

**Put title line 1 here: *Sustainable Development and Coastal Tourism: A Stakeholders' Perspective***

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**(Short) Abstract**

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This study employs the example of Bulgaria's North Black Sea coast to examine the destination stakeholders' perceptions of sustainable tourism development and the degree to which the principles of sustainability have been implemented in the policies and practices in the past three decades. It aims to contribute to the body of knowledge on coastal tourism development and its problematic relationship with the concept of sustainability in times of rapid changes. A multidisciplinary and holistic approach is adopted to develop an analytical framework for the study of sustainable tourism development.

**Key words:** sustainable tourism development, local community, stakeholder's perspectives, qualitative research, transition

## **Extended Abstract**

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You can add as many figures and tables as you wish.

### **1. Introduction**

This research studies the stakeholders' perceptions of sustainability and the degree to which the principles of sustainability have been implemented in the policies and practices on Bulgaria's North Black Sea coast. It contributes to the body of knowledge on coastal tourism development and its problematic relationship with the concept of sustainability in times of rapid changes. A multidisciplinary and holistic approach is adopted to contextualise the study within the wider arena of politics and power and develop an analytical framework for the study of sustainable tourist development, which could be applied in similar contexts.

### **2. State-of-the-art (Literature Review)**

Although there is a growing body of research on the transformation of tourism in the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries after 1989, only a few studies focus on the traditional coastal tourism destinations and attempt to critically evaluate the challenges of implementing the principles of sustainability. This is a part of a broader issue relating to the study of mass tourism globally - while the evolution of tourism and the drivers for its development are well documented, there is limited research on the extent to which the historical processes might inform the knowledge and understanding of modern tourism (Shapley and Harrison, 2017). In addition, studies on sustainability and impacts of tourism in traditional CEE destinations are usually concerned only with specific aspects and use different timeframes, thus providing a slightly distorted picture of the processes and underlying factors. More specifically, previous studies on coastal tourism in transition economies attribute failures to achieve sustainability to the political complexity (Alipour and Dizdarevic, 2007), the economic transformations (Jordan 2000), and the socialist legacy and inefficient planning (Bachvarov, 1999, 2006).

In the recent years, there have been attempts to place the emphasis on the positive economic contribution of tourism (Ivanov 2005, Ivanov 2017); however, most scholars share their concerns about the overall sustainability of this phenomenon and the inability of the society to effectively plan and manage tourism development to the benefit of all stakeholders. These are based on the studies of the modern manifestations of tourism, such as prostitution (Hesse and Tutenges, 2011), pub crawls and alcohol abuse (Tutenges, 2015), high staff turnover (Matev and Assenova, 2012), urbanization of the sea coast (Holleran 2015), destruction of sand dunes (Stancheva, Ratras, Orviku, Palazov, Ravis, Kont, Peychev, Tonisson and Stanchev, 2011) and deteriorating sea water quality (Moncheva, Racheva, Kamburska and D'Hernoncourt, 2012). Contrary to previous studies, this research takes a holistic approach and aims to establish a link between the outputs (*what* is happening) and the inputs (*why* this is happening).

### **3. Research Methodology**

The theoretical framework of this research is based on the *path-dependency path-creation approach* and New Institutional Economics in that it acknowledges the existence of a greater variety of structures, procedures and processes and their capacity to interact with one another. Within an analytical framework of interdependencies between the main elements of the

political and economic sectors, the *actors'* (decision-makers') behaviour is viewed as influenced by *the institutional framework* (property rights, regulation, institutions and informal rules of the game).

This research focused on the subjective views of stakeholders involved in the process and on the meanings given to social relations in order to understand existing policies and practices (Roberts and Simpson, 1999) and the decision-making behind these. The adoption of a qualitative approach helped to go beyond the initial conceptions and study of 'which events led to which consequences and derive explanation' (Miles and Huberman 1994). A case study strategy was employed to examine and analyse the development processes that took place in the Varna-Balchik destination on Bulgaria's Black Sea Coast. Research data was collected using a multi-method research approach with a combination of secondary data and primary data gathered using qualitative research techniques including a series of stakeholder interviews. This study involved 38 semi-structured in-depth interviews with 24 research participants, 20 informal conversations with 'gatekeepers' and a large number of conversations with local people. The in-depth interviews were conducted with decision-makers from stakeholders' groups at a local, regional and national level, who were involved in tourism development at some time over the period studied. The primary data was analysed using a *Framework* thematic analysis.

#### 4. Research Findings and Discussion

Overall, the meanings of *sustainable tourism development* were socially constructed and varied over time and across (and even within) the different stakeholder groups. The study revealed distinctive stages in the process of adopting the principles of sustainability. Throughout most of the 1990s, *tourism development* was perceived by the study participants as dominated by the transformation of property relations and the establishment of a regulatory framework. In contrast, post-2000 public policy documents present *tourism development* as committed to sustainability and diversification. However, primary and secondary data analysis showed that policies and actions which aimed at achieving sustainability through diversifying the tourist product and environmental upgrading were not supported by an effective enforcement mechanisms or consistent financing. In the context of lenient enforcement and control frameworks, most tourist businesses pursued policies for expanding their facilities, resulting in the urbanisation of some coastal resorts and a ribbon-type development of the villa-zones along the coast.

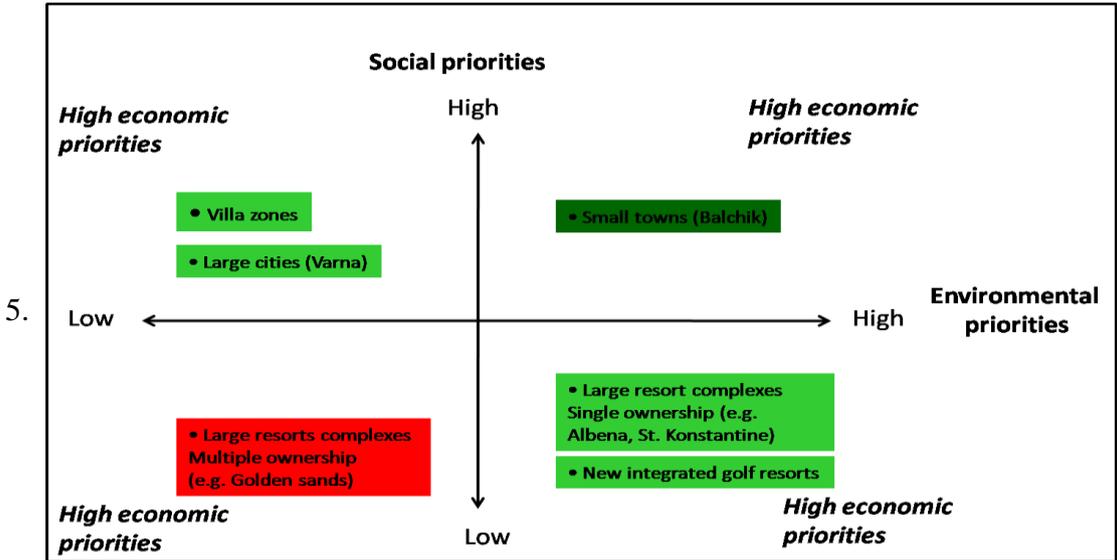
The research data suggested that in the destination studied local empowerment had a central role in determining the scale and scope of tourism development and the implementation of the principles of sustainability. This reflects the increasing recognition given to the roles played by local communities in the planning and development processes (Roberts and Simpson 1999). Community participation has been a widely-accepted criterion of sustainable tourism in the transition CEE countries (Hall 2000, 2003). The local authorities had an important role in tourism development on their territory as they had almost unrestricted power in decision-making in regard to physical development of tourist facilities and the spatial spread of tourist superstructure and infrastructure. However, the transition and post-transition processes placed priority on the economic and political aspects over environmental considerations. As one of the interviewees put it, the local authorities "followed the investors to such an extent that they had destroyed their own territories" (PS6). This was further enabled by the legislation which only empowered the head of the local administration and the political tiers they were representing, instead of empowering the community, through introducing different levels of local decision-making and encouraging the establishment of tourist councils locally. This

finding is consistent with Burns’s (2004) concern about enforcing local empowerment in an administrative way by means of the legislation framework.

The data analysis revealed that budget cuts crippled local policies aiming to improve the environment and stimulate the pursuit of economic growth at any cost through real estate and tourism development. This is consistent with Hall’s (2000) and Andriotis’s (2006) findings that many countries have decentralised powers and responsibilities, including those for environmental management, but often without providing adequate support in terms of financial provision. This research suggested that many of the processes that determined tourism development on Bulgaria’s North Black Sea coast were not only common to all transition economies, but were observed in other mature South European coastal destinations and the trade-offs were made at the expense of the environmental and social concerns. It also showed that the issues of sustainability have been taken seriously only when negative impacts from tourism development threaten the competitiveness of the large tourist businesses.

At the specific (embedded) level, the ‘development model’ of the destination studied comprised three distinguishable trajectories of development each one reflecting a different type of spatial and time-span: (a) the transformation of the former integrated seaside resort, (b) development of ‘new-generation’ integrated golf resorts, and the transformation of the villa zones. The model in Fig 1 shows that in the destination studied, small coastal towns were most successful at balancing the economic, social and environmental aspects of development. Large cities and villa zones while high on economic and social priorities failed to address environmental issues and, in fact, exacerbated old conflicts over the use of natural resources. At the other end, traditional purpose-built seaside resorts and new integrated golf resorts which had a majority ownership, were high on environmental issues and moderate on the economic growth issues, however, in practice they scored relatively low on the social priorities in spite of the aspirations of their owners. The reason for such a situation is embedded in the model of integrated resorts and not so much in the policies of the owner company. Lastly, very high on the economic growth and low on both environmental and social aspects came the (only) large purpose-built resort complex which had a multiple-ownership structure.

Figure 1. Overall sustainability of Bulgaria’s North Black Sea coast in term of the balance achieved of economic, social and environmental priorities in policies and



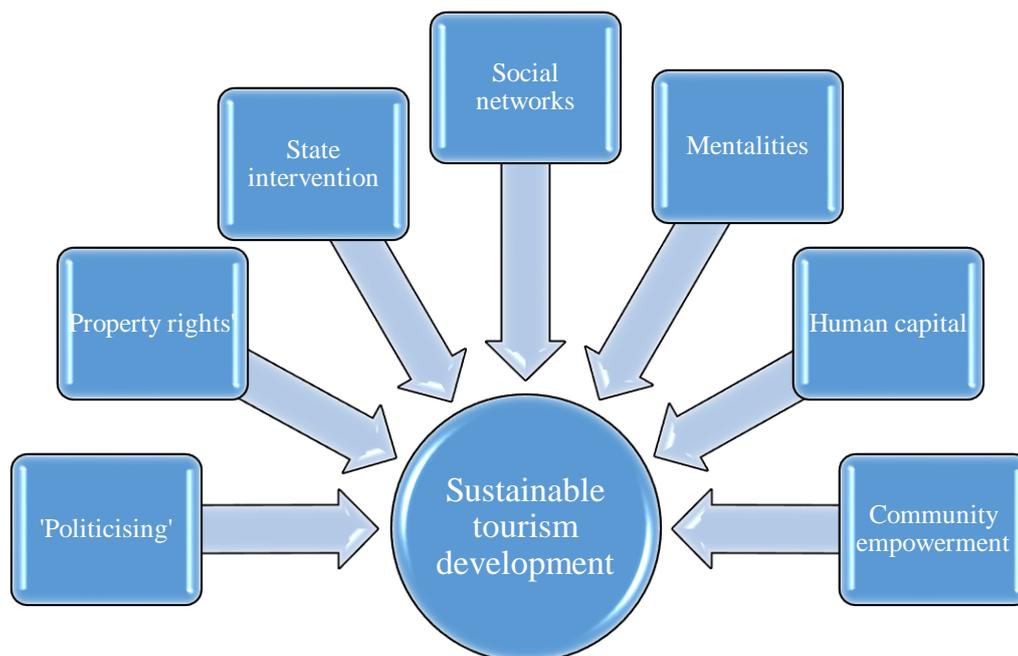
## ion and Implications

The research findings demonstrate that sustainability does not fit well into the rapidly changing transition contexts. In spite of the increasing empowerment of the local communities and their attempts to achieve balanced development by implementing integrated and long-term planning, the primary data reveal increasing concerns over the ineffectiveness of policy-making, the increasing urbanisation of the coastal strip and the competitiveness of Bulgaria's North Black Sea coast tourism offer.

The transformation and further development of the destination studied was determined by the interplay between *continuity* (persisting legacies of the post-socialist period) and *change* (the forces of transition). The transition as a societal and political context of tourism development and its local manifestations influenced the tourism development trajectories through the interplay of several factors and many of these were observed in other, non-transition contexts (see Bianchi 2004 and Baidal 2004 on Spain, and Andriotis 2001, 2006 on Greece). None of these factors on their own were unique for the specific destination or the 'transition' context. It is rather the way(s) in which these factors were interwoven in a path-dependent path-creative way and taking into account the 'hard' and the 'soft' elements of the socio-economic system (Tomer 2002) that could provide an explanation to *why things happened in the way they did*.

An analytical framework (see Fig.2) was developed based on the research findings to explain the specific development pathways observable in the destination under study. The framework takes into account the political (*politicising*), psychological (*mentalities*), institutional dimensions of transition (*property rights, social networks and local empowerment*), the role of the state (*reduced state intervention*), and the individual (*human capital*). Some of these themes (*politicising* and *mentalities* in particular) are largely absent from previous research on tourism in transition and from the wider tourism studies.

Fig. 2 Factors determining the implementation of the principles of sustainability



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