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Navigating sustainability: Enhancing coastal and marine tourism through green skills, co-creation, and multi-stakeholder engagement

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Abstract

Purpose – Coastal and marine tourism, consolidated by national and local governments' aspirations to improve the vitality of the economy by developing the tourism sector, is considered one of the key contributors to the EU's blue growth. The challenge remains how to do this without compromising the sensitive nature and needs of local communities for environmental, social, economic and cultural sustainability. The aim of this research is to understand how to enhance sustainable coastal and marine tourism from the perspectives of green skills, value co-creation and multi-stakeholder engagement. **Methodology** – The applied methodology is mixed methods, including qualitative and quantitative approaches. **Findings** – The findings highlight the need to support stakeholders' capabilities, such as green skills, to be able to cooperate and engage in co-creating sustainable tourism with other stakeholders. Our case studies highlight the need for skills development at different levels to empower stakeholders to change their behaviour, engage in co-creation and acknowledge new technologies that support the transformation to sustainable tourism. **Implications** – Our study highlights the value of co-creation as a theoretical perspective in studying sustainable tourism, confirms the previous theoretical claim of a holistic, sustainable development view in coastal tourism and provides insights for its management.

Keywords: coastal and marine tourism, sustainability, green skills, co-creation, multi-stakeholder perspective

JEL classification: Z32, Q56

Navigacija održivosti: Unapređenje priobalnog i pomorskog turizma kroz zelene veštine, ko-kreiranje i angažovanje različitih zainteresovanih strana

Sažetak

Svrha – Priobalni i primorski turizam, konsolidovan aspiracijama nacionalnih i lokalnih vlada da unaprede vitalnost privrede razvojem turističkog sektora, smatra se jednim od ključnih faktora koji doprinose plavom rastu EU. Ostaje izazov kako navedeno sprovesti bez

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ugrožavanja osjetljive prirode i potreba lokalnih zajednica za ekološkom, socijalnom, ekonomskom i kulturnom održivošću. Cilj ovog istraživanja je da se razume kako unaprediti održivi priobalni i primorski turizam iz perspektive zelenih vještina, zajedničkog stvaranja vrednosti i angažovanja više zainteresovanih strana. **Metodologija** – Primijenjena metodologija je kombinovana metoda, uključujući kvalitativni i kvantitativni pristup. **Rezultati** – Rezultati naglašavaju potrebu da se podrže sposobnosti zainteresovanih strana, kao što su zelene vještine, kako bi mogli da sarađuju i učestvuju u zajedničkom stvaranju održivog turizma sa drugim zainteresovanim stranama. Naše studije slučaja naglašavaju potrebu za razvojem vještina na različitim nivoima kako bi se zainteresovane strane osnažile da promene svoje ponašanje, učestvuju u zajedničkom stvaranju vrednosti i priznaju nove tehnologije koje podržavaju transformaciju ka održivom turizmu. **Implikacije** – Ova studija naglašava značaj zajedničkog stvaranja vrednosti kao teorijske perspektive u proučavanju održivog turizma čime potvrđuje prethodnu teorijsku tvrdnju o holističkom, održivom pogledu na razvoj priobalnog turizma i pruža uvid u njegovo upravljanje.

Ključne reči: priobalni i primorski turizam, održivost, zelene vještine, ko-kreiranje, perspektiva više zainteresovanih strana

JEL klasifikacija: Z32, Q56

1. Introduction

Coastal and marine tourism is one of the fastest-growing segments of the tourism industry, accounting for approximately 50% of all global tourism (Northrop et al., 2022; Renfors, 2021). The European Union (EU) has recognised coastal and marine tourism as a crucial component of its blue growth strategies (ECORYS, 2018; European Commission, 2019), being the largest and fastest-growing sector within the blue economy in terms of gross value added and employment (European Commission, 2022b). The nature of coastal and sea areas is sensitive, and these areas can easily be exposed to pollution, as several researchers have noted. This can have long-term negative consequences (Stewart & Draper, 2007). On the one hand, tourism benefits from ecosystem services, such as clean water and beautiful landscapes that nature provides, but on the other hand, using these services can also harm nature. In the same way, tourism development may change the traditional ways of life and livelihoods of local people by restricting their access to and use of shore areas and making their economy highly dependent on tourism, for example (Leposa, 2020). A recent study by Fernández-Macho et al. (2024) provides fresh insights into how tourism affects European coasts. Among other destinations, they identified the western coast of Finland, Åland and Varsinais-Suomi as having great potential for development because of their high attractiveness to tourists, despite their somewhat underdeveloped tourism sectors. Finland has taken the development of sustainable tourism as one of its priorities with the strategic aim of doubling its tourism exports by the year 2028 while ensuring its sustainable growth (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, 2020). These aims impact Finnish coastal and marine tourism, where a systemic view is needed to develop the green skills of local stakeholders, for example (Renfors, 2024).

The current paper further elaborates the ideas presented at the 31st Nordic Symposium on Tourism and Hospitality Research in a session chaired by the Susberg research group. We emphasise that the development of sustainable coastal and marine tourism requires the enhancement of green skills, co-creation practices and multi-stakeholder engagement to establish “a balance between the economic, environmental, and societal” (Wang et al., 2016, p. 652) and cultural dimensions (Duxbury, 2021; Soini & Birkeland, 2014) of sustainable tourism. The local stakeholders’ perspective holds significant importance using not only a

collaborative (Stewart & Draper, 2007) but also a co-creative approach (Font et al., 2023; Kang, 2020; Kastenholz & Gronau, 2022; Rinaldi et al., 2022). This approach could foster the development of a holistic coastal and marine tourism ecosystem, enabling the identification and understanding of potential conflicts and growth (Dimitrovski et al., 2021), which is crucial for enabling tourism destinations to move towards a sustainable future (Hoarau-Heemstra et al., 2023).

In this paper, we focus on the development of two coastal destinations in Finland, the Turku and Pori areas. Our main research question concerns how to enhance sustainable coastal and marine tourism from the perspectives of green skills, value co-creation and multi-stakeholder engagement. These themes are discussed in the following chapter of the Literature review. The cases of creating a sustainable (and smart) coastal city (Turku) and developing a novel cruise destination (Pori) are examined from the perspective of the overall need to discuss green skills, co-creation of value and multi-stakeholder engagement for sustainable tourism as critical tools. We first present the literature review on these topics, then follows the methodology section that presents how we conducted the two empirical case studies. The results and discussion section draws upon the analysis of the case studies, which are then further elaborated upon and summarised in the conclusion section.

2. Literature review

2.1. Green skills in coastal and marine tourism

Coastal and marine zones are critical areas for economic activity and recreation, making the integration of green skills within the tourism sector of these areas extremely important (European Commission, 2022a). Coastal and marine tourism requires specialised green skills related not only to minimising environmental impact but also to ensuring the sustainability of marine ecosystems and coastal communities. Furthermore, with climate change leading to rising sea levels and increasing threats to coastal and marine environments, tourism professionals equipped with green skills can play a leading role in adaptive and mitigation strategies (Cedefop, 2020).

The transition to a more sustainable and green economy is set to influence the requirements for skills significantly, as highlighted by Cedefop (2012). Structural changes in the economy will inevitably surge demand for specific occupations while causing a decline for others. At the same time, the evolution of new economic activities could lead to new occupations, which will require innovative skill profiles and adaptations of qualification and training frameworks to cater to these emerging needs. Furthermore, greening induces changes in numerous existing occupations and sectors, which necessitate modifications to existing job tasks, prompting a reevaluation and adjustment of the current training and qualification structures relevant to those occupations (Renfors, 2024). For example, an essential gap in green skills training for protected area specialists has already been discovered in the tourism industry (Hermans et al., 2019). This study highlights the need to use effective tools to assess the impact of tourism on the environment and economy and increase knowledge about various initiatives and groups working towards sustainable tourism in protected areas.

Green skills may include resource efficiency, climate change and transition to a low-carbon economy, biodiversity conservation, sustainability communication skills towards a green economy, and the encouragement of customers to be more responsible. Additionally, environmental management skills are necessary to manage companies' environmental impacts by planning, operating, monitoring, and improving their actions (Renfors, 2024).

Despite its known importance, education on green skills for coastal and marine tourism in higher EU educational institutions faces myriad challenges. Existing curricula may lean heavily towards traditional maritime operations or broad tourism management, sometimes overlooking specific sustainability concerns related to coastal regions (Renfors et al., 2023). Since maritime and coastal tourism often overlap with other activities, such as fisheries, transport, and marine conservation, the education system must ensure that green skills incorporate interdisciplinary knowledge that balances all these facets. Furthermore, the utilisation of green skills at coastal tourism destinations promotes cooperation among different groups involved, such as governments, businesses, non-profit organisations, and the local community (Dimitrovski et al. 2021; Hoarau-Heemstra et al., 2023). By working together, these parties can devise and execute well-rounded plans for sustainable tourism that encompass environmental, societal, and economic goals. This method of developing tourism aligns with the idea of creating value together, as it utilises each stakeholder's individual strengths and resources to attain shared advantages and lasting results. In the following subchapters, we discuss in more detail how to co-create value for sustainable coastal and marine tourism.

2.2. Co-creating value for sustainable tourism

Co-creation is essential for moving towards sustainable futures in various sectors (Arnold, 2017; Brandsen et al., 2018; Hakio & Mattelmäki, 2019; Leino & Puumala, 2021) because of the complexity of sustainability challenges, which cannot be addressed by acting alone (Rinaldi et al., 2022). In the tourism sector, there is an increasing need for actors to start collaborating more intensively (Eckhardt et.al, 2021; Sulyok et al., 2022) to reach the goals of sustainable tourism (Font et al., 2023; Kastenholz & Gronau, 2022; Rinaldi et al., 2022). The previous literature, which adopted a historical perspective on the concept of sustainable tourism, emphasises that sustainable tourism has evolved through stages and was initially seen as an alternative to mass tourism but later shifted towards making mass tourism more sustainable (Sharpley, 2020). Currently, in the context of cities, the New Urban Agenda as an accelerator for the Sustainable Development Goals (The New Urban Agenda, 2020) or the European Union's mission for Climate Neutral and Smart Cities will also highlight the development of the tourism sector by emphasising, for example, the promotion of local culture and products (Northrop et al., 2022). However, it has been indicated that tourists themselves, whether in the cruise sector (Kang, 2020) or more generally, can become co-creators of their tourism experience, where emerging technologies provide new avenues. This kind of empowerment of consumers is crucial for striving for businesses (Neuhofer, 2016), as consumers' participation in designing services contributes to meeting the expectations of service users (Leino & Puumala, 2021). Therefore, digitalisation and smart tourism have been recognised as potentially causing fundamental changes in tourism. However, the process of value creation, as well as to whom value is created, has remained unclear (Liburd et al., 2017; see also Saarijärvi et al., 2013). Value should be understood in terms of environmental, social, and cultural value in addition to economic value, and the question of whom value is created for should also be considered. However, even developments in ecotourism, tourism in marine protected areas and community-based tourism have been found to face difficulties addressing the challenges of social and environmental sustainability (Leposa, 2020). Understanding the positions and needs of crucial stakeholders in the tourism industry and constructing a shared understanding of these among the actors involved in value co-creation is challenging. As the skills and knowledge of several actors in the value creation process affect how value is created (Saarijärvi et al., 2013), their knowledge of all dimensions of sustainability plays an important role (see also Renfors, 2021).

The current paper draws from the approach of [Liburd et al. \(2017; 2022\)](#), who view tourists not as end-users but as crucial actors with whom smart and sustainable tourism should be co-designed. This approach is in line with the latest critiques on connecting sustainable tourism with smart cities with the top-down understanding of smart cities as sustainable tourist destinations that do not embrace enough “social participation mechanisms” ([Ivars-Baidal et al., 2023, p. 1568](#)). The shared premise for “the strategic role of co-creation for competitive performance, stressing a management and marketing approach” ([Campos et al., 2018, p. 371–386](#)) is essential. Simultaneously, it is crucial to consider that sustainability is seen as a factor for increasing the competitiveness ([Cimbaljević et al., 2023](#)) of various actors in the tourism sector, with multi-stakeholder cooperation elaborated upon in the next part of the literature review.

2.3. A multi-stakeholder perspective on the sustainable development of a coastal destination

In a recent study, [Kulkov et al. \(2023\)](#) reviewed the sustainable development of coastal areas, especially from the business perspective, by organising research in areas related to regional management, social responsibility and education in sustainable behaviour. The multi-stakeholder perspective on the sustainable development of a coastal destination means that the actors have a common vision of what sustainable development is like and what kind of future it leads to. The cooperation between sectors and conflict resolution enable the sustainable growth of coastal regions ([de Andres Gonzalez et al., 2018](#)). [Barbier et al. \(2011\)](#) call for improved institutional and legal frameworks for managing, controlling, and regulating economic activities that are destructive to coastal and marine ecosystems. Concerning cruise tourism, [James et al. \(2020\)](#) call for “intergovernmental agreements to address regulatory issues and coordination and collaboration between destinations” (p. 1425). [Dimitrovski et al. \(2021\)](#) studied stakeholders’ holistic view of the sustainable development of cross-border coastal areas in the Baltic Sea (Finland and Estonia) by using mixed methods.

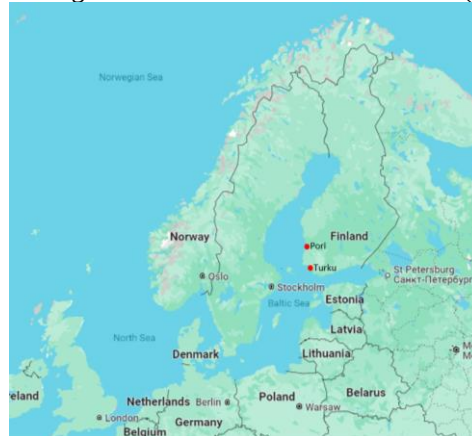
Regarding the key areas for future studies of sustainability in coastal tourism, [Kulkov et al. \(2023\)](#) called for more research on the basis of cooperation between stakeholders, what encourages and motivates them in sustainable development, and how the tourism industry survives and adapts to the challenges brought about by a global pandemic, such as COVID-19. For example, cruise tourism, as a part of coastal and marine tourism, experienced total stagnation caused by COVID-19 in 2020-21. Previously, the industry had grown exponentially over two decades. The COVID-19 pandemic has induced considerable financial losses, a risk of liquidity, and a reduction in the workforce ([Radić et al., 2020](#)). Despite this turmoil, the latest report by the Cruise Line International Association ([CLIA, 2021](#)) shared cautious optimism, arguing that “58% of international vacationers, who have never cruised, would likely to cruise in the next few years”. The sustainability of cruise tourism has recently received attention; for example both [CLIA \(2018, 2020\)](#) and the World Tourism Organisation [UNWTO \(2018\)](#) have signalled a need for the development of cruise tourism practices and processes. Sustainable development is especially important when a new port of call is introduced to cruise passengers and operators. Both parties are well aware of the possible negative effects of cruise tourism on destinations ([Weeden & Dowling, 2016](#)). In a paper presented at the Susberg research group’s chaired session (published in [James et al., 2023](#)), James and Halkier presented how the key actors of a cruise ecosystem implement a strategy path in their efforts to develop cruise tourism to be more sustainable. The researchers emphasised the need for a careful analysis and understanding of the future economic and social effects of these actions. By examining the economic and political goals of stakeholders and the mechanisms that shape their views on the future of Greenlandic

cruise tourism, [James et al. \(2023\)](#) contribute to discussions about destination development path dynamics. Within a multi-stakeholder approach, they avoid dichotomous path development as the only means of conceptualisation.

3. Methodology

The research question of how to enhance sustainable coastal and marine tourism from the perspectives of green skills, value co-creation and multi-stakeholder engagement is approached through case study research ([Yin, 2003; 2009](#)) by focusing on the development of two Finnish coastal destinations, Turku and Pori (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Map showing the locations of the two case cities (marked with red)



Source: Google maps with authors' adding

Case 1 Turku

The analysis of the case of Turku draws from the research project Smart Port City funded by the City of Turku (Turku Urban Research Programme 2022-2025). Turku provides an interesting case because in the spring of 2022, this city was selected as one of the 100 frontrunner cities in Europe to become climate neutral by the end of the decade. This European Union's mission for Climate Neutral and Smart Cities programme supports Turku in the climate work outlined in the Turku Climate Plan ([Turku Climate Plan 2029](#)). In the plan, the city adheres to sustainable development and mitigates climate change in all its operations and urban development. As the city is located in Southwest Finland and surrounded by an archipelago of more than 22 000 islands ([Siivonen, 2018](#)), the city wants to connect its centre with the unique archipelago that is seen as having great potential for tourism. The study conducted in the Smart Port City project concentrates mainly on the area of Linnanniemi - starting from Turku Castle and reaching the harbour. The development of the area has just started, and the construction of a new terminal building will be realised by 2027. This will free land for urban development, including temporary art-related activities.

The research material used in the current paper consist of ten semistructured interviews carried out with the key persons at the city of Turku (7), the port of Turku (2) and the local DMO (1). The interviews (between 45 and 75 minutes in length) were recorded, transcribed and thematically analysed ([Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2016; Creswell & Creswell Báez, 2021](#)) in NVivo. The interviews covered several themes, such as the development of the port and Linnanniemi area, digitalisation, data collection, management and sharing, smart cities,

and tourism. The questions were to some extent modified according to the knowledge area of the interviewees. In the current paper, we concentrate mainly on the theme of tourism, where the aim was to understand how the transformation of the Linnanniemi area supports tourism in Turku and how the role of tourists is seen in the process of supporting the city of Turku to become smart and sustainable.

Case 2 Pori

The second case city, Pori, is situated on the west coast of Finland. It was a new port in a British cruise company's itinerary, where Pori was one of the cruise destinations. The cruise ship visited Pori during one day in June 2016, when the quantitative data were gathered (180 completed surveys from 400 cruise passengers, Lemmetyinen et al., forthcoming). As noted by [Weeden and Dowling \(2016\)](#), in the case of a novel cruise destination, caring for sustainability is especially important for both parties involved in cruise tourism, passengers and operators, both of whom are well aware of the negative effects of cruise tourism. For a destination management organisation, a survey of cruise tourists provides valuable information about cruise travellers' relationships with sustainability: first, the motives of cruise passengers to choose the city as the stopover for their cruise and, second and more importantly, how they perceive their visit from the perspective of sustainability. The case study of Pori largely adopts the mixed-method approach and data triangulation to project the behavioural continuity of the senior cruise tourism market. The quantitative survey was followed by a qualitative part in 2020 with 30 qualitative interviews among the representatives of the creative tourism ecosystem to shed light on the stakeholders' views on how to develop the destination in a sustainable and inclusive way. The overall theme in the interviews was the informants' vision of the destination as sustainable and inclusive. The length of the interviews was approximately 60 minutes. The interviews conducted in Finnish were first transcribed and then translated to English since they were part of an international research project.

4. Results and discussion

Case 1 Turku

The interviews conducted in the context of Turku indicate different approaches for understanding future developments related to the transformation of the Linnanniemi area. The changes of Linnanniemi aim to connect the city centre to "one of the biggest archipelagos in the world" ([Linnanniemen yleissuunnitelma](#), p. 31) by opening more riverbanks for public use and creating green, attractive public spaces for locals and visitors. The local DMO, Visit Turku Archipelago, has initiated changes in its organisation to increase Turku's competitiveness as a tourist destination. Collaboration with the two neighbouring cities, Naantali and Pargas, is essential for this change. Therefore, the view is broad when discussing the development of the Linnanniemi area and its potential for becoming attractive to tourists. "...all these cultural developments and investments which Turku is doing, are wonderful. We definitely need that, but it's not gonna change the big picture unless we are working on that from the [destination] image perspective now already." (DMO).

The city representatives emphasise the construction of Linnanniemi's identity and the involvement of city inhabitants in contributing to the development of the area. The local cultural heritage, Turku Castle, has a central role in the construction of Linnanniemi's identity and in the development of its waterfront. In addition, the local city inhabitants are

seen as key drivers for making the area attractive to tourists. *“I go back to this identity; it’s the key thing. If there is a good spirit in the area, I think that’s the main thing that will attract people, because where the local people want to be tourists want to be, I think that’s the main thing.”* (City).

Emphasising the role of **the local context and its continuity** in a changing waterfront area in the city, as well as focusing on **local ways of life**, supports the main goals of sustainable tourism and principles of cultural sustainability (see also Northrop et al., 2022; Soini & Birkeland, 2014). However, establishing a shared understanding of the role of tourists, who could become part of shaping the value of their tourism experience, as indicated in the literature section of the current paper, is more complex on the basis of our analysis.

Our interviewees recognised tourists’ needs for acquiring information about services and destinations when planning a trip or while travelling and thus considered tourists mainly as **users of information and services**, as illustrated in a quotation by the city: *“...that also attracts people to the area, as we get more services into the area and the artists are a big part of that livelihood in the areas that you have. Different kinds of happenings in the area.”* The port brought up tourists’ needs to acquire information and find transportation to or from the port and to consume their services related to boarding: *“There has been very initial discussion about providing users some sort of digital port map of the port area [showing them] how to navigate in it. Also, [there were] some very early discussions on interactive information screens.”* Although these aspects are essential parts of tourist experiences, the more active role of tourists, becoming co-creators, was not perceived by the port. This may imply that the port considers shipping companies their primary customers and thus focuses its attention on them.

To some extent, tourists’ role as **a source of information** that can be used in decision making, developing services or attracting investments was also recognised. The DMO was actively developing its practices of acquiring and analysing data about the current situation of tourism, as well as sharing information they had gained with the industry. Additionally, the city recognised the possibilities that new technology and digitalisation offer for understanding tourists’ behaviour as consumers (e.g., big data). It was regarded as useful, although not yet properly utilised, as recognised by the DMO: *“Visa collects a huge amount of consumer data, and we can basically get quite an understanding of the consumer behaviour through that.”* Larger and more detailed data could support the city’s decision making regarding investments and service development. However, despite the opportunities provided by new technologies for acquiring tourism data, our study indicates that DMOs and especially small-scale service providers have limited resources and competences for analysing and utilising such data. This limitation has also been recognised as a barrier to smart tourism in earlier studies (Liburd et al., 2017).

The DMO and the city recognised the opportunity to **engage tourists in co-creation**. For example, tourists’ engagement in developing tourism services was seen as highly potential and desirable by the DMO, which recognised opportunities provided by the technology for service design: *“there are so many methods in the service design. So, I mean it’s the key element to success in the future...whether it’s inhabitants or whether it’s visitors. I think we definitely need to get them to join... There are such powerful... I would say engagement tools through [which] people can be part of the process.”* Interestingly, the tourists’ ability to spread the word about the city as a destination and to contribute to a desired international atmosphere in the city were recognised by the city, although concrete ways to do this, or how to support it digitally, were not brought up. In our data, sustainability was conceived in terms of planning and building a city with more green areas and smart mobility solutions that contribute to an enjoyable atmosphere for city residents and visitors and mitigating climate

change. In addition, the DMO speculated about the city's ability to attract more conscious travellers, indicating the responsibility and role of tourists in co-creating sustainable tourism. However, this type of tourism was seen likely to occur in the future and not to represent mainstream tourism. The future may also entail overtourism, a risk that was seen as something to be kept in mind. The local people's hesitant or suspicious attitudes towards tourists arriving in their communities were acknowledged by the DMO. This calls for engaging and giving voice to various stakeholders in developing tourism as well as acknowledging different conceptions of sustainable tourism. The DMO has taken actions to identify the stakeholders who should participate in the development. Orchestrating this is, however, challenging: the stakeholders vary from public organisations to associations and small businesses, which often lack resources, knowledge, and networking. On the bases of the data, there clearly exists a need for stakeholders to modify their mindset from competition to coopetition and collaboration. The same need was also observed by Björk (2023), who proposed that a more significant role should be given to the theory of marketing value co-creation in researching the development of destination interaction. He also saw the lack of cooperation and co-opetition as an obstacle to sustainability in coastal and marine tourism.

Moreover, technology could be utilised to facilitate the interaction between different stakeholders, offering opportunities for tourists to engage in co-creating their touristic experiences and participating in innovation processes (e.g., Neuhofer, 2016), as well as contributing to the development of the green skills of various stakeholders. However, in addition to harvesting the opportunities new technologies offer, reaching this in the context of Turku requires the coordinated collaboration of numerous stakeholders and a joint strategy; as one of our interviewees puts it: *"Everything starts from a common vision"*.

Case 2 Pori

With respect to the multi-stakeholder aspect in developing a sustainable cruise destination, this study contributes to the earlier literature by considering the key stakeholders' viewpoints both on the demand (cruise passengers, individuals) and the supply side (destination marketers, policymakers, organisations).

A survey exploring the motivational grounds of cruise passengers (individual)

In the survey among the cruise passengers, the motivational grounds of the cruise passengers were identified with survey questions (measured on a Likert scale ranging from 1-7) measuring their intrinsic motivation for cruising, for example, asking whether the reason was to achieve a peace of mind or to completely escape from daily routines. More than half of the cruise passengers felt that getting away from their everyday life was the most important reason for taking a cruise. Another important reason motivating other passengers was to learn something new from the places where the cruise ship was visiting and to obtain new knowledge. A more comprehensive report on the survey findings will be published in a forthcoming article (Lemmettyinen et al., forthcoming). With respect to the passengers' environmental responsibility while cruising, the majority of them (53%) had a lower level of awareness of the negative impacts of cruise tourism on the environment, whereas nearly half of the passengers (47%) were characterised by less frequent cruise involvement, which might be interpreted from an environmentally conscious standpoint, with the aim of minimising the effect of cruise travel on the environment. The findings of the survey show that cruise passengers' norms and attitudes are valid aspects of understanding coastal and marine sustainability.

A qualitative interview completing the survey analysis (organisational)

These are the themes of sustainable development that appeared in the qualitative interviews with stakeholders: certified sustainable development, the importance of the coast and the archipelago and Pori as a city of events.

Certified sustainable development

Informant I19, representing the local DMO, said that responsibility in tourism has always been an important criterion for Finland, especially now that Visit Finland has launched a new sustainable development programme called *Sustainable Travel of Finland*. Satakunta, the province whose capital is Pori, has also joined that program, and Visit Pori has encouraged local businesses to follow its principles to attain a sustainability certificate. Informant I19: *“This is the strength of Finland, and this will be our strength because it has been carried out so well. So, let’s say that this COVID-19 might have made us become a part of this sustainable travel in Finland process sooner than planned.”* However, tourism businesses, especially small ones, may lack the resources and knowledge needed for developing their sustainability to match the accreditation requirements. Visit Finland has recognised this and offers training programs for businesses to support their knowledge and skills development (see also [Renfors, 2021](#)).

The importance of the coast and the archipelago

In the interviews with the stakeholders, Informant I19, representing the local destination marketing organisation, spoke of the importance of the coast and the archipelago and saw Yyteri beach as a top sustainable attraction of the whole province: *“So we go with our strengths, as Yyteri beach for example as a nature-based sustainable attraction..., and then ...[]...we have our cultural services, which include events and other cultural services. And these of course, these exact things you can’t find anywhere else”*. Most of the beach areas in Yyteri are protected and belong to the Natura 2000 network. Moreover, Yyteri is one of Finland’s most popular beaches, which is hoped to increase its number of visitors. This is one example of a site where nature protection and development as a tourist attraction need careful balancing. In Yyteri, visitors are offered information about fragile nature and proper ways to behave.

Informant I10, the leader of the cultural sector in Pori, praises Reposaaari *“as its own, idyllic village in the archipelago”* as a sustainable coastal attraction, whereas Informant I1 represents a natural history museum called Luontotalo Arkki (in English The Ark Nature Centre), which conserves, produces and documents natural history material by conveying and communicating phenomena regarding nature and the environment to people and by producing many parallel programmes in the form of various lectures and expert events and excursions. As an example, informant I10 mentioned lighthouse excursions: *“Lighthouses are a fantastic cultural heritage because the environmental theme is strongly related to it, and they are popular destinations in local travel, coastal travel and sea travel”*.

Pori, the city of events

Informant I27 is an entrepreneur who founded a music festival several years ago. For reasons of anonymity we do not reveal the name of the festival. He sees Pori as a city of events, and this could also be taken into consideration when planning itineraries for coastal tourists: *“Pori is good as a city of events on a principled level. Pori Jazz here surely has favoured the city. Or, however, it’s one of the oldest festivals in Finland and has been here for so long,*

and it's an enormous deal, so a kind of event industry was generated around it. There are people here who understand the nature of the events". Many people from the cultural scene have moved there, professional amateurs and even professionals, and they have organised, through community labour, the Reposfääri festival, which, according to Informant I10, is *"one of the best summer events ever, ... somehow it has such a fantastic atmosphere that everyone is working just because they love it"*.

The results of the stakeholder interviews emphasise the importance of multi-stakeholder engagement and the importance of dialogue between stakeholders when managing the sustainable development of the Nordic coastal area and a new cruise destination. It is important to understand how cruise passengers' motivation towards sustainability issues is related to their loyal and pro-environmental behaviour towards the cruise industry (see also [Dimitrovski et al., 2021](#); [Han et al., 2018](#); [Lemmetyinen et al., 2016](#)).

Stakeholders, for example, local destination marketing organisations, were asked about their perceptions of whether COVID-19 had changed attitudes towards sustainable development in coastal areas. It seemed that in the era after the pandemic, the respondents saw that attitudes towards sustainability in tourism were becoming more positive. As one of the informants stated, it has always been important for Finland to follow the principles of sustainable and responsible development as a tourism country. Now that the national Visit Finland organisation launched the Sustainable Travel of Finland program, it was clear that the province of Satakunta, with Pori as its capital, would take part in the program ([Renfors, 2021](#)). Visit Pori encouraged enterprises in the tourism industry to join the program with the possibility of obtaining certificates of sustainability. *"After COVID-19, sustainability will be the new normal"* (Informant I19).

5. Conclusions

The development of coastal and marine tourism from the perspective of sustainability, considering its environmental, economic, social and cultural dimensions, is challenging but crucial for the enhancement of sustainable tourism. In this paper, we have concentrated on the importance of green skills, co-creation and multi-stakeholder approaches as ways to support the sustainability and viability of coastal and marine tourism, which respect the local way of life and do not harm the delicate balance of the ecosystem. Green skills are essential for ensuring that coastal and marine tourism remain viable and thrive without compromising the ecosystems that attract tourists. Addressing the challenges in imparting these skills necessitates innovative educational strategies, stronger industry–academia collaboration, and a deep-rooted commitment to sustainability ([Renfors et al., 2023](#)). [Renfors' study \(2024\)](#) summarised how "green skills in the tourism sector reflect systems thinking and require a holistic approach" (p. 12). This is in line with [Hoarau-Heemstra et al. \(2023\)](#), who stated that "tourism's impact ultimately depends on key stakeholders' willingness to collaborate to build a common envisioned future of sustainable [...] tourism" (p. 7). Green skills are needed to make all coastal tourism stakeholders aware of environmental sustainability and engage them in sustainable behaviour. The entire ecosystem of coastal destinations is interconnected with economic and social sustainability dimensions, which is why skills are required to understand these connections. As [Renfors \(2024, p. 12\)](#) concludes, green skills should be used to motivate and empower to change behaviours, and especially to make stakeholders actually do something to achieve this transition.

The results of the qualitative interviews among the organisational respondents in this study, again, follow [Dimitrovski et al. \(2021\)](#), emphasising pro-environmental behaviour from a multi-stakeholder perspective. Even though the interviews indicated that there has been a

paradigmatic change caused by COVID-19 into more sustainable coastal tourism, we need to be cautious about drawing conclusions too quickly. A couple of years after the pandemic, Patrick Brouder, one of the keynote speakers at the Nordic Symposium, referred to his own article (Brouder, 2020) *Matrix of potential evolutionary pathways towards tourism transformation* and asked, “While the COVID-19 crisis offered a once in a generation opportunity for a radical transformation of the tourism sector, the nagging question is where is this transformation today?” (Brouder, 2023, keynote speech at the Nordic Symposium).

Furthermore, digital transformation has a pivotal role in advancing sustainable tourism (e.g., Ivars-Baidal et al., 2023). Digitalisation and new technologies offer new opportunities for the collaboration of several stakeholders and value co-creation. Even though cities and tourism ecosystems are rapidly developing their smartness, in our case study, smartness has not yet materialised in the extensive collaboration of stakeholders, including for example, engaging tourists in service development. However, participating in value co-creation also depends on the knowledge and skills of the participants (Saarijärvi et al., 2013). To be able to contribute to the co-creation of sustainable tourism, stakeholders need to have a shared vision of the targets of the collaboration, technological and collaboration skills in addition to the focal green skills. On the one hand, tourists’ expectations and requirements for the sustainable practices of destinations and service providers are important for the development of sustainability; on the other hand, not all tourists can be regarded as sustainability conscious. For example, according to Case Study 2, more than half of the senior cruise tourists did not perceive the sustainability of the destination as their primary motive for visiting it. Nevertheless, when visiting, the cruise passengers were pleased with the sustainability of the destination. The cruise passengers were also ready to share their positive experiences with their relatives and friends and to revisit the city later. Hence, investigating cruise travellers’ relationships with sustainability results in useful information for those who are responsible for managing and leading the destination into a sustainable future.

Our case studies indicate a desire for growing numbers of tourists because of their positive impact on the economy. The possibility of over tourism was recognised, but only as a risk that may become true someday in the future. Our case areas are in a good position to develop sustainable tourism practices and ecosystems for mitigating the potential negative impacts of increasing tourism and preserving the fragile coastal and marine ecosystems that tourism depends on. Sustainable tourism needs to be co-created by different stakeholders, such as authorities, local governments, DMOs, service providers, and the tourists themselves, and digitalisation and new technologies are essential for attaining sustainable tourism to find a balance between the different dimensions of sustainability. However, the opportunities these offer can be seized only if the stakeholders possess the motivation, knowledge and skills needed.

The studies reported in this article are not without limitations. The case studies represent North European coastal ecosystems and communities with developed infrastructure, coordinated efforts of national and regional DMOs to enhance the sustainability of tourism, and no problems related to over tourism. Rather than offering generalisable knowledge, the qualitative case studies (Case 1 and the stakeholder sub study in Case 2) offer exemplary insight that can be used for theoretical generalisation. The informants in the quantitative study in Case 2 were relatively aged, European cruise tourists, whose attitudes and behaviour do not represent the entire cruise tourist population.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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