

Understanding Tourist Preferences for Sustainable Tourism Practice in Central Europe

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Abstract: This study examines how tourists prioritize sustainable practices in Central Europe using the Kano model. With the growing importance of sustainability in tourism, there is limited research on how tourists evaluate different sustainable practices in this region. The objectives are to classify sustainable tourism practices into five Kano quality categories based on tourist preferences and to identify the key practices tourists prioritize when selecting destinations. A quantitative approach was used, surveying 250 tourists in Budapest, who rated 12 sustainable tourism practices. The data were analysed to categorize these practices as "Must-be," "One-dimensional," "Attractive," "Indifferent," or "Reverse." The results revealed that *environmental conservation* (M = 84.4%), *wildlife-friendly tourism* (M = 77.6%), and *waste reduction* (M = 75.2%) were the top priorities, classified as "Must-be" attributes, indicating their essential role in tourist satisfaction. In contrast, *fair trade practices* (68.8%) received lower priority. These findings suggest that tourists in Central Europe place more value on visible environmental sustainability efforts rather than ethical practices like fair trade. The study highlights the importance of focusing on *environmental conservation*, *wildlife protection*, and *waste reduction* in tourism strategies. By understanding these preferences, tourism stakeholders can develop strategies that align with tourists' priorities, supporting both sustainability and economic growth in the region.

Keywords: Kano Model; Tourist Satisfaction; Environmental Sustainability; Wildlife Protection; Waste Reduction

Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana wisatawan memprioritaskan praktik berkelanjutan di Eropa Tengah menggunakan model Kano. Dengan semakin pentingnya keberlanjutan dalam industri pariwisata, masih terbatas penelitian mengenai bagaimana wisatawan mengevaluasi berbagai praktik berkelanjutan di wilayah ini. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengklasifikasikan praktik pariwisata berkelanjutan ke dalam lima kategori kualitas model Kano berdasarkan preferensi wisatawan dan untuk mengidentifikasi praktik utama yang diprioritaskan wisatawan saat memilih destinasi. Pendekatan kuantitatif digunakan dengan mensurvei 250 wisatawan di Budapest, yang memberikan penilaian terhadap 12 praktik pariwisata berkelanjutan. Data yang diperoleh dianalisis untuk mengkategorikan praktik tersebut sebagai "Must-be", "One-dimensional", "Attractive", "Indifferent", atau "Reverse." Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa konservasi lingkungan (M = 84,4%), pariwisata ramah satwa liar (M = 77,6%), dan pengurangan limbah (M = 75,2%) adalah prioritas utama yang diklasifikasikan sebagai atribut "Must-be", yang menunjukkan peran pentingnya dalam kepuasan wisatawan. Sebaliknya, praktik perdagangan yang adil (I = 68,8%) mendapat prioritas lebih rendah. Temuan ini mengindikasikan bahwa wisatawan di Eropa Tengah lebih menghargai upaya keberlanjutan lingkungan yang terlihat dibandingkan dengan praktik etis seperti perdagangan yang adil. Penelitian ini menyoroti pentingnya fokus pada konservasi lingkungan, perlindungan satwa liar, dan pengurangan limbah dalam strategi pariwisata. Dengan memahami preferensi ini, pemangku kepentingan pariwisata dapat mengembangkan strategi yang sesuai dengan prioritas wisatawan, mendukung keberlanjutan dan pertumbuhan ekonomi di wilayah tersebut.

Keywords: Model Kano; Kepuasan Wisatawan; Keberlanjutan Lingkungan; Perlindungan Satwa Liar; Pengurangan Limbah

1 INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry is experiencing major changes as sustainability becomes increasingly important (Rainanto et al., 2023). While tourism is a key global economic sector, it has also contributed to environmental damage and social issues (Najeha & Vitrianto, 2024). As awareness of these effects grows, there is rising demand for tourism practices that focus on sustainability. Tourists are showing more interest in destinations and services that emphasize eco-friendly practices, such as sustainable accommodations, transportation, and conservation efforts (Hulu, 2024). This shift is reflected in the global push for sustainable travel, though challenges persist. Many regions still struggle with fully adopting these practices despite the growing attention to sustainability (Li & Xu, 2024).

Although sustainability in tourism is gaining recognition, there are still gaps in understanding how tourists prioritize different sustainable practices when making travel decisions (Fei et al., 2024; Hilmawan et al., 2024). These gaps are particularly evident in Central Europe, where tourism plays a significant economic role, but research on tourist preferences for sustainability is limited (Petrovszki et al., 2024). Most existing studies focus on global tourism, especially in larger or Western destinations (Scott et al., 2019; Skora et al., 2022; Dube, 2022; Quer, 2020). While these studies point to an increasing demand for sustainable tourism, they often lack specific insights into Central Europe, where local needs and preferences may differ. Furthermore, current research tends to overlook the diversity of tourist motivations and does not fully address how tourists perceive and value sustainability.

This study seeks to fill these gaps by examining tourists' preferences for sustainable practices in Central Europe. The research will apply the Kano model to analyse how tourists rank different sustainability factors. The model categorizes practices into five quality categories, offering insights into which practices are seen as essential, which enhance satisfaction, and which set destinations apart. Understanding these preferences will help tourism stakeholders develop more effective strategies for promoting sustainability in the region. The primary objectives of this study are (1) to classify the sustainable practices into five quality categories based on tourist preferences. (2) to identify the sustainable tourism practices that tourists prioritize when selecting destinations in Central Europe based on quality category. This study will address the following key research questions:

1. How do tourists perceive various sustainable practice attributes across the five quality categories?
2. What are the key sustainable tourism practices that tourists prioritize?

By addressing these questions, this research aims to offer valuable insights into the preferences of tourists regarding sustainability in Central European tourism. The findings will help destination managers and policymakers tailor their sustainable tourism strategies to meet the needs of this diverse group of travellers, fostering both environmental preservation and economic growth. Following this introduction, Section 2 will review relevant literature on sustainable tourism, tourist preferences, and the application of the Kano model. Section 3 will outline the research methodology, Section 4 will present the result and discussion, Section 5 will conclude the study.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Sustainable Tourism and Its Growing Importance

The global tourism industry, as a major economic sector, faces significant pressure to adopt sustainable practices due to concerns about environmental and social impacts. Environmental issues caused by tourism, such as carbon emissions from transportation and resource depletion at popular destinations, are well-documented (Bhuiyan et al., 2024). Social impacts, including strains on local cultures and communities, are also increasingly recognized (Priatmoko & David, 2021; Farisi et al., 2024). Sustainable tourism aims to balance tourism's economic benefits with the need to protect environmental and cultural resources for future generations (Jayasinghe et al., 2024).

Research indicates that tourists are increasingly aware of sustainability issues and are choosing destinations that prioritize eco-friendly practices (Rocha et al., 2020). Studies show that tourists are willing to pay more for sustainable services, including eco-certified hotels, responsible tour operators, and environmentally-friendly transport (Wahnschafft & Wolter, 2022; Shin et al., 2023). However, many regions face challenges in fully adopting these practices, often due to economic barriers, limited regulations, and a lack of awareness among tourists and service providers (Styles et al.,

[2014](#)). Variations in the implementation of sustainable practices across regions, especially in areas with developing tourism infrastructures, continue to hinder progress.

Sustainability's complexity, encompassing economic, environmental, and social dimensions, has led to diverse sustainable practices across the tourism industry (Islam, [2024](#)). Efforts range from energy-saving initiatives in hotels to community-based tourism models. For tourists, prioritizing which sustainable factors to consider when selecting destinations is not always straightforward, indicating a need for more focused research into how tourists perceive and value different aspects of sustainability. This study's focus on tourist preferences within the specific context of Central Europe addresses this research gap.

2.2 Tourist Preferences and Sustainable Practices

Tourist preferences regarding sustainability help shape how sustainable practices are integrated into the tourism sector. Existing research reveals an increasing interest in sustainable tourism but often lacks detailed insights into preferences for specific sustainable practices (Estêvão et al., [2019](#)).

Studies by Madani et al. ([2024](#)) indicate that tourists often prioritize environmental conservation and cultural preservation when selecting destinations. Central Europe, however, may show unique patterns in tourist preferences due to its specific cultural, economic, and environmental characteristics (Barák et al., [2022](#)). Tourism is economically significant in Central European countries such as Austria, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, which draw millions of tourists to their cultural and historical sites. Despite this, few studies address how international tourists prioritize sustainable practices within this region (Kazda et al., [2024](#)).

Tourist motivation research highlights the complex factors that influence sustainable travel choices. While environmental concerns are often primary, personal values, social influences, and perceived destination quality also play a role (Alipour et al., [2019](#)). Tourists may favor destinations that showcase visible sustainability efforts, such as renewable energy use or waste management practices, while others emphasize socio-cultural aspects, such as support for local traditions and community engagement in tourism (Miralles et al., [2023](#)). Research that explores how tourists perceive

and prioritize these factors is limited, especially regarding how they weigh various sustainable practices when choosing destinations. This study uses the Kano model to categorize sustainable practices, which offers a structured approach to understanding tourists' priorities in this area.

2.3 The Kano Model and Its Role in Tourism Research

The Kano model, created by Noriaki Kano in the 1980s, organizes customer preferences and satisfaction into five quality categories. The "must-be" category represents basic needs that tourists expect to be met; without them, dissatisfaction is high, but enhancing them only slightly improves satisfaction. The "one-dimensional" category includes performance needs, where satisfaction increases when these features are present, but their absence causes dissatisfaction. The "attractive" category consists of excitement needs, where satisfaction rises when these features are present, but their absence does not lead to dissatisfaction. The "indifferent" category encompasses attributes that have little impact on satisfaction, whether present or not. Lastly, the "reverse" category includes attributes that may cause dissatisfaction if present, while their absence may enhance satisfaction, which runs counter to typical expectations. Kano model has become a useful tool in tourism research to analyse how tourists perceive different elements of a destination, such as service quality, amenities, and sustainability practices (Shen et al., [2021](#)).

Research by Sun et al. ([2023](#)) and Wang and Jia ([2024](#)) shows how the Kano model can help tourism providers understand tourists' preferences and satisfaction with destination features. By distinguishing between kano categories, the model helps identify the sustainability measures that are critical for attracting tourists and those that can enhance their experience. Applying the Kano model to understand tourist preferences for sustainable practices can reveal which factors are most significant for tourist (Nuojuia et al., [2024](#)). By organizing these practices within the Kano categories, this study will clarify how tourists evaluate sustainability in tourism destinations within the region and which sustainability aspects influence their decisions. The insights from this analysis will guide tourism managers in developing targeted sustainability strategies that align with tourist priorities in Central Europe.

3 METHODOLOGY

This study used a quantitative research design based on the Kano model to prioritize sustainable tourism practices. The research process involved several steps. First, sustainable tourism practice attributes were identified through a literature review (see [table 1](#)). Second, surveys were conducted 250 participants from Budapest, a city chosen for its status

as a central European tourism hub with a diverse population that reflects a wide range of perspectives on tourism. The sample size was determined based on Roscoe's rule of thumb, which suggests an optimal range of 30 to 500 participants for research studies to ensure reliable and generalizable results (Sekaran and Bougie, [2019](#)).

Table 1. Sustainable tourism practice construct

Construct	Description	References
Environmental Conservation (EC)	Efforts to minimize environmental impact	Mestanza et al. (2019)
Local community engagement (LCE)	Involvement of local communities in tourism planning and decision-making.	Rifai et al. (2024)
Cultural preservation (CP)	Promotion and protection of local traditions, customs, and heritage.	Fahmi et al. (2023)
Fair Trade Practices (FTP)	Support for fair trade products and services.	Chen and Wu (2020)
Sustainable transportation (ST)	Investment in infrastructure that promotes sustainability	Zientara et al. (2024)
Wildlife-friendly tourism (WFT)	Activities that do not disturb wildlife or natural habitats	Moorhouse et al. (2023)
Waste Reduction (WR)	Practices to minimize waste production and encourage recycling in tourism destinations.	Fakfare et al. (2024)
Water conservation (WC)	Practices that minimize water consumption	Fakfare et al. (2024)
Sustainable food practices (SFP)	Support for locally sourced, organic food and waste reduction in dining options	Thelen and Kim (2024)
Pollution Control (PC)	Measures to prevent air, water, and noise pollution from tourism activities.	Wang et al. (2024)
Carbon Offset Programs (COP)	Availability of carbon offset options for tourists.	De and Macario (2024)
Inclusive tourism (INT)	Accessibility for people with disabilities, and ensuring tourism is inclusive of all socioeconomic groups.	Page and Connell (2024)
Local economic resilience (LER)	Focus on diversifying the local economy to reduce dependency on tourism alone	Zhang et al. (2021)
Environmental restoration initiatives (ERI)	Engagement in habitat restoration or other conservation initiatives to reverse environmental damage	Zhou et al. (2023)

Source: Author analysis (2024)

The survey consisted of 28 questions, equally divided into two categories: functional and dysfunctional. These questions were meticulously designed to measure customer satisfaction regarding fourteen attributes of sustainable tourism practice. Each attribute was evaluated through specific questions, as illustrated in [Table 2](#), which provides a sample question related to one of these attributes. Next, the attributes were tested for validity and reliability using Pearson correlation and Cronbach's alpha. After reliability and validity test, Attributes were classified using kano evaluation matrix by comparing responses

under functional and dysfunctional conditions (see [Table 3](#)). The final step focused on prioritizing the attributes by analyzing their frequency percentages within each quality category. The prioritization process adhered to the framework of the model, which ranks the categories by their relative importance. The prioritization order followed the model's framework: "must-be" attributes were the highest priority, followed by "one-dimensional," "attractive," "indifferent," and "reverse" attributes, which held the lowest priority. The research framework is presented in [Fig. 1](#).

Table 2. Example of kano questionnaire used in this research

	Questions	Answers
Functional question	What if the tourism destination had implemented <i>inclusive tourism</i> ?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I love it • I expect it • I don't care • I can tolerate it • I hate it
Dysfunctional question	What if the EV doesn't have implemented <i>inclusive tourism</i> ?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I love it • I expect it • I don't care • I can tolerate it • I hate it

Source: Kano (1995)

Table 3. Kano evaluation matrix

		Dysfunctional question				
		I love it	It expect it	I don't care	I can tolerate it	I hate it
Functional question	I love it	Q	A	A	A	O
	I expect it	R	I	I	I	M
	I don't care	R	I	I	I	M
	I can tolerate it	R	I	I	I	M
	I hate it	R	R	R	R	Q

Source: Kano (1995)

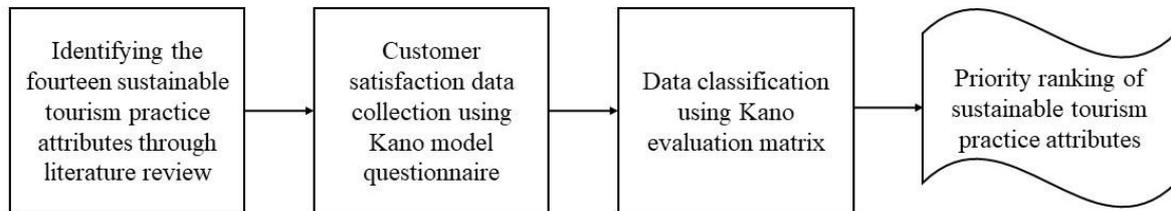


Fig. 1. Research framework

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Sustainable tourism attribute prioritization

The survey data, collected from 250 respondents, revealed a diverse demographic profile. Of the respondents, 68.4% were female, while 31.6% were male. The sample was primarily composed of individuals aged 25 to 35 years, who accounted for 57.6% of the total. Educational background analysis showed that a majority (52%) of the respondents held a university degree. To ensure the reliability and validity of the survey items, statistical analyses were conducted. Cronbach's alpha scores, ranging from

0.73 to 0.78, indicated a level of internal consistency exceeding the generally accepted threshold for reliability. Additionally, Pearson's correlation coefficients confirmed the validity of all items, with significant results at a 0.01 level, indicating strong relationships between variables.

As outlined in the methodology, the prioritization of sustainable tourism attributes was determined using the Kano model. This approach categorized attributes based on the percentage of responses within each quality category. Attributes with the highest percentage in the "Must-be" (M) category were identified as the highest priority. These were followed in descending order by percentages in the "One-dimensional" (O), "Attractive" (A), "Indifferent" (I), and "Reverse" (R) categories.

The findings from this study provide a clear prioritization of attributes essential to sustainable tourism practices, with Environmental Conservation (EC) (M = 84.4%), Wildlife-Friendly Tourism (WFT) (M = 77.6%), and Waste Reduction (WR) (M =

75.2%) emerging as the top three most crucial factors. These results suggest that these attributes are not only central to sustainable tourism strategies but are also perceived as the baseline requirements for ensuring positive tourist experiences (see [Table 4](#)).

Table 4. Sustainable tourism attributes prioritization

No	Attributes	A	O	M	I	R	Q	Category	Rank
1	EC	5.60	7.60	84.40	2.40	0.00	0.00	M	1
2	LCE	3.60	90.40	4.40	1.60	0.00	0.00	O	6
3	CP	80.00	11.60	4.40	4.00	0.00	0.00	A	10
4	FTP	13.20	11.20	6.80	68.8	0.00	0.00	I	14
5	ST	5.20	86.40	7.60	0.80	0.00	0.00	O	7
6	WFT	8.40	12.80	77.60	1.20	0.00	0.00	M	2
7	WR	6.00	15.60	75.20	3.20	0.00	0.00	M	3
8	WC	8.40	16.80	72.00	31.20	0.00	0.00	M	4
9	SFP	86.00	8.40	3.60	2.00	0.00	0.00	A	9
10	PC	8.80	16.40	71.20	3.60	0.00	0.00	M	5
11	COP	76.80	10.80	7.60	4.80	0.00	0.00	A	11
12	INT	10.00	83.60	4.80	1.60	0.00	0.00	O	8
13	LER	73.60	15.60	8.80	2.00	0.00	0.00	A	12
14	ERI	70.80	10.80	12.40	6.00	0.00	0.00	A	13

Source: Author analysis (2024)

The significant positive impact these attributes have on tourist satisfaction aligns with existing research that underscores the growing importance of environmental and ecological considerations in tourism. For instance, studies by Suárez-Rojas et al. (2022) highlight that ecologically conscious tourists increasingly prefer destinations with strong environmental management practices, further reinforcing the critical role of EC. Likewise, wildlife tourism has gained attention in recent years, with tourists showing a preference for experiences that support conservation efforts rather than exploit wildlife for entertainment Suresh et al. (2022). Furthermore, WR practices are increasingly integrated into tourism due to the rising concerns about the environmental impacts of waste, particularly in high-traffic tourist areas Fakfare et al. (2024). These findings contrast sharply with the low priority placed on *fair trade Practices* (FTP) (M = 68.8%), which was found to have a minimal influence on tourist satisfaction. While FTP is an important ethical principle within sustainable tourism, the lower ranking suggests a disconnect between tourists' awareness of or value placed on these practices compared to the more tangible environmental attributes.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This study highlights the critical role of environmental and ecological factors in shaping sustainable tourism practices and the tourist experience. The findings emphasize the growing importance of attributes such as Environmental Conservation (EC), Wildlife-Friendly Tourism (WFT), and Waste Reduction (WR) in meeting the expectations of modern tourists, particularly those aged 25 to 35 years. These attributes, identified as fundamental for ensuring a positive and sustainable tourism experience, reflect the increasing demand for eco-conscious and socially responsible tourism offerings. The prioritization of these factors aligns with broader global trends towards environmental sustainability, which are becoming central to policy-making and business strategies in the tourism industry.

The research underscores the need for tourism operators, policymakers, and destination managers to integrate sustainable practices that prioritize ecological conservation and waste management while promoting wildlife-friendly experiences. These findings are not only valuable for tourism practitioners aiming to enhance satisfaction among

environmentally aware tourists, but also provide actionable insights for the development of sustainable tourism policies that can mitigate the environmental impacts of mass tourism.

6 LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study, while insightful, has limitations. The sample of 250 respondents, primarily aged 25-35 and predominantly female, may not fully represent diverse global tourist populations, limiting the generalizability of the findings. The reliance on the Kano model may also overlook the complexity of tourists' attitudes toward sustainability attributes. Future research should include broader, more diverse samples and consider alternative methodologies.

Additionally, the low ranking of fair trade practices (FTP) suggests limited awareness of its importance, indicating the need for studies exploring how education and communication can enhance tourists' valuation of FTP. Future work could also examine how external factors like economic shifts or global crises affect the prioritization of sustainability attributes.

Further studies could explore the long-term impact of sustainable tourism attributes on tourist loyalty, the economic benefits of sustainability, and the role of digital platforms in promoting environmental consciousness. Understanding how cultural, social, and economic factors influence sustainability perceptions across different destinations will provide a more comprehensive understanding of sustainable tourism strategies globally.

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