE Tourismus- und Regionalberatung, 2017).

Tourism is often considered an economic driver for rural regions and the positive effects are praised, while possible negative effects such as poorly paid employment or commercialization of culture are often overlooked (see Table 1). Steinecke (2011) describes that if not developed within a sustainable and organized strategy, tourism can change the landscape and townscape, leading to sprawl and destruction of the very landscapes attracting visitors. Ecologically speaking, recreational activities can endanger plant and wildlife and disturb game in protected areas. He continuous by stating, as other

authors like him (Ehmer & Heymann, 2008; Mayer & Job, 2016; Pröbstl-Haider, Lund-Durlacher, et al., 2021b), that climate change will also continue to impact tourism and related recreational activities. The impacts climate change has and will continue to have on tourism need to be actively addressed in planning both to mitigate climate change and in reaction to it to create a tourism sector that is not only sustainable but also resilient.

While international and national policies can set goals and indicators, it is the destination level that is the appropriate scale to tackle sustainability effectively, if they are capable of acting strategically (BTE Tourismus- und Regionalberatung, 2017; Rein & Strasdas, 2017). Rein & Strasdas (2017) continue by affirming the importance of stakeholder participation and the use of appropriate indicators to measure successful development. Policy and academia agree on these two factors being important.

Table 1: An overview of main positive and negative effects of tourism on rural destinations (based on Rein & Strasdas, 2017; Steinecke, 2011)

Economic	Social	Ecological
Negative effects		
• Poorly paid employment • Seasonal work • Uneven distribution of economic advantages • Gender • Few management positions	• Commercialization of culture • Increased crime • Gentrification • Increased cost of living • urbanization	• Impact on biodiversity in sensitive areas • Loss of biodiversity • Adverse effects of infrastructure landscape • Sealing • Activity-related effects: destruction and disturbance of habitats
Positive effects		
• Employment opportunities • Job diversity • Regional economic boost, foreign exchange, multiplier effects • Expansion of infrastructure • Reduction of disparities	• Preservation of traditions and culture • Appreciation of traditional art and crafts • Preservation of vernacular architecture and monuments • Strengthening local identity	• Co-financing conservation areas • Valorization of landscape, species and nature for conservation • Environmental education

Therefore, active management, strategy development and implementation are vital components for destination development. It is the destination level that is responsible for planning, developing and

most importantly, implementing an appropriate tourism strategy, as only they can balance regional needs and positive effects of tourism with the potential negative effects of Table 1.

An appropriate tourism planning strategy which can address the rural destination's unique selling points will benefit the region as a whole (Hartley & Wood, 2005). In order to do so, the destination management organization (DMO) must act sustainably under the following success factors, according to Rein and Strasdas (2017, pp. 293):

- Economic and social developments under consideration of ecological limits
- Economically oriented in accordance with the community's social needs
- Incorporate the local stakeholders in participatory planning processes
- Uphold the unique cultural dynamics
- Institutions provide information and engage in participatory planning

They argue that the DMO has a double task: on one hand it is responsible for the destination's sustainability, but on the other hand also for the sustainability of the products and providers it coordinates, leads and positions in the international market. The aim is for it to become a self-organized and efficient instrument of communication, coordination and cooperation which serves the local population first and foremost to ensure long-term sustainable development (Rein and Strasdas, 2017, pp.294).

Stakeholders in tourism are very diverse (Wanner & Pröbstl-Haider, 2019). The most predominant stakeholders at the local level include tourism service providers involved in specialized transportation, accommodation, health and wellness facilities, conference centers, recreation, and gastronomy (Bandi Tanner & Müller, 2019). However, stakeholders are by no means limited to those directly involved in the tourism industry, but also cross sectoral stakeholders who influence tourism (Rein & Strasdas, 2017). This group of stakeholders includes the local population, those employed by providers, business owners, part-time employees, those without direct connection to the tourism industry, local administration and politics, NGOs, and development experts (Bandi Tanner & Müller, 2019; Wanner & Pröbstl-Haider, 2019).

Sustainable rural tourism is complex and multifaceted. From a planning perspective the complexity is heightened through the juxtaposition of top-down policies and bottom-up stakeholder participation. In these processes, the planner has been morphing from sole leader of development processes to an advisor or moderator in incrementalistic planning together with stakeholders as the importance of participation grows (Schulz et al., 2021). There is a plan for tourism to become more sustainable in accordance with policy goals and indicators, yet stakeholders seem to be struggling to implement this plan.

Considering the call for sustainability, change in planning philosophy, the new role of and increased influence by participation policy, this dissertation aims to investigate what is blocking rural tourism regions in central and southeast Europe from becoming more sustainable and what the factors for

success to improve participatory sustainable tourism planning are. To answer this question, the following sub-questions are posed:

1. What demands do policies make for sustainable tourism planning at local and regional level?
2. Why and how are stakeholders needed?
3. How can barriers to participatory planning be overcome?

The hypothesis being tested is that there is a disconnect in understanding between high level policy and actual local level implementation which is preventing successful participatory tourism planning in rural regions. The first aim is to identify where and why this disconnect between policy and implementation is occurring. The second aim is to produce practical solutions to overcome barriers identified as being a hindrance to sustainable tourism planning at a local level in rural tourism regions.

Remembering that policy on sustainable tourism by both the UN and the EU and their corresponding indicator systems are well established and their implementation has been lagging, the practice-oriented approach of this research will contribute to improving rural regions' abilities to meet policy goals and contribute to wider sustainability in tourism and regional development.

2. **Theoretical foundation**

Tourism is often described as a complex system with many influencing factors (Gazoni & Da Silva, 2021; Leiper, 1979; Mill & Morrison, 2009; Sedarati et al., 2019) and while there are many ways to investigate tourism as a result of this complexity, the case at hand examines rural tourism under consideration of tourism from a planning perspective as a segment of this system. Currently, the systems approach is not broadly applied to tourism development according to studies conducted by Sedarati et al. (2019) and Gazoni & Da Silva (2021). However, both studies argue that the approach would benefit sustainable tourism development. According to Leiper (1979) in its most basic geographic system, tourism can be seen spatially divided into three regions: tourist generating, transit and tourist destination. From a planning perspective it is the destination out of these three which is of most interest, as the destination and its DMO influence the priorities of tourism products, typically organizes the planning process and related stakeholder involvement[1]. However, all planning processes by the DMO should follow or are embedded into regional or national tourism policies. Therefore, policies are considered as influencing factors on the destination (Farsari, 2012; Roxas et al., 2020; Sedarati et al., 2019) and stakeholders are vital participants in this system who can be found within many relationships within the tourism system (Bramwell, 2011).

The following sections will begin with a discussion of current literature on tourism policies influencing sustainable tourism development in central and southeast Europe. It discusses the influence of international, European, national and regional policies on tourism development and investigates how these policies influence destinations and destinations' incorporation of stakeholders into participatory planning approaches. Analysis of international and national policies will show how the plan for a more sustainable future for tourism is communicated and where the divisions in tasks are. It will show which demands and responsibilities are currently placed on destinations to assist in achieving sustainable tourism.

Considering the importance of tourism destinations as a hub between policy and stakeholders, this section concludes with an investigation of current literature and case studies on stakeholder involvement in sustainable tourism, why stakeholders are needed and the factors for success and failure of participatory planning for sustainable tourism development. While there is a top-down influence by policies, stakeholders also influence destination development from within through bottom up processes, as illustrated in Figure 1. The literature review shows that significant stakeholder involvement and participatory approaches are called for and highlighted in planning and implementation phases, but are not properly anchored in destination management in practice. This

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[1] Tourism was heavily impacted by travel restrictions and lockdowns as of March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Because this dissertation focuses on tourism from a planning and supply side, the influences of the pandemic will be limited in the long-run as full recovery of the tourism sector is expected (Balas et al. (2020); Casado-Aranda et al. (2021); Everingham and Chassagne (2020). Therefore, the COVID-19 the pandemic is not discussed.

is contradictory, as it is policies and DMOs who strongly recommend participatory processes in the first place.

Figure 1: Intensity of call for participation in guidelines and recommendations opposed to actual stakeholder involvement (own illustration)

2.1. Tourism policy

2.1.1. Background

The tourism system is framed by the policies which surround it. Policy aims to provide a direction for sustainable development often clearly addressing sustainability (Rein & Strasdas, 2017). Generally speaking, they set standards and expectations, in some cases even concrete targets to be achieved. Tourism policy is "a progressive course of actions, guidelines, directives, principles, and procedures set in an ethical framework that is issue-focused and best represent the intent of a community (or nation) to effectively meet its planning, development, product, service, marketing, and sustainability goals and objectives for the future growth of tourism" (Edgell et al., 2008).

Climate change is an excellent example for the interconnectedness of various policies: There are national and international policies addressing climate change. However, since tourism is interconnected with a variety of sectoral policies (Hall & Page, 2014) and therefore, policies addressing sustainability influence tourism both directly and indirectly at multiple planning levels. Furthermore, tourism not only contributes to climate change (OECD, 2011) but is also influenced by it (Pröbstl-Haider, Lund-Durlacher, et al., 2021a; Pröbstl-Haider, Wanner, et al., 2021) many tourism

policies address climate change and include adaptation as well as mitigation strategies (Rein & Strasdas, 2017).

Much of the tourism policy literature concentrates on pro-poor policies contributions in developing nations (Andriotis, 2001; Dieke, 2003; Roe et al., 2004) and granted, tourism policies' objective is to improve regional citizens' lives (Biederman et al., 2008). However, developments of late are beginning to lay a stronger concentration on policymaker's (Stevenson et al., 2008) and stakeholder's (Albrecht, 2010; Anastasiadou, 2008; Wanner et al., 2021) perspectives. Another main subject of policy related literature is the look at regional policies and the comparison of various national policies. Policies for the Nordic countries, for the alpine chain or eastern Europe are examples this kind of policy related research (Anastasiadou, 2008; Halkier, 2010; Hughes & Allen, 2005). Anastadiadou (2008) however, highlights the research gap in central-eastern European tourism policy analysis.

Intergovernmental institutions face challenges in institutionalizing tourism policy (Estol et al., 2018). Majone (2014) argues that as policy is developed, it needs to move away from a purely territorial approach and more towards functional approaches which would imply inter-jurisdictional competition. Bell et al. (2007) for example, investigate forest functions across Europe in regard to the connection between tourism and outdoor recreation. The comparative research revealed significant differences between policies and implementation within the European regions. Cooperation becomes less interesting to regions however, if they face competition between one another (Schumacher et al., 2016).

Along this line, several authors (Bousset et al., 2007; Zimmermann, 2018) address that policy also needs to call for bottom-up and participatory approaches which can address values, capabilities and needs of the local population. As the local population and actors learn and improve capabilities, they need to be able to respond to socioeconomic and environmental changes through policy instruments provided (Bell et al., 2007; Ooi et al., 2018), especially if the region is working in rural and nature-based tourism.

2.1.2. International policies

In the following section, international and European policies relevant to the research conducted are presented. These policies are the framework for sustainable tourism development in central and south-east Europe. Internationally, Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have set global sustainability goals and although officially, tourism only plays a minimal role in this document, there are many aspects to which tourism can contribute productively. This is recognized through Tourism4SDGs. At a European level, the EU's policies concentrate on cohesion across member states in order to raise and maintain standards and increase sustainability of tourism across their territory. The most relevant international tourism policies for central and south-east Europe, their influence and current states of research will be discussed in the following segments.

2.1.2.1. Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The United Nations General Assembly approved the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which included the SDGs (Figure 2) and explicitly mentions tourism in SDGs 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and 14 (Life Below Water) (United Nations, 2015). A supplementary document lists 231 indicators to measure the 169 corresponding targets set out to be achieved through the SDGs (United Nations, 2021).

Tourism goals and linked indicators in the SDGs are the following (United Nations, 2021):

- 8.9. By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products.
  - Indicator: 8.9.1. Tourism direct GDP as a proportion of total GDP and in growth rate
- 12.b Develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products.
  - Indicator: 12.b.1. Implementation of standard accounting tools to monitor the economic and environmental aspects of tourism sustainability
- 14.7 By 2030 increase the economic benefits to small island developing states and least developed countries from the sustainable use of marine resources, including through sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture and tourism.
  - Indicator: 14.7.1 Sustainable fisheries as a proportion of GDP in small island developing states, least developed countries and all countries

Agenda 2030 and the SDGs have come to be seen as crucial for implementing sustainable development and have significant influence on national development strategies worldwide (Rein & Strasdas, 2017). The UNWTO, is responsible for the coordination of the tourism sector, policy development, topical conferences as well as conducting studies and collecting statistics (UNWTO, 2021a). The agency continuously links its policies and works towards the achievement of all SDGs (shown in Figure 2) and not only to the SDGs tourism is explicitly mentioned in. As a result Tourism4SDGs was brought to life (UNWTO, 2021b) which acknowledges that as a major driver of regional and economic development, tourism can contribute to all SDGs. It recognizes travelers, providers, international organizations and public bodies as contributing stakeholders. In regard to policy, Tourism4SDGs importance of creating policy to foster partnerships, dialogue and participatory planning at regional and international levels take focus. However, the SDGs and Tourism4SDGs are non-binding, meaning that while nations, cities or communities pledge to join and follow the goals, there are no consequences for not adhering to them. Some tourism destinations such as Austria also analyses how and in what way tourism has an influence on all the SDGs, highlighting the enormous potential influence of tourism (BMWFW, 2017; UNWTO, 2021b).

While the potential for the SDGs to influence sustainable tourism sounds quite promising, there is still little scientific literature investigating the links between SDGs and tourism development. There is

some literature praising the connection of tourism's ability to contribute to global sustainability in regard to employment opportunities, sustainable production and consumption and nature conservation (Rein & Strasdas, 2017; Scheyvens & Cheer, 2021). Scheyvens and Cher (2021) expand on this thought and see these policies as important to achieve desired goals, especially when combining sustainable tourism development with goals such as climate action and nature conservation both on land and below water.

Figure 2: The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations 2019)

Literature on the importance of partnerships (SDG 17) for (participatory) tourism develop are more common, yet very critical of the policy's achievements addressing the international policy level's short-comings to assist in long-term sustainable tourism development (Adie et al., 2020; Beisheim & Simon, 2018). Beisheim and Simon (2018) determined that while the SDGs set clear goals, the policy fails to demonstrate clear responsibilities and thus offers little accountability. This issue is further magnified by the UN's low capacity to coordinate or monitor efforts to achieve the policies they draft. Additionally, they state that financial constraints are continuous barriers to implementing the SDGs and solutions to this are not laid out in the policy (Beisheim & Simon, 2018). (Adie et al., 2020) determined that partnerships, deemed vital to sustainable development under SDG 17, are too often only geared at short-term results related to development projects and lack the long-term orientation needed for a sustainable future. However, in the context of participatory planning and stakeholder

involvement, SDG 17 can be perceived as a clear recommendation for more cooperation, participatory planning and inclusive development.

2.1.3. EU policies

The European Union does not count tourism as one of its competence fields, and thus nation states and regions hold full authority over tourism policy. However, EU policy, while non-binding to the member states, can still coordinate, support or supplement national actions and policies, provide financial support or even implement sectoral policies which will influence sustainable tourism development (Juul, 2015).

Policies, networks, initiatives and commission communications are the four non-binding policy instruments the EU uses. A summary of these is found in Table 2. Additionally, the EU may use financial instruments in the form of project funding through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Social Fund (ESF), Cohesion Funds, Instrument for pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) and their development programs such as LEADER and Interreg to fund single or regional tourism development projects (Beck, 2018).

Looking at the policies in Table 2, a strong focus on two aspects can be seen. First, the desire to strengthen sustainability can be seen across the actions, initiatives and indicator systems. Although it should be mentioned, that the goal is to incorporate economic and social cohesion and increase sustainability across the entire EU. Furthermore, the research and thematic networks function as knowledge exchange hubs while cross boarder policies aim to break down administrative borders when it comes to sustainable regional development. The commission communications are predominantly focused on establishing Europe's tourism economically (increasing stronger partnerships, job opportunities and competition in the global market) and also about establishing the EU destinations as high-quality and sustainable. It is this desire to be viewed as sustainable which links the communications to the introduction of certification systems (EMAS, Eco-Label and ETIS) (Cismaru & Ispas, 2015). Second, the EU tries to strengthen participatory approaches through all their policy instruments (Jiricka & Pröbstl, 2009).

Beck (2018) summarizes that sectoral policies and commission communications, such as those concerning waste, energy, transportation or biodiversity to name a few examples, also affect tourism development even though they do not explicitly mention tourism. As described by Anastasiadou (2008), The EU's policies in this regard are supplementary or secondary. According to Estol et al. (2018) "the extension of regulations on the environment and social cohesion, amongst other areas, have added value to the long-term sustainability of the tourism industry" in the European Union. Halkier (2010) similarly recognizes that the EU's influence on tourism is not as passive as it may at first appear and also recognizes sectoral policies as having a great influence on European tourism, especially for developing tourism in areas of the continent where until recently, it had been an insignificant economic activity. These areas include portions of central and southeast Europe.

The ambition to have an influence on tourism development is also visible in the lists of tourism related actions and initiatives in Table 2. One of these actions with an increasing influence is ETIS (European Commission, 2016). ETIS was an approach by the EU to introduce a form of benchmarking or development tool. "The development of sustainability indicators is a process of both scientific knowledge production and political norm creation" (Cannas 2019:110). Therefore, the creation of ETIS is an approach by the EU to introduce the aims laid out in their policy documents in an applicable and practical indicator system that demonstrate to destinations, where priorities for future development should lie. These indicators can also be used politically to justify policy or to kick-start debates about important planning content and goals (Gasparini & Mariotti, 2021; Wanner et al., 2020).

The European Union has attempted to create an indicator system which is described as a management and information tool for destinations, as it is not a certification system or required statistic (European Commission, 2021). The tool kit lists 43 core indicators divided into:

- Destination management

- Economic value

- Social and Cultural impact

- Environmental impact

With supplementary indicators for maritime tourism, accessible tourism and transnational cultural routes (European Commission, 2016: 21-24). ETIS serves as a tool to create evidence-influenced policy, aims to give destinations the ability to assess tourism impacts and assists destinations by providing a set of indicators that goes beyond the usual economically oriented indicators used in tourism such as duration of stay or spending (Font et al., 2021).

As already mentioned, ETIS stands out from other indicator systems through its call for stakeholder participation and awareness raising and underlines the high relevance of participation from a European perspective (European Commission, 2016). ETIS also encourages a heightened understanding of sustainable tourism planning content, divides responsibilities among local stakeholders and encourages greater long-term sustainability by encouraging information based decision making among stakeholders (Cannas, 2019; Gasparini & Mariotti, 2021; Modica et al., 2018; Tudorache et al., 2017). Gasparini & Mariotti (2021) argue, that ETIS greatest achievements are not the indicators per se, but the social learning and awareness raising on sustainable development issues amongst tourism stakeholders in destinations which it generated during implementation.

Table 2: Examples of European tourism policies (Beck, 2018)

Commission Communications:
- Basic Orientation for the Sustainability of European Tourism   - A renewed EU Tourism Policy: towards a stronger partnership for European Tourism   - Agenda for a Sustainable and Competitive European Tourism   - A European Strategy for more Growth and Jobs in Coastal and Maritime Tourism   - Europe, the world's No.1 tourist destination – a new political framework for tourism in Europe
Actions and Initiatives:
- European Destinations of Excellence (EDEN)   - European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas   - Funding for Sustainable Transnational Tourism Products   - European Tourism Indicator System (ETIS)   - EU Eco-Label   - Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS)
Research and thematic networks:
- European Research Network on Sustainable Tourism (ERNEST)   - Network of European Regions for a Sustainable and Competetive Tourism (NECSTouR)   - Knowledge Networking Portal for Sustainable and Responsible Tourism (DestiNet)
Cross Border Policies:
- Alpine Convention   - Carpathian Convention

One of the central challenges of measuring sustainability in tourism development is that there is such a variety of definitions and plethora of indicators which are not comparable (Bandi Tanner & Müller, 2019). Amongst the indicators that are used, the literature finds that economic indicators tend to be easily available, while social and environmental indicators are less easy to find (Bandi Tanner & Müller, 2019; Becken et al., 2020; Modica et al., 2018). And this is also where the greatest criticism of ETIS can be found: Since its creation the European Commission has done little else with this promising tool and has not secured finances to assist regions or created a central digital platform to collect the data for further benchmarking or influential use (Font et al., 2021). Transferable indicator collection techniques are lacking, making the use of ETIS for local stakeholders difficult (Modica et al., 2018; Tudorache et al., 2017). This is a serious deficit, considering the importance EU policy gives to participatory planning and the involvement of stakeholders as essential elements of European policy (Jiricka & Pröbstl, 2009).

International Organizations such as the United Nations influence tourism policy through supranational policy such as the SDGs. While these lay the groundwork for what is to be achieved by 2030, they are often vague in nature and do not include indictors appropriate for regional tourism development. The EU works in a non-binding fashion on tourism, although the influence they have through sectoral policies is not to be underestimated. With ETIS, a management approach exists, that is aimed at assisting regions in implementing long-term sustainable tourism. However, it is not widely used. Tourism policy continues to be a member state competence, yet is structured differently between the nations; some anchoring tourism at a national level while others anchor it at a regional level. Tourism policy in central and southeast Europe as well as the influence the SDGs and higher-level policies have on regional implementation and development of sustainable tourism remain an under-researched area in tourism studies.

2.1.4. National and regional policies

The SDGs were written to be further developed, framed and managed at national level (Ferrer-Roca et al., 2020). Taking a closer look at the individual countries, on which tourism policy responsibilities in Europe lie, it is clear that even within Europe, there is great diversity amongst the policy structures at national level among the member states. While some nations have a more centralized approach, leading tourism from a national ministry for example Bulgaria and Romania, others have tourism policy anchored at state or regional level such as Germany, Belgium, Austria and Spain (Anastasiadou, 2008). Although differences in prominence of tourism policy may also depend on the importance tourism plays for a nation (Becken et al., 2020). Ferrer-Roca et al. (2020) state that this should be taken as an opportunity for central governments to break thinking purely along administrative borders and to support peripheral and rural regions in their tourism development. To do this, and to comply with UN and EU policies, stakeholder participation in tourism development is needed.

Over past decades, there appeared to be an assumption that introducing policy to decentralize European nations, for example by reducing the numbers of municipalities through amalgamation, would lead to improving local public services (Ladner et al., 2016; Morpeth & Yan, 2015; Vries, 2000) and encourage more democratic and inclusive participation processes (Andrews & Vries, 2007; van Houwelingen, 2018; Vries, 2000). In a study conducted by Ladner et al. (2016) it was found that local governments of Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia have developed greater local autonomy since 1990. However in a European comparison, southeastern Europe still shows lower levels of autonomy at the local level compared to central and western European nations (van Houwelingen, 2018).

The autonomy given to municipalities is generally based on policies which allocate tasks for social assistance, and, most importantly for tourism, on land use to municipalities (Ladner et al., 2016). So while UN, EU and even national policies set sustainability goals, much of the responsibilities are ultimately found at the regional or local level. Additionally, van Houwelingen (2018) has found that the smaller a municipality is, the greater citizen engagement is, as the opportunity to actually

influence policy and regional developments are felt more by the participants. Thus, not only is responsibility allocated to municipalities, it is here at the local level that policies also wish to promote stakeholder participation processes.

However, the literature suggests that successful participation is usually due to local competence and the ability to identify demands and increase efficiency (Andrews & Vries, 2007). With slight trends towards local autonomy declining (van Houwelingen, 2018), it is therefore not mere a matter of political structure or policy, but more importantly a matter of competence that must be examined at the destination level.

2.2. Tourism destinations

The destination is situated at regional and local planning levels and is a central scale to investigate in tourism planning as the DMO or similar coordinating organization at this level are responsible for individual tourism development to build on strengths and incorporate stakeholders while complying with national laws and policies and striving to fulfill the international development goals. They are strategic units responsible for (Bandi Tanner and Müller, 2019, pp.152):

- Coordinating goods and services for select target groups
- At least one shared brand
- Qualified and competent management
- Quality control
- Sufficient management and human resources to fulfill their task, especially communication with relevant markets

Bandi Tanner and Müller (2019) state that destinations do not stop at town or municipal limits, but are larger regional units, considering the tourism chain itself goes beyond local administrative bounds. Meaning that planning approaches must incorporate cross-border cooperation across municipal boundaries, sometime even across national borders if necessary and appropriate.

At this level destination marketing, cooperation, visions and strategies are developed. Cooperation can take place not only up and downstream of the tourism chain but also across sections (Rein & Strasdas, 2017; Roxas et al., 2020). For example, this means that within tourism system, a rural destination can be strengthened by linking tourism and agriculture to increase income, market local products or landscape conservation for example (Steinecke, 2011). The literature highlights the crucial importance of cooperation with different stakeholders and stakeholder groups to achieve this; such as those from local economy or agriculture chambers (Fraser et al., 2006; Prell et al., 2007). Considering the links between tourism and other sectors at destination level, it is important to recognize that the DMO's responsibilities go beyond purely tourism related tasks and are strongly linked to other areas of regional development (Bandi Tanner & Müller, 2019; Rein & Strasdas, 2017).

The authors suggest embedding tourism in planning, economy, environment and socio-cultural developments.

Linking tourism to planning, Bandi Tanner & Müller (2019) suggest that stakeholder development at DMO level should include institutions which might be supportive when developing visions and strategies as well concepts for stakeholder participation, indicators for measuring success of implementation and sustainability. Furthermore, links between non-tourism related development plans of the municipality must be established and the shared use of infrastructure, public transport and multi-model transportation offers addressed.

Partnering with economic stakeholders such as local businesses, entrepreneurs and chambers of commerce should bond together to develop sustainable offers and the use of local products (Rein & Strasdas, 2017). To further economic development, the DMO can also work with partners for marketing, public relations, sales promotion, communication activities and sponsoring opportunities (Bandi Tanner & Müller, 2019; Steinecke & Herntrei, 2017). On the topic of marketing, the DMO should also organize joint information and a reservation platform for sales purposes (Bandi Tanner & Müller, 2019).

Linking tourism to environmental partners can be achieved by working with protected area management, environmental NGOs and the community. The aim of working with these partners is to combine forces to conserve outstanding landscape beauty and natural integrity, maintain regionally specific architecture and landscape, use natural resources wisely and integrate visitor management schemes to enhance visitor experience and reduce environmental impacts (Bandi Tanner & Müller, 2019; Rein & Strasdas, 2017).

Social and cultural partners such as health institutions, child care, museums, cultural associations, and communities are often overlooked as tourism partners but link to tourism by providing information about culture, protecting cultural assets and coordinating between providers, attractions and management (Bandi Tanner & Müller, 2019). They strengthen regional identity and customs and uphold immaterial heritage of the region.

Tourism is not purely an economic activity. As the aforementioned listed partners and activities indicate, there are many opportunities to use a participatory approach to contribute to sustainable development including the improvement of transportation and sanitation infrastructure, economic sustainability resource management and efficient and positive effects on livelihoods and quality of life for citizens. It is perceived as the destination's responsibility to ensure that tourism is used as an economic regional driver and a tool for sustainable development for the region as a whole (Andriotis, 2001; Ashley et al., 2001; Dieke, 2003).

2.3. Stakeholder involvement in tourism

Including stakeholders in planning processes can benefit regions by rising awareness, generating innovative collaborations for managements and products or strengthening bonds to overcome times of crisis and create a more confident future-oriented approach among stakeholders (Steinecke & Herntrei, 2017). It can also lead greater acceptance of planning results and understanding for outcomes by increasing transparency of the planning processes (Hartley & Wood, 2005). A stakeholder is "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objective." (Freeman, 1984, p. 46). In this case, the definition can be made more precise: Stakeholders are people who are interested in and may profit from their region's development in a direct or indirect way (Waligo et al., 2013). Tourists are excluded from this definition of stakeholders. This follows Murphy's Community Approach (Murphy, 2013) which underlines that beneficial partnerships are vital to tourism planning. Murphy (2013) highlights the importance of recognizing stakeholders and taking their differing perspectives on issues into account to ensure sustainable tourism development.

Additionally, stakeholders must be drivers and active participants of the planning process (Waligo et al., 2013). It is the local stakeholders and not the visitors or tourist who need to be empowered through the opportunity to discuss issues that influence their daily lives and quality of life (Norton, 2007; Wall & Mathieson, 2007). Main regional and local stakeholders described by the literature are listed in Table 3. The definition includes a great variety of stakeholders involved in sustainable rural tourism development, ranging from administration to accommodation providers, associations to mountain rescue, politicians to local population.

While Table 3 provides a general overview of who stakeholders in tourism may be at this level of planning, the individual constellation and composition of relevant stakeholders will vary from destination to destination. Selection of stakeholders who are relevant to the planning process is required and must be conducted by means of analysis and categorization (Ford et al., 2009; Reed et al., 2009). In certain situations non-tourism related residents may be included in the selected group (Kantsperger et al., 2019). Not all stakeholders need to be involved in every decision as some may be more relevant to certain planning stages or content, or are more strongly affected by certain outcomes of planning the planning process.

The literature shows that benefits of participation are well studied and have been determined to be generating trust and understanding between stakeholders, which becomes instrumental in developing and implementing tourism strategies (Reed et al., 2009). The generated understanding does not only apply among stakeholders but also between stakeholders and planners to assist in understandings regionally specific issues and power dynamics (Tosun, 2000). Such cooperation is crucial for tourism development in rural or peripheral areas, as their locations often hinder strong connections to higher level institutions and require them to build strong and effective development

partnerships locally (Hall, 2007; Zillinger, 2007). By including stakeholders in rural development, local institutions are strengthened and decisions and activities are led by locals (Schulz et al., 2021).

Table 3: Summary of relevant stakeholders and their influences on and tasks within tourism (based on (Bandi Tanner & Müller, 2019; Rein & Strasdas, 2017; Steinecke, 2011)

Level		Stakeholders	Planning influences and tasks
Destination	**Regional**	State level government	Strategy development
		DMO	Marketing
		Tourism associations	Coordination
			Communication
			Cooperation
			Monitoring
	Local	Local government and administration	Infrastructure management
		Providers (e.g. gastronomy, accommodation, conference facilities, transportation, recreation and sport, health and wellbeing, parks)	Providing tourism goods and services
			Represent local interests
		Indirect providers (e.g. involved in land management, cultural activities)	
		Local population	

To reap the benefits of participatory planning, the planner must actively integrate stakeholders into planning processes. In such scenarios, the planner is no longer functioning as an expert influencing the decision maker, but becomes more of a moderator or guide for the planning process (Fürst, 2008; Schulz et al., 2021). By taking this position, the planner is responsible for creating a planning process that will ensure long-term sustainable tourism development in a manner that is well accepted, fair and transparent but must also navigate the difficult task of ensuring awareness is raised, capacity is developed, trust is built and expertise provided.

The ideal participatory process is well described in the literature: It must be interactive and allow stakeholders to join in in analysis, take initiatives themselves and shift existing power structures (Schulz et al., 2021). They should be involved wherever possible to ensure better accepted results and to generate greater understanding for planning content among the local population (Bramwell & Lane, 2005; Hartley & Wood, 2005). Involving a diverse group of stakeholders will bring various vantage points and views together to create a fair and equitable participation process; an important

aspect of social sustainability in planning and regional development (Hull & Huijbens, 2016; Rein & Strasdas, 2017; Schulz et al., 2021).

But the great diversity of interests which can be the strength of participatory approaches is also its greatest weakness (Prell et al., 2007). This complexity can lead to various forms of participation which (Arnstein, 1969) is summarized along a ladder of participation (Figure 3). In this model meant to give a measure of participation, participation can range from non-participation over tokenism to degrees of citizen power. The aim for sustainable development is to reach a degree of citizen power.

There are many possibilities to design the process, depending on the goals to be achieved. To develop a joint sustainable tourism strategy and vision, classic forms of participatory process design are found in options such as workshops, focus groups, world cafés, discussion forums, consultations, surveys and statements, courses, master classes, training session, and round tables (Hull & Huijbens, 2016; Jaansoo, 2019; Schulz et al., 2021). Content may include discussion of issues and goals for tourism development in the region but also solutions and next steps. Results are often written down in minutes, or collected by a moderator (e.g. during a world café) for later use. The outcomes of these forms of stakeholder participation can generally be used to develop strategic documents and influence tourism development (Rein & Strasdas, 2017). Strong forms of citizen power may also include establishing official partnerships and councils (Schulz et al., 2021), although these may not be very interactive and are limited to the inclusion of a more select group of stakeholders.
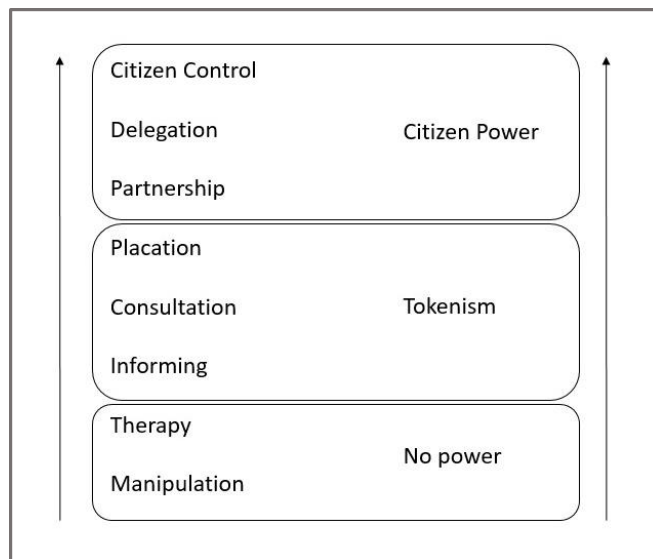
Figure 3: Ladder of Participation (own illustration based on Arnstein, 1969)

Depending on the topic, options for the use of geographic information systems (GIS) and mapping may be used as an interactive way to visualize and position aspects important for planning (Hull & Huijbens, 2016; Verutes et al., 2020). Planners may even opt to use gamification (Seiffert-Brockmann et al., 2018), virtual reality (Schauppenlehner et al., 2018) or citizen science (Schauppenlehner et al., 2021) methods to engage the tech-savvy stakeholders. Both of these methodologies engage stakeholders in digital, interactive formats aimed at increasing their interest in the process, while simultaneously gathering important information about the region and stakeholders' perceptions and knowledge about a variety of relevant issues and regional specificities. However, digital and technologically intense engagement options may be costly and be of more interest to stakeholders for the fun experience rather than interest in contributing to the planning process (Schauppenlehner et al., 2021).

Involving stakeholders from the beginning to the end of the planning process, from vision development to strategy implementation will increase acceptance of strategies and results among the community. It ensures transparency and increases equity in decision making (Hartley & Wood, 2005; Kadi et al., 2015). By structuring and organizing participatory planning approach in an effective, fair and strategic way, non-participation, tokenism and more importantly conflicts can be avoided (Kadi et al., 2015; Rein & Strasdas, 2017).

Hartley & Wood (2005) identify 10 criteria to achieve stakeholder participation:

- Communication
- Fairness
- Timing
- Accessibility
- Provision of information
- Influence on the process
- Competence
- Interaction
- Compromise
- Trust

Participatory planning approaches are most effective when applied to strategy and monitoring development at the destination level (Rein & Strasdas, 2017). In these stages they must be incorporated in a manner that evokes citizen power during which their participation fully involves them in decision making and the influence can be seen in the resulting output (Fraser et al., 2006; Hartley & Wood, 2005). Only then will the content become relevant for policy makers.

Start	Planning processes	Results
Incorporate marginalized groups	Compromise	Equity of decision making
Accessibility	Influence on the process	Accepted strategies
Provision of information	Interaction	Accepted results
Timing	Trust	Transparency
Competence	Fairness	
	Communication	
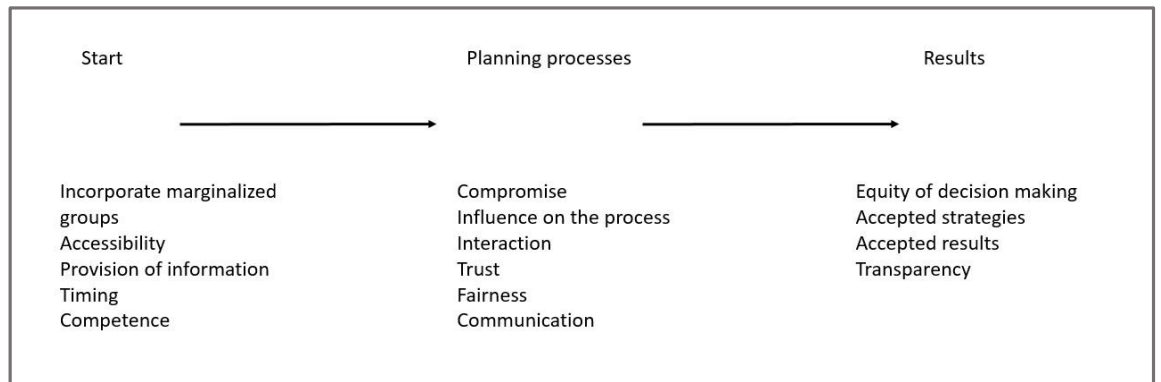
Figure 4: Benefits of stakeholder participation (own illustration based on Hartley & Wood, 2005; Kadi et al. 2015)

Hartley and Wood (2005) and Kadi et al. (2015) identify factors for successful stakeholder participation, which as shown in Figure 4, affect different segments of the planning processes. Some of these factors must be implemented at the beginning to lay a solid foundation for participatory approaches, such as the incorporating marginalized groups, budgeting enough time or accessibility to needed information. During the process, trust, fairness and compromise are built to ultimately generate equity in decision making and accepted strategies and results. The factors for success are interlinking and must all be incorporated into the planning process to achieve the wanted results (Hartley & Wood, 2005).

2.4. Barriers faced by stakeholders

Involving stakeholders in the planning process is not without its pitfalls, and the difficulties facing the application of a participatory approach are not only the diversity of the stakeholder group itself. If poorly managed, the process can face a multitude of barriers planners need to be aware of. Only if planners are aware of the barriers which usually occur, can the processes be conducted in an efficient and meaningful way to ensure success. The following barriers effecting the practical implementation of participatory planning approaches are identified by Tosun (2000) as:

Table 4: Barriers to stakeholder involvement (based on Tosun, 2000)

Operational Barriers	Structural Barriers	Cultural and Personal Barriers
Centralized administration	Attitudes	Lack of participatory experiences
Lack of coordination	Expertise	Limited capacity of the poor
Lack of information	Domination by elite	Apathy
	Legal system	Low awareness
	Human resources	
	Lack of financial resources	

Hartley and Wood (2005) investigated barriers which are less about the functionality of the process and more about those felt by stakeholders themselves. They agree with Tosun (2005) on regulatory constraints, lack of information and low awareness but also add the following barriers:

- Mistrust
- Failure to influence the process
- Poor execution of the method
- Poor access to legal advice
- NIMBY (not in my backyard syndrome)

These two sets complement each other and can be summarized as a full list of barriers to stakeholder participation for tourism planning as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Barriers to stakeholder involvement for tourism planning in rural destinations (based on Tosun, 2000; Hartley & Wood 2005)

Operational Barriers	Structural Barriers	Cultural and Personal Barriers
Lack of information on planning and legalities	Poor legal framework & regulatory constraints	Low capacity of poor
Weak administration	Lack of access to resources	Apathy
Poor coordination	Lack of expertise	Low awareness
Poor execution	Lack of training	Mistrust
Failure to influence process	High costs	Domination by elite
		NIMBY

Current case studies in tourism investigated barriers and have found that they continue to persist. The greatest barriers in these case studies were found to be under operational and structural barriers (Akama, 2002; Dodds, 2007; Hatipoglu et al., 2016; Ladkin & Bertramini, 2002; Zarakosta & Koutsouris, 2014). The most dominant issues are poor coordination, failure to influence the process, lack of expertise and training. Stakeholders feel the failure to communicate or failure to influence the planning processes strongly. Poor coordination and lacking financial instruments are further barriers in operation of stakeholder involvement. Lack of knowledge and leadership are final structural barriers that continue to exist according to the case studies.

Cultural and personal barriers highlight the commitment, time and willingness to engage that is required of stakeholders. Conflict of interest was grouped under domination by elite and continues to be a barrier which must be countered and requires proactive planning process approaches. Mistrust, lack of resources, low capacity and poor execution were not identified as serious barriers in case studies (Blackstock, 2005; Dodds, 2007; Dogra & Gupta, 2012; Hatipoglu et al., 2016; Ladkin & Bertramini, 2002).

Moving beyond the barriers of Tosun (2000) and Hartley and Wood (2005) the investigation of the case studies highlighted the influence of an outcome versus process-oriented approach, in that the type of approach influences both politicians' and stakeholders' ability to address long-term sustainability goals while following short-term aims. It is important that a process-oriented approach is taken when involving stakeholders.

It cannot be negated, that the planner themselves can become a barrier if their role begins to become conflicted between planner or expert and their role as a moderator of the stakeholder involvement process. Fürst (2008) is adamant that planners must acknowledge their role as a moderator of the process to ensure a fair stakeholder involvement process.

The literature not only identified barriers, but also suggested ways to overcome them. Hartley and Wood (2005) provide the recommendation that stakeholders should be involved early and effectively, be provided with easily accessible and understandable information (documents, discussions, public options) and most importantly that the results should be taken seriously and be considered in the outcome of the processes. They finalize their recommendations by stating that the involvement processes should be simplified and more transparent to increase the interest in participation. This would naturally also need to coincide with policy changes to allow for sufficient time and financial resources to support participatory planning processes, their collaboration and coordination and to understand the power structures hindering processes locally (Blackstock, 2005; Dogra & Gupta, 2012; Hartley & Wood, 2005; Hatipoglu et al., 2016; Kunjuraman & Hussin, 2016). Furthermore, decision-makers and planners need to change their frame of mind towards participatory planning and actively and deliberately apply this approach throughout the process to overcome barriers to participation (Tosun, 2000). How successful these suggestions are has not been addressed by literature and is therefore a research gap to be filled through the research at hand.

3. Methodology

3.1. Overview

In order to understand the role of stakeholders at different levels, the application of several methods was necessary. The foundation of the research is built on international and national policy analysis and action research, which include the use of manuals and guidelines to assist stakeholders throughout the tourism planning process. Stakeholders were assisted in analyzing the policies which build the framework in which they are meant to locally develop sustainable tourism. Investigating the influences of international and national policies on local level planning and stakeholder involvement processes requires methodology which recognizes the influence of policy, while also focusing on how stakeholders and planners incorporate these in local planning processes. Therefore, a combination of action research, policy analysis, focus groups, questionnaires and interviews was required. These methods complimented each other by bridging shortcomings: For example, stakeholder focus groups were useful for working on tourism policy. To incorporate specific stakeholders however, an individual approach was needed at first, provided through semi-structured interview and questionnaire methodology. Through the results gained from these methodologies, later stages of the participatory planning process were enhanced through stakeholder focus groups which incorporated insights from interviews and enhanced the participatory nature of later planning stages. The opportunity for a multi-methodological approach to achieve improvements within the planning process are the greatest strength of action research to ensure applicable outcomes for both research and practitioners. Questionnaires and interviews assisted action research, but were valuable stand-alone methodologies to understand stakeholders' motivations and contributions to tourism development in their regions. The interlinking of the methodologies is shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Interlinking and complementing methodologies applied

	Policy analysis	Action research		
		Stakeholder focus groups	Questionnaires and surveys	Semi-structured interview
Tourism policy and strategies	x	x		
Participatory planning process		x	x	
Incorporating specific stakeholders			x	x

3.2. Policy analysis

Policy analysis collects information on and evaluates government measures on their effectiveness (Knill & Tosun, 2015). Here, tourism policy at national and regional level is investigated on its effectiveness to develop sustainable rural tourism destinations.

The analysis was based on evaluations conducted by stakeholders in the study areas in accordance with manuals provided (Beck, 2018; Meyer & Pröbstl-Haider, 2018). This was done to overcome language barriers and investigate policies which were regionally relevant to those responsible for tourism development. Furthermore, such qualitative data collection can be used to identify the relationships between policy outputs and policy impacts (Knill & Tosun, 2015). The documentation and evaluation, recorded in assessment templates were further complimented by round table discussions, which explained the assessments. Conducting policy analysis in this manner, which is described by Knill and Tosun (2015) also links to the importance of collaboration in action research (see next section on action research; McNiff, 2013). The obtained data was then analyzed to investigate the intended and unintended effects current tourism policy has on local implementation.

3.3. Action research

Action research is a practice led and practice based methodology (McNiff, 2013; Reason & Bradbury, 2006). It is a collaborative methodology and relies on working with others as colleagues and learning partners as opposed to subjects. It is a cyclical process, which allows for revision of based on what has been learned and does not aim for consensus but for collaboration, negotiation and understanding (Jones & Bryant, 2016; McNiff, 2013; Morales, 2016). As tourism planning involves a variety of stakeholders and often involves navigating numerous conflicts of interest, using this methodology effective in obtaining data and results from the study areas. Complying with McNiff (2013) data was gathered through record sheets, templates, surveys and round tables (focus groups) during INSiGHTS and in work with the Ecomodel Achental. The literature recommends the use of action research to develop tourism with and for destinations (Goebel et al., 2020). This is meant to create greater commitment among stakeholders (Eelderink et al., 2017) and produce results which are relevant to local needs (Jones & Bryant, 2016; Morales, 2016). Furthermore, action research aims to empower stakeholders to address local issues and needs (Datta et al., 2015). However, Goebel et al. (2020) note, that participatory action planning has not yet been researched much in the context of sustainable tourism development.

Tourism studies must go beyond pure theory, as the results are to be used in real world situations if sustainability in rural tourism regions is to be achieved and therefore action research was chosen as the most appropriate methodological approach. INSiGHTS (Integrated sustainable green healthy tourism strategy) was an Interreg Danube Transnational Programme Project which ran from 2017 – 2019. Its aim was to develop sustainable tourism strategies and corresponding sustainable tourism

products in eight regions in central and south east Europe (see section study area for locations of these regions). Partners located in the regions were public institutions actively involved in tourism planning; municipal councils and regional development agencies. In Germany, the project partner was a tourism association. The regions were accompanied by so called knowledge providers who worked closely with project partners by providing planning tools, assessment tools and information to achieve the project goals. Working as a knowledge provider enabled the perfect opportunity to conduct action research: analyzing the overall processes and interactions between project partners and with their stakeholders.

Conducting this work in nine regions in parallel added further depth to the research. Each region worked within a different national policy framework and with a different constellation of stakeholders, depending on regional specificities and tourism focus. Thus, the research investigated the different approaches and content of co-development and decision making in nine different tourism development processes in nine different regions.

Action research was used during INSiGHTS by providing guidelines, templates and master classes in a step-by-step planning approach with local stakeholders (Meyer & Pröbstl-Haider, 2018; Pröbstl-Haider & Meyer, 2017a, 2017b). Within these steps, questionnaires and focus groups after Matthews & Ross (2010) were used to collect further in-depth information from local stakeholders participating in tourism planning when needed. In later stages, the partners conducted round tables with the established stakeholder groups which ranged from 25 to 50 representatives of everything ranging from ministries to sports clubs, local government to enterprises and regional development associations. Each region had a different compilation of stakeholders in their group which reflected their unique offers, needs and desires. Data gathered from these meetings and the meeting minutes were analyzed by knowledge providers. Systematically collecting data through all stages complies with action research data collection requirements (McNiff, 2013).

Action research is not only observatory but also reacts to findings and in this case, steers processes towards more sustainable outcomes. Analysis of the planning process and incremental outcomes by participating with stakeholders truly underlines this methodology's practice-based nature and the true collaboration between researchers and stakeholders. It is this collaboration which allowed stakeholders to become participatory observers themselves, learning how to reflect on previous planning stages to improve those ahead.

The aim of action research is to produce improvements to practice and communicate these recommendations well (McNiff, 2013; Reason & Bradbury, 2006). By working with all eight regions and providing standardized and transferable guidelines and templates comparable data was collected. The guidelines were developed to assist the regions with each planning step, from setting goals to developing visions and strategies. In an incremental process, if issues were identified, they could be addressed or accounted for in the following steps. "Action research is not a thing itself; the term always implies a process of people interacting together and learning with and from one another

in order to understand their practices and situations, and to take purposeful action to improve them" (McNiff, 2013: 25).

3.4. Stakeholder focus group

A focus group is a qualitative method in which relevant participants are brought into a setting in which they can discuss thoughts and perspectives on a certain topic (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). There are several benefits to focus groups including being able to observe group dynamics, how the group works together and how they interact (Eelderink, 2018). Most importantly for action research is how focus groups generate more input and ideas and lead to social learning (learning from each other) (Chiu, 2003). A moderator leads the discussions to ensure participants remain engaged and empowers the participants to lead an engage (Kumer & Urbanc, 2020). This methodology has been used in a variety of fields from medical to social science and thus, the intended outcomes of the aims can vary greatly.

Stakeholder focus groups were used for the national policy analysis and in later stages again for the development of tourism visions and strategies. For these groups, tourism boards or DMOs such as the Ecomodel region were brought together with local tourism stakeholders. In other focus groups, regional representatives from different participating regions discussed their experiences with participatory planning approaches. The methodology was used to both generate data on planning content (policies and strategies), as well as, as a method to compare planners experiences in the implementation of planning steps across central and southeast Europe.

3.5. Questionnaires and interviews

For research based in the Achental region, a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews afterwards (Matthews & Ross, 2010) were conducted with alpine farmers. The questionnaire contained factual and background information concerning farm operations and answers were given either as quantities or chosen from a list of possibilities. The answers obtained were collected in a standardized table for evaluation and did not need further coding.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in-person based on an interview guideline which could be introduced in a manner appropriate for the interviewee and allowed them to expand on topics most relevant to them in their answers. The aim of the interviews was evaluation (Matthews & Ross, 2010 pg. 224) of their relationship to and current developments of regional tourism. Not all participants wished to be recorded, so answers were transcribed during the interviews. The transcriptions were indexed and coded in accordance with relevant topics (e.g. recreation and tourism, benefits, alpine farming, etc.) and summarized in a table. (More information on questionnaire and interview content can be found in Wanner et al., 2021).

4. Study areas

The study areas focused on central and south east Europe and included nine regions which are shown at the EU NUTS 3 level in Figure 5. The investigated areas were based on initial work within the Interreg project INSiGHTS (Interreg Danube, 2021), gathering information on stakeholders, policy and sustainability indicators while completing the task of developing regional sustainable tourism strategies in the Danube Transnational Programme area. These study areas were further expanded to include the Eco Model Achental region (Traunstein, Germany; in blue in Figure 5) in which further in-depth stakeholder investigations and policy analysis was conducted. The nine investigated regions, shown in Figure 5 were:

- Plovdiv, Bulgaria
- Central Istria, Croatia
- Traunstein, Germany (blue)
- Ulm/Neu Ulm, Germany
- Zala County, Hungary
- Harghita County, Romania
- Komárom, Slovakia/Hungary border
- Central Sava, Slovenia
- Šumadja and Pomoravlje, Serbia

Figure 5: Study area: Regions investigated shown at the NUTS 3 level (Wanner, 2021)

The selected study areas included regions in nations such as Germany and Slovenia which have been long time members of the EU and newer members of the EU such as Slovakia and Hungary (joined in

2004) and Bulgaria and Romania (joined in 2007). Croatia is the newest EU member, as they officially concluded the accession process in 2013. Serbia is a potential candidate nation. Therefore, a broad spectrum of national policy and planning approaches could be investigated. It also meant that the influence of EU policy based on how long a country had been a member could be explored. All regions are lesser developed tourism destinations in their nations.

5. Results

5.1. Overview

This chapter elaborates the results obtained through the previously described methodologies during the research conducted in the studies areas. First, the results on investigating tourism policies, originally published in Wanner et al. (2020) are outlined. This section highlights the most important results on national policies obtained, including similarities and differences which resulted in policy recommendations described in section 5.2.4.

This is followed by section 5.3, the description of results from Wanner et al. (2021), in which the tourism destination level is investigated regarding relevant and important stakeholders. It highlights the need to incorporate marginalized or overlooked stakeholders in planning processes. The section finishes with recommendations obtained during action research and highlights how stakeholder involvement was applied in planning practice in the study areas.

In the final section of the results, section 5.4., barriers to stakeholder participation as identified in Wanner & Pröbstl-Haider (2019) are described. Although participation was introduced early and effectively into the planning processes, conflicts of interest between economic and social and ecological development goals remained. It also became evident, that the awareness levels of stakeholders concerning sustainability and sustainable development aims varied across the regions and within stakeholder groups.

5.2. Tourism policy [2]

5.2.1. Introduction

The international and EU policies which affect tourism development introduced in section 2.1 are a framework in which national and regional policies are developed. National policies are supposed to incorporate international policies in a regionally applicable manner and integrate sustainability aims set for tourism in both industry and development. Action research used policy assessment by local stakeholders to better understand national tourism and sectoral policies and to understand how effective national policies are to support sustainable tourism developments in the investigated regions. In focus groups, stakeholders were asked to identify short comings of these policies which led to policy recommendations being drafted.

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[2] The results presented in this section can be found in detail in Annex Paper 2; Wanner et al. (2020).

5.2.2. National tourism policy analysis

Building on the stakeholder workshops conducted in the study areas, national and regional tourism policies for Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia were investigated on five indicators:

- National strategy time frames
- Number of accompanying strategic documents
- Vision versus implementation orientation
- Extent of adaptability in respective policies
- Binding versus guiding documents

As described in detail in Wanner et al. (2020) differences between the nations are evident across all five indicators.

First and foremost, differences in strategy time frames and the number of accompanying strategic documents are easily visible among the investigated regions. While some national tourism strategies only had a time frame of 4 or 7 years (Croatia, Slovenia and Slovakia) other nations worked with policies with much longer timeframes of over 10 years (e.g. Bulgaria, Romania). Germany was an interesting comparison from a policy perspective as tourism is based at a state level and no national tourism policy document exists in the same way as in other nations. The length of the implementation timeframe will influence which goals are set thematically, how they can be achieved, which indicators for measuring success will be used and their ability to react to outside influences on the national strategy (Wanner et al., 2020). Additionally, transnational and cross-border cooperation can be difficult when different sustainability goals are being followed on different timelines with focal points for project funding and development shifting with every national policy developed.

Wanner et al. (2020) show that additional policy documents address all administrative levels. Germany, Romania and Bulgaria have very few additional documents (3-5 additional policies). Serbia, Slovenia and Hungary work with additional 7 to 9 policy documents. Croatia and Slovakia have the most (10 and 11 respectively). In these countries, policy has a broader thematic scope through which they must view tourism development. For planning, this means that tourism is embedded in a greater sustainable development approach of the nation. These documents also address higher levels of administration and allow rural regions in these nations more freedom of interpretation of the overarching goals set by the national level, as national policy documents tend to set vague goals to ensure all regional differences can be incorporated. Across all national policies, the communication is poor between the planning levels concerning who is responsible for which goals, at which planning levels and when, which leads to a lack of accountability.

Many frameworks for sustainable tourism have been developed over the decades (Hashemkhani Zolfani et al., 2015) and amongst them one can differentiate between policies which are implementation or management oriented and those that are vision or assessment oriented. Vision

orientation seeks to determine a direction in which to development and progress towards, while implementation-oriented documents are more of an instruction in how to achieve the goals. "Germany and Serbia follow vision-oriented documents, noticeable through the large number of strategies and longer implementation periods. Slovakia as well-set clear goals but has few supporting concrete implementation documents. Slovenia and Romania are characterized by vision orientation with supporting documents and laws suggesting implementation is based on the visions and given legal footing. Bulgaria, Croatia and Hungary follow an implementation orientation. This is evident through the supporting documents and large number of action plans that can be found amongst their supporting documents" (Wanner et al., 2020 pg. 6).

Aside from following a vision versus implementation orientation, another crucial aspect of policy is whether or not feedback loops, adjustment opportunities and monitoring have been incorporated to ensure results can be achieved. It was determined that Bulgaria's national tourism plan (Strategy for Sustainable Development of Tourism in Bulgaria) has an accompanying action plan in which monitoring and evaluation is integrated. Action plans are especially valuable for planning, as they indicate clear steps, time lines and to some extent also include responsibility. In Bulgaria the action plan was set for a three-year period, allowing for feedback loops to be incorporated into the next action plans. They are generally non-binding in nature, but show a degree of commitment of governments to implement their tourism strategies. This was an exception to the rest of the study areas. Slovakia, Slovenia and Serbia indicated that sustainability indictors should be monitored in tourism regions, although this is also non-binding and resources are not made available for assistance in this task. Croatia, Germany, Hungary and Romania do not have monitoring guidelines included in their policies. Central Istria (Croatia) and Zala and Komárom (Hungary) both suggested that the introduction of an indicator system such as ETIS would be a valuable addition to their national policies. With the exception of Plovdiv (Bulgaria) the national policies are seen as very broad with no streamlined monitoring or feedback loops to be incorporated for future policy improvements.

It is very difficult to determine to what extent the national and additional policy documents are binding. Out of the study areas only two, namely Romania and Slovenia, listed a law, order or decree as addition to policy documents influencing sustainable tourism development in their regions. It can therefore only be stated that these are definitely binding in nature. The other documents which included acts, strategies or action plans must be assumed to be guiding in character.

Through the investigation of national documents, it was determined that many of the goals are vague and uncoordinated, making it difficult for destinations to determine which role they are meant to play in sustainable tourism development. Vague policies and unbinding documents are also unlikely to be used for stakeholder involvement or as a backbone for participatory planning.

5.2.3. National policy self-assessment

After the national policy analysis, stakeholders conducted a self-assessment of their national policies across three thematic pillars: integrated sustainable tourism management schemes, smart tourism products linked to greenways and the promotion of eco-conscious and healthy lifestyle choices. They were asked to conduct a self-assessment of the national tourism policy's overall goals, desired conditions, criteria and indicators. Across the first two pillars the average scores were "little below desired conditions" with some variations across the nations. For stakeholders from Germany their scoring was considerably lower than average, as no national document exits. All of the countries indicated that destination and tourism clusters were well established and integrated into management schemes. Hungary and Serbia scored lowest in this section of the self-assessment due to lacking clear sustainability goals, low capacity and no destination management organizations. All regions indicated that they struggled with poorly developed sustainability criteria, mission statements and financial schemes to implement tourism development plans. It became clear, that there was a dissatisfaction with the guidance or better said, the lack there of, coming from the national level.

Concerning smart tourism products, the average was again "little below desired conditions". Bulgaria, Romania and Slovenia scored especially high in product development. This means that they feel their tourism products for sustainable tourism are well developed. Critical assessments were made by Slovakia, Hungary and Serbia due to not having any DMOs to support sustainable tourism product development and lack of initiatives to support local values and culture. Concerning sustainable product development there was a desire to link local business, private sector and DMOs in future to improve sustainable development.

The final pillar, promotion of eco-conscious and healthy lifestyle choices, had a broad spectrum of results. Slovakia, Bulgaria and Slovenia indicated that the current conditions met the desired conditions and that policy in this regard fulfilled their needs. Slovakia indicated that although the national level was strong, regional and local levels remained weak and that opportunities for education and qualification for tourism employees were not sufficient. Hungary was far below average in this pillar and determined that policy was far below the desired conditions on national, regional and local levels in supporting specific sustainable tourism marketing, sustainability standards or generally positioning itself as a sustainable destination internationally. Furthermore, they too states that the national policies were not providing enough support in regard to education and learning either.

In addition to the investigation in Wanner et al. (2020), Wanner et al. (2021) found that stakeholders working across sectors in Achental (Germany) found the cumulation of policies concerning building regulations, health & hygiene and nature conservation to be too inflexible to meet individual regional challenges and currently hinder further tourism development.

The self-assessment of national policies by stakeholders working at the local and regional destination planning level indicated that the vague goals and lacking accountability are due to poor

communication between planning levels. Further round table discussions between stakeholders and policy makers indicated that regional and local levels were not given the tools they needed to strengthen rural regions' ability to implement the goals. Tools such as strategy development, financial means for additional assistance or stakeholder involvement processes do not exist.

5.2.4. Policy recommendations

Considering the insights gained during stakeholder-round tables and the self-assessment process it became evident that national policies and EU policies fail to meet the needs of local level implementers in rural regions of south-east Europe.

Interpretation of goals set in international and national policies are left to the regions and their stakeholders as the formulations are too vague and without clear indicators. Without indicators or a division or responsibilities and due to policy documents non-binding nature, it is impossible to hold any institutions or stakeholder accountable for failing to achieve sustainable development in the anticipated timeframe.

Communication and coordination between planning levels continues to be poor. This is true for all regions investigated. This is also reflected in policies not complimenting each other which makes the integration of management schemes into larger policies impossible.

During the round tables it was also stated that often responsibilities are given to regions or DMOs without providing the necessary tools, instruments or financing to implement the development tasks they were given. For example, stakeholder participation was recognized as an important part of tourism planning, yet no expertise on how to conduct these processes or funding for holding workshops were provided.

Additionally, it was recognized that there was a disconnect between European Union tourism policies and frameworks and the local implementation, especially in rural regions and even more so concerning sustainability. Upon further examination, the literature on tourism policy in southeast Europe was deemed limited and gaps were identified (Anastasiadou 2008, Hughes & Allen 2005, Stevenson et al. 2008).

In lieu of the obtained results the following policy recommendations of all regions were summarized (Table 7). The policy recommendations find national and destination level to be the planning levels at which most barriers need to be overcome. The international level should hold responsibility to setting clear goals and responsibilities, but also provide transparent financing through projects or support tools. The stakeholders felt that national and destination levels have the most room for improvement. However, setting clear goals was seen to be more a task of the national level, while managing available tools and resources could be improved at destination level to better address individual needs. As a whole, communication and coordination is needed at all planning levels. Specific new trends were also mentioned as areas in which more support is needed.

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Table 7: Overview of transnational policy recommendations by implementation level (Wanner et al., 2020 pg. 9)

Recommendation		Level		
		International	National	Destination
Setting clear goals	Select clear sustainability goals	x	x	
	Include climate change goals	x	x	
	Use suitable indicators		x	x
	Discuss goals with implementing institutions		x	
	Strengthen weak, rural & alternative regions		x	x
Communication & coordination	Coordinate, organize & strengthen DMOs			x
	Define clear division of tasks & responsibilities	x	x	x
	Enhance accountability	x	x	x
Discuss new trends	Sharing economy		x	x
	Digitalization		x	x
Available tools & financial resources	Training & care for professionals & workforce			x
	Stakeholder involvement		x	x
	Consideration of locals' needs			x
	Transparent financing	x	x	x

The recommendations make clear a desire for policy to strengthen the destination level. Strengthening the destination should also integrate them into larger management schemes in which they are supported by national policy which in turn reflect international goals. While destinations want to increase their   capacities, they are also seeking guidance and support, not complete independence.

5.3. Destinations and stakeholder participation[3]

5.3.1. Introduction

International and national policy bestows the destination with great responsibility to develop tourism sustainably. But when policy and strategies are developed top-down without participation, their goals and aims do not align with local needs or interests. This will lead to apathy among the local stakeholders and ultimately cause poorly accepted results (Tosun, 2000; Hartley and Wood, 2005). The literature showed that stakeholders must be involved early in the processes and effectively to achieve the best results (Hartley and Wood, 2005).

Past literature concentrated on the destination and DMO's tasks from economic perspectives such as income generation and employment opportunities (Mayer et al., 2010), or focuses on their position as a hub for marketing (Bandi Tanner & Müller, 2019; Rein & Strasdas, 2017; Steinecke & Herntrei, 2017). However, there is an obvious gap in the central role they should be taking to integrate stakeholders into participatory planning for sustainable tourism development. Furthermore, perspectives on the influence of personal values and quality of life as underlying stakeholder motivation is mentioned vaguely, but not put into practice or integrated in the tasks of the DMOs.

5.3.2. The involved stakeholders

Under the policy recommendations of Table 7 organizing and strengthening the DMO along with participatory planning processes and considering local stakeholders' need shift a focus onto the destination level. Deeper investigation of the destination level revealed that stakeholder participation and consideration of the locals' needs were greater issues than anticipated by DMOs. The stakeholders investigated in-depth in the Achental region of Germany, were alpine farmers. In this destination they provide important services for the tourism industry in the form of landscape management, landscape conservation, local produce and providing food and beverage services. They contribute valuable social and ecological sustainability by strengthening the region through upholding culture and functioning as landscape stewards according to Dwyer (2018). All of these "tourism services" are seen as daily activities for the farmers without necessarily being linked to tourism, but more centrally to their activities as farmers actively working in agriculture. The link to tourism is practically given to them by the DMO, as hiking routes pass through their alpine pastures and marketing is centered around activities on alpine pastures and linked to local heritage and history of alpine farming. They were not asked to join in tourism development, and yet are in the midst of it.

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[3] The results presented in this section can be found in detail in Annex Paper 3; Wanner et al. (2021).

The assumption that planners or DMOs know what stakeholders want or that they are purely economically focused is false (Wanner et al., 2021). Stakeholders not directly involved in tourism are often overlooked by planning, as the planners often assume that stakeholders are benefitting from tourism economically. As significant contributors to tourism through landscape conservation and tourism products it was a surprise for the DMO to see that there was no interest by this group of stakeholders (alpine farmers) to become more involved in tourism through increased cooperation in marketing and product development and they were in fact predominantly not interested in expanding tourism offers beyond what they had already established previously, such as limited gastronomy or just opening their lands for recreation activities such as hiking and paragliding. The issues these sentiments were founded on were "significant legal requirements, poor visitor behavior, underappreciation of their work towards landscape maintenance, differing interest in contribution of and to tourism and lack of institutional coordination and support" (Wanner et al., 2021 pg.7). The DMO underestimated the importance of personal values and interest in quality of life influencing the stakeholders' decisions. Thus, economic incentives for tourism development was falling on deaf ears. When a destination relies heavily on stakeholders to jointly develop and embrace tourism, such negative or hesitant attitudes can greatly hinder further tourism development. However, they may also represent an opportunity to generate greater understanding among stakeholders and ensure that economic ambitions are not pushing social and ecological aspects of sustainability to a breaking point.

5.3.3. Consequences and recommendations

Destinations can tackle issues by recognizing who relevant stakeholders are and by actively integrating them into planning. Following the interviews and surveys among farmers, a workshop provided the opportunity to address local stakeholders' needs by providing a forum in which the DMO could learn about and address previously unknown issues. An integrated strategy is needed to appropriately address (marginalized) stakeholders' needs to ensure social sustainability in the region. Such an integrated strategy needs to be built on five pillars (Wanner et al., 2021):

- Information: Visitors and locals need to be provided with information which addresses not only proper behavior in the region but also generates greater appreciation for local tradition, culture and contributions to landscape maintenance.
- Networks: destinations need to actively organize a network between stakeholders in and around tourism to strengthen regional cooperation and support both logistically and in administrative tasks.
- Economic benefits and regional development: Not all stakeholders seek economic gain through tourism. While recognizing this, not all products must be commodified for tourism and the destination can also provide local population with greater access to regional goods and services. Strengthening offers for both locals and tourist.

- Resource efficiency: The DMO should function as a hub for finding partners and bringing solutions to the region which will assist in overcoming outdated and inefficient use of resources to increase ecological sustainability concerning topics of energy, water and waste.
- Visitor management: a small scale and regionally specific spatial zoning concept for visitor management should be introduced to respect those who do not wish to be involved in tourism.

The study of Achental showed that the involvement of marginalized stakeholders is important to destinations in order to understand the true needs of all local stakeholders and avoid making assumptions, such as purely economically oriented mindset. Recognizing the needs of local citizens is an important pillar on which social sustainability is built.

The DMO or generally the destination planning level is an important hub at which an integrated strategy for a tourism region can be developed to incorporate all relevant stakeholders, even those often excluded in the planning process. In Wanner et al. (2021) interviewed stakeholders indicated that they felt there was no central organization they could contact with their tourism concerns. This would be a task well suited for a DMO, as they are situated between tourism providers and higher regional or national tourism institutions and would therefore be in a position to mediate between national goals and local needs.

Ultimately, the results highlighted that stakeholder participation can be incredibly useful to a destination in order to understand which developments will lead them on a sustainable path with the local community and stakeholders. Tourism products and strategies were being developed and promoted for the benefit of the stakeholders, but the DMO had failed to actually ask what the stakeholders wanted. It was shown that this process may limit tourism development opportunities if stakeholders do not share a common vision with planners. However, finding common ground between planners and stakeholders are necessary for social sustainability and an important aspect of the paradigm shift needed in tourism as described by Dwyer (2018).

5.4. Barriers to stakeholder involvement[4]

5.4.1. Introduction

Participatory planning processes are complex. Therefore, bringing stakeholders together and integrating them into the planning process can come with conflicts and barriers. During the investigation of the study areas, structural and operational barriers were lifted, due to the

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[4] The results presented in this section can be found in detail in Annex Paper 1; Wanner & Pröbstl-Haider (2019).

involvement in a well-funded programme (Interreg Danube Transnational Programme), which provided access to needed resources and expertise. During this time, a concentration on how to integrate factors for success was applied in drafting manuals and guidelines. By using action research within the project INSiGHTS an opportunity arose to analyze and compare eight tourism planning processes running in parallel. An analysis of cultural or educational reasons for certain barriers could be investigated more closely and the concentration was laid on cultural and personal barriers. By investigating cultural barriers in the study areas, it became evident that low awareness and conflicts of interest continue to be barriers to the stakeholder process, as discussed in Wanner & Pröbstl-Haider (2019).

5.4.2. Low Awareness levels concerning sustainability

Partners and their local stakeholder groups used a self-assessment manual (Pröbstl-Haider, 2017) to determine sustainable tourism development overall goals for their regions set in 5 categories:

- quality of visitor experience, including the criteria visitor satisfaction, unique selling proposition, inclusive offers, improved infrastructure for outdoor recreation in the destination and attractive infrastructure for tourists' outdoor experience and environmental education;
- socio-cultural and built heritage aspects, including the criteria local food, awareness and use of cultural hotspots, contribution of tourism taxes to event organization, security, socio-cultural disturbance and perception of cultural impacts;
- socio-economic benefits and regional development, including the criteria economic benefits, reduction of seasonality and availability and quality of services;
- environment and land use heritage, including the criteria reducing resource consumption, climate change adaptation and sustainable mobility and climate change risk avoidance;
- destination strategy, cooperation and management structures, including criteria on sustainability goals, destination initiatives and destination learning;

which reflected the goals set by the EU in various central policies and through ETIS (European Commission, 2007, 2010, 2016; Tourism Sustainability Group, 2007) and also reflected aims of the SDGs.

The results show that there are substantial differences in awareness levels concerning the content of tourism planning and development. Predominantly, it was found that the perception of sustainability, landscape conservation and climate change varied. Action research enabled the analysis and comparisons of reasons behind these different attitudes. It was found that "sustainability" is understood differently by different stakeholders. Furthermore, there is no common consensus or

understanding on how tourism fits into the sustainability debate. A common foundation needs to be built among stakeholders, before proceeding in the planning process.

The results showed that the highest levels of awareness were achieved in destination strategy and management and socio-economic benefits and regional development, with goals in these categories having been given the greatest importance and weighting (Wanner & Pröbstl-Haider, 2019). All partners agreed that a tourism strategy was needed and that this strategy must include sustainability goals, maintenance and awareness of cultural heritage and aim to achieve high visitor satisfaction. Generally, there was a high awareness level among stakeholders on goals concerning socio-economic benefits (e.g. reducing seasonality, increasing income, increasing tourism services) and aspects of management and strategy. The awareness on quality of visitor experience was mixed across the study areas. While half of the partners saw the need to improve infrastructure for outdoor recreation and other unique selling points, the regions Harghita (Romania), Zala (Hungary) and Plovdiv (Bulgaria) did not prioritize these goals and accepted the current state as sufficient already. Among environmental and socio-cultural goals, the following ranked especially low:

- Climate risk avoidance
- Reducing resource consumption
- Contribution to events
- Gender issues
- Cultural impact

This meant that the majority of stakeholders did not recognize these goals as aspects to be addressed by tourism development or to be incorporated into their own tourism strategies. They were either perceived to be entirely irrelevant or to be the responsibility of other planning institutions.

The central EU tourism policies (European Commission, 2007, 2010) and ETIS (European Commission, 2016) describe an approach to sustainability which seeks to develop a European tourism sector which is economically, ecologically and socially sustainable. ETIS indicators specifically include core indicators on gender equality, social impact, cultural heritage and climate change. Yet by indicating that the above listed aspects were irrelevant to their regional goals, it showed that there was a disconnect between the EU policy's understanding of what "sustainability" is meant to be in European tourism and how regions understand what their development goals and contributions to sustainability are, should or could be.

The expectation that a longer membership in the EU and thus longer exposure to EU tourism policies would influence the understanding of sustainability was false. The regions Zala (Hungary), Central Sava (Slovenia) and Šumadja and Pomoravlje (Serbia) showed higher levels of awareness across all five categories. Ulm/Neu Ulm (Germany) and Central Istria (Croatia) showed midrange of awareness and the lowest levels of awareness on social and ecological topics were seen in Plovdiv (Bulgaria), Harghita (Romania) and Komárom (Slovakia). This being said, Wanner and Pröbstl-Haider (2019) showed no significant difference in influence or guidance of EU tourism policy when comparing

longstanding members (Germany, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia) to newer and non-members (Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, Serbia).

Perceived deficiencies increase awareness on certain topics and discussions with stakeholders illustrated the underlying issues concerning awareness levels. Economic issues such as seasonal employment or low overnight stay are represented in stakeholder discussions as main issues to focus on, as increasing the number of overnight stays is seen as a solution to increase income generation. However, clean energy or waste management are not seen as issues, because they do not affect any tangible issues. The lightbulbs will still work and trash will still be collected and disposed of. If the awareness for greater ecological issues does not exist, ecological sustainability is not felt as a pressing issue to address. So, the constant conflict of economic and ecological interest persists.

5.4.3. Conflicts of interest in planning

Awareness on certain topics can be influenced by certain elite stakeholder groups who dominate discussions and stand in conflict of interest towards other stakeholder groups. After having chosen overall goals, stakeholder groups were asked to self-assess their current performance on the five categories mentioned in the previous section. During the self-assessment, all regions saw their socio-cultural development performance as fair to good. The same was seen for environment (with the exception of Serbia). The same is true for destination strategy and management (with the exception of Hungary). Socio-economic benefits and regional development along with the category quality of visitor experience were viewed far more critically with a greater number of participants seeing deficiencies or improvement required.

Only half of the regions viewed climate change and sustainable transport as important goals, three regions are seeking to reduce resource consumption and only one region is looking to following climate risk reduction as a goal. Yet six of the regions view their current state of environmental development as deficient or fair with improvement required.

"A conflict of interest arises between economic and environmental issues, leading to the domination of the regional economic aspects such as socio-economic benefits and product development. Socio-economic benefits, destination strategy and product development scored low in self-assessment and had high levels of awareness. Environment and land-use along with socio-cultural and built heritage scored high in the self-assessment and low in awareness" (Wanner & Pröbstl-Haider, 2019 pg. 13).

5.4.4. Planning recommendations

The use of manuals and guidelines in the processes showed that it is important to clarify differences in understanding early in the planning process. A universal understanding of planning content or definitions of central terms and criteria (e.g. "sustainability") cannot be assumed. These differences

and misunderstandings can hinder the planning process and become barriers for current or future participatory planning approaches and the integration of stakeholders into strategy development. To counter this issue, courses, master classes or lectures led by experts may minimize differences in understanding or perception. However, even this may not be the cure-all for this barrier.

It is vital for the planning process to recognize and anticipate different understandings and perceptions (as they are to be expected anyways with a diverse stakeholder group) and to have a strategy on how to incorporate and balance differences in perception and values.

6. **Discussion**

The results have shown that participatory processes are of relevance within policy, within destinations and to stakeholder involvement to achieve sustainability goals in tourism. An investigation and discussion of the interplay between these factors enhancing and hindering active stakeholder involvement is necessary for long-term sustainable tourism planning in rural destinations.

6.1. **Methodological considerations**

Action research successfully accompanied eight parallel planning processes in eight different destinations. In total this means that over three hundred stakeholders were part of the process. The side by side analysis of the individual processes allowed a deeper investigation into collaboration and communication between stakeholders while creating sustainable tourism strategies and corresponding products. The strength of applying this methodology was found in the transferable manuals and guidelines which were used for conducting participatory planning. They were found to be a successful tool for stakeholder involvement.

The research conducted here has shown that it is possible to efficiently use stakeholders in complex planning processes through the use of standardized tools to increase participation. It was possible to gain useful results on policy analysis, goal setting, vision development, self-assessments and strategy development across all eight regions. The theoretical foundation has answered the question why stakeholders are needed. The literature also identifies barriers and suggests solutions (Blackstock, 2005; Dogra & Gupta, 2012; Hartley & Wood, 2005; Hatipoglu et al., 2016; Kunjuraman & Hussin, 2016). These suggested solutions based on identified barriers, however, are not followed up with further investigation as to their applicability to real world planning scenarios.

The application of action research has shown how stakeholders can be incorporated early, effectively and in a manner that truly influences planning outcome and is of interest to policy makers, fulfilling the conditions set out by Hartley and Wood (2005), Tosun (2000) and Fraser et al. (2006). Precondition for successful stakeholder involvement and solutions to overcoming barriers were determined to be a methodology which incorporates clearly defined goals, transferable and easy to use guidelines and feedback loops which allow for an incremental planning process based on outcomes learned in previous planning stages.

6.2. **The role of involvement at the policy level**

Tourism influences both local economy in rural destinations and the destinations' environment but does not hold a prominent role in higher level policies (Anastasiadou, 2008; Ashley et al., 2001; Estol et al., 2018). The fragmented approach of European policies pointed out by Anastasiadou (2008)

continues to hold true. Halkier identified a "lack of strategic clarity bordering on fuzziness (Halkier 2010 pg. 103). Tourism policy at European level continues to lack strong goals with clear objectives, while bestowing destinations with the responsibility of using sustainability indicators and ensuring sustainable tourism development. The research conducted (Wanner & Pröbstl-Haider, 2019) showed that stakeholders are interested in combining tourism development with the development of alternative energy or organic products for example but national policies currently do not address their interests and do not work in their favor, thus national policies are not strengthening rural regions.

There is a "discrepancy between the envisaged objectives for development and the actual status of implementation" (Wanner et al. 2020 pg. 9). This was shown in Wanner et al. (2020) and Wanner et al (2019) through the lack of clear criteria to define sustainability in tourism in an applicable manner. Sustainability is recognized as important and named in policy (Wanner et al., 2020) but the task of implementation is often left at the international or national policy level and does not wind up as an aim of tourism planners and stakeholders at the destination level (Wanner et al., 2019). In this regard the literature has been calling for improved coordination and integration for some time (Dieke, 2003; Dodds, 2007; Estol et al., 2018; Yeoman et al., 2012), with Dieke (2003) suggesting that policy could and should be used to improve human resource skills, management and progress towards digitalization in tourism. This is echoed by Wanner et al. (2020) in their call for improved coordination and division of responsibilities for a more sustainable tourism development.

The regional goals set by stakeholders in the investigated regions were not influenced by international policy, as the higher-level policy goals were too vague, did not provide accountability. Stakeholders have limited awareness of some EU policy instruments such as ETIS, but the UN policy or the SDGS had no influence on any tourism planning at all. The lack of any influence of the UN policies and SDGs are also why there is no mention of them in the results. No connection between the regions and the SDGs were made by either stakeholders or the DMOs. This confirms Estol et al. (2018) that intragovernmental organizations struggle to institutionalize tourism policy.

Furthermore, the stakeholders said communication across all planning levels was poor. In the study area, the common perception and high awareness remains focused on product development, socio-economic aspects of tourism and destination strategy development (Wanner and Pröbstl-Haider, 2019). Less awareness is paid to environment, land-use and socio-cultural aspects. This contradicts European policy, in which environment and socio-cultural aspects, built heritage and land-use feature strongly in European policies as factors that are very the very core of European tourism.

The national policy self-assessment was shown to be a valuable approach to identify clear deficiencies among practitioners and add constructive criticism to the debate on why it is that policy is not having its intended effect. Seeing well-conducted participatory and bottom-up planning process in action has confirmed the literature's call for stakeholder involvement as a valuable contribution to address values, capabilities and needs of the local population (Bousset et al., 2007; Zimmermann, 2018).

Circumstances in regions which are perceived as intact reduce awareness, while awareness for a matter is increased, when deficiencies are perceived (Wanner & Pröbstl-Haider, 2019). In practice, this means that a region which is looking to increase tourism will focus on economic aspects and environmental goals become secondary, if they are considered at all. A national level example of the mismatch between perception and awareness is Austria's "Plan T" which was developed in a participatory process with over 500 stakeholders and is meant as the foundation of sustainable tourism development (BMLRT, 2022). Plan T recognizes emission reduction in regard to transportation along with energy and resource efficiency by tourism providers as important aspects to develop more sustainably in the Austrian tourism industry, yet does not mention how climate change adaptation is to take place in Austrian tourism and fails to provide an applicable action plan, division of tasks, accountability plan or clear concrete goals (Prettenthaler et al., 2021). Therefore, while sustainable tourism development is mentioned, the statements made in national policy will not assist the destination level since it is too vague. Dodds (2007) stresses that short-term economic goals must make way for social and environmental concerns to be integrated into long-term tourism strategies, if sustainability is to be achieved. The action research conducted here showed that even early integration of sustainability was not a simple task.

Tourism policy is therefore not influencing local level planning in any of the investigated regions. This is due to the lack of clear goals, poor coordination and the policies lack of connecting with topics of relevance for local stakeholders.

To answer the first sub-question posed in the introduction: International and national policies place demands on destinations to implement and measure sustainable tourism, yet do not provide them with clear goals or tools to do so. Thus, the hypothesis has also been confirmed that there is a clear disconnect in understanding between high level policy and actual local implementation abilities which are hindering sustainable tourism development in rural areas of central and southeast Europe.

6.2.1. Awareness of sustainability and related indicators

Initially, it was believed that introducing indicators strongly linked to ETIS and the SDGs as part of the vision and strategy development would assist regions in linking local destination development to international policies. The plan was that accompanying regions through step-by-step planning approaches and manuals for the development of indicator-based strategies conducted in participatory planning processes would address deficiencies of indicators systems such as the lack of clear collection techniques (Modica et al., 2018, Tudorache et al., 2017) or having too many indicators to choose from (Bandi Tanner & Müller, 2019). In an attempt to strengthen the integration of sustainability in tourism planning, indicators were introduced at the goal setting stage of the planning process. Stakeholders were asked to link clear indicators to set goals to make goals clear and achievable. However, their use across central and southeast Europe was inconsistent and there was little interest in applying them (Wanner & Pröbstl-Haider, 2019). Agreeing with Font et al. (2021) that

the European Commission continues to miss opportunities to support regions and their stakeholders in data collections or to centrally and digitally collect data for benchmarking on a European level.

Wanner et al. (2020 pg. 10) correctly identify the need for "tangible and consistent measures of implementation should be developed with practical implementation on national and regional levels in mind." In agreement with Bandi Tanner & Müller (2019), Becken et al. (2020) and Modica et al. (2018), the action research demonstrated that even with manuals and guidebooks to assist stakeholders in developing strategies including social and environmental indicators, economic indicators still remain in focus with stakeholders. With too many indicators to choose from, stakeholders chose the path of least resistance so to speak and will opt for indicators they have already been collecting (which tend to be the easy to collect economic data for which data collection, storage and reporting systems are already in place). Indicators on employment or overnight stays are already used in all regions for example. However, some of the indicators are more difficult to collect such as those concerning use of renewable energy by tourism providers or use of sustainable transport options by guests. In Harghita (Romania) for example, a baseline study in rural tourism would be necessary before sustainability indicators could be usefully applied.

Contributing to answering sub question 1, policies place the demand for sustainable tourism indicator collection at local and regional level. However, this is not a demand tourism destination can currently fulfill. The observations on use of indicators based on ETIS in the investigated regions concur with Font et al. (2021) that the greatest achievement of ETIS remains their ability to raise awareness and increase social learning among stakeholders. It is not enough to solely raise awareness, if the awareness among stakeholders is not applied towards generating more sustainable planning and development. The differences in awareness levels between stakeholders led to conflicts of interest during the planning process. ETIS, designed as a transferable tool was a good basis for the manuals and guide lines and can be used to introduce sustainability indicators to stakeholders. However, it does not account for differences in perception and awareness on sustainability and climate change attitudes and understandings among stakeholders. Through workshops and master classes these differences could be discussed and awareness levels among stakeholders were raised which also laid a foundation for understanding the use of sustainability indicators among tourism stakeholders in the study areas.

Furthermore, ETIS is not being used as a tool for evidence-influenced policy (Font et al. 2021). Therefore, there is a lack of understanding among stakeholders as to why the time and effort should be allocated towards the collection of data which neither they themselves nor others seem interested in. If Gasparini & Mariotti (2021) are correct in saying that indicators are used politically to kick-start debates about planning content and goals, then more efforts need to be made by the EU to ensure that data collected through sustainability indicators actually influence policy development and would present an opportunity to create policy in consideration of planning practices occurring in rural tourism destinations.

6.3. Barriers at destination level

The lack of coordination and clear goals, identified in higher-level policies, clearly transfer to the destination level. European frameworks may influence national policies, however Wanner et al. (2020) showed that they are not influencing regional implementation; regardless of whether the country was a long-term member of the EU, a newer member or in pre-accession. The trickle down of barriers onto the destination level were seen to be caused by two factors. The first being the lack of coordination across planning levels. In rural regions especially, this means uncertainty which national policy goals they are meant to be implementing in rural areas. This in turn means destination management schemes cannot be integrated as they require established cooperative, coordinated governance systems. The second factor causing a rift between European policy and destination planning is the lack of applicable indicators which leads to poor monitoring and evaluation abilities for regional sustainable tourism policies.

Content of national policies is interpreted differently at regional levels, and although not intended this causes decentralization or a diffusion between which goals are being followed by which regions. Deficiencies in division of responsibilities or setting clearly defined goals to be achieved by rural tourism planning were directly addressed as barriers in round tables in Serbia, Hungary and Romania (Wanner & Pröbstl-Haider, 2019). Poor coordination and cooperation were determined to be barriers in Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. The reason for this is the issue of determining what is meant by "sustainability", what the term constitutes and whose responsibility it is to implement sustainability goals. The general consensus among all regions was that national policy needs to improve their definition of sustainability and road map the steps to be taken, so that rural regions' responsibility become clearer. Furthermore, the regional responsibilities need clearly defined tasks and adaptive management schemes to compensate for rural tourism regions lack of expertise, financial and human resources (Wanner et al., 2020). This would assist local planning authority's ability to prioritize tasks and provide an improved environment for private sectors investments.

Policy improvements will only assist regions in becoming more sustainable to certain extent. The rural regions self-responsibility needs to be increased. Wanner et al. (2019) successfully shifted awareness in the planning process through participatory approaches to address that sustainability goals do not necessarily have to be handed down by a national government or other policy. It can be a choice a region actively makes for itself. The literature (Reed et al., 2009; Tosun, 2000) was put into practice and the research confirmed, that stakeholder participation should be used to educate and generate greater understanding for planning content in order to achieve more sustainable planning outcomes. Generating greater understanding is important to decentralizing sustainable tourism development and allowing destinations to adapt to regionally specific needs.

This would also strengthen alternative tourism destinations. Wanner et al. (2020) identified several specific needs: Komárom (Slovakia/Hungary), for example, had great interest in cross-border cooperation for adventure tourism products and tourism products centered around the cultural

heritage. To achieve this, financial resources would need to be improved both on the Slovak side as well as for their Hungarian counterparts. The investigated regions in Hungary and Bulgaria both aim to reduce seasonality and increase the length of stay in their destinations. Policies can assist these ambitions by targeting alternative target groups for example (Anastasiadou, 2008). The investigated region in Hungary plans to develop their profile to highlight unique cultural aspects to shape into sustainable tourism products. They reflected Dieke (2003) in the recognition of involving local residents as stakeholders to embrace and implement these tourism development goals if greater social sustainability is to be achieved.

DMOs and stakeholders such as communities, private sector companies and investors, and NGOs need to be strengthened. The local level needs to be assisted by ministries and DMOs to cooperate in promoting sustainable tourism (Wanner et al., 2020). Improvements in policies are needed which reflect the needs of the stakeholders to properly influence the planning process and recommendations were made. Destinations cannot fulfill the demands of international and national policies, as the goals are too vague on the one hand and they are not provided with sufficient tools on the other. Participatory planning approaches were shown to assist regions in becoming more sustainable destinations, if the destination is provided with the tools and funding to introduce a stakeholder involvement process (Wanner et al., 2021; Wanner & Pröbstl-Haider, 2019). It is therefore not enough to simply provide the framework for participation to take place in (such as time, reasons, rooms, code of conduct), as the literature seems to suggest. Continuous and active planning are needed, including setting communication methods, designing inputs for the process, inviting stakeholders and deciding on content focus points. This becomes even more important when applying more innovative forms of participation such as gamification or virtual reality (see section 2.4.).

6.4. Barriers to stakeholders

Stakeholder involvement is more challenging in rural areas than in urban environments. Reasons for this can include employment which will influence their time availability, education levels, and destination leadership. Livestock farmers, for example, may have evening work in the stables and could not attend meetings later in the day. When developing participatory processes, it is therefore important to carefully consider your stakeholder's background and availability. Furthermore, participation processes cannot be too academic and must reflect the stakeholders' world of experiences and be relevant and interesting to participants. This would include recognizing that most stakeholders have limited if any experience in tourism development, regional development and most of them lack hospitality training. It is important to consider that destination leadership in rural tourism regions may not necessarily be organized through a DMO or tourism focused institution but through conservation organizations or national parks for example. Recognizing alternative institutions shaping tourism development can be an additional challenge when developing rural tourism. Considering these circumstances, it is not only important to recognize who the stakeholders in rural areas are, but

also to weigh the pros and cons of different participatory planning methodologies and chose the type of engagement which will be the most effect (Reed et al., 2009).

Stakeholders are needed not just their participation but their motivation and willingness to engage in tourism are needed for economic growth and sustainable tourism development (Mayer et al., 2010). Sustainability goes beyond neo-liberal economic growth and socio-cultural aspects for quality of life, happiness and content are needed to increase long-term sustainability (Dwyer, 2018). This was also proven true in Wanner et al. (2021).

Low awareness and conflicts of interest seen to be barriers in the literature (Blackstock, 2005; Dodds, 2007; Zarakosta & Koutsouris, 2014) were also confirmed to be difficult barriers to overcome in practice (Wanner et al., 2019). Unlike operational or structural barriers, which are more easily overcome by providing access to financial and/or human resources to some extent, the cultural barriers require greater time investments and educational approaches. It also came as no surprise that these barriers were evident in the investigated regions, as the policy issues (poor communication and vague goals) flow into these barriers as well. Action research provided an opportunity to investigate eight regions in parallel step-by-step planning approaches. The actual implementation of transferable planning guidelines across diverse stakeholder groups was in line with Hartley & Wood's (2005) call for early involvement in the planning process to overcome barriers.

However, even with manuals and guidelines provided, low awareness and conflicts of interest were identified early in the process. Corresponding with action research's incremental approach, time was taken to educate the involved DMOs, regional authorities and other stakeholders on important aspects of environmental sustainability. Especially in Zala (Hungary), Šumadja and Pomoravlje (Serbia), Harghita (Romania) and Plovdiv (Bulgaria) where environmental indicators were not being collected.

A process-oriented approach proved to be successful in incorporating stakeholders in the planning process and adapting their inputs into the final sustainable tourism visions and strategies, with extra attention also given to environmental factors previously overlooked (Wanner et al. 2019). The use of transferable and adaptable guidelines and manuals greatly assisted in overcoming structural and operational barriers. While they showed some effect on overcoming cultural barriers, it was the extra time and resources put into education and awareness raising that showed the most effect in overcoming cultural barriers dealing with planning content.

6.4.1. Rural context

Tourism trends indicate that visitors are looking for "unspoiled environment" and "natural conditions" (Bandi Tanner & Müller, 2019; Sand & Gross, 2019) and thus rural regions are gaining importance for tourism in Europe. With growing interest and expected visitor numbers, it becomes a pressing issue to develop tourism products for rest and relaxation, adventure and nature-based

activities now and not wait until it is too late to set a sustainable foundation for tourism development. It was already mentioned in the section on barriers at the destination level that rural areas concentrate on economic benefits, destination management and product development, while socio-cultural and environmental impacts of growing tourism "could remain unconsidered, overlooked and underdeveloped" (Wanner et al. 2019 pg. 14). To overcome this barrier, the socio-cultural aspects and environmental impacts to the region need local stakeholder input. Those directly and indirectly involved in tourism need to be brought together (Wilson et al., 2001) to avoid conflicts of interest and include regionally relevant planning concerns (Kadi et al., 2015). Mayer and Job (2010) add to this, saying that rural regions in which outdoor recreation is central to tourism are dominated by an understanding of cultural landscapes which are also home and working environments for stakeholders. Practice oriented and relevant stakeholder input will make the content more relevant for policy makers, a current deficit in planning pointed out by Fraser et al. (2006).

The strong connection of rural tourism to the cultural landscape were central in the development of sustainable tourism in the investigated regions in central and southeast Europe. Zala (Hungary) and Šumadja and Pomoravlje (Serbia), as areas with the least developed tourism offers at the moment, displayed higher interest in bringing together stakeholders. Harghita (Romania) and Plovdiv (Bulgaria) on the other hand, have well established DMOs and their round tables and stakeholder meetings held higher interest in creating content relevant for policy makers. All regions were aware that by being rural, their natural environments and unique historical aspects which shape their cultural landscape were their greatest asset which they were both seeking to use and protect. Each region reflected their unique cultural aspects in their strategies, as they grew to understand that the combination between culture and natural conditions would be the center of their sustainable tourism strategies.

In past studies (Aigner & Egger, 2010; Arnberger et al., 2006; Kirchengast, 2008; Mayer & Job, 2010) on tourism in rural areas, statistical analysis and expert interviews were used to determine the strategies and developments needed. But Wanner et al. (2021) clearly showed that these approaches are not sufficient for creating participatory tourism planning for more sustainable destinations. When stakeholders not directly involved in tourism are not included, their voices are taken; reinforcing barriers (Hartley & Wood, 2005; Tosun, 2000) and leading to non-participation or degrees of tokenism at best (Arnstein, 1969). Making assumptions about stakeholders without understanding their motivations, which are not purely economically oriented, blocks social sustainability in rural regions. The survey and semi-structured interviews of Wanner et al. (2021) clearly illustrated that stakeholders' interests are not always evident. The actual challenges stakeholders are faces often differ from those the policy makers assume. In this example, it was clear that aside from a general disinterest in tourism as a source of economic gain, strict policies on hygiene and construction were blocking farmers from expanding their tourism offers. The restrictions of these policies and their effects on being farmers' willingness to renovate or develop tourism infrastructure on their alpine pastures had not been evident before the participatory planning approaches were introduced.

The rural context in tourism development is important for sustainability due to the number of stakeholders who are indirectly involved in tourism and the importance of the cultural landscape plays in tourism offers.

6.5. Strategies to overcome barriers in stakeholder involvement

Multiple barriers have been identified as blocking rural tourism planning from becoming more participatory and therefore also more sustainable destination. Under the EU's call for greater participation the foremost barriers are found in the exclusion of marginalized stakeholders and those not directly linked to tourism, and the belief that stakeholders are solely economically focused. If stakeholders are not brought into the planning process, there is a lack of understanding for the planning content, low awareness of sustainability goals and poor access to resources and expertise on sustainable development. There is also a conflict of interest which continues to pull the processes towards economically focused goals and strategies and exclude social and environmental aims.

Considering the call for sustainability indicators and participation, what is blocking rural tourism regions in central and southeast Europe from becoming more sustainable and what are the factors for success to improve participatory sustainable, rural tourism planning? To answer this question, Table 8 summarizes the barriers identified in this study as those hindering sustainable tourism planning in the investigated regions. The table also summarizes the factors for successful sustainable tourism planning as determined through action research in the course of the research.

It has been demonstrated here, that the barriers are already found at the policy levels, where a vacuum of clear goals and strategies hinder sustainable participatory tourism planning. There is only very limited coordination across all planning levels, regardless of location of the nation or the time they have spent as an EU member.

While the EU and the UN call for participatory planning, the bottom-up approaches are not as efficient as they could be and are not picking up the slack of high-level policies' lack of sustainability action. The bottom up approaches do not give sustainable development a central role in practical implementation, because they do not understand the content. This has been shown at a European level in research presented (Wanner & Pröbstl-Haider, 2019; Wanner et al., 2020).

There is a mismatch between the policies provided and the content that would actually address the support that stakeholders need to contribute to sustainable tourism development, be these developments on tourism products, tourism infrastructure or tourism strategies (Wanner et al., 2021). Therefore, a disconnect is being witnessed: there is policy development without demand, because policy is being developed without proper incorporation of stakeholders. This in turn reinforces the operational and structural barriers which are preventing stakeholders from influencing the planning process or being incorporated early and effectively.

In an ideal world, policy would be based on input provided through participatory processes. It would allow for locals to jointly conceptualize and accept foundations that incorporate social aspects such as quality of life and happiness and environmental sustainability alongside economic goals. It would allow for strategies which focus on the conservation of natural and cultural landscapes which define local tourism products.

Table 8: Barriers and success factors for sustainable rural tourism development

Barriers	Success factors
Vague goals	Clear achievable indicators
No accountability	Divide tasks & responsibilities
Lack of tools	Strengthen rural regions abilities to use planning methods: strategy development, stakeholder involvement
	Selection of suitable methods
Poor communication	Transparency
	Information tools tailored to stakeholder groups
	Define sustainability in a usable & applicable way
Marginalized stakeholders	Transparency and participation will produce well accepted results
Belief stakeholders are solely economically focused	Social aspects ensure greater happiness and social sustainability
Stakeholders not directly linked to tourism are overlooked	Networks create understanding, awareness, acceptance and confidence in planning choices
Lack of understanding for planning content	Step-by-step planning approach
Low awareness	Clarify responsibilities and provide tools to fulfill these
Conflict of interest	Involve stakeholders early, continuously and give the opportunity to discuss
Access to resource and expertise	Clarify "sustainability"
	Introduce process-oriented planning

Sadly, the reality is different. Support and funding are linked to policies, set in timeframes that vary between international and national frameworks. The concentration on specific topics for set timeframes ensure that regions are specifically seeking out how to obtain funding for projects that

may not even actually address their needs or desires. The vacuum or financial and human resources in rural regions drive DMOs to orient themselves economically and in accordance to current funding opportunities policy provides.

Tourism policy across Europe builds strongly on the cultural landscape. The cultural landscape is seen as the core which makes Europe interesting, unique, and attractive. However, the aims laid out are not understood or cared about by stakeholders (Wanner et al., 2020). Social aspects including local values must be respected and integrated in order to achieve the goals the EU lays out. More effort needs to be made to unify rural sustainable tourism development in central and southeast Europe. This requires information preparation, redrafting of policy, education and training for leaders in the regions.

The research has also shown that there is no harmonization of sustainability indicators across Europe. While having a solid foundation in the SDGs for general sustainable development and ETIS specifically for European tourism development, these indicator systems are drastically under-utilized. If baseline studies were implemented through the assistance of the EU, with common data collection methodology and central digital data storage, the indicators have great potential. By anchoring EU policies to benchmarks linked to indicators, stakeholders may be able to contribute more effectively to sustainable tourism development.

Tourism policies need to be developed with stakeholders in mind. This requires recognizing the current shortcomings: not addressing stakeholders needs, not providing financial, educational or training support to rural regions and not deploying the current indicator system to its full potential.

7. **Conclusion**

This study investigated rural regions developing sustainable tourism through participatory planning processes. The focus on study areas and processes in southeast and central Europe contributed to filling current research gaps on tourism policy development of these regions and on stakeholder involvement processes. First the relevance of policies for local planning processes was analyzed. The results show that current policies place demands to coordinate, implement and measure tourism development on the local level yet does not provide the responsible institutions such as DMOs or local governments with the tools or means to do so. Although the international policies are non-binding, tourism destinations want to become more sustainable. However, the vaguely formed goals and lacking accountability, transparency and division of tasks are preventing the implementation of sustainable rural tourism as described in policy. Ultimately, the research has shown that EU policies and SDGs were found not to influence implementation of sustainability goals at the local level. The call of the SDGs and the EU to include participation is being heard by tourism destinations. An investigation into lesser researched aspects of central and southeast European tourism policy showed that the issues of international policies (vague goals, lack of coordination) are transferring to the national level policies as well. To overcome this deficiency, rural regions should be strengthened in their financial means available, abilities to develop sustainability strategies, and their competence in stakeholder participation methodology in planning processes.

The inclusion of stakeholders will incorporate their values, capabilities and needs. They must be included to increase social sustainability and avoid making assumptions about their motives. Action research proved to be an effective methodology to apply to sustainable tourism development, as it provided an opportunity to work together with stakeholders to identify underlying issues and influence the planning process and planning outcomes. Further use of action research in other tourism planning settings should be investigated in future to determine how this methodology may be used to strengthen regions across Europe in their ability to work with stakeholders.

While perceptions of sustainability, landscape conservation and climate change may vary between stakeholders, this is a barrier that must be overcome before progressing in the planning process. Tools such as educational courses, master classes, lectures or involving experts should be used. Destinations must take initiative to identify issues and tackle them as they arise. The research here has shown that awareness raising at an early stage was successful in overcoming barriers to participatory planning. In agreement with current scientific literature, early and effective involvement, easy access to and understanding information will contribute to participatory planning processes which are transparent and truly influence planning results. In order to influence policy however, improved communication and coordination across planning levels are necessary. Greater efforts need to be made in research to identify how exactly international policy can be developed to strengthen rural regions effectively.

Precondition for successful stakeholder involvement and solutions to overcoming barriers were determined to be a methodology which incorporates clearly defined goals, transferable and easy to

use guidelines and feedback loops which allow for an incremental planning process based on outcomes learned in previous planning stages. Continuous planning efforts must be made including inviting stakeholders, setting communication methods, designing inputs for the process and deciding on regional focus points to ensure that participatory planning will effectively contribute to sustainable development in rural tourism regions in central and southeast Europe and beyond. To improve policy and increase sustainability, stakeholder motives must be considered and not assumed, or else policy will not address the barriers in place. The research has made evident that participatory planning is the key to bridging the issues between policy goals and practical implementation of sustainable tourism strategies. To achieve sustainable tourism, we as researchers must contribute to educating and encouraging stakeholders to become engaged and effective participants in the joint creation of a more sustainable future.

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8. Appendix

8.1. Paper 1

sustainability

MDPI

Article

Barriers to Stakeholder Involvement in Sustainable Rural Tourism Development—Experiences from Southeast Europe

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Abstract: Participative planning approaches are vital to sustainable development in rural areas. However, stakeholder involvement also faces many barriers. In this Danube region case study, barriers to stakeholder involvement across eight rural regions are investigated. With the standardized conditions provided through an ERDF and IPA funded EU project, special attention could be paid to socio-cultural barriers, specifically concerning perception of sustainability and conflicts of interest. The effects of these barriers to the planning process are seen in the comparison of awareness concerning overall goals, indicators and the regional self-assessments. The implications for planning and management in rural tourism areas find that the perception of sustainability varies greatly, perceived deficiencies increase awareness and that crucial indicators need to be understood by stakeholders beginning a participative planning approach.

Keywords: rural tourism; stakeholder involvement; participative planning; rural areas in the Danube area; sustainable rural development

1. Introduction

With interest in stakeholder participation growing, there have been both advocates and opponents pointing out the benefits and pitfalls this approach can have on tourism development. Tourism offers an especially interesting backdrop for participative planning methods, since there is such an array of potential stakeholders. While some authors perceive an extensive stakeholder involvement as the ultimate precondition for a successful and integrated strategy, others highlight the difficulties and the limited professional outcomes. Some supports for stakeholder involvement praise the approach for its communication and collaboration abilities in planning well-accepted tourism strategies and for its ability to avoid conflict arising during implementation [1]. Wilson et al. [2] see it as a major factor for success, specifically for rural tourism development, in the way it brings those directly and indirectly involved in the tourism sector together. Fraser et al. [3] note that the benefits of participation are felt most strongly if stakeholders are truly incorporated into decision making and final results, and are made more relevant for policy makers. Opponents to this approach are sceptical as they find involvement to be tokenistic [4] or even a simplistic way of creating an illusion of responsibility [5]. Considering this variety in opinion, the perception may also be the result of the respective planning approach and significantly influenced by the circumstances, the timeframe and the provided framework.

Interreg, also known as the European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) uses programmes such as the Danube Transnational Programme as a financial instrument to assist regions in implementing joint projects between member states. It fosters regional exchange, peer learning and bottom-up development processes. The aim of Interreg is to bring regions together to focus on sustainable

solutions and ultimately lead to shared solutions to common issues in economy, environment and society and to improve the creation and implementation of European policy. The European Union pays special attention to funding opportunities for participatory processes which are seen as an essential element [6] through Interreg. Within the Danube Transnational Programme, projects seek to use tools that will support small-scale pilot actions that will ensure long-term sustainable development.

It is within the Interreg Danube Transnational Programme that the project INSiGHTS—integrated slow, green and healthy tourism strategies—was funded and developed to assist partners in eight European countries to create and implement strategies that ensure long-term tourism development that protects local natural and cultural resources. To follow this objective, three thematic pillars were focused on: Integrated tourism management, coordinated tourism supply and promoting a healthy and eco-conscious lifestyle. The planning process to achieve these goals was supposed to be obtained through intensive stakeholder involvement. More information on INSiGHTS is provided in Section 3. The paper at hand presents and analyses the respective participatory process in the eight partner countries against its contribution to sustainable tourism development and barriers against it.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Stakeholder Involvement and its Benefits

In its most basic form, a stakeholder is defined as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives" [7] (p. 46). In tourism planning, stakeholder involvement is typically characterized by great diversity, embracing representatives of the tourism industry, tourists, entrepreneurs, communities, administrative bodies and non-governmental organizations, experts and the local population. Amongst tourism projects the variety of stakeholders can be just as diverse from project to project as the methodological approaches and necessary time involvement. Therefore, stakeholder involvement takes shape in many different forms with typology ranging from tokenism to citizen control [8]. Through categorisation and analysis of these stakeholders, the appropriate ones can be chosen for involvement [9–11]. In our context, we defined stakeholder in tourism as people who have an interest in the regional development and may profit from their regions' development in a direct or indirect manner. According to Waligo et al. [12] these stakeholders are classified as "primary stakeholders." In our definition we are following Murphy's Community Approach [13]] who underlined that beneficial partnerships are essential for tourism planning and that it is imperative to recognise stakeholders when managing tourism more sustainably and take account of their different perspectives on the issue (see [14–16]). Following this approach, stakeholders should not be recipients of sustainable tourism planning initiatives but active participants and drivers of the planning process [12]. This approach also takes into account that tourism development can result in heavy exploitation of local resources, enhance gentrification and influence the local quality of life [17,18]. Norton [19] along with Wall and Mathieson [20] underline that local stakeholders (and not tourists) need the opportunity to discuss issues that influence the quality of their lives and need to be sufficiently empowered to do so. Therefore, the primary stakeholders in this study exclude tourists and concentrates on those with interest in regional development.

The benefits gained through stakeholder involvement is, according to the literature, a more transparent and better-accepted tourism strategy and results [21]. It increases equity of decision-making and incorporates marginalized groups. It helps to understand the diverse range of (potentially conflicting) interests and navigate the regionally specific issues. Furthermore, it is a tool for education to generate understanding of regional issues and politics [22]. Participation is instrumental in development and execution of strategy if it leads to trust and understanding among the diverse range of participants [9].

Hartley and Wood [21] identify 10 criteria to evaluate the conditions under which the benefits of stakeholder involvement can best be achieved: Communications, fairness, timing, accessibility, information provision, influence on the process, competence, interaction, compromise and trust. Under

these conditions, bringing stakeholders together can lead to an integrated and regionally appropriate planning strategy that will address unique selling points and products, and will benefit the region as a whole. By actively contributing, the variety of stakeholders understand the planning process from beginning to end, which increases acceptance. But as Prell et al. [23] (p. 15) state: "This variety of personality and people which is clearly the most important strength of participatory modelling is also its largest weakness.", indicating that there continue to be barriers to the process that hinder its success.

2.2. Barriers to Participatory Processes

Few efforts have been made to directly identify barriers to stakeholder involvement in tourism planning or conditions that benefit its success. Tosun [22] made a first attempt at categorising barriers while Hartley and Wood [21] investigated conditions that would benefit involvement according to the Aarhus Convention. The fact that clear barriers are listed and explained makes them standout in the stakeholder literature. Both papers address the issues arising when the methodology of stakeholder involvement is put into practice. Where in theory the design of such a process enforces democracy and transparency, all too often one is confronted with tokenism and manipulation, typologies categorised as nonparticipation by Arnstein [8]. Hartley and Wood [21] and Tosun [22] have gone beyond the theory and identified barriers to the practical implementation of stakeholder involvement.

Tosun [22] identifies barriers in three categories: Operational, structural and cultural (see Table 1). While his paper concentrates on tourism destinations in development, the presence of these barriers in rural regions is mentioned as well. Operational limitation includes centralised administration, lack of coordination and lack of information. Structural limitations are made up of the attitudes, expertise, domination by the elite, legal system and human resources. Additionally, Tosun sees high costs and lack of financial resources as potential structural barriers. Finally, cultural limitations play into barriers as well. In eastern European countries, this includes a lack of participatory experiences in local planning and decision making. Limited capacity of the poor, apathy and low levels of awareness also hinder local participation.

Table 1. Barriers to stakeholder involvement for tourism planning in rural regions (categorised after Tosun [21] and expanded through Hartley and Wood [22]).

Operational Barriers	Structural Barriers	Cultural and Personal Barriers
Lack of information on planning and legalities	Poor legal framework & regulatory constraints	Low capacity of poor
Weak administration	Lack of access to resources	Apathy
Poor coordination	Lack of expertise	Low awareness
Poor execution	Lack of training	Mistrust
Failure to influence process	High costs	Domination by elite
		NIMBY

In further investigation of conditions for stakeholder involvement, Hartley and Wood [21] identify eight barriers. They agree with Tosun [22] that regulatory constraints, lack of information, and low levels of awareness or knowledge of planning are to be considered a hindrance. They add further barriers: mistrust, failure to influence the process, poor execution of the method and poor access to legal advice. Finally, they see the effects of the "Not in my backyard" (NIMBY) syndrome to be a barrier, especially where interests diverge and consensus difficult to achieve.

While Tosun's [22] barriers are concentrated on the frameworks and surrounding conditions, Hartley and Wood [21] address barriers that are more directly felt by the stakeholders themselves. Therefore, these two sets of barriers complement each other. Combining Hartley and Wood's [21] barriers with those Tosun [22] has established, a list of 16 identified barriers falling into three categories after Tosun that affect stakeholder involvement in rural tourism planning is obtained

The framework presented in Table 1 assists in analysing and structuring the experiences and outcomes of case studies on stakeholder involvement in tourism destinations. Case studies have been analysed on barrier to stakeholder participation in tourism. Since the amount of cases in rural tourism is rather limited, case studies in urban settings have been included. An investigation of recorded barriers to stakeholder involvement gave insight into the variety of regions and categories of barriers that are most evident in practical work with stakeholders. The theoretical analysis of these case studies illustrates the frequency of barriers and which solutions may have already been found to tackle them. The findings on barriers reported in tourism related case studies are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Case Studies and their barriers.

Case Study analysis	Operational Barriers					Structural Barriers					Cultural and Personal Barriers				
	Lack of information	Weak administration	Poor coordination	Poor execution	Failure to influence	Poor legal framework Regulatory constraints	Lack of access to resources	Lack of expertise	Lack of training	High costs	Low capacity of the poor	Apathy	Low awareness	Mistrust	Domination by elite conflict of interest
Thrace region, Turkey [24]	X**	X	X			X		X				X			X
South Kynouria region, Greece [25]	X	X	X					X	X			X	X		
Kenya [26]	X	X	X			X	X	X	X		X				
Cusco, Peru [27]			X	X	X**			X	X	X		X			X
Calvia, Spain [15]			X		X	X		X	X				X		
Abai village, Malaysia [28]			X*						X				X		
Port Douglas, Australia [29]				X	X									X	X
Jumma and Kashmir region, India [30]										X		X			X

* In long-term implementation, loss of motivation. **: lack of strategic vision.

The highest number of barriers were identified within the operational barriers category. The largest named issue being poor coordination followed by failure to influence the planning process. Poor coordination can stem from underlying issues such as lacking financial resources or time constraints. It can also consist of failing communication leading to an uncoordinated approach that does not lead to acceptable results. A failure to influence the planning process reflects poor implementation of participation and indicates non-participatory approaches in its design.

Amongst the structural barriers lack of expertise and lack of training were identified as being the most challenging. The lack of knowledge on methodology and content continue to affect planning processes negatively. If there is no expertise, there is no leadership within the process or for the stakeholders. A lack of expertise is a barrier that causes inappropriate solution measures and poor planning strategies.

Apathy and a lack of motivation lead among cultural and personal barriers. Not only is commitment required of stakeholders, but also interest in development, time investments and the

willingness to engage in dialogue. Equally difficult is the issue of domination of elite, under which conflict of interest was also grouped, as conflict of interest usually leads to the more dominating party being able to push their ways forward. Mistrust and lack of access to resources did not appear to be hard felt barriers in these studies. Low capacity and poor execution are not often mentioned as barriers. What has not been mentioned in the analysed case studies are differences that local culture has on perception of planning related issues such as climate change adaption or gender issues.

Planning frameworks highlight an additional barrier that strongly influenced the process: An outcome-oriented versus process-oriented approach. The style of approach influences the perception of both stakeholders and politicians following short-term aims without a long-term mentality. Such an approach is detrimental for the planning process, does not lead to sustainable outcomes and will lead to further problems down the road.

Furthermore, the role of the respective planning bodies differs within the analysed studies. The planner himself can become a barrier to the process if there is conflict between their role as a planner or expert and their role as process moderator. In changing approaches, the planner needs to see their function clearly as a moderator and guide as opposed to an expert influencing the decision making [31].

While several authors of case studies [24,28–30] identify some solutions to the barriers dealt with in the mentioned regions such as structures that encourage collaboration and coordination, linking stakeholders into the planning process, promotion through tourism organisations, capacity building amongst locals and understanding the prevailing power structures, Tosun [22] and Hartley and Wood [21] summarize the needs quite precisely. Hartley and Wood [21] identify early and effective involvement of stakeholders as a key factor. Additionally, information should be easily accessible and understandable by providing access to documents, discussion and public opinion. Results from participation should be taken seriously and considered in outcome decision-making, if the stakeholders are not already directly involved in the final decision-making. Most importantly policy changes should be implemented to encourage participation and allow a sufficient amount of time for the process. A simplification of the process would allow greater transparency and increase enthusiasm. Tosun [22] adds that decision-makers need to change their attitudes and behaviours towards participation and use specific and deliberate strategies at all planning levels, from local to international, to tackle barriers.

Due to the European funding and the support provided by knowledge providing partners, the INSiGHTS project keeps the operational and the structural factors constant and, as a result, these are of little to no influence. This allows a greater study of the influence of the respective socio-cultural conditions in the pilot regions. Therefore, this paper addresses the following research questions: Which are the cultural barriers that constrain stakeholder involvement in this south-east European case study? How do these barriers influence the perception of sustainability goals and the respective stakeholder engagement in tourism development?

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Case Study Areas in the Danube Transnational Program

The INSiGHTS projects contribute to the current debate on stakeholder involvement by creating and using a methodology specifically designed to engage stakeholders and avoid structural and operational barriers. Analysing current theoretical standings and issues arising in other case studies, guidelines were designed to contribute to stakeholder involvement [32–34]. Links to the Self-Assessment Manual [34], Regional Visions: Integrated Development Concepts on Sustainable Tourism Guidelines and Template [33], and the Strategies for Integrated Development Concepts on sustainable Tourism Guidelines and Template [32] can be found in the supplementary materials at the end of this paper. The design addresses the early and effective involvement of stakeholders [21] and the development of a framework also addresses operational and structural issues identified in the case studies and literature [3,9,12,21,22,24,35]. The framework encouraged collaboration and coordination

of stakeholders throughout the planning process. The guidelines were designed to deliver outputs that could directly flow into planning outcomes.

INSiGHTS worked in eight regions. The presented paper uses this unique opportunity to analyse eight parallel tourism planning processes within a European Union funded project under standardised conditions in order to better understand typical barriers and examine strategies to overcome constraints. The results are of particular interest because INSiGHTS partners are mainly located in south-eastern European countries. The differences in meaning of stakeholder involvement in planning traditions across these regions are expected to become visible. Considering south-eastern European planning traditions are rooted in their post-communist history, meaning they are centralised and follow a more top-down tradition, cooperation with stakeholders is more of a challenge [36,37]. The applicability of the results may also be able to strengthen planning processes in similar European Union funded projects.

The regions working in this project are located in rural areas of the Danube Transnational Programme region and consists of partners from Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia (Lead partner), Slovenia and Serbia. They share a common interest in developing new tourism products that will be attractive to visitors and increase sustainability. At the same time, each region has individual natural and cultural resources that create unique issues and a unique project environment (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Interreg Danube Transnational Programme area (2019).

3.2. Planning Process

The planning process and the related stakeholder involvement which will be analysed in this paper were carefully designed and consists of tailored planning tools. To achieve the set objectives and ensure long-term regional development over the course of the two and half year runtime, participatory guidelines on self-assessment, vision development, strategy building and product development were

provided [32–34]. They anticipated possible barriers. These guidelines were designed to be transferable among regions while also strengthening the local focus on individual and unique issues at hand.

Clearly phrased guidelines were used to introduce stakeholders into the planning process in the INSiGHTS piloting regions. Broken into three parts, these guidelines were short, straightforward, and especially designed for users who do not come from a planning background. Among a detailed step-by-step narration, they also included templates. All guidelines which include template tables can be found on project website [38]. The template tables were used by project partners in their self-assessment and vision development. This approach broke the overlaying objective—creating long-term and sustainable tourism strategies—into manageable steps for those who were conducting such a task for the first time. The templates provided a clear understanding of the task at hand and introduced the partners to long-term planning. It was agreed that this methodology would ensure awareness raising and generate greater understanding amongst the partners for both the planning process and of the long-term goals they were aiming to achieve in their regions.

In a first meeting regional stakeholder groups were set up. The groups roughly consisted of between 25 and 50 people in each region. Piloting regions incorporated regional stakeholders from municipal government, statistical institutions, destination management organisations (DMOs), small and medium enterprises, interest groups, ministries, sports clubs, mountain rescue and development associations to name a few. Masterclasses and regional empowering stakeholder workshops held twice throughout the project were the meeting point and discussion forum in which participants could come together.

Regional stakeholders contributed concrete information and evaluation in various planning steps. Firstly, all stakeholders discussed and agreed upon common goals which were based on development goals set by the World Tourism Organisation, the European Union and the United Nations SDGs. This laid the foundation for further analysis. For the Status Quo Analysis [39] information was provided through indicators listed in the guidelines. While some indicators were mandatory, others could be selected from or were optional. During the analysis of strengths and weaknesses, stakeholders incorporated local knowledge on cooperation, management structures, built heritage and current visitor experience. These were the basis for following discussions on socio-economic and environmental development. After full understanding of the current state was achieved and with the previously chosen common goals in mind, a joint vision development and corresponding strategy were developed with the stakeholders [33,34].

3.3. Methodological Design

From the beginning typical operational barriers listed in Table 1 were eliminated: Information on planning and the legalities were compensated though knowledge providers of the project. Coordination and execution were organized and compensated any weak administration that may have otherwise occurred. The process-oriented approach provided continuous direct influence from stakeholders into the tourism planning process.

Similarly, the structural barriers were analysed and significantly reduced. Through knowledge providers being present, resources, expertise and training were given and available. The co-funding from European Union funds (ERDF and IPA) meant that costs were not a burden to the process either. Lastly for structural barriers, the legal and regulatory frameworks for tourism were studied in each of the regions. While there are many frameworks at EU, national and regional level to be abided to, they were not identified as constraining [40].

During the establishment of INSiGHTS, all project partners willingly joined and were aware of the desired objectives and outputs. By nature of participation NIMBY, mistrust and apathy were not relevant cultural barriers and were therefore not considered in the analysis. The following results thus concentrate on barriers such as awareness, domination or conflict of interest. The barriers that defined stakeholder involvement during INSiGHTS were all to be found in the "cultural and personal barriers" grouping.

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4. Results

Since the typical structural and operational barriers were avoided by the cooperation program and the methodological design, the following results focus on the two strongest barriers identified as describing stakeholder involvement in this case study.

- Low awareness [15,24,25,28]
- Domination and/or conflict of interest [24,27,29,30]

4.1. Low Awareness of Major Elements for Sustainable Tourism Development

Since the whole planning process in the eight pilot areas focuses on sustainable tourism development in the respective countries the awareness of overarching goals was analysed. In order to do this, the respective partners were asked about the importance of sustainability goals listed below in their planning environments. This was done via the self-assessment manual [34] by project partners in cooperation with their regional stakeholder groups. Within the meetings the data collected on overall goals and self-evaluation were examined. The overall goals reflect the values and aims of the INSiGHTS project and were categorised into five thematic fields relevant to tourism development:

- Destination strategy, cooperation and management structures.
- Environment and land use heritage.
- Socio-economic benefits and regional development.
- Socio-cultural built heritage.
- Quality of visitor experience and product development.

To establish consensus among stakeholders the first step was to examine each of the 32 overall goals and decide to what extent it should be a goal in their region. If stakeholders agreed that a goal was very important, the awareness was high. If the stakeholders in a pilot area did not recognise a goal as important then the awareness was evaluated as low (Table 3).

Looking at the five thematic fields one can see that overall the destination strategy and the quality of the visitor experiences including product development were perceived as major goals. The awareness of the project partners and their stakeholders is high in these two fields and there is an understanding of the importance of the included aspects. The socio-economic area holds medium to high awareness across all stakeholders.

Surprisingly low and overall quite diverse were the awareness levels concerning the environment and land use heritage as well as the socio-cultural and built heritage. Several pilot areas and their stakeholders ranked the goals lower than the other thematic fields. Thus, they were not aware of the importance of these aspects for sustainable tourism development in their region.

A closer look taken at the goals perceived with low or very low awareness. It showed that the least awareness for environment and land use heritage could be found in the indicators "climate risk avoidance" and "reducing resource consumption". In addition, the indicators "contribution to events", "gender issues", "gentrification" and "cultural impact" held the lowest levels of awareness in socio-cultural and built heritage. The partners were obviously not aware of possible impacts on their cultural life, gentrification and gender issues tourism development could have. However, all provided goals were accepted as crucial elements of a sustainability tourism development by at least one partner. In order to understand the barriers related to specific sustainability goals and respective cultural differences the indicators which showed the highest diversity among the partners were analysed in detail (Table 4).

Table 3. Awareness overall goals agreed upon.

Sustainability Goals	Indicators	Awareness	
Destination strategy, cooperation and management structures	The region has a strategy concept	Very high	1
	Sustainability goals are supported	Very high	1
	DMO development	Low	4
	Destination management initiatives and visibility	High	2
	Destination learning	Medium	3
Overall awareness for destination strategy:		high	Ø 2,2
Environment and land use heritage	Protection of natural resorts / protected area	Medium	3
	Protection of habitats	High	2
	Land use heritage	Medium	3
	Reduce resource consumption	Very low	5
	Climate change adaption and sustainable mobility	Low	4
	Climate risk avoidance	Very low	5
Overall awareness for environment issues:		low	Ø 4,4
Socio economic benefits and regional development	Economic benefits	Medium	3
	Reduction of seasonality	Medium	3
	Tourist's expenses	High	2
	Gentrification ownerships of tourism infrastructure	High	2
	Availability and quality of services	Medium	3
Overall awareness for social economic benefits:		medium to high	Ø 2,6
Socio cultural and built heritage	Maintain and awareness of cultural heritage	Very high	1
	Local food	High	2
	Built heritage	Medium	3
	Awareness and use level	Medium	3
	Contribution to events	Very low	5
	Gender issues	Very low	5
	Security	Low 4	4
	Socio-cultural disturbance	Low 4	4
	Gentrification by increasing housing costs	Very low	5
	Perception of cultural impacts	Very low	5
Overall awareness for socio-cultural and built heritage:		Low	Ø 3,7
Quality of visitor experiences and product development	Visitor satisfaction	Very high	1
	Unique selling proposition	Medium	3
	Inclusive offers	Medium	3
	Improves infrastructure for outdoor recreation	Low	4
	Infrastructure for outdoor experience and environmental education	Medium	3
	Recommendation	Very high	1
Overall awareness for quality of visitor experience:		Medium to high	Ø 2,5

Legend:	1	very high awareness: goals are supported by all partners (8)
	2	high: supported by 7
	3	medium: supported by 5-6
	4	low: rejected by 3-4
	5	very low: rejected or little support by 5–7

Table 4. Analysis of low and very low awareness per goal by region.

Goal	Desired Condition	BG	HR	DE	HU	RO	SK	SI	RS
Improved infrastructure for outdoor	The number of infrastructure for main outdoor recreation activities are monitored, maintained, and in a good condition	med	high	high	med	low	high	high	high
Security	The crime rate is not influenced by tourism	high	med	high	high	low	low	high	high
Destination Management	There is an organisation in the destination which serves as a connector between different stakeholders, groups, and local organisations. The role and importance of destination leadership is clear	med	high	med	high	med	med	high	high
Climate change adaption and sustainable mobility	Tourism contributes to strengthen climate change adaptation and environment-friendly mobility	med	med	med	high	high	high	med	high
Socio-cultural disturbance	The share of visitors in relation to the local residents is perceived as adequate	high	med	low	med	high	low	high	high
Contribution	Tourism taxes contribute to the organisation of events	low	high	low	high	low	high	high	med
Reduce resource consumption	Tourism contributes to save energy and environmental resources	med	med	high	med	med	high	med	high
Gender issues	The share of men and women employed in tourism is equal/similar	med	med	med	high	med	med	high	high
Gentrification	Effects by gentrification such as increasing number of second homes or increasing costs for homes are limited	med	high	high	high	med	low	med	n/a
Perception of cultural impacts	The majority of visitors believes that they are low-impacting the destination identity	med	low	high	high	med	low	high	med
Climate risk avoidance	Tourism infrastructure considers possible risks due to climate change	low	med	med	med	med	low	med	high

Legend:	High Awareness	(high) the partner believes this is an important sustainability goal
	Medium Awareness	(med) the partner believes this is partly an important sustainability goal
	Low Awareness	(low) the partner believes this is not a goal of importance

The European Union specifically promotes sustainability goals in tourism based on its policy documents including "Action for more sustainable European Tourism" [41], "Agenda for a sustainable and competitive European Tourism" [42] and "Europe, the World's No 1 Tourism destination—A new political framework for tourism in Europe" [43] and by related guidelines, such as the European Tourism Indicator System [44]. Hence, it is to be expected that the extent of acceptance and awareness of sustainability goals depends on the guidance of this European influence. Therefore, the results by the Croatian, German, Hungarian, Slovakian, and Slovenian partners were compared with the Bulgarian, Romanian and Serbian partners as the first group of regions have been part of the European

Union for a longer time and have therefore been more exposed to the EU's policy influence. However, the comparison did not show a significant influence of European policies and respective guidance.

As the results in Table 4 show the awareness on sustainability aspects of the respective local stakeholders, it becomes evident that the lowest levels of awareness concerning major sustainability elements were predominantly found in Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia. Croatia and Germany were in a mid-range while Hungary, Slovenia and Serbia showed a higher awareness than the other piloting areas. The results presented underline that the local stakeholders are often not aware of European policies and that the processes are guided by the local exchange among stakeholders at a regional level.

4.2. Domination and/or Conflict of Interests

The awareness of sustainability goals may be influenced by current situation and existing conflicts of interest or dominating subjects in the respective region. Therefore, the partner regions were asked to conduct a self-assessment based on the criteria and indicators presented in Table 3 and to summarize their current performance according to the five thematic areas in regard to the goals. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Regional Self-Assessments in INSiGHTS 2018.

Pilot Region	Destination Strategy, Cooperation & Management Structure	Environment and Land Use Heritage	Socio-economic Benefits and Regional Development	Socio-cultural and Built Heritage	Quality of Visitor Experience and Product Development
Bulgaria	++	+	++	++	+
Croatia	+	+	+	++	+
Germany	+	+	–	++	+
Hungary	–	+	++	+	++
Romania	++	++	++	++	+
Slovakia	+	++	–	++	–
Slovenia	+	+	+	+	+
Serbia	+	–	–	+	–

Legend: ++ good performance; + fair performance, improvement required; – deficiencies.

The comparison shows that all partners evaluated their socio-cultural and built heritage well. In fact, it was the only category in which none of the self-assessments showed deficiencies. This category is felt to be performing well and is not in need of any major improvements. Concerning the thematic field of Environment and Land Use Heritage all except Serbia felt that the current performance was fair to good and no strong improvements were necessary. Serbia indicated deficiencies in this field. This may explain the overall low awareness concerning gentrification or resource consumption.

Very critically seen on the other hand are the socio-economic benefits and regional development. Three partners (Germany, Slovenia and Serbia) even perceive significant deficiencies here.

A challenging field is also the quality of visitor experience. Most of the case study partners felt that they could improve their current offers and attempt to further tourism product development. Slovakia and Serbia indicated strong deficiencies in current visitor experience and tourism products. Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Romania and Slovenia indicated the current situation to be fair, with room for improvements. Only Hungary indicated content.

Only two partners state a good performance concerning their destinations strategy and the management structure: Bulgaria and Romania. Hungary indicates deficiencies.

Amongst the partner regions there is a clear tendency towards identifying deficiencies in socio-economic benefits and regional development and in quality of visitor experience and product development. There were also thematic fields that showed medium to high awareness in regard to their importance for sustainable tourism development. Interestingly, destination strategy and environment and land use heritage showed very similar self-assessments.

A conflict of interest arises between economic and environmental issues, leading to the domination of regional economic aspects such as socio-economic benefits and product development. Socio-economic benefits, destination strategy and product development scored low in the self-assessment and had high levels of awareness. Environment and land use along with socio-cultural and built heritage scored high in the self-assessment and low in awareness.

Most partners, except Romania and Slovakia, are quite critical in their self-assessments and state that they are currently not addressing sustainability goals in an entirely sufficient manner. So, it came as a surprise to find that despite current global dialogue only 50% of the regions also saw climate change adaptation and sustainable mobility as an important goal. Only three regions identified reduction of resource consumption as a goal and only one region saw climate risk avoidance as a current development goal. There appears to be a disconnect between acknowledging the importance of sustainability itself and which local goals can be set to achieve sustainability regionally.

5. Discussion

5.1. Methodological Considerations

The methodological design of INSiGHTS and the related case studies in different countries were an excellent opportunity to research specific barriers to stakeholder involvement and study how to overcome them. The unique opportunity within the frame of a European Union funded project could implement many recommendations identified in section two of this paper to break down barriers, such as coordination and capacity building but also the early involvement of stakeholders [21].

Defining primary stakeholders in a manner which excluded tourists and focused on stakeholders with regional development interests ensured that Hartley and Wood's [21] recommendations to directly incorporate stakeholder outputs into planning outcomes successfully contributed towards the development of sustainable regional tourism strategies. By conducting policy roundtables with this group of stakeholders, steps towards improving future tourism policies at regional, national and European level were taken. Thus, the remaining barriers, in this case two predominantly socio-cultural barriers and how to overcome these, could be studied in-depth.

As the case studies in section two showed, this study too confirmed the existence of well-known barriers. Specifically to this case study, low levels of awareness and conflicts of interest or domination were the prevailing topics. The process-oriented methodological design was flexible and transferable to adapt to the needs of the local stakeholders. While not abolishing all barriers through design, the process allowed for anticipation of barriers and opportunity to overcome them within the project implementation.

5.2. Perception of Sustainability

While generally accepting sustainability as an important dimension of development on the surface, in further discussion with project partners described in the Status Quo Synthesis [39], sustainability was deemed to be an issue to be tackled at national or even international levels. Sustainability was perceived as an issue that while relevant, did not apply to the partners' realm of action. This attitude offered an explanation for the positive self-assessment and very low level of awareness. Recognising the issue lying in the perception of sustainability, INSiGHTS rose awareness of self-responsibility and points of action that could be integrated in destination management and product development.

Thus the perception of sustainability amongst project partners and the regional stakeholders was shifted and awareness heightened, confirming Tosun's [22] interpretation of stakeholder involvement as a means to educate stakeholders and Reed et al. [9] perception of it being instrumental in generating understanding of planning content amongst a highly diverse range of participants. Gaps in awareness of major elements of sustainability were filled through INSiGHTS in the process of sustainable tourism strategy development.

5.3. Influences on Engagement in Tourism Development

The presented results indicate that current dominating perception has an influence on the evaluation of sustainability goals and therefore also influences how regions engage in tourism development. The rather positive self-assessment of environmental and land use heritage as well as the socio-cultural and built heritage may have led to a lower awareness and ranking of corresponding goals. The indicators characterised by a rather critical self-assessment such as destination strategy and management, socio-economic aspects and the quality of visitor experience and product development, also achieved high awareness. A good or fair performance may lead to the impression that there is no further need to analyse or develop within these thematic fields.

Typical arguments dominating the discussion of tourism development in rural areas such as economic benefits, destination management, and product development play a major role in the self-assessment [34] but also in the related awareness and planning process towards sustainable tourism development. The domination of certain thematic areas over others impacts the overall development. Consequently, important socio-cultural aspects or environmental impacts could remain unconsidered, overlooked and underdeveloped.

Through allocating time and ensuring that all major elements of sustainability were understood by stakeholders in a manner that made it manageable and implementable at their local and regional realm of action, the benefits of stakeholder involvement such as avoiding conflict of interest [1], making content relevant for policy makers [3] and bringing those directly and indirectly involved in rural tourism together [2] were achieved.

5.4. Implications for Tourism Development Planning and Management in Rural Destinations

First and foremost, the understanding of sustainability differs significantly across rural regions. Although to some extent all regions in Europe work within the same European sustainability policies, the perception of these and implementations they carry are received differently at the regional level. Furthermore, the national policies and regional strategies play into overall goals being followed. As shown in this case study the perception of what constitutes sustainability and perceived responsibility varies from region to region. Therefore, the major aspects of sustainability which play into sustainable tourism planning and increasing awareness need to be made clear to participating stakeholders. Similar awareness levels should not be taken as a given fact, especially when working internationally.

Secondly, circumstances perceived to be intact and functional reduce stakeholders' awareness levels. Perceived deficiencies increase awareness. This is seen in the constant conflict of interest between economic development and environmental sustainability. While environmental aspects are currently being perceived as intact, domination of socio-economic development goals will lead the development if the process is not readjusted to strongly incorporate environmental goals. It is important to increase stakeholders' awareness levels concerning sustainability and integrate sustainable practices into the development processes from the onset.

Finally, studying crucial indicators and importance of certain goals is an important measure to conduct before starting a self-evaluation in project development or planning processes in rural destinations.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, INSiGHTS was able to avoid structural and operational barriers through tailor-made yet transferable guidelines which offered continuous planning support to the project partners and their stakeholders in the piloting areas. The process-oriented approach in methodology left only the barriers of low awareness and conflict of interest to be tackled.

While at international and European levels there is an abundance of sustainable tourism policy, there is low awareness for environmental and socio-cultural sustainability at a local level with the regional self-assessment in this case study showing content in these areas. Therefore, it was found that

the destination management, product development and socio-economic goals were dominant in initial tourism development strategies.

Recognising the differences between self-assessment and thematic awareness levels, regions were assisted in overcoming these barriers and in developing strategies that were more durable for a sustainable future. The process-oriented design of the guidelines made this possible.

For both planners implementing the guidelines and for stakeholders applying them, the benefits of using guidelines were reflected in the incorporation of outcomes into the process and resulting sustainable tourism strategies. While the guidelines were developed for INSiGHTS partners, they have a transferrable character that has yet to be put to trial in other regions.

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8.2. Paper 2

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Policies related to sustainable tourism – An assessment and comparison of European policies, frameworks and plans

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ABSTRACT

Policies at European, national and regional levels are meant to influence rural tourism development. This paper analyses the policies relevant to sustainable tourism at the local level by investigating policy documents and related stakeholder processes in seven European Union member states and one pre-accession nation. National policy assessments were conducted by stakeholders and resulted in roundtable discussions between government representatives and policy implementers. The results were policy recommendations that seek to create stronger multi-level governance structures for long-term sustainable development. In the study presented here, it became clear that while policies at European and national levels follow many sustainability aims and seek to implement sustainable rural development, these policies are showing little influence on development at the local level. By providing recommendations, this paper examines the conditions under which policies could become more practical for local implementation of overarching policy goals.

Management implication

In this paper we recognize that tourism developers are dissatisfied with the European and national policies under which they must work locally. Sustainability aspects within these policies are difficult to achieve as coordination is poor, communication lacking and there is a high uncertainty as to what the goals for the local level even are. To address these problems, the following management actions are identified:

- Active engagement with local policy makers and influencers when deficiencies and gaps in policy are seen;
- Coordination with superior institutions to clarify responsibilities, improve communication and generate more transparency in the governance structures;
- Identification of which policies' sustainability indicators to follow.

1. Introduction

European and national policies aim to give direction for sustainable development. In rural tourism areas, however, the deficiencies of these documents are evident. The study presented tries to identify policy shortcomings, show how and whether the national and European tourism policies correspond and demonstrate how rural tourism destinations evaluate their national policies. The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) funded project INSiGHTS, supported by the Interreg Danube Transnational Programme (DTP), is based on eight mostly eastern European rural regions. Within this project eight parallel tourism planning processes were analysed including their links to tourism policies on national and international level. The regions working in this project are located in rural areas of the DTP region and consist of partners from Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Serbia (Fig. 1). The aim of INSiGHTS is to establish a tourism strategy founded on a common interest in developing new tourism products that will be attractive to visitors and increase sustainability. At the same time, each region has individual natural and cultural resources that create unique issues and a unique project environment. The eight regions were accompanied in this project by two knowledge providers; one each from Austria and Hungary. The knowledge providers' role in this project was to provide expertise and research based assistance to the partners in order to ensure that the project outputs were in line with the standards of current applied tourism research.

The paper aims to understand the relevance and importance of European and national policies for local development. The objective of the

paper at hand is to assess policies under which the rural regions in the study area develop sustainable tourism and discuss the relevance of these policies for local development approaches. In this paper, an overview of currently relevant policies of the European Union (EU) is given. These together with the EU Strategy for the Danube Regions (EUSDR) set expectations, standards and targets for sustainable regional tourism development. This is followed by analyses of national, regional and local policies deemed relevant by stakeholders to sustainable, green and healthy tourism development in the rural partner regions. The locally relevant policies are then investigated under a self-assessment by the project partners. The evaluation of the policies in place, commonalities and differences between the national policies show possible effects on tourism development. Against this backdrop, opportunities for improvement are discussed. By creating a comparison between respective national policies, the paper offers recommendations on how to improve the policies in order to meet expectations, standards and targets set in the policy frameworks by the European Union (EU) and EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR). According to Edgell, Allen, Smith, and Swanson (2008:7) tourism policy can be defined as "a progressive course of actions, guidelines, directives, principles, and procedures set in an ethical framework that is issue-focused and best represents the intent of a community (or nation) to effectively meet its planning, development, product, service, marketing, and sustainability goals and objectives for the future growth of tourism". This definition highlights the broad strategic goals which are typical in tourism development. Tourism is a field which is highly interconnected with policy and planning and touches on different fields of expertise (Hall & Page, 2002). The objective of tourism policy is improving the lives of a nation's, region's or locality's citizens (Biederman et al., 2007). Understanding the tourism planning process is essential, because tourism can be valuable in terms of regional development or otherwise serve as a factor of destruction (Getz, 1987 cited in Hall & Page, 2002). In the literature on tourism policies and strategies many publications focus on developing countries and analyse the respective pro-poor policies (Andriotis, 2001; Dieke, 2003; Roe et al., 2004). Other papers have tried to develop tailored tourism policies to address specific aspects such as event tourism, to increase effectiveness (Getz, 2008; Poon, 1993; Yeoman, Rebecca, Mars, & Wouters, 2012) and climate change adaptation (Dodds, 2007). In the last years the focus has also been on tourism policy making from the policymakers' perspective (Stevenson, Airey, & Miller, 2008) as well as the stakeholder perspectives on the EU tourism policy framework and their preferences on the type of involvement (Anastasiadou, 2008). The issue of disconnect between national levels and local levels, especially in rural settings is also recognized in case studies such as Albrecht (2010). Albrecht identifies that in her case, stakeholder involvement within a policy frame work led to implementation of actions, however, "their actions did not necessarily address strategy content" (Albrecht, 2010, p. 108).

Only in the last decade has the scientific literature focused on analysing European policies in detail (Anastasiadou, 2008; Halkier, 2010; Hughes & Allen, 2005). In his study Halkier (2010) drew upon European and Nordic documentary sources as well as existing specialist literature, to examine the development of an EU policy statement on tourism, as well as two areas of EU policy - competition policy and regional development. It is concluded that while policies specifically targeting tourism have been limited in reach and profile, the touristic side effects of other economic and social policies central at the European level have clearly been considerable, primarily by facilitating the emergence of new multinational tour operators and budget airlines, but also by supporting development of new services and experiences in parts of Europe where tourism has until now been a socio-economic activity of relatively limited importance.

In the context of tourism policies Anastasiadou (2008) highlighted that less attention has been paid to tourism in Central-Eastern Europe, the New Member States region. In addition, Estol, Camilleri, and Font (2018) have identified a gap in academic research, concerning the evolution of EU tourism policy and the conditions under which it has been planned, organized and implemented. These are both gaps the paper at hand intends to fill. Estol et al. (2018) also exposes the challenges of institutionalizing tourism policy in intergovernmental institutions. On a supranational level it is important how integration is implemented and Majone (2014) argued that regional integration

Fig. 1. Interreg Danube Transnational Programme area (2019) with indicated partner regions.

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should follow a functional rather than territorial approach, which implies an inter-jurisdictional competition rather than pre-defined solutions. However, Schumacher, Bouris, and Olszewska (2016) mentioned that competitive characteristics have considerably contributed to the ineffectiveness of transnational cooperation. As areas respond differently to comparable changes and results of integrated rural tourism are not easily foreseeable, bottom-up planning processes and decentralisation of policies should be envisaged (Bousset et al., 2007). This has to do with Zimmermann (2018) mentioning that apart from the holistic characteristic of sustainable tourism, the host is very important, as a transition towards sustainability is based on the local population and its identity, values, needs, and capabilities. Edgell et al. (2008) defined sustainable tourism as meeting criteria such as the efficient use of environmental resources whilst conserving natural heritage and biodiversity, but also comprises respecting socio-cultural authenticity of host communities in terms of inter-cultural tolerance and furthermore should provide socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders. Thus, the individual is in demand, which is expressed in offering slow tourism for example, which means that travellers are sensitive for themselves but also for the perception of the environment, leading to a minimisation of negative environmental effects (Schäfer, 2010). Ooi, Duke, and O'Leary (2018) contended that due to the fact that tourism deals with natural environments and the change of macro-environmental and socioeconomic conditions, there is the need of communities to be able to respond, which is based on individuals and organisations striving towards improved knowledge and learning. Apart from private people a number of agents are involved in local and regional tourism, namely communities, federal states and tourism organisations (Tschurtschenthaler, 2010). However, the public authority and societal autonomy or self-regulation are interconnected, which can be seen as public and private policy actors that need to be in relative balance and which comprise hierarchies, markets, networks and communities (Hall, 2011).

This paper investigates in what way EU-policy frameworks together with national level policies effect the implementation of sustainable tourism in rural destinations, and how policies need to change in order to achieve implementation of goals and aims set at the transnational level.

2. Methodological approach

The EU funded DTP area project INSiGHTS presented a unique opportunity to conduct research on the effects of European frameworks and national policies on local tourism development across the Danube region. To do so, policies in the partner regions needed to be investigated.

Following an initial European policy overview, the eight partner regions (Fig. 1)- based on intensive stakeholder involvement- had to compile their respective local and national tourism policies and provide a national policy assessment. The project partners were, with exception of the private registered tourism association in Germany, all public institutions involved in regional development. In Romania and Hungary, the partners were county councils. In Slovakia, Slovenia, Croatia, Bulgaria and Serbia the partners were regional development agencies.[1] The tools for compiling and assessing policies were provided by knowledge providers to ensure a comparable quality. As mentioned previously, a knowledge provider's role is to provide information, planning or assessment tools and to assist the partners in order to ensure that the project outputs are achieved. Additionally, in INSiGHTS knowledge providers worked to ensure that the outputs contributed towards tourism research and as one of the knowledge providers within the project, the authors were involved in developing manuals including templates and offered consultancy opportunities to project partners.

Furthermore we analysed the overall process and interaction with our partners applying action research comparing their responses and outcomes (McNiff, 2013; Reason & Bradbury, 2006).

As a first step a policy analysis was conducted. The "Assessment Tool and Reporting for National Tourism Development Strategies" (Meyer & Pröbstl-Haider, 2018) was provided to partners who were given 12 weeks to complete the task. Before evaluating the policies in the respective partner countries within the INSiGHTS project the partners were asked to summarize the respective national and regional policies. The collection of policies is the framework within partners perceive their work is conducted. Therefore, depending on the regional tourism and focus areas of development, the list of policies varies across the regions. Since the majority of the regional and local policies related to sustainable tourism are only available in the project partners' national languages, they were asked to translate and summarize these policies. Thus, in a first step reviews of national, regional and local policies were conducted by each of the partners, which were then provided in a translated form in order to assess the actual status of relevant documents. These documents were also partially considered in national policy assessments.

In a second step the project partners assessed their tourism related policies on their efficiency to actually implement sustainable tourism development. As the INSiGHTS project aims to improve the currently available tourism-related policies in 8 piloting regions, the policy assessment tool provided by the knowledge providers was used. The assessments were conducted by the regions themselves and reflected their experience in practical application of the policies in their regional development work. By these means, the 8 piloting regions created national level policy inventories, descriptions and recommendations for each of their countries. Based on the inventory (Table 1) an evaluation was carried out by INSiGHTS projects partners. The inventory table identified the main policy documents concerning tourism at a national level, listed any additional complementary planning documents or initiatives and gave insight into goals and planned achievements. The inventory includes specific criteria such as land-use zoning or waste reduction to understand whether sustainability goals are included.

The main national policies listed in the inventory were then assessed along three thematic pillars: Integrated sustainable tourism management schemes, smart tourism products linked to greenways, and promotion of eco-conscious and healthy lifestyle choices. Each of these themes was given an assessment table. These tables were filled out by the partners together with their respective stakeholder group characterising the given situation on a scale of 1–4 (0 – missing, 1 – far below, 2 – little below, 3 – meeting desired conditions, 4 – fully meeting or exceeding).

The overall goals were divided into the national and destination

Table 1
Inventory form.

Name of the main document representing tourism policy in the country	Years of implementation
Names of the complementary planning documents and initiatives (linked to the other sectors for example by the environmental agency, by the ministry of health, and many other)	Years of implementation and main content
The documents' planned achievements and consideration of further goals, please elaborate on the following aspects • land-use zoning • ecosystem functioning • biodiversity conservation and sustainable use • sustainable transport • greenhouse gas reduction in the tourism industry • climate change adaptation and mitigation in destinations • waste reduction and management • poverty alleviation/mitigation	

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[1] For further information on the respective partners please see the website http://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/insights.

levels, listed desired conditions and criteria as illustrators and gave indicators by which the desired condition could be assessed. The "desired conditions" were established by knowledge providers based on the European Tourism Indicator System (ETIS) after discussions with stakeholders were held and adapted to the settings of project regions. They are intended to serve as a tangible expression of the overall goals to help stakeholders better understand what is meant.

The policy assessment was then built on through roundtables with local stakeholders in the respective countries. Stakeholder groups had been established at the beginning of the project and included between 25 and 50 representatives from government, statistical institutions, destination management, ministries, sports clubs, mountain rescue, local enterprises and regional development associations. Members of stakeholder groups differed amongst the regions as they represented local interests. The round tables brought together stakeholders and policy developers as partners invited relevant members of government to attend a full day roundtable discussion. During these sessions, stakeholders shared their experiences working within the policy frameworks and brought forward recommendation ideas. The government officials gave feedback on the viability of some of these suggestions. The minutes from these meetings have been analysed and considered by the authors in order to understand the main arguments. The data collected by project partners on policies and their assessments along with the meeting minutes were then evaluated and compared by the knowledge provider. Additionally, partners offered recommendations for improving the policies under which they work. This collaboration between partners within the project allowed for a comparable data set which led to transnational policy recommendations being prepared by the authors.

3. Results

3.1. Policy framework, initiatives and actions related to sustainable tourism at European level

Tourism is a national and regional competence field amongst the Member States of the EU and regions therefore have full authority to follow national or regional tourism policies. While EU tourism policy is limited to support, coordination or supplementation of national actions, they can provide financial support or legislation through other policies which affect sustainable tourism development (Juul, 2015).

There are four ways in which the EU can influence sustainable rural tourism development: Commission Communications specifically addressing tourism at a policy level; actions and initiatives; thematic and research networks for knowledge and information exchange; and sectoral policies. None of these forms carry mandatory authority. Table 2 is a brief overview of policies, based on the policy inventory by Beck (2018). It quickly becomes clear just how many policies are meant to influence tourism development.

Rural tourism regions work within a large and well established European framework which continues to incorporate and add policies aiming to improve sustainable development at a local level.

3.2. Overview of national tourism policies

Although the project partners are all located in rural areas, the overview on tourism policies in place showed significant differences. In the following section these differences are analysed against five indicators:

- National Strategies and their respective time frames;
- Number of accompanying strategic documents;
- Vision versus implementation orientation of these documents;
- Extent of adaptability in respective policies;
- Binding documents versus general guidelines

Table 2
Summary of European Policies based on Beck (2018).

Commission Communications:
• Basic Orientations for the Sustainability of European Tourism (European Commission, 2003)
• A renewed EU Tourism Policy: Towards a stronger partnership for European Tourism (European Commission, 2006)
• Agenda for a Sustainable and Competitive European Tourism (European Commission, 2007)
• A European strategy for more Growth and Jobs in Coastal and Maritime Tourism European Commission (2014)
Actions and Initiatives:
• European destinations of Excellence (EDEN) (European Commission, 2018a)
• CALYPSO: Tourism for All (European Commission, 2011)
• European Charter for Sustainable tourism in Protected Areas (Europarc Federation, 2010)
• Funding for Sustainable Transnational Tourism Products (European Commission, 2018c)
• European Tourism indicator System (ETIS) (European Commission, 2016)
• EU Eco-label (European Commission, 2018b)
• Eco Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) (European Commission, 2018d)
Research and thematic networks:
• European Research network on Sustainable Tourism (ERNEST)
• Network of European Regions for a Sustainable and Competitive Tourism (NECSTouR)
• Knowledge Networking Portal for Sustainable & Responsible Tourism (DestiNet)
Cross Border Policies:
• Alpine Convention
• Carpathian Convention
Furthermore, tourism-related measures can be implemented through structural funds including the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Social Fund (ESF), the Cohesion Fund, Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance along with programs such as Interreg and LEADER. The four Macro Regions (Danube Region, Baltic Sea region, Alpine Space Region and Adriatic-Ionian Region) prioritized sustainable tourism development as well. Other sectoral policies and strategies along with corresponding Commission Communications mention or affect tourism as well including those addressing transport, biodiversity, water, waste management, corporate social responsibility and energy to name some.

4.2.1. Timeframe for implementation and consideration

The documents discussing national tourism policies vary greatly in implementation length across the 8 regions, with the shortest, Croatia and Slovakia, having a 7-year implementation time and the longest, Romania, using a 20-year strategy. Germany, not having a national strategy, leaves the strategy to the federal state level and is currently working with a policy document approved in 2010 and having an open-ended implementation plan. Examining the neighbouring countries of Hungary and Slovakia for example, differing implementation spans are obvious. While Slovakia allows 7 years for implementation, Hungary started 4 years later and is allowing 14 years for implementation. The following Table 3 shows the respective differences. The length of time allowed for implementation is likely to influence which goals can be set and achieved, how they are measured and how they can react to developments. At a transnational level, the variety of implementation

Table 3
Inventory of implementation periods for national policy documents.

Country	Main National Policy Document	Implementation
Bulgaria	Strategy for Sustainable Development of Tourism in Bulgaria	2017–2030
Croatia	Tourism Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia	2013–2020
Germany	Concept of the Bavarian State Government on Tourism Policy	2010 -
Hungary	National Tourism Development Strategy	2017–2030
Romania	The Masterplan for the Development of National Tourism	2007–2026
Serbia	The Tourism development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia	2016–2025
Slovakia	Tourism Development Strategy	2013–2020
Slovenia	Strategy for the Sustainable Growth of Slovenian Tourism	2017–2021

spans will make it difficult for nations to include new sustainability goals simultaneously.

3.2.2. Number of documents to be considered

National level policy documents will give the overall guideline for a nation to follow for several years of development. While one difficulty may be found in adapting these strategies to transnational aims, especially concerning sustainability, these documents are flanked by many other influencing policies within countries. This gives countries, federal states and regions an opportunity to react to developments and fine-tune implementation. On the other hand, having a large number of additional supporting and influencing policy documents can be overwhelming and may cause delays in implementation of actions or measures if coordination is poor.

Examining Table 4 shows the variety of administration levels these documents are addressed to. Across all regions there are national level documents that complement the tourism policy documents. Even for Germany, where there is no national level tourism policy, there are supporting documents (Practical Guide – Sustainability in Tourism of Germany).

Generally speaking, Bulgaria, Germany and Romania have very few additional documents to supplement the main national tourism policy document in their countries. With a range of 3–5 further policy documents to adhere to, which all operate at rather high administrative levels, more freedom of interpretation is given to the regional level. This means that these countries do not have a large number of documents to consider while following the overarching strategies.

Serbia, Slovenia and Hungary are working with a mid-range of additional documents (between 7 and 9). Croatia and Slovakia work within the frames of the most additional policy documents. In these countries policies concerning transport, waste management and energy are included in the policy frameworks through which they navigate their sustainable tourism development. For these countries, the policies encompass a greater thematic scope. For planning, this implies an embeddedness of tourism in the greater sustainable development of the nation.

3.2.3. Vision versus implementation orientation of these documents

Policy documents can be drafted with a variety of purposes. A distinct difference that is necessary to examine when considering policy recommendations is the difference between a vision orientation and an implementation orientation. Over the past two decades around 150 frameworks and tools on sustainable tourism have been developed (Hashemkhani Zolfani, Sedaghat, Maknoon, & Kazimieras Zavadskas, 2015). Amongst them one can differentiate between assessment or vision orientation and a management or implementation orientation. Where visions investigate criteria and indicators with a retrospective attitude, the implementation orientation is more future oriented. For policy documents this means that a vision orientation aims at creating a general direction in which development should progress, an implementation orientation has the purpose of instruction, so to speak. Implementation orientation will also be more strongly bound to forward looking indicators. The examined policy documents were analysed on whether they are more vision oriented or more implementation oriented. In the following section the respective character of the national documents is described and the possible consequences are discussed.

According to the tourism-related documents in Slovakia it can be deduced that on a national level the objectives are clearly formulated. However, it appears to be vaguely formulated how this aim should be implemented or pursued, although the implementation was planned to be finished in 2020. The main additional documents also seem to discuss similar contents. The fact that the destination management organisations (DMOs) are encouraged and taught to create and provide tourist products, which was not the case yet, reflects both a situation where an implementation plan has to be designed as well as one where concrete action plans will be established on a local and regional level. In addition,

Table 4
Additional Policy Documents influencing Sustainable Tourism Development.

Country	Additional Policy Documents	Total no.
Bulgaria	Action plan for the period 2017–2020 for Strategy for sustainable development of tourism in Bulgaria	3
	Tourism Act	
	Strategic plan for development of cultural tourism in Bulgaria	
Croatia	Sustainable Development Strategy of Republic of Croatia	10
	Energy Development Strategy of Republic of Croatia	
	Transport Development Strategy of Republic of Croatia	
	Rural Development Programme of the Republic of Croatia	
	National Action Plan for Renewable Energy Sources (Proposal)	
	Croatian tourism action plans: Health-tourism Development Action Plan, Green Tourism Development Action Plan, Cyclotourism Development Action Plan, Cultural Tourism Action Plan	
	Waste Management Plan of The Republic of Croatia	
Germany	Tourism Policy Report of the Federal Government	3
	Practical Guide – Sustainability in Tourism of Germany	
	National Sustainable Consumption Program	
Hungary	National Development Concept	9
	National Forest Strategy,	
	National Landscape Strategy	
	2nd National Climate Change Strategy	
	4th National Environment Protection Program	
	National Rural Areas Strategy	
	National Transport Infrastructure Development Strategy	
	Healthy Hungary	
	Employment Policy Strategy	
Romania	The Strategy for the Development of the National Economy	5
	Order no. 58/1998: organization & implementation of tourism activity	
	Decision no. 413/2004: on the National Tourism Authority	
	The National Territory Planning Document	
	The National Development Strategy for the period of	
Serbia	National sustainable development strategy	7
	The master plan for sustainable development of rural tourism in Serbia	
	National and regional spatial plans	
	National strategy of sustainable use of natural resources and goods	
	Strategy of sport development in the Republic of Serbia	
	Strategy of agriculture and rural development of the Republic of Serbia	
	Regional strategy – Sustainable Development Strategy for Sumadija & Pomoravlje	
Slovakia	Tourism Support Act	11
	Manifesto of the Government of the Slovak Republic	
	Strategy for the Development of Culture in the Slovak Republic	
	Operational Programme Quality of Environment	
	Strategic Transport Development Plan of the Slovak Republic	
	National employment strategy of the Slovak Republic until 2020	
	National Strategy of Development of Cycling Transport and Cycle Touring	
	The National Forest Programme of the Slovak Republic	
	Slovakia - Rural Development Programme (National)	
	Strategic framework for health for 2014–2030	
	2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development	
Slovenia	Decree on Special Protection Areas (Natura 2000 sites)	8
	Law on mountain paths	
	Nature Conservation Act	
	Law on the Protection of Cultural Heritage	
	Labour Relations Act	
	Collective agreement on the activities of catering and tourism in Slovenia	
	Decree on the handling of packaging and packaging waste	
	Rural development strategy	

most of the mentioned documents intend an implementation finalisation in 2020.

Slovenia has a range of national level documents regulating topics relating to tourism, such as environment protection, hiking and cycling

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paths, waste management and documents discussing the employers' situation including those in the tourism sector.

Tourism-related policies in Romania show that there is an ongoing implementation of a masterplan that began in 2007 with an envisaged finalisation in 2026. In addition, there are additional documents dealing with the National Development Strategy, the organisation and implementation of tourism activities in Romania and the organisation and operation of a national tourism authority. Thus, it cannot be properly deduced whether the national tourism policy is to be adequately implemented or envisaged in the upcoming years.

The tourism-associated documents in Croatia revealed that on a national level a tourism strategy is being followed and has been in implementation since 2009 and should be finished in 2020. However, the implementation is envisaged through action plans which are documents related to several topics mentioned in the inventory form, such as rural development, traffic development, renewable energy systems, rural economy including high quality food production, transport system, land use, waste management as well as the attempt of introducing Croatia as a year-round destination.

In Bulgaria the tourism documents are on a national level related to a nation-wide strategy striving to sustainable development which was initialised in 2014, actualised in 2017 and which should be finally implemented in 2030. In order to achieve the envisaged goals a range of milestones or sub-objectives was defined. However, the formulation and presentation appears as a kind of draft concept rather than providing concrete implementation actions.

The tourism-related documents in Germany showed that there is no national level tourism policy. Therefore, the federal states are in charge. However, on a national level there is a practical guide that presents recommendations concerning sustainability in tourism. In addition, there is also a document dealing with presenting a national sustainable consumption program aiming for transparency in sustainable tourism and climate-friendly holiday travel. Within this document, which already should have been implemented in 2017, concrete actions allow to state that local and regional destinations already do know what to do, but additionally a nation-wide document could support some aspects throughout implementation.

According to the tourism-related documents in Serbia at national level a strategy exists. The topics discussed comprise landscape convention, rural development and rural tourism, the lack of sustainable transport, sustainable use of natural resources and regional spatial planning. In addition, most of the mentioned documents intend an implementation to be finished in 2025 and began in 2015.

By comparing the partners' inventories and documents discussing tourism policies it can be concluded that nearly all countries pursue a national tourism strategy with one exception, Germany. In Germany, a practical guide serves as a recommendation, but actual strategies are on the level of federal states. In general, most of the national strategies are currently in the phase of implementation. Thus, it cannot be concluded whether the tourism strategies are already showing effect or not.

In summary, Germany and Serbia follow vision oriented documents, noticeable through the large number of strategies and longer implementation periods. Slovakia as well sets clear goals but has few supporting concrete implementation documents. Slovenia and Romania are characterised by vision orientation with supporting documents and laws suggestion that implementation is based on the visions and given legal footing. Bulgaria, Croatia and Hungary follow an implementation orientation. This is evident through the supporting documents and large number of action plans that can be found amongst their supporting documents.

3.2.4. Extent of adaptability in respective policies

Aside from following a vision or implementation approach, these policies differ in another important matter when it comes to their application in sustainable tourism development: the extent to which they consider monitoring and feedback loops and to what extent these

elements are crucial parts of the plans.

According to Bulgaria, the Strategy for Sustainable Development of Tourism in Bulgaria is complemented by the corresponding action plan in which monitoring and evaluation is contained. The action plan has a very brief 3-year runtime, ending in 2020 while the strategy itself continues until 2030. The assumption is that the action plan covers both monitoring and feedback loops, allowing for another action plan to come and incorporate knowledge gained from the first one.

Concerning Croatia, a lack of consistency and concrete direction was addressed by project partners along with a call for implementing a monitoring system such as the European Tourism Indicator System (ETIS). Furthermore, a lack of evaluation of the financial schemes was identified. Improving the collection of data and introducing monitoring systems with feedback loops were stated as recommendations. The extent of the Croatian policies is rather limited.

As Germany has no national level tourism policy, there is no national level monitoring system in place. Regionally, municipalities have been known to set up their own sustainability goals. In the participating German region, it was indicated that feedback for sustainable development is discussed in regionally self-organized meetings. The self-monitoring is not further elaborated. It is not bound directly to any tourism policy document.

Hungary's policy inventory and evaluation indicated no national level monitoring. Similarly to Croatia, they also suggested the implementation of a monitoring system as beneficial to the implementation process, even suggesting indicators including CO2 targets, transport indicators and local production as valuable to the tourism sector. They could also be linked to the National Climate Strategy. The practitioners see the lack of feedback loops and evaluation in the policy documents as planning gap in Hungarian tourism development.

The Romanian national level tourism policy was elaborated before they joined the European Union. Therefore, changes over the years and within the government have meant that implementation and attempts to evaluate or monitor the strategy subsided. The current Ministry of Tourism no longer contains the National Tourism Organization. As a result, Romania's tourism policies at a national level does not extend into monitoring or incorporate feedback loops into current tourism strategies.

Slovakia monitors sustainability criteria through their national policy and as a result of being part of the Carpathian Convention. As part of the Tourism Support Act, there is a monitoring of economic competitiveness at the local and regional levels to some extent. Under certain conditions these regions may receive funding from the state budget and authorization from public administration in the field of tourism. Feedback is incorporated in tourism policy to a certain degree in the form of competitions seeking innovative solutions. On the whole the policy documents themselves do not contain concrete monitoring approaches but this is being compensated to some extent through activities taking place outside of the set policies.

Sustainability indicators are monitored to some extent in Slovenia. Concrete measures for monitoring and evaluation are not included in the listed tourism policy documents.

The Serbian case appears to be a mixed bag of monitoring according to the inventory provided by the partner. Strong measures and monitoring are in place to secure biodiversity and ecosystems. Policies on construction also apply strict monitoring mechanism for environmental protection. Transport, health and environment monitoring are being established within Transport Health Environment Pan European Programmes (THE PEP, UNECE 2019). The body will work on the concrete measures. In tourism, however, sector goals and measures are not prescribed or monitored. Therefore, Serbia has monitoring and feedback loops in place for some aspects highly relevant to tourism, but it is lacking any monitoring directly in the sector.

Generally, the extent of the respective policies does not frequently include clear monitoring or evaluation approaches to complement the tourism development strategies. Bulgaria is an exception with its

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additional action plan. Slovakia, Slovenia and Serbia state monitoring of sustainability indicators in tourism regions. Croatia, Germany, Hungary and Romania indicate that the national policy documents do not contain monitoring guidelines.

3.2.5. Binding documents versus guidelines

According to the policy inventories provided, it is difficult to conclude how binding the policy documents are for the various regions. What can be said is that only two countries, namely Romania and Slovenia included an order, decree or law in their inventories. This would suggest that these documents alone are legally binding. All other documents mentioned in the inventories such as action plans, acts and strategies suggest a less binding and stronger guideline character.

3.3. National policy assessments – evaluation of management schemes, tourism products and healthy lifestyle

This section presents the evaluation of national policy documents (Table 5). The evaluation was conducted across the three thematic pillars of INSiGHTS: Integrated sustainable tourism management schemes, smart tourism products linked to greenways, and promotion of eco-conscious and healthy lifestyle choices.

Table 5 summarises the results of the partners' self-assessments concerning the status of the national policies regarding integrated sustainable tourism management schemes in rural regions. The overall average achieved was 2,3. This means, that overall the policy documents are perceived as insufficient, lying a little below the desired conditions

concerning the support of integrated sustainable tourism management schemes. There are clear deviations from this average. Slovenia (3,2) and Bulgaria (2,8) have achieved several milestones for integrated management schemes by scoring high at national level, tourism clusters and in destination learning. This also applies for Germany, but its potential high score and hence achievement of goals was reduced by the fact that a national strategy is non-existent (cf. Section 4.2.4). Moreover, the partners in Serbia and Hungary (both average 1,2) achieve comparably low values and consequently, amendment is required in these regions. Serbia identified good national strategies but great lack of capacity at the local level, indicating no DMO or tourism cluster. Hungary noted a complete lack of clear sustainability goals for a management scheme to follow. The overall goals of integrated management schemes seem to be implemented to a moderate extent. Indicators which scored as below desired conditions were sustainability criteria, mission statement and the use of financial schemes.

The average score within the second pillar, "smart tourism products linked to greenways", achieved an overall average of 2,1. Table 6 shows the results of the partners' self-assessments. Slovenia (3,3), Romania (3,1) and Bulgaria (2,7) show especially high scores in product development. Germany (2) and Croatia (2,2) are close to average. Germany's high scores at regional and local levels are lowered yet again by the lack of national strategy. Croatia's score generally meets the desired conditions, with only the connection between DMOs and business sector scoring low. Serbia (1,2), Slovakia (1,1) and Hungary (1,4) express situations that are far below the desired conditions. Slovakia's low score is based on the complete lack of the DMOs' support of developing

Table 5

Summary of national policy self-assessments related to integrated management schemes0 – missing, 1 – far below, 2 – little below, 3 – meeting desired conditions, 4 – fully meeting or exceeding.

Overall goals	Desired conditions	Criteria	Indicator	BG	HR	DE	HU	RO	SK	SI	RS	Avg.
National Strategy	The country has a strategic concept for tourism including sustainability goals	Strategic management and/or cooperation goals	Tourism concept exists	3	2	0	2	2	3	4	3	2,4
			Sustainability criteria or guidelines are included	3	2	0	0	2	3	3	3	2,0
Sustainability goals	Sustainability goals are supported by the communities and/or regional governments and communicated	Published cooperation goals, transparent for the public and communicated	Existence of a mission statement, published in a flyer, folder, or common website	3	1	2	1	1	2	3	1	1,8
	Sustainability goals have integrated the most important features	- land-use zoning - ecosystem functioning - biodiversity conservation and sustainable use - sustainable transport - greenhouse gas reduction in the tourism industry - climate change adaptation and mitigation in destinations - waste reduction and management - poverty alleviation/mitigation	5 out of 8 issues are covered by the description of sustainability goals (= 4)	3	4	3	0	2	4	2	2	2,5
Destination management	Destination are identified and supported by governmental schemes and the role and importance of destination leadership is clear.	Existence of DMOs (Destination management organisations)	Existence of a DMO or a leading organization is defined	2	2	4	2	3	3	4	0	2,5
		Governmental financial or other schemes are in place	The use of schemes is sufficient	2	3	3	2	2	2	3	0	2,1
Tourism Cluster	A Tourism Cluster is established, which involves all major tourism stakeholders.	The Stakeholder Group (cluster) at national level meets regularly and provides recommendations to improve tourism business performance	Tourism Cluster support at destination level is sufficient	3	2	4	2	0	3	4	0	2,3
Capacity Building in sustainable tourism	The government or science and NGO networks provide capacity building initiatives to DMOs, tourism sector, NGOs and local communities	Organized or co-organized offers for qualification and learning	Offers for learning and qualification in tourism	3	2	3	1	4	2	3	1	2,4
		Please evaluate existence and the quality	Network or -platform for exchange and learning	3	2	4	1	4	2	3	1	2,5
			Avg.	2,8	2,2	2,6	1,2	2,2	2,7	3,2	1,2	2,3

Table 6

Summary of national policy self-assessments related to smart tourism products linked to greenways 0 = missing, 1 = far below, 2 = little below, 3 = meeting desired conditions, 4 = fully meeting or exceeding.

Overall goals	Desired conditions	Criteria	Indicator	BG	DE	MR	HU	RO	SK	SI	RS	Avg.
National Strategy	Development of sustainable tourism products are supported by national level initiatives	Published strategy/master plan has integrated chapter on sustainable product development	Tourism concept exists	3	0	3	1	3	3	4	1	2,3
		Sustainability criteria or guidelines for products are included		3	0	2	1	3	2	4	1	2
	Incentive schemes support the tourism sector for operating sustainable tourism products	System of incentives by financial or non-financial means	Existence of a financial scheme	3	0	3	2	3	2	3	1	2,1
			Existence of non-financial scheme	2	0	3	2	3	2	3	1	2
Destination management	The DMO supports development of sustainable tourism products	Communication of sustainability requirements of tourism products	DMO information to business sector on sustainable product development	2	3	2	1	1	0	4	1	1,8
		Regular meeting	DMO meets with business sector regularly to discuss actions on sust. Tourism product development	3	3	1	1	2	0	3	1	1,8
Destination initiatives	The DMO, business sector, NGOs and local communities support the values of the destination	Conservation of natural values and protection of the cultural value through relevant bodies (e.g. protected area, office for monument protection)	Regular measures on nature conservation are effective & well communicated	2	4	2	2	4	0	3	2	2,4
			Regular measures on cultural protection are effective & well communicated	3	4	2	2	4	0	3	2	2,5
Destination learning	The DMO provides education & learning offers for its members with other institutions And strengthens the local network.	Organized or co-organized offers for qualification and learning on sustainable tourism product development	Offers for learning and qualification in tourism	3	2	2	1	4	1	3	1	2,1
			Network or platform for exchange and learning	3	4	2	1	4	1	3	1	2,4
			Avg.	2,7	2	2,2	1,4	3,1	1,1	3,3	1,2	2,1

sustainable tourism products and the lack of destination initiatives to support the local values. Serbia and Hungary both indicated that while in existence, product development was far below desired conditions across all policy levels. Destination initiatives scored slightly higher.

While national level strategies and destination learning had a mixed assessment, there was a clear dissatisfaction with the current situation at the local level in regard to product development. Specifically, the connection between DMO and private sector or local businesses is deemed as insufficient. There are neither regular meetings with the business sector nor do DMOs provide local business with information on product development.

Finally, "promotion of eco-conscious and healthy lifestyle choices" was assessed and the results are shown in Table 7 with an overall average score of 2,3. Hungary (1,1) is far below this average, and indicates subpar conditions across all policy levels. Slovakia (2,6), Bulgaria (2,9) and Slovenia (3,4) are above average. Bulgaria and Slovenia indicate that all governance levels operate within policy frameworks that meet or even exceed desired conditions to promote healthy lifestyles. Slovakia is strong on a national level but indicates that the regional and local levels are weaker and even indicates that offers for learning and qualification at a destination level do not exist.

Overall, the assessments concerning the application of national policies on promoting healthy lifestyles in rural tourism is slightly below meeting the desired conditions. While numerous partners indicate conditions exceeding desired conditions these are countered by other areas where policy is absent. Generalising, national strategies and promotions are seen as satisfying by half of the partners. National promotion is especially well received by the partners. At the destination level, the promotion of sustainable tourism products is considered low along with the opportunities for education and learning.

3.4. Policy recommendations

Based upon the self-assessments and recommendations that were received from project partners and the roundtables, issues identified in tourism policy literature continue to surface. EU policy frameworks and corresponding national policies continue to fail to meet the needs of local level implementers in rural areas. This is evident in the scores achieved across all three thematic pillars. In order to create policy which will assist regional development in meeting transnationally set goals and aims, Table 8 summarises the recommendations gathered in this study. Naturally, recommendations can be beneficial and implemented at multiple levels. Table 8 gives a general indication of which level should be responsible and hold accountability according to the results obtained in this study.

Most of the recommendations can be found in two areas: Setting clear goals and improving communication and coordination. The need for improving these aspects indicates that policies at the different governance levels do not complement each other and responsibilities, fields of action and accountability are not reflected in current policy. In this regard it was brought up by project partners that a clear division of responsibilities would allow for more transparent funding schemes to ensure that financial support was available to those actually responsible for given tasks. It was also indicated that stronger attention needs to be given to new and rising trends in future policies. Finally, concerning tools and financial resources the partners indicated that it was both a responsibility of national and local level governance.

4. Discussion

4.1. Methodological challenges

The policy assessment and its critical analyses are based on stakeholder involvement in the 8 partner countries. Although the methodological approach was designed and provided by the knowledge provider aiming to get comparable results, the influence of the different

Table 7
Summary of national policy self-assessments related to healthy lifestyle choices 0 = missing, 1 = far below, 2 = little below, 3 = meeting desired conditions, 4 = fully meeting or exceeding.

Overall goals	Desired conditions	Criteria	Indicator for the assessment	BG	DE	HR	HU	RO	SK	SI	RS	Avg
National Strategy	The country promotes its image as a sustainable destination	Marketing concept available to the public, which contains a statement on sustainable tourism promotion	Sustainability statement is included	3	0	2	1	4	3	4	2	2.4
				3	0	1	1	4	3	3	2	2.1
National promotion	The National Tourism Organization (NTO) implements the full range of country marketing, incl. sustainability standards	The NTO communicates all frequent measures through their website	Existence of NTO website with all promotion actions	3	4	2	1	0	3	4	3	2.5
		- National fairs - International fairs - Promotional materials - Website regularly updated on sustainable products - Booking platform for sustainable products - Mobile App for visitors on destinations and attractions	Measures implemented by the NTO 4 out of 6 issues are covered by the NTO (n = 4)	3	3	2	2	2	4	4	4	3
Destination management	The DMO promotes its sustainable tourism products to locals and to visitors	Existence of DMO marketing tools	Existence of a website	3	4	3	1	0	3	3	2	2.4
			Existence of a label and/or certification on sustainable tourism products	2	3	2	1	0	2	3	1	1.8
Destination learning	The DMO provides together with other institutions education and learning offers on marketing and promotion of sustainable products	Organized or co-organized offers for qualification and learning. Please evaluate existence and the quality	Offers for learning and qualification in tourism marketing for the business sector and NGOs	3	3	2	1	4	0	3	1	2.1
			Avg	2.9	2.4	2	1.1	2	2.6	3.4	2.1	2.3

Table 8
Overview of transnational policy recommendations by implementation level.

Recommendation		Level		
		Internat.	National	DMO
Setting clear goals	Select clear sustainability goals	x	x	
	Include Climate Change goals	x	x	
	Use suitable indicators		x	x
	Discuss overall goals with implementation institutions		x	
	Strengthen weak, rural & alternative regions		x	x
Communication and coordination	Coordinate, organize, strengthen DMO			x
	Increase cooperation	x	x	x
	Define clear division of tasks and responsibility	x	x	x
	Enhance the accountability	x	x	x
Discuss new trends	Sharing economy		x	x
	Digitalisation		x	x
Available tools and financial resources	Training & care for professionals & workforce			x
	Stakeholder involvement		x	x
	Consideration of locals' needs			x
	Transparent financing	x	x	x

composition of local stakeholders and their overall perception is visible throughout all assessments. Notably, the partners from Slovenia and Bulgaria assessed the policy conditions noticeably higher than other participating regions. Thus, the question arises whether this is actually the case or shows subjective bias. Thus, according to these examples it is questionable to what extent the assessments reflect the actual situation or otherwise show assessments resulting from methodological discrepancies. The conditions under which stakeholder involvement can flourish, and how this methodology can contribute to more transparent, regionally specific and better accepted results can be found in stakeholder literature (Arnstein, 1969; Hartley & Wood, 2005). While Tosun (2000) sees the barriers to stakeholder participation, Norton (2005) and Wall and Mathieson (2006) find that local stakeholders need an opportunity to discuss issues that influence them and have ample opportunity to do so. Involving stakeholders is valuable to the planning process. The perception in self-assessments conducted by stakeholders continues to be an aspect to reflect on while investigating the results.

We tried to overcome this methodological weakness by also analysing the protocols and minutes to understand the respective assessments and the overall discussion process. The minutes showed that the assessments were reasonably argued. Therefore, it can be concluded that for all three topics, the sustainable tourism management schemes, the tourism products linked to greenways and the healthy lifestyle choices, the overall situation in the participating countries is at least on an advanced level of implementation even though the already mentioned exceptions exist. Thus, in Slovenia and Bulgaria several goals have generally been achieved at a high level and in Hungary the goals achieved tend to be on a somewhat lower level which means that further efforts are required. Overall, the combination of standardized guidelines for the participatory process and the additional evaluation of minutes and protocols lead to transparent and reliable results.

4.2. Influence of the European guidelines and frameworks

Transformation towards sustainable development is expressed in numerous documents ranging from national to regional level. Nevertheless, it is often mentioned by the project partners that there is a discrepancy between the envisaged objectives for development and the

actual status of implementation. The problem with the documents is that tangible criteria, such as communication strategies, tourism products and offers in terms of sustainability, are not satisfactorily defined. Lacking clear goals was directly brought forward at roundtables held in Serbia, Hungary and Romania. The recommendation is to reassess the policy documents and create straightforward objectives, including sustainability goals, with implementation benchmarks that can be followed by implementing institutes and bodies. It is further recommended that the strategies of tourism development at national level should harmonise various sectorial policies and foster better cooperation between different authorities. Here the study supports the findings that there is difficulty in coordination of tourism policy from Estol et al. (2018).

The strategic document related to sustainable development of tourism should mention the responsible authority on national, regional and local level and should discuss the relevant documents also in terms of cooperation and processes providing solutions, which has already been implemented up to a certain extent and which should be further elaborated in sub-strategies. Poor coordination and cooperation was seen to be lacking in the national policy assessments and was also directly mentioned in roundtables of three quarters of the project partners (Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia). A clear cooperation approach, detailing division of tasks and responsibilities is a recommendation that found support amongst all partners. A clear division of tasks will avoid overlapping responsibilities and therefore increase accountability, efficiency and transparency.

In addition, issues related to sustainability in tourism need to be analysed, discussed and suitable solutions provided in both nationally and regionally relevant documents. Moreover, tangible and consistent measures or indicators of implementation should be developed with practical implementation on national, regional and local levels in mind. One approach of measuring a nation's, region's or even destination's status of sustainable development is the European Tourism Indicator System (ETIS) which can be used in terms of analysis, management, monitoring and evaluation. Romania's round table identified the need for a baseline study in their roundtable following the policy assessment.

European guidelines and frameworks are influencing national policy, yet are not influencing regional implementation levels. Two main reasons were identified through the self-assessment and round-table discussion: First, the lack of multi-level coordination causes an uncertain division of responsibility. In rural regions this is seen especially when trying to implement integrated management schemes. Management schemes cannot be integrated into a system, if the governance system is not coordinated and does not cooperate. Secondly, the lack of goals with applicable indicators is causing a rift between European policy and local development. In rural regions the lack of indicators to follow when trying to implement strategies leads to poor long-term implementation and monitoring and does not enable evaluation. Similar findings on incoordination and lacking goals can be found in the literature (Bousset et al., 2007; Halkier, 2010; Schumacher et al., 2016). This has effects on tourism product development, destination learning and management.

4.3. Relevance of tourism policy for tourism development

Tourism has an important role to play in rural development both for the local economy and environment. To achieve this, tourism needs to be given due recognition in policy development and stronger efforts need to be made to integrate tourism in high level policies (Anastasiadou, 2008; Ashley, Roe, & Goodwin, 2001; Estol et al., 2018). The importance of integration and coordination of policies continues to be mentioned throughout literature (Dieke, 2003; Dodds, 2007; Estol et al., 2018; Yeoman et al., 2012) and is equally stressed by project partners in this study. Estol et al. (2018) establish that currently at a European level the initiatives encourage stakeholder networking and exchange of best practice. There is much potential to go beyond this level by creating policy that can navigate differing levels of available resources and skills in member states to actually implement tourism development. Agreeing

with Anastasiadou (2008), the intention of the following recommendations is not to create a common policy that would replace national level competence, but moreover one to create a more beneficial environment to coordinate tourism policies more effectively.

Cooperation and communication with implementing authorities and bodies featured heavily in the roundtables held in Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany and Hungary. In general, regions with a less established regional structure and rural areas can benefit from tourism via taking part in the general economic development and contributing to the macroeconomic growth. Slovakia discussed strengthening alternative and rural regions through improving financial resources and cross-border cooperation during their roundtable. In terms of decentralisation also adventure products and heritages regardless whether cultural or natural are seen as positive contribution. The Hungarian round table discussed the importance of health tourism at length, elaborating on the sectors potential to reduce seasonality and increase overnight stays. Bulgaria as well discussed reduction of seasonality through an expansion of product offers. Strengthening alternative regions, extending seasons and seeking out alternative target groups through policy was also identified as a measure by Andriotis (2001). A special focus should be on the non-high-priority-destinations as these could develop rapidly and this requires special attention in order to develop slow, green, healthy tourism. Some recommendations gathered at the Hungarian roundtable regarding this included creating a unique profile and products, and address new target groups. Awareness raising amongst locals in support of sustainable tourism development was also brought forward by the Hungarians and echoes Dieke's (2003) study. All of these ideas collected would assist in strengthening rural and alternative tourism destinations.

The destination level was recognized by partners to be affected by lacking resources, especially in regard to their cooperation with the private sector. A stronger integration of the destination level into tourism policy would be beneficial in creating a scenario with clearly defined tasks and adaptive management schemes. By coordinating with the destination level, tourism development may be able to achieve a better environment for financial investments and therefore improve their ability to set and follow a long-term strategy. Dodds (2007) stresses, that it takes a long-term strategy to incorporate social and environmental concerns over short-term economic goals. At national, regional and local levels it is recommended to provide practical and sustainable approaches for tourism development and management in terms of policy making and tourism business. Often there is a need for enhancing existing offers and supporting preservation and sustainable management of natural and cultural resources based on national institutions. Furthermore, legislation in terms of national policies needs to be actualised and the opportunities of the sharing economy should be considered in legislation and guidelines.

Serbian partners indicated that appropriate models of DMOs should be presented to regions. In general, the strengthened cooperation of various stakeholders such as the communities, academics, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and the business sector (local and regional level) is highly recommended. Also the different institutions dealing with sustainable tourism at the national and regional levels (ministries, DMOs) should better cooperate in terms of developing and promoting sustainable tourism. As a result of the roundtable held in Bulgaria, four regions are joining Plovdiv in creating a sustainable tourism strategy which will be coordinated into a larger regional policy.

It is necessary to know about a destination's needs and aims in order to consider the interests of the local population and the tourism providers. For the local population it is for instance of great importance to preserve biodiversity, natural resources and heritage. One example for the needs of local people is the consideration of the employees' needs and potential in terms of education which should be more strongly considered and developed. Therefore, the employers and also governments are challenged in terms of finding a better social agreement. Furthermore, it was recommended by the roundtable held in Serbia that within the responsibilities of DMOs there should be a focus on training

and capacity building within the tourism workforce in matters of sustainability. Professional development and promotion of newest standards should be disseminated by the DMO in their region.

Dieke (2003) also recognizes the stronger development of tourism policy as an important driver for improving human resources in regard to skills, management and digitalisation. Simultaneously, this pushes tourism policy as a driver for anticipating new and emerging fields in tourism. Digitalisation featured strongly in the roundtable held in Germany, as it has already been incorporated in the federal state's strategy but has yet to be developed at the local level. Interestingly it also included the themes data access for destinations and required infrastructure to support strong digitalisation. This is seen to have huge potential in order to provide new products and tourism experiences. Communication strategies in terms of sustainability should be extended to include social and online media. Awareness raising should be strengthened on national, destination and local level. Based on national incentives and technical assistance integrated tourist products should be created.

The absence of goals is described as "a lack of strategic clarity bordering on fuzziness" by Halkier (2010:103). Between this statement and partner feedback on policies, it is evident that there is a clear need for defined common goals, especially concerning sustainability. A more concentrated approach is required to consolidate the fragmented involvement of the European Union and give it direction and focus (Anastasiadou, 2008). Recommended measures in terms of sustainability comprise amongst others the certification of quality management systems, improving the companies' presentation and advertising, supporting small and medium sized enterprises in terms of participating at international events, improving the cooperation of companies related to tourism sector and developing strategic marketing documents. In terms of green and healthy tourism alternative energy needs to be considered in tourism services whilst developing the framework to provide organic products, which needs to be mentioned in the national strategies. In the case that a destination has suitable landscape-related and agricultural (pre-)conditions, agro-tourism and ecotourism should be strengthened and a stronger development of local product chains fostered.

5. Concluding remarks

This study contributes towards research on policies and strategies in southeast Europe and the new European Union member states; an area in which there continue to be few studies conducted (Getz, 2008; Hughes & Allen, 2005). Building on tourism policy literature, this case study investigated how policies are seen and received by rural tourism developers. Through self-assessments and roundtable discussions with policy influencers, practical insight was gained into this little researched area.

All three thematic pillars (integrated management schemes, smart tourism products linked to greenways and healthy lifestyle choices) showed a variety of satisfaction across the regions. Generally, policy is seen to be slightly more adequate in support of management schemes and eco-conscious and healthy life-style than for coordinated and integrated tourism product development. Across all three thematic pillars policy is perceived as mediocre with occasional DMOs or NTOs that currently fully meet the desired expectations. This is reiterated in the policy suggestions which predominantly focus on improving communication and coordination along with setting clear goals. There is a desire for stronger support from national level policy to enable improved action at the local level. This will require improved coordination and accountability between the national and local levels if the targets of the EU and EUSDR policy frameworks are to be met to bridge the current gap between international policies and local developments.

While policy improvement and coordination are an ambitious task, many aspects were brought forward that would simplify the policy landscape and create a clear division of responsibility and improve accountability which would enable tourism development to follow long-

term development strategies, especially in rural regions. There are many recommendations for improving sustainable tourism policy, but most importantly policies should be developed to form strong support and clear leadership at international, national and regional levels to ensure the long-term sustainability of rural tourism destinations.

Author contributions

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8.3. Paper 3

Research Article

The future of Alpine pastures – Agricultural or tourism development? Experiences from the German Alps

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ABSTRACT

Alpine pastures are central to tourism in the European Alps. Tourism development in many alpine destinations relies significantly on the work force and products of alpine farmers without considering or integrating them in tourism related processes, assuming that farmers are interested in further economic growth through tourism. The question arises, whether an adequate involvement will support this interest in maintaining or expanding tourism use. The paper at hand used questionnaires and in-depth interviews with alpine farmers in the Achental region of Southern Bavaria, Germany, to examine current experiences with tourism and outdoor recreation. The study concludes that the interest in expanding tourism use is rather limited and financial aspects have little impact on the main motivation to engage in tourism development. In contrast, the study shows many conflicts arising in the clash between agricultural production and tourism use. Therefore, management actions by the local association Eco-model Achental tasked with tourism coordination are essential, including farmers as stakeholders in a participative planning process. New initiatives and support covering legal aspects, visitor management, information, networking, energy and water management are considered key to maintain this sustainable form of rural tourism in the region.

Management implications: In this paper we recognize that certain stakeholder groups have been neglected in tourism planning processes. However, stakeholders who are largely responsible for stewardship of the landscape need to be incorporated in regional tourism development to ensure sustainability. Therefore, the following management actions are identified:
-Actively engage crucial stakeholders in participatory planning processes.
-Understand that stakeholders' motives are not necessarily based on economic gain.
-Identify factors that support landscape maintenance.
-Create a network of stakeholders to generate appropriate support for a variety of interests.

1. Introduction

Alpine pastures (German "Alm" or "Alpe" meaning a summer mountain farm) have a long history in the European Alps (Bätzing, 2015; Ringler, 2010). They were first developed in the middle ages to extend the feeding opportunities for livestock. This form of farming often included feeding rights in mountain forests, reserving valley meadows for hey production. In addition, bringing the animals up to the high mountain areas increases health and resistance of livestock. Finally, this form of land use was attractive because it reduced the workload for the farmer in the summer season (Ruppert, 2001; Mayer et al., 2008). Due to the short vegetation period these "extensions" of the typical farm were essential for the survival of farms. Figs. 1 and 2 are depictions of typical alpine pastures. In the 19th century the alpine pastures gained attention through the developing tourism, mountaineering and the travelling from central and northern Europe to the Mediterranean. The alpine pastures, the closeness to nature and animals as well as the gorgeous view and the self-sufficient, basic lifestyle were illustrated in many paintings; often far from reality but shaping an image still valid for tourism development today (Pröbstl, 1996). Many tourism destinations in the European Alps promote this specific form of land use as a unique experience often including homemade culinary dairy products and educational services (e.g. cheese production, insights into farm management). This multifunctional form of land use (Ruppert, 2001; Aigner & Egger, 2010)

Fig. 1. Images of the Oberauerbrunstalm, an alpine pasture in the study area (AELF-Traunstein, 2021)

Fig. 2. Images of the Oberauerbrunstalm, an alpine pasture in the study area (AELF-Traunstein, 2021).

embracing agriculture, outdoor recreation and tourism as well as conservation needs served as a blueprint for similar agro-touristic development elsewhere (Chiodo et al., 2019).

However, despite the high relevance in the European Alps this issue has been covered by very few international publications. The manuscript at hand is one of the first to focus on the mountain farmers' opinions and perspectives of tourism and recreation as additional sources of income and thus provides an important addition to the literature.

Currently publications, research findings, websites, promotion material and guidebooks for hiking and mountaineering promote the alpine pastures, the related mountain huts and offers (Aigner & Egger, 2010; Strasser, 2014; Amberger et al., 2006). Despite the significant relevance for tourism and outdoor recreation, alpine pastures fall under agricultural legislation, even if they provide food and beverages, limiting tourism use in many respects (Mayer et al., 2008, p. 113; Kilburn, 2018; Almwirtschaft Österreich, 2015).

An inventory across the alpine region shows that the number of alpine pastures has declined significantly following World War II and into the 1970s. Currently, based on significant national funding – started in the 1970s and enhanced by the European Union – the number of

pastures is more or less stable (Mayer & Job, 2010; Weingartner, 2014). However, many authors underline significant regional differences and different trends (Streifeneder et al., 2007). Main reasons for these differences are the accessibility of high mountainous areas, tourism infrastructure and related facilities, the opportunity to get well-trained personnel for the farm and part-time tourism use, the integration of time-consuming management of the alpine pasture into the overall farm management and finally the significance of the overall economic benefits (Kirchengast, 2008; Ringler, 2014; Mayer et al., 2008). From a tourism perspective the maintenance of alpine pastures is of high relevance and has been subject to several European funded research projects (e.g. European Mountain Agrofood products, EuroMARC, INTERREG IV-A Almregion Bayerisch-Salzburger Kalkalpen). A possible loss of alpine pastures is likely to lead to a reduction of infrastructure and points of interest in alpine tourism destinations. The development in the 1960s and 70s showed that the reduction of alpine pastures increases the amount of forests and changes the overall character of the landscape reducing the amount of flowering meadows (Hunziker, 2000). The maintenance of well-managed alpine pastures is therefore of high relevance for tourism but depends on the farmers and is completely outside the realm of influence of the tourism sector. Alpine farmers are a significant stakeholder subgroup for any future tourism development in these alpine destinations. However, they are often excluded from participatory tourism development (Khazaei et al., 2015) despite the important role farmers have in the provision of the landscape and local products. As Dwyer (2017) discusses, this makes them part of a required paradigm shift in tourism, in which cultural context and co-creation play a major role for sustainable development. Touristic use may offer farmers the opportunity to diversify their sources of income and to maintain this traditional land use and its positive effects on landscape beauty and biodiversity.

While this issue has been widely discussed from a tourism perspective (see Amberger et al., 2006; Aigner & Egger, 2010), biodiversity and conservation perspective (Ringler, 2007), the perspective of the farmers and their trade-offs between agriculture and tourism has been studied less.

The overall goal of this study is to focus on farmers as crucial yet overlooked stakeholders in alpine tourism destinations and significant providers of tourism services. Specifically, it seeks to understand their role in maintaining cultural landscapes and determine factors that support the maintenance of alpine pastures and to summarize current positive and negative effects of tourism. We hypothesize that.

- an in-depth investigation of farmers' interests is a major precondition for a successful integration of alpine pastures into regional tourism and outdoor recreation,
- tourism offers should be developed and promoted in close cooperation with farmers involving them at an early stage and
- conflict resolution in alpine environments requires an integrated concept.

The study uses the Achental region in southern Bavaria, Germany, as a case study area analysing the given situation and discussing strategies and possible solutions for sustainable development.

2. Tourism and alpine pastures– literature review

2.1. Cultural landscape – a new demand

Since the 1990s the tourism literature highlights the increasing relevance of cultural, rural landscapes for tourism (Bell et al., 2007; George et al., 2009; Pröbstl, 2010). Research on tourism trends report the increasing relevance of nature, authenticity and meaningful experiences (Bandi Tanner and Müller, 2019; Jepson & Sharpley, 2015; Lane & Kastenholz, 2015; Pröbstl-Haider & Pütz, 2016).

One factor, at least in industrial societies, is demographic change,

characterised by an increasing shift towards the elderly generation, which is typically more attracted by nature and nature experiences (George et al., 2009). This older generation is now much more mobile than they have ever been before and is interested in returning to their roots. They are also interested in a combination of health and nature-based offers. George et al. (2009) explain this desire for returning to one's roots as a possible effect of globalization. The feeling of being lost in a globalized world is compensated by a retreat into one's own private sphere, the home and garden (so called "cocooning") and awakens new demands in tourism for regional authenticity and environmentally sound offers. Selecting a tourist destination in a rural area could also be motivated by a certain quest for the meaning of life, which may be more likely to find while being active in nature, rather than in the triviality and strict functionality of modern urban life.

The alpine pastures match this new tourism demand providing.

- a unique landscape experience with open but managed landscapes above the treeline or in between mountain forests with cattle, sheep or horses;
- a landscape offering outstanding biodiversity, uniquely diverse and fragile environment and conditions for protection against landslides, avalanches or rock fall;
- a cultural experience with a long tradition, combining local customs and events, with significant relevance for local identity and specific alpine culture.

Therefore, Schermer (2010) perceives tourism use of alpine pastures as an opportunity to use endogen sources for further tourism development. The cooperation with alpine pasture workers and owners relies on social, physical, cultural and natural capital of an alpine destination instead of bringing external money and dependencies in, which may lead to gentrification and other negative effects to local farmers. Such stewardship of the landscape by farmers is vital to a sustainable development of alpine tourism (Dwyer, 2017). In the case at hand, collaborative planning should integrate the farmers into the planning process not only as conservers of a working and protected landscape but as co-creators who incorporate their values and knowledge into tourism development.

2.2. Alpine pastures – economic benefits by structural diversification

The development of tourism use of alpine pastures has been embedded into their traditional use of extensive grazing of cattle, cows, sheep or horses. Additional income can be generated by different products and offers which are sometimes also combined:

- Direct marketing of dairy products (milk, cheese) and other farm products
- Service of beverages (such as beer and lemonade)
- Service of beverage and food (simple gastronomy)
- Full gastronomic services and commercial operation
- Private rooms or sleeping opportunities (primitive)
- Accommodation opportunities or rent of alpine huts

(modified after Mayer et al., 2008; Mayer et al., 2010; Arnberger et al., 2006).

It is up to the entrepreneurial decision of the respective farmer to select one or more of these different opportunities. The decision-making process is significantly influenced by the following criteria (Mayer et al., 2010):

- The form of agricultural management
- The available personnel
- The suitability of the existing buildings and required investments
- The accessibility of the alpine pasture
- Legal requirements and regulations (mainly on water and hygiene)

- Funding opportunities in tourism and the trade off with agricultural funding
- The availability of other economic sources such as forestry or hunting rights

The agricultural management was mainly characterized by a combination of cows and cattle. Today, alpine pastures in Upper Bavaria are solely dominated by cattle grazing. While in Upper Bavaria in the 1950s the amount of alpine pastures with cows, milk and opportunities to produce dairy products was still about 30% it has sunk to about 5% (Mayer et al., 2008; Ringler, 2007). Milk and dairy production on the alpine pasture requires well trained personnel, who are also willing and capable of engaging with tourists in the sale of the products on location. In contrast cattle grazing is a quite extensive land use with a control of water and salt from time to time and a reduced surveillance of the distribution across the farmland.

Tourism use requires suitable buildings for gastronomy and overnight stays. Vogt (2013) indicates a recognition of these problems and barriers to those involved in agrotourism. A trade-off is needed, to determine whether a possible investment will pay back. In addition, the permission for new construction in their sensitive environment in Bavaria are rather difficult to get (Busse et al., 2013). Tourism development is thus additionally influenced by the construction costs, which are expensive due to the high elevation and the accessibility by small mountain roads or trails. To get a required concession for gastronomy or overnight stays, many criteria need to be fulfilled. Especially the standards on water quality (potable water) and hygiene are significant.

Since the 1990s the agricultural funding scheme of the European Union had significant effects on alpine farmers' traditional form of land use. The funding schemes applied in the different alpine countries provide different opportunities and therefore trade-offs between the programs and their goals (e.g. conservation goals, extensive land use, tourism development) (Hinterstoisser, 2006). For the Bavarian Alps in Germany these different funding opportunities are shown in Table 1.

The Bavarian program for mountain farmers also covers investments such as adaptations to the main buildings, modernization of the

Table 1
Overview of funding opportunities for alpine pastures in the German part of the Alps (StMELF, StMWI 2017).

Funding programme	Funding object	Funded by
Bavarian Mountain Farmer Programme (BBP)	Approved alpine pastures and pasture economy	Bavaria
Contractual nature conservation programme (VNP)	Sustainable and nature-friendly management, habitats and biocenosis of domestic flora and fauna, preserved biotope areas	EU, Bavaria
Cultural landscape programme (KULAP)	Environmentally friendly management, investment measures for hedges/copses, stone walls and structural/landscape elements	EU, Federal Government, Bavaria
Direct payment	Agricultural farm owners, climate and environment supporting land cultivation methods	EU
Compensation payment (AGZ)	Due to unfavorable local conditions disadvantaged regions	EU, Federal Government, Bavaria
Special programme „Alpine farming and mountain restaurants"	Necessary renovation, modernization and expansion measures of alpine pastures/mountain gastronomy of commercial entrepreneurs	Bavaria
Rural development (rural road construction)	Planning and construction of connection routes to alpine pastures, single farmsteads, hamlets and field and forest roads	Federal Government, Bavaria

3

infrastructure but mainly addressed to agricultural needs. As Table 1 shows, only one program is focused on tourism purposes. The special program "Alpine farming and mountain restaurants" started in 2017. It is addressed to alpine huts and gastronomic services on the mountain and requires that the owner is an entrepreneur (licensed) and already provides tourism or gastronomic services.

Finally, the farmers need to take other sources of income into consideration when deciding about a possible tourism development. In their context forest ownership is of significant influence. An amount of (more than 50 ha) old mountain forest is likely to reduce a possible engagement in tourism because of the additional income by the extraction of timber. The combination with forestry is ideal for the farmer since forest work needs to be done in the winter months while the management of alpine pastures happens mainly in the summer. In addition, the forest use does not require additional personnel (Hinterstoisser, 2007). Further income can be generated by hunting rights, which are often well paid in an attractive mountain environment. However, this additional source of income is often in conflict with tourism development and related outdoor recreation activities (Mayer et al., 2008).

The literature review revealed significant regional differences and related strategies for an economic diversification. A comparison across the alpine chain reveals that the economic contribution by tourism use on alpine pastures differs significantly (see Table 2).

Table 2 shows additional tourism use on alpine pastures comparing regions in selected provinces in Austria, Germany, Italy and Switzerland (Tasser et al., 2013).

Table 2 illustrates that tourism use is typical for alpine pastures across the alpine chain. However, its relevance differs significantly between the regions, even within the same countries and respective legal conditions. It is also visible that the amount of alpine pastures has no influence on the interest in tourism use. Our case study region in Upper Bavaria is characterized by a lower percentage.

2.3. Environmental impacts and conflicts

Several studies report significant impacts arising since the 1990s by tourists visiting alpine pastures on the one hand, and impacts for tourism infrastructure on the other; such as road and cable car construction or renovations of alpine huts for accommodation (Groier, 1993; Hunziker, 1995, Arnberger et al., 2006; Kirchengast, 2008; Mayer & Job, 2010). Road construction for the personnel of the alpine pasture, medical service, animal welfare and transportation of products attracts new motorized user groups leading to additional conflicts with other tourism segments (e.g. hikers, mountaineers), disturbance for the wildlife and the cattle and environmental impacts (soil, vegetation, noise, light). Therefore, Mayer and Job (2010) report an increasing amount of conflicts caused by the visitors of alpine pastures. Mountain bikers are a significantly growing user group leading to damages on the trails, conflicts with the animals and accidents. But hikers are also criticized for inappropriate behavior. Most of the problems are – according to Mayer and Job (2008) – due to inappropriate behavior. An increasing number

Table 2
Alpine pastures with additional tourism use (Tasser et al., 2013).

Country	Region/province	Amount of alpine pastures	Percentage of pastures with additional tourism use
Austria	Salzburg Region	1787	23%
	Tyrol	2151	21%
Germany	Allgäu	690	23%
	Upper Bavaria	748	12%
Italy	South Tyrol	1738	16%
	Trento	458	10%
Switzerland	St. Gallen	379	13%
	Graubünden	748	10%

Table 3
Overview on main subjects of the face-to-face interviews with farmers. Shorted version with keywords.

1. Benefits and personal motivation
Motivation/advantages
Personal history/background
Importance of agricultural enterprise
Role of funding opportunities
Accessibility of the alpine pasture
2. Recreation and tourism
Tourists preferences
Impacts by tourism
Relevance of day trips vs. tourists
Existing and planned offers
Conflicts with guests
Areas with many conflicts
Moderation of conflicts and conflict resolution
Direct marketing
Cooperation with tourism
3. Eco-model Achental
Role of and support by Eco-model
4. Alpine farming health and services
Health related effects of working on the pasture. Working hours per day
Regulations concerning hygiene
Tourism: permission to serve drinks, restaurant concession
5. Water supply at the alpine pasture
Services of drinking and service water
Water rights, limitations and conflicts (scarcity, quality)
Water supply in the future (climate change, required investments)
6. Personal outlook

of visitors leads to widening of trails (everybody walks on the grass) and additional impacts by erosion, disturbance of the grazing animals and little respect for fences and agricultural management (fences were not closed). Furthermore, the visitation of alpine pastures accompanied by a dog is an additional typical conflict (Mayer & Job, 2010). A tourist with a dog attacked by young cattle and ultimately dying, increased the discussion about adequate behavior in the German and Austrian Alps in 2019, reflected in the Alpine Pastures Summit (BMLRT, 2020).

2.4. Legal regulations for tourism services

Germany, Austria and Switzerland have defined specific regulations tailored for gastronomic services on alpine pastures defined in the agricultural law. These regulations differ between countries and regions and are characterized by exceptions from hygienic standards and limited to the summer season. Some of these regulations valid for the Bavarian alpine pastures are described in the following. Providing dairy products such as cheese and butter and gastronomic services in Bavaria requires the consideration of health aspects and related permits. Specific legal requirements exist especially for offering dairy products to ensure hygienic standards (Milchgesetz vom July 31, 1930, Milch-Güte-Verordnung, Milch-Garantie-Regelung von 1984, Milch und Fettgesetz vom December 10, 1952, EG-Verordnung für Milch und Milchhygiene, Agenda 2000, GAP 2003). Additional regulations exist for the provision of beverages and food. No permit is needed if the offer is "typical for alpine pastures", which includes the serving of self-produced products and of customary, bottled drinks within the scope of alpine pasture management as well as non-alcoholic beverages. The requirements for a full gastronomic service are complex and consist of specific infrastructure and permissions which can lead to significant investments for infrastructure (e.g. calibrated bar dispenser systems).

3. The Achental region – the case study area

The Achental region consists of eight communities located in Upper Bavaria close to the Austrian boarder (Fig. 3). The rural and mountainous area is home to 27,801 inhabitants (Statistik Bayern, 2019a). About 320 alpine pastures are registered in this mountainous area

Fig. 3. Location of the municipalities of the Eco-model Achental in Bavaria (Data Source: Bayerische Vermessungsverwaltung 2019; own illustration 2019).

spanning 293.41 km² at elevations between 700m and 1400m above sea-level. The statistics for Bavaria (Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Ernährung, Landwirtschafts und Forsten, 2010) show a steady (but small) reduction of farms with alpine pastures in the last decades. Overall, the Achental is characterized by a minimal reduction of agricultural land. Livestock has reduced by 15% over the past 15 years. The reasons for this decrease given by the local farmers' association were increasing legal regulations, increasingly high demands by clients and international competition (DVB, 2017).

The Bavarian state tries to strengthen the conditions for alpine pastures by offering funding opportunities addressing various goals (see Table 1). In the Achental region only funding opportunities listed in Table 1 have been or are being used. About 40% of the local farmers use at least one of these agricultural funding opportunities.

Access to potable water, which is a precondition for tourism offers on alpine pastures, is rather limited in this region due to subsoil conditions (lime stone) (and summer droughts). While a well or creek suffices for livestock, the standards for tourism are naturally higher and require a controlled provision of potable water. Many alpine pastures had to implement individual measures or connect to public infrastructure to fulfil these requirements for potable water and also for sewage treatment.

The alpine pastures in the Achental have a high relevance for the regional outdoor recreation activities and are a significant part of local tourism offers which are dominated by hiking, paragliding, mountaineering or mountain-biking in summer and snow shoeing, alpine skiing and ski touring in winter. Being within an hour's drive from both Munich and Salzburg, the area is popular among weekend visitors. The average stay of tourists in the region is about four days. In 2019, the case study area registered 903,115 overnight stays (Statistik Bayern, 2019).

Aside from the focus on outdoor recreation, the destination presents several products linked to alpine pastures or provided by alpine pastures. The region promotes its 320 alpine pastures as a highlight or final destination of outdoor recreation, while local educational trails inform on alpine lifestyle, reflected in available tourism materials (Ökomodell Achental, 2021). Of the 320 alpine pastures, 25 are service providers with gastronomic services and overnight stays (Heimat & Geschichtsverein Achental e.V., 2019). This means that 8% are used for direct tourism related economic opportunities.

The Eco-model Achental - an association of nine municipalities

focusses on sustainable regional development embracing mainly tourism, agriculture and renewable energy (Ökomodell Achental, 2021). It perceives itself as the destination management organization (DMO) in tourism and has positioned itself as a governance institution to coordinate and initiate regional development. However, while the DMO typically promoted tourism on alpine pastures, there was uncertainty concerning the intentions and interest of farmers (Table 3) (see Table 3).

4. Methodological approach

In order to understand the farmers' perspective and their trade-offs between agriculture and tourism we decided to conduct individual semi-structured interviews with farmers who own or manage alpine pastures. These interviews were accompanied by a form to collect spatial data, ownership and statistical information (see Table 4). 25 of the 320 farms were chosen with the assistance of the Eco-model and selected as representative farms for this area (reflecting size, structure, distribution, location and exposure, organic and non-organic farming), of which 22 agreed to interviews. The duration of these were between 45 min and 2 h and conducted by two people. Transcription of content was the role of one of the researchers, as most of the farmers declined recording of their

Table 4
Summary of economic structure of the investigated alpine pastures (N = 22).

		Percentage
Organization of business	Professional farming	67
	Part-time farming	33
Type of cultivation	Conventional	32
	Organic	68
Use of alpine pastures	Young cattle	76
	With milk products	24
Inclusion of external young cattle	Yes	24
	No	76
Land tenure	Private property	48
	Legal management rights	33
	Land loan/rental pasture	19
Size	Under 30 ha	55
	30 ha–60 ha	30
	Over 60 ha	15
Accessibility	On foot	18
	By car	82

5

99

comments. The results of the transcripts were coded manually. The paper at hand focuses on the content related to tourism and outdoor recreation.

After the interviews interdisciplinary workshops were held in the Eco-model region Achental to develop possible solutions to the issues mentioned and to bring in external view and expertise. It was moderated by experts from the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences Vienna who have in-depth knowledge of tourism, outdoor recreation and alpine land use. The results of the interviews were presented and discussed in a regional forum whose invited experts included mayors of the local communities, regional agricultural experts, tourism managers, Eco-model management, farmer association and local farmers. The discussion between the variety of stakeholders lead to the development of conflict resolution approaches.

5. Results

5.1. Interviews with farmers

5.1.1. Structure of the farms involved

The majority of the farms provide organic products and the main source of income is farming. Most of them (50%) manage only their own property (referring to alpine pastures. See Table 4). Only one third of the managed land is rented and 20% belong to a group of owners but are managed by one farm (old legal management rights). About 25% of the farms produce their own dairy products and 25% bring additional animals from other farmers to their alpine pastures. All farms, including the alpine pasture, are managed mainly by one to two people alone; only 14% employ personnel.

5.1.2. Working conditions and main motivation

As shown in section 2, the development on alpine pastures has been increasingly influenced by regulations and legal requirements on health, hygiene but also nature conservation or building codes. Asked about the relevance and suitability of these regulations 17% mention one or several complaints. The regulations are seen as too strict and inflexible to meet the respective challenges. The regulations on water quality and related to milk and cheese production cause the most problems. They are seen as the major hindrances to farmers to keeping cows and producing dairy products on their alpine pastures.

Agricultural funding opportunities are used by all farmers. *"Agricultural funding opportunities are crucial for the upkeep of the alpine pastures"* and *"funding is the only way this work can be compensated, as the costs would otherwise far outgrow the benefits"* were the farmers' notions in the interviews when asked about the importance of funding for alpine pasture management. The tourism related funding opportunities are unknown by most of the respondents and therefore currently not crucial for future farm management.

In the interviews, nearly all farmers highlighted that working on the alpine pasture is of high relevance for them. Many used the terms "freedom", "retreat", "silence", "undisturbed conditions", "close to nature" to describe their feelings. Simultaneously, they stated that the work in the high mountains regions is "hard", "time consuming" and characterized by "working with their hands". Some farmers also underlined that maintaining the alpine pasture is an intergenerational task and challenge they inherited from their parents and grandparents. They also pointed out, that they would never sell this property. The interviews demonstrated deep-rooted personal connections and feelings of responsibility for the landscape as underlying motivations for their work. However, the overall working conditions have improved since 82% of the alpine pastures are entirely accessible by car. Only in a few locations salt for animals and personal equipment need to be transported on foot.

5.1.3. Contribution to and of tourism

All farmers were asked about their contribution to tourism and all

expressed their experience that alpine pastures with and without services contribute to tourism by providing a "specific atmosphere", a special "semi-natural setting" and the opportunity of an "exceptional view" and of course the provided products and services (e.g. milk, other beverages, food). For 55% of the respondents the tourism offer is not of relevance for their own overall income; 25% indicated mediocre relevance and essential for only 20% of the respondents.

5.1.4. Perception of impacts by tourism and outdoor recreation perspective

In addition to hygiene-related regulations, water scarcity and water quality are also viewed as impeding tourism development. When asked if there was interest in expanding their contribution to tourism, most farmers (82%) were not interested in changing their situation. Only 18% were open to expanding or starting tourism offers.

Directly asked about the overall effect of tourism on their business and farm, the overall opinion of interviewees was rather negative (60%). Only farmers directly profiting from product sales evaluated tourism positively. When asked to further explain their negative opinion, a plethora of reasons was mentioned, shown in Fig. 4. Disruption of animals and faecal contamination by dogs were the biggest concerns, followed closely by trash, open fences, mountain bikers and pollution of troughs.

While complaining about the "misbehavior" of guests several farmers highlight that they believe most of the problems are due to insufficient knowledge of proper behavior. Only few visitors have insight into farm life and how to behave around animals. Tourists are typically not aware of consequences of inappropriate behavior, as the following typical notation shows: *"The visitors think that this landscape is made for them. They don't understand the work we have to put in to maintain it."*

Several farmers followed up these statements by underlining that meeting tourists is enriching and part of life on alpine pastures. A typical quotation describes this experience as followed: *"I enjoy chatting about my work and exchanging life stories with the guests, if they stop to talk."* The critical perception of tourism and outdoor recreation often led on to a discussion on whether guidelines should be developed and promoted to reduce mentioned negative impacts.

5.1.5. Cooperation with tourists and marketing for alpine pastures

One third of the respondents strongly supports new guidelines to better steer the behavior of outdoor recreationists and tourists. About 20% believe that these rules are required and existing guidelines should be better promoted and obeyed by visitors.

Tourism may contribute to marketing alpine pastures and bring in additional clients. Here the majority – except those alpine pastures offering overnight stays – underlines that they do not want additional promotion. In fact, 18 of the 22 farmers mentioned no interest in cooperations for promotional purposes; two were interested in cooperations with hotels and low interest was seen in being included in hiking guides or on the tourism webpage.

Asked about a possible organization that could address the mentioned conflicts the respondents mentioned different organizations. There was no dominating organization with some farmers mentioning the local tourism organization or farmers' association while only few mentioned the Eco-model Achental. Solutions for addressing joint issues were also seen in cooperation outside of organizations.

5.1.6. Sociocultural contribution and societal perception

For many farmers the alpine pasture is perceived as the heart of the farm built over centuries, based on local knowledge, tradition and experience passed on from generation to generation. They expressed that in good intentions to protect the sensitive alpine environment, the reputation of alpine pastures is likely to increase. Instead of regulations for the big farms in the lowlands, contaminating the ground water and contributing to the loss of biodiversity by intensive use, the majority of interviewed farmers expects new regulations in conservation law for the alpine area.
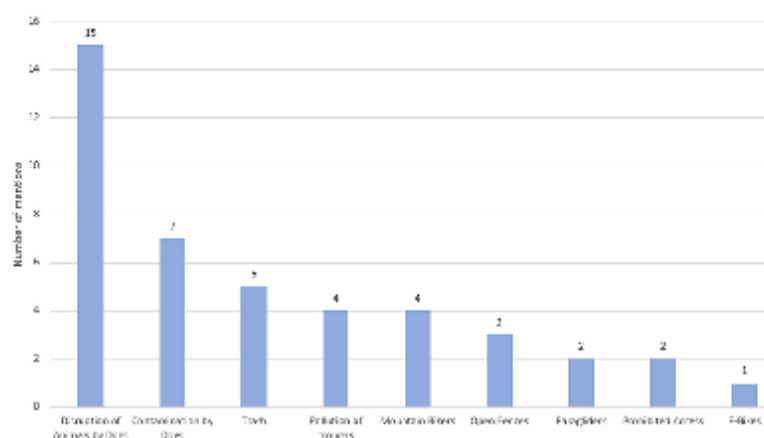
100

Fig. 4. Emerging conflicts concerning alpine pastures (n = 22, multiple answers possible).

Farmers expressed the feeling that society, even the local population and explicitly the tourists, are not aware of the farmers' role in maintaining the ecological function, protection against natural hazards and the socio-cultural functions in keeping this tradition alive, the landscape open and their form of land use tangible for anyone. The increasing amount of regulations are perceived as "guardianship" which fails to assist them as stewards of the landscape.

Several farmers mentioned the returning of the wolves, increasing number of guests and related accidents to explain that they feel "lost" or "abandoned" when significant problems occur. The following statements by the respondents illustrate their perceptions: *"If society want to have wolves back, then the society has to pay for equipping this process and its consequences."*

"If the increasing amount of guests on our land leads to conflicts – in Austria one woman with a dog died – then the tourism associations should help with liability issues and new forms of insurance."

"Currently, it is just us making new fences against both the wolves and the tourists."

Many are arguing that their positive contribution to tourism, such as the maintenance of the typical open alpine landscape, is done whether they profit from tourism or not. Many of them said they carry the burden without any societal appreciation. Asked about a possible organization that could address the mentioned conflicts, the respondents mention different organization. Further asked about an organization that could be supportive in this respect, the farmers mention nine different organizations. Their answers demonstrate the obvious lack of a central organization to contact or partner with.

To summarize, the main issues identified in section 5.1. which currently prevent farmers from positioning themselves more centrally in tourism development are: significant legal requirements, poor visitor behavior, underappreciation of their work towards landscape maintenance, differing interest in contribution of and to tourism and lack of institutional coordination and support.

5.2. Workshop results for conflict resolution

5.2.1. Integrated concept

The workshop revealed that an integrated concept is needed to accompany the conflict resolution process. The concept should be based on visions reflecting the overall goals. These visions can be used to define crucial steps of conflict resolution and local planning. Fig. 5 summarizes the key components of the proposed integrated concept. The main pillars are described in the following sections.

5.2.2. Information and knowledge transfer

The survey reflected that many conflicts with tourists and outdoor recreationists are caused by a lack of knowledge. Unbeknownst to themselves, the visitors often cause problems. The workshop discussed how to provide information tailored to the tourists' needs. Information means should include the internet (e.g. the website of the DMO with tourism offers and events) and information along main trails when entering the alpine pastures (e.g. on metal plates) and provide flyers for accommodations. Additionally, in cooperation with the farmer association and the DMO (Eco-model Achental) the development of educational products to disseminate knowledge on alpine pastures and its specific natural elements such as vegetation, the role of farming, avalanche risks, etc., is recommended. Educational trails, based on digital information, are further options.
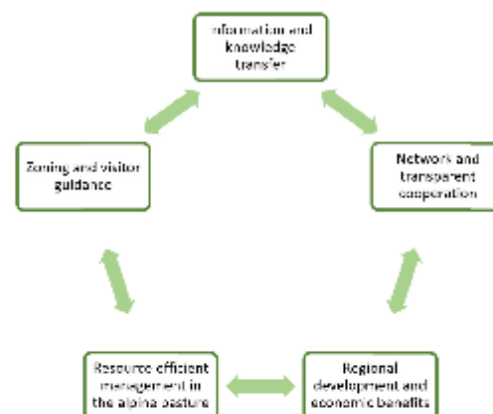

Fig. 5. Integrated concept for regions with alpine pastures characterized by significant tourism and outdoor recreational use.

The workshop also proposed alpine working days (or a week) in which the tourists receive an explanation of the ecological and agricultural conditions as well as an introduction to typical pasture management, followed by working the landscape themselves e.g. erasing disturbing plants or cutting down upcoming succession of trees. These experiences and the active contribution to the maintenance of the landscape will be an added value for the tourist and may influence future behavior. However, the farmers mentioned in the interviews that this offer may only be feasible if liability issues are clarified and a tailored solution provided by the farmer association in cooperation with the local DMO would be necessary.

5.2.3. Network and transparent cooperation

The inventory and the interviews with farmers showed that farms providing tourism products are stuck in a predicament. Since the landscape preservation is essential for tourism development and farm products will contribute to the diversification of the tourism products in general, a closer cooperation between the farmers, their association and tourism representatives (DMO) is highly recommended. The members of the Eco-model could serve as the bridging organization between the tourism branch and farmers and provide logistic and administrative components for new tourism products. Furthermore, the Eco-model Achental could organize measures such as printing information material and website information. In this context the concept of joint marketing and branding should be applied (Vuorinen & Vos, 2013) which replaces competitive approaches by focusing on cooperation.

5.2.4. Regional development and economic benefits

Workshop participants agreed that the economic benefits for farmers engaged in the maintenance of alpine pastures should be actively supported by the Eco-model Achental. A crucial component in this context is the development of a common label, which stands for regional production as well as quality control. The visibility of products from the alpine pasture should be enhanced in grocery stores or souvenir shops in order to get more attention by both tourists and the local population. The workshop also revealed that this form of regional development is only possible when the farmers are interested in a cooperation and willing to share experiences.

A second important aspect is the direct marketing of milk products or meat to tourists. In addition, the economic benefit can be enhanced by offering locally produced food in mountain huts on the alpine pasture. The interviews with the farmers but also the inventory of the legal requirements revealed that it is difficult to understand the respective legal requirement embracing not only hygiene but also building restrictions, the type of gastronomic service, and the many other aspects. In order to find tailored solutions and get permission by local authorities and administration, a local advisory board supported by members of local administration would be necessary.

Statements during the workshop highlighted that many of the current challenges are unclear. Whether and how an enlargement for tourism use can be recommended must be discussed in light of the accessibility, the personnel involved, the availability of personnel, the sensitive alpine environment and many other factors. The interviews clearly demonstrated that it is not every farmer's desire to engage with tourists.

5.2.5. Resource efficient management of alpine pastures

In the past working on alpine pastures meant the return to a rather primitive lifestyle. The workshop discussed whether new technology could make the living conditions in alpine pasture less difficult and more comfortable. The water resources are limited. Therefore, it is important to ensure a high quality of potable water and its permanent availability. Technical solutions such as solar pumps or facilities to save rainfall may help to conserve energy and contribute to a wise use of the existing water resources.

In addition, this infrastructure may contribute to enhancing the quality of life on the alpine pasture, save working time and money. Again, the Eco-model may serve as a coordinator in finding suitable partner firms, developing tailored solutions for alpine pastures and arranging excursions to visit similar solutions or to overcome possible barriers. The joint application of new facilities may also strengthen the cooperation between the farmers and the Eco-model.

5.2.6. Visitor management

For tourism experts joining the workshop the significant negative impacts by tourism and outdoor recreation were surprising. In addition, it was expected that the farmers are per se in favor of tourism development and alpine pastures were perceived as any other tourism infrastructure. The interview results clearly demonstrated that this perception was false and that farmers had had plenty conflicts to report. The mapping of conflicts allowed the discussion of local hotspots and possible reasons for increasing conflicts. Aside from better communication (see above), a spatial concept and zoning system should be applied to solve the reported conflicts. Such a concept should be developed on a small scale, local level to address the regional specificities (such as preferred trails or crowding hotspots). The workshop also highlighted that visitor management should consider different target groups such as mountain bikers or paragliders, as conflicts were often clustered around trails related to certain recreational activities. These groups are also easier to handle because facilities such as suitable starting points or single trails help to steer their spatial use and distribution. This kind of visitor management will only work if the preferences of the farmers are fully respected.

From a tourism perspective it was also discussed whether this spatial management could be based on an additional survey involving all alpine pastures in order to adapt the accessibility for tourists according to the provided offer and the willingness to accommodate guests. First applications show that this will not be easy because the road and trail network already exists. However, a new guidance system using signposts and other information means seems feasible.

6. Discussion

6.1. Lessons learned and scientific prospects

The study at hand is based on an in-depth survey of 22 representative farms in the Achental region. The willingness to participate (response rate 88%) and the length of the interviews showed a great interest in getting involved and managing the given situation. In light of this experience, it is surprising that many other studies dealing with this subject are mainly based on statistical analysis and/or expert judgements with little or no involvement of farmers and do not lay their focus on the farmers role as central stakeholders. This might have had an influence on the respective outcomes and recommendations.

Arnberger et al. (2006) involved alpine pasture inspectors, experts from the government, local administration representatives of tourism associations and tourism service providers on alpine pastures to analyze the interrelation of alpine pastures and the tourism industry and development options for their Austrian wide study. Farmers not involved in the tourism business were not included. Aigner and Egger (2010) analyze the economic benefits of alpine pastures and its attractiveness for farmers in the European mountains based on secondary data and a literature review. Kirchengast (2008) used for his publication on alpine pastures five interviews with farmers (one farm per region: Steiermark, Oberösterreich, Salzburg, Kärnten and Vorarlberg) and interviews with selected experts. Scarpa et al. (2011) looked at alpine pastures and tourism by asking visitors based on a choice experiment. Mayer and Job (2010) chose for their conflict analysis on alpine pastures, nature conservation and tourism 53 expert interviews. While some farmers were included, they were not given a prominent or individualized stakeholder role and the focus was laid on other stakeholders and experts with little or no active role in landscape maintenance.

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This compilation of recent studies in the German speaking Alps shows that in most cases the issue of alpine pastures and tourism has been done without a proper involvement of those whose future is discussed. The survey by Stasser (2014) was the only exception we could find for the German and Austrian Alps. Her study is based on interviews with farmers.

The question is whether this dominance of expert-based research has consequences. The analysis by Mayer and Job (2010) argues that in the "outdoor recreation dominated understanding of cultural landscapes" the perception and needs of those who are working and maintaining this landscape are not being recognized. They state that many people discussing the future of alpine pastures forget that this landscape is the home and working environment of farmers and not just a potential room for more tourism development or related outdoor recreation activities.

Therefore, research on alpine pastures and tourism development should go beyond export-based scenarios. For example Aigner and Egger (2010) highlight that in the future farmers should focus on selling experiences such as the renting of lamas or goats for hikes with children to make the hike more attractive. The study at hand shows that a survey involving farmers is able to show their real interests, main constraints or challenges and whether or not tourism development matches their future plans and motivation.

6.2. Preconditions for future development

In the context of future development four main aspects should be considered and analyzed:

Tourism trends and demand: Tourism development plans should carefully analyze current tourism trends and tailor the touristic offer to these proposed multifaceted target groups and new trends. Arnberger et al. (2006:43) state that the management of alpine pastures "is confronted with a changing tourism demand". This statement still holds true to this day. The tourist of the future asks for an "unspoiled environment" and "natural conditions". This argument is confirmed by recent studies (Bandi Tanner & Müller, 2019; Sand & Gross, 2019). They argue that alpine pastures have therefore a high potential for tourism development, but also adventures and challenging activities are likely to be performed in this cultural landscape. Since the urban dweller is looking for silence and relating this group is, according to Arnberger et al. (2006), an additional target group. In alpine huts with internet access and a good and stable electricity supply also company retreats and mental trainings might be a new target group.

Economic benefits: Aigner and Egger (2010) justify their tourism focused vision with an expert-based calculation of possible economic benefits by additional tourism development. For Austria the income that can be generated by tourism is much higher than the income based on primary use (such as milk, meat, dairy products, timber production and hunting.). Seeking stronger sustainability will, however, require the consideration of social aspects which go beyond mere neo-liberal approaches focusing on additional income (Dwyer, 2017) and expand into consideration of social aspects including happiness and quality of life. In this study, we have found that motivation to develop tourism among the Achental farmers was limited. Similarly, Mayer et al. (2010) note that willingness and motivation are necessary to generate income from tourism.

Strasser (2014) also analyzing tourism development options for alpine pastures in an Austrian destination distinguishes between the vision by the experts and the vision based on a farmer survey. While the experts argue in favor of an investment in tourism and tourism related direct marketing the farmers themselves are less interested in additional sources of income but in maintaining the current use of their alpine pastures (Strasser, 2014, p. 136) by funding opportunities. In contrast to the experts the farmer survey highlighted possible conflicts that may go along with tourism development such as conflicts with hunting, more traffic, parking problems and noise. They are also skeptical concerning possible activities such as mountain bike tours and argue that they want

to focus on their "original work". The majority does not want to depend on tourism development and is therefore against significant shifts. Her findings reflect the same skeptical judgements as the study at hand.

Time Management: Several papers (Aigner & Egger, 2010; Vogt, 2013) dealing with possible visions for alpine pastures in the German or Austrian Alps highlight one crucial aspect, and that is time. Aigner and Egger (2010) who argue in favor of tourism development on alpine pastures report that "beside the positive economic effect by tourism development, one need to consider that due to the additional workload for tourism services there will be less time for the necessary management of the alpine pasture and the required alpine care. They add that there might be more management required if cattle or sheep are disturbed by a high number of visitors and other forms of conflict management (e.g. additional fences, gates, controlling).

Time constraints in our study area are also mentioned in the farmer survey conducted by Strasser (2014). Farmers stated that the production of goods for direct marketing is very time consuming. In the survey presented here, the management of the alpine pasture and the farm is mainly done by one or two people. If no suitable personnel (for the farm or tourism offer) is available, this aspect limits any possible development concepts.

Intrinsic motivation: When it comes to the discussion of visions and future development of alpine pastures in the German and Austrian Alps the proposed concept by experts (Strasser, 2014; Arnberger et al., 2006; Aigner & Egger, 2010) and those by the affected farmers differ significantly. This effect can be seen in the literature but also in our case study region. This significant discrepancy is easy to explain. The main motives of the farmers to work on the alpine pasture have been mentioned in section 5.1.2. The terminology the farmers used to explain the working conditions there are "freedom", "retreat", "silence", "close to nature" etc. A typical statement to describe their intrinsic motivation was: "*If I am repairing fences for several days I can forget about the rest of the world*". "Additional income" or "economic benefit" are not the key motives for their oftentimes hard work. Therefore, for many farmers tourism development is a development that contradicts their main motivation. It is likely to reduce the "freedom", the "silence" and unspoiled natural conditions. Knowing this, the discrepancy between the experts in several studies and the farmers is not surprising. The different opinions also show the physical distance to the objective which typically leads to different evaluations (Job & Weizenegger, 2000; Mayer & Job, 2010). Kirchengast (2008) also highlights that for society, alpine pastures enjoy a highly valued mental image. They represent "homeland", a world that is still complete ("heile Welt"), as well as the "good old days". Mayer and Job (2010: 61 f.) believe that this image has a significant impact on the attractiveness for tourism on one hand and on the future concepts on the other. For planning processes towards a sustainable development focusing on this image alone is not helpful (Schermer, 2010) and an organization such as the Eco-model Achental could step up to enhance the process by empowering underrepresented stakeholder groups (Khazaei et al., 2015). Future concepts should be based on the individual plans of those working on these alpine pastures. In addition, these concepts should be integrated into overall regional strategies, that consider outdoor recreation and tourism without being a burden for this specific form of land use.

7. Conclusion

Tourism development of alpine pastures is promoted by many experts as a means to enhance economic outcomes, yet implementation continues to be difficult. However, for many farmers, tourism development often counteracts their main motivations despite the possible economic potential. Additional knowledge about tourism and service industry experiences are often required or a precondition to provide high quality and attractive tourism offers. For many farmers, tourism development also means increasing efforts in alpine management and is perceived as an additional burden due to disturbances, rubbish and

inappropriate behavior by visitors.

Considering that farmers are central stakeholders, whose engagement and cooperation is a precondition of tourism development on alpine pastures, increased efforts need to be made to actively incorporate them into tourism planning. Therefore, the paper at hand presents an integrated regional concept which includes knowledge transfer to visitors to influence their future behavior, a network between farmers to enhance direct marketing, knowledge exchange on management of natural resources and renewable energy and finally a zoning concept assisting farmers investing in tourism on alpine pastures and protecting those less interested in tourism.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Alice Wanner: Conceptualization, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Visualization. Ulrike Pröbstl-Haider: Conceptualization, Methodology, Supervision. Magdalena Feilhammer: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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