



THE 18<sup>TH</sup> EDITION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
EUROPEAN INTEGRATION  
REALITIES AND PERSPECTIVES

## Role of Tourism in a Green Economy

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**Abstract:** Recently, industrialization without considering environmental issues has led to the climate change crisis in the world. In this regard, green economic growth is essential for the future and life of next generation and in the long term, it will lead to sustainable development. One of the sectors that contributes to green economy is Tourism sector. The development of the path of “green tourism” to minimize impact on the environment, will create environmentally friendly leisure options, making responsible travel, saving money, making choices on energy-saving technologies with low impact on the environment. In this regard, it is of great importance to clarify that the relationship between tourism and green growth is conducive to promote the harmonious coexistence of tourism industry benefits and economic and environmental systems. The purpose of this paper is to explore the impacts of tourism on green economic growth through a descriptive analysis, as well as the advantages of “Green Economy” in tourism. One of the most important results achieved is that the transfer to a “green” economy would not only improve the environmental situation, but also will create a favorable image for tourism and increase the number of tourists, the employment potential and encourage socioeconomic growth.

**Keywords:** environmental issues; green tourism; economic growth

**JEL Classification:** O13; O44; Q01; Q56; Z32

### 1. Introduction

The recent advances in communication technology, transportation and facilitation in the movement of population have encouraged the tourism industry into one of the world’s largest industries. Its importance on the economic development it’s highlighted by its inclusion in the United Nations’ Sustainable Development (SDGs), as it is directly mentioned in 3 of the 17 goals. It is having a significant impact in the economy of many communities around the world because of its multiplicative effect by creating income, taxes and providing jobs even in other sectors, not only related to the touristic activity. According to UNWTO, in the years before the Covid-19 pandemic, tourism industry accounted for around 10% of global GDP.

On the other side, tourism can negatively impact the environmental quality by energy consumption, carbon content, Green House Gas emissions and higher demand for fuel that come as result of the increased number of visitors. In this regard, it has been criticized to have adverse environmental and social effects more than many other sectors. Nevertheless, well-managed tourism, as well as green tourism, which can have a positive impact on the environment through the use of environmentally friendly technologies, is a successful tool to combat environmental degradation.

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The key aim of green tourism is encouraging protection of the ecosystem by minimizing the environmental damage generated by traditional tourism and strengthening the cultural identification of citizens, as well as has helped foster environmental protection, history, and societies which are visited on tourist sites. A green tourism is eco-tourism because it protects money as earth's resources (Azam & Sarker, 2011).

This research will be carried out using a descriptive qualitative approach. The data used in this study comes from various previous studies that still have relevance to the tourism sector in green economy. The results showed that the transfer to a “green” economy would not only improve the environmental situation, but will also create a favorable image for tourism, increase the number of tourists, the employment potential and encourage socioeconomic growth.

## **2. Related Work**

In October 2008, UNEP proposed a “Green Economy”, as an economy that focuses on providing people's needs while highlighting its impact on the environment. It is considered as an economic activity low in carbon, does not rely on fossil fuels, saves natural resources, and, lastly, social justice. In this regard, it improves welfare and can eliminate the negative impacts of economic growth on the environment and scarcity of natural resources. Loiseau emphasized that the green economy is an economic concept with distinct implications than the economy since it prioritizes the future of natural resources, environmental welfare, and minimizing the risk associated with the use of natural resources. It is believed that green economic practice is an economic practice that stresses long-term planning since this economic practice can reduce poverty, carbon emissions, and ecosystem destruction (Marhaeni et al., 2023).

The research on the impact of tourism on the environment consist in three key viewpoints: the “environmental deterioration theory”, “environmental improvement theory”, and “non-linear relationship theory”. Most studies support the first view that the rapid development of tourism is at the cost of environmental pollution and ecological degradation; that is, the development of tourism resources and activities will cause problems such as water pollution, air pollution, and soil degradation and as regard it will affect the environment in tourist destinations. Some other studies support the second view, according to which the development of tourism can alleviate greenhouse gas emissions. Tian et al. investigated the impact of tourism development on carbon emissions in G20 economies from 1995 to 2015 and found that, for every 1% increase in tourism development, pollutant emissions would decrease by 0.05%, indicating that tourism development can be the driving force for reducing carbon emissions. Ahmad and Ma took Asian Tigers as case studies for exploring the role of tourism development in pollutant emissions and its impact mechanism, arguing that tourism development can curb carbon emissions by replacing high-emitting industries and promoting the use of renewable energy.

In addition to the above viewpoints, some scholars have concluded that tourism has a non-linear impact on environmental quality, mainly inspired by the environmental Kuznets curve, according to which the improvement of the level of tourism development, pollutant emissions will exhibit an inverted U-shaped curve. The study by Ozturk et al. showed that the EKC assumption between tourism income and the ecological footprint is more prevalent in upper-middle-income countries than in lower-middle-income and lower-income countries. Paramati et al. provided evidence for the EKC hypothesis between tourism and carbon emissions, arguing that the EKC hypothesis for tourism applies in both developed and developing economies. Lv and Xu examined the non-linear impact of tourism on the environment, arguing that, in the early stage of tourism development, tourism’s legal and regulatory systems are not

perfect and the relevant supporting policies and regulations are not standardized, leading to a sharp increase in pollution; however, when tourism develops to a certain stage, the laws, regulations, standards, and policies related to tourism are also becoming increasingly improved and well-managed, thereby reducing pollutant emissions.

Other studies support the idea that tourism development is beneficial to promoting green growth. In this regard, according to Marsiglio, tourism can stimulate emission reduction activities and economic growth incentives by developing a stylized dynamic economic model, positing that a well-planned tourism sector can be an important tool for promoting green growth in multiple developing countries. Pan et al. proposed an interactive framework between tourism and economic, social, cultural, and environmental sustainability, arguing that tourism can contribute to changes in the green economic system.

In this regard, the modern green economy concept emphasizes standard policies, such as how to assess the environment economically and impose sanctions on activities that are harmful and have the potential to damage the environment, as well as on how this concept can encourage economic actors to produce goods, trade and consume things that are environmentally friendly (D'amato & Korhonen, 2021). The income and jobs generated from the green economy are expected to motivate to carry out environmentally friendly activities (Fernandes et al., 2021).

### **3. Problem Statement**

The tourism sector is rapidly growing and as a result will become the world's largest source of greenhouse gas emissions (GHG). Its development can be assessed as a dual-edged weapon, since tourism is an important source of economic growth and as well a massive contributor to waste production and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Having said that, tourism sector affects the green economy through more sustainable practices, climate change mitigation and ecotourism. In this regard, it is of great importance to clarify the role of tourism on green economy in order to promote the harmonious coexistence of tourism industry benefits and economic and environmental systems.

### **4. Concept and Terms**

Tourism is one of the most important drivers of economic growth, but it is important to note that the 'success' of tourism destinations should be evaluated not only in terms of "arrivals" but also in terms of broader economic, social and environmental drivers, as well as its impacts. In this regard, its development must be in the "green economy" in order to increase the employment potential, socioeconomic growth, preservation of natural, cultural and architectural heritage as well as the use of natural resources will be provided renewability and sustainability of consumption. According to UNEP, a green economy can be thought of as one that is low carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive, where growth in income and employment should be driven by investments that reduce carbon emissions and pollution, enhance energy and resource efficiency, and prevent the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services.

There is growing recognition of the tourism sector potential contribution to the green economy through more sustainable practices, climate change mitigation and eco-tourism (Reddy and Wilkes 2015). Greening tourism involves policies and programmes that consider not only tourists' expectations for the responsible management of natural resources but also the needs of the communities that tourism schemes support or affect. Innovation and in particular green innovation have a fundamental role to play in improving sustainability and maximizing the potential environmental, social and cultural benefits of

tourism in the transition to a green economy. However, the tourism industry often faces such opportunities and challenges in a more immediate way, due to its often-direct dependence on the natural environment as an attraction.

## 5. Solution Approach - Toward a Greener, More Sustainable Future for Tourism

The need and value of conserving unique natural, social and cultural assets of destinations, motivates the private and public sectors to invest in sustainable tourism. Realising the importance of the natural resource, becomes more and more necessary to adopt measures in order to overcome obstacles to green growth and implement policies that improve environmental and economic outcomes from activity in natural resource sectors.

In this regard, it is of great importance to assess the greenhouse gas emissions generated by people during tourism, which is mainly carbon dioxide, in order to low-carbon tourism. In tourism activities, the carbon footprint can be calculated with the relevant tourism income or tourist consumption. Having said that, the main factors affecting carbon emissions in tourism activities are: tourist arrivals, tourism consumption levels, and energy consumption in tourism-related industries. The method used to calculate the tourism carbon footprint per capita is as follows:

$$TCF=Y \cdot C$$

$$TCF^*=TCF/N$$

where TCF is the tourism carbon footprint of the year, Y is the total revenue of the tourism industry for the year, and C is the carbon dioxide emission intensity of the tourism industry. TCF \* is the tourism carbon footprint per capita, and N is the total number of tourists for the years 2017 - 2022.

In this paper, C uses the world average tourism carbon emission intensity of 623.13kg/10<sup>3</sup>USD\$ (Huang & Tang, 2021). The data on the total revenue of the tourism industry for Albania on the years 2017 - 2022 are gathered from “Statista: Travel & Tourism Albania”. While the data on number of tourists are gathered on World Data.

**Table 2. Tourism Carbon Footprint Per Capita 2017 - 2022**

Year	Y (m \$)	C	TCF (kg)	N (m)	TFC*
2017	52.63	623.13kg/10 <sup>3</sup> \$	32,795,332	5.12	6.4
2018	55.97	623.13kg/10 <sup>3</sup> \$	34,876,586	5.93	5.88
2019	59.24	623.13kg/10 <sup>3</sup> \$	36,914,221	6.41	5.75
2020	22.17	623.13kg/10 <sup>3</sup> \$	13,814,792	2.66	5.19
2021	31.55	623.13kg/10 <sup>3</sup> \$	19,659,751	5.7	3.44

*Source: Author's calculations*

Based on the above results, it is noticed the increase in the tourism carbon footprint because of the increase in the number of tourists. Specially, between the years 2021 and 2022, the growth rate of tourists is 114%, meanwhile the growth rate of the tourism carbon footprint is 42%. For this reason, there is a need to encourage the investment in sustainable tourism due to the environmental benefits and opportunities, notably in the areas of:

- Energy – investment in energy-efficient features and services; likely carbon surcharges; technological advances with low-carbon technology; and government incentives.
- Water – Investments in water-saving systems, grey water reuse and rainwater collection and management systems can help reduce the volume of water consumption.

- Waste – Lower levels of waste generation improves financial return for private sector actors, while better management of that same waste creates opportunities for jobs, and enhances the attractiveness of destinations.
- Biodiversity – the natural resource is a base from which tourism sector benefits. Policies of mainstream tourism are likely to change towards more effective conservation of sensitive ecosystems. Conservation and restoration provide a highly profitable, low-cost investment for maintaining ecosystem services.

In the framework of investments, innovation has an important role to play and needs to provide new ways of production and consumption in order to generate new sources of growth that better reflect the full value of economic activity to society. Without innovation, it will be very difficult and costly to address major environmental issues and, as such, innovation plays a crucial role in enabling green and growth to go hand. One of the advantages of innovation is that the gains of one country do not come at the cost of another. Importantly for tourism, and other predominantly service oriented sectors, innovation to improve environmental performance is not only about new technologies. Non-technological innovation will play an increasingly important role in the transition to a green economy such as changes to marketing and organisational methods, and also innovation in social and institutional structures.

To make the transition to a green economy, specific conditions will be required consisting of the backdrop of national regulations, policies, subsidies and incentives, and international market and legal infrastructure and trade and aid protocols.

In this regard, the key areas that tourism policies should focus will include:

- **Decarbonisation:** Understanding the GHG emissions profile of tourism helps governments decide where and how to invest into innovation to maximise the decarbonisation impact. In this regard should be advanced sustainable production and consumption by increasing energy efficiency, promoting circular economy models, and reducing tourism's greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), to reach net-zero by 2050. Tangible evidence of the carbon implications of different market segments or tourism activities supports businesses to design low carbon portfolios and invest in energy management. Policy instruments, such as carbon taxes, emission standards for vehicles, fuel mandates, and building standards often play a part in wider economic decarbonisation strategies, including in the tourism sector;
- **Climate change adaptation:** Climate risk is a concern, both in terms of tourism's substantial contribution to greenhouse gas emissions, and its exposure to multiple and often cumulative climate impacts (Scott et al., 2019). Reliably estimating tourism's carbon footprint is challenging, but recent estimates range from 8% to 11% of global emissions (WTTC and UNEP, 2021). Climate resilience needs to consider the whole value chain, with the links between tourism and primary industries such as agriculture and forestry particularly important. Fostering links between them, can build resilience for both sectors. In this framework, might be aimed to improve the life of agricultural communities through the identification of market opportunities in the tourism sector for sustainable agriculture value chains adapted to climate change;
- **Ecosystem restoration:** Tourism contributes to ecological decline in multiple ways, while natural landscapes and biodiversity are also drivers and assets for tourism. Addressing the negative impacts of tourism's resource consumption requires a transition towards the circular economy, in which economic activities regenerate human and natural capital (UNEP and World Bank, 2021). These changes can help to minimise wastage, reduce emissions, and diminish economic leakages in tourism whilst creating new

business opportunities and promoting shorter, local supply chains. Improving the responsible use of natural capital is a core aspect of more sustainable tourism models. Governments can support the alliance between tourism and conservation by implementing mechanisms targeted at different parts of the value chain, initiatives to better integrate environmental considerations into tourism curricula and training, introduce visitor management systems, and deployments of smart technology to optimise visitor flows;

- **Inclusiveness:** Environmental challenges are intricately linked with social issues. Climate resilient development brings together governments, civil society and the private sector through multi-dimensional governance that focuses on risk reduction, equity and justice (IPCC, 2022). Networked governance arrangements connect national opportunities with the local level context and help to optimise decision making. Fostering the networks and building more integrated governance systems has the potential to increase tourism’s ability to transition, as stakeholders at all levels are actively involved in the design process. A more inclusive tourism requires the empowerment of local residents to participate in and drive decision making for tourism, including to support the green transition. Local community participation can help preserve the environment and biodiversity and optimize the economic benefits generated by the tourism sector. Local community participation in developing the tourism sector can be carried out in different ways, such as participation in planning processes, decision-making, and implementation of tourism development programs. In addition, local community participation can also be carried out through training and education, which can improve local communities’ skills and knowledge in managing tourism sustainably. Local community participation can also increase social solidarity among local communities, which can help increase togetherness and cooperation between local communities, government and tourism entrepreneurs;

- **Embedding green principles in strategic tourism planning and policy:** A greener tourism model needs to improve the integration of tourism with other sectors; politically, economically and socially. The interdependences and linkages between tourism and other key value chains make the sector a strategic entry point to accelerate sustainability and circularity across the wider economy. Building resilience and sustainability of the tourism sector therefore inevitably requires a holistic, cross-sectoral approach which considers related value chains and leverages potential synergies when designing policy interventions. Connecting tourism strategies to wider government priorities reduces policy conflict, and provides an opportunity to leverage existing investment and programmes designed at a larger scale than tourism alone.

## **6. Analysis of Results**

Tourism has its part to play in the transition to a low carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive economy. Taking this into consideration, the role of tourism in a green economy can be supported by:

- Leverage government’s role in catalysing the green tourism transition, by encouraging public sector funded or procured tourism infrastructure to highest environmental standards and contribute to climate resilient development;
- Improve coordination of tourism policy with relevant policy areas and in particular conservation and environmental management, climate action, sustainable transport, and social development (including health and regional economic development);
- Establish tourism governance mechanisms that connect and align action on greening across all levels of government, and promote transparency and accountability;

- Implement a mix of evidence-based policies and interventions to promote greener tourism practices and prioritise actions targeting high impact areas along the tourism value chain, on the supply and demand side;
- Promote the integration of tourism into the wider economy and leverage linkages to strengthen the sustainability and resilience of tourism and other key supply and value chains, maximise local benefits and advance principles of the circular economy;
- Promote understanding of sustainability and related concepts, such as sustainable procurement, resource efficiency and circular innovation;
- Ensure greater community involvement and strengthen community capacity in maintaining environmental sustainability and community welfare. The Green economy initiatives in the tourism sector can be a source of income for local people and help improve people's welfare;
- Understanding tourist volumes and investing in the required infrastructure and mechanisms to manage these sustainably;
- Provide opportunities for businesses to restructure, upskill and invest in new technology as part of the recovery to be more digital, sustainable, resilient and inclusive;
- Catering to tourists with a greater appreciation of the environment and desire to connect with nature;
- Shifts toward local tourism: driven by increasing costs, uncertainty and sustainable choices. This can reduce GHG emissions and encourage diversification from local visitor opportunities.

Green economy initiatives focused in the tourism sector can help strengthen local environmental and cultural awareness among local communities and tourism actors by directly involving the community in tourism management, either through developing tourism products that involve local communities or through training and skills development that enable local communities to gain direct economic benefits from the tourism sector. However, green economy initiatives have challenges and obstacles in their implementation including:

- a. Limited funds that can hinder these initiatives' development because of the investment they require.
- b. Lack of understanding of the importance of sustainability because some stakeholders in the tourism sector still do not understand the importance of environmental sustainability and welfare of local communities.
- c. Lack of support from the government.

To overcome these challenges and obstacles, several solutions that can be implemented include:

- a. Green economy initiatives in the tourism sector can be initiated by promoting existing attractions more sustainably.
- b. Various education campaigns to increase understanding of the importance of environmental sustainability and the welfare of local communities.
- c. Partnerships and collaboration between stakeholders in order to overcome limited funding and increase support in developing green economy initiatives in the tourism sector.

## **7. Conclusions**

The sustainability of tourism growth is a significant factor in a country's development as it assures sustainability in social and economic well-being. The tourism industry, provides a complete mechanism to create employment opportunities, increase production levels, and generate income in both the formal and informal economic industries. The sustainability of tourism is a source of sustainable social growth in the country, which ends with a sustainable rise in economic growth.

Green economy is a concept of sustainable economic development that prioritizes economic, social, and environmental sustainability in a balanced way. Its pay attention to the needs of local communities and support their participation in tourism management. Through the involvement of local communities, they can have a more active role in tourism management and feel responsible for the environment and the surrounding biodiversity. This can strengthen their sense of unity and social solidarity (Shahraki, 2022). Developing green economy initiatives can also improve the social welfare of local communities. In sustainable tourism management, infrastructure development and promoting local tourism products can improve the local community's economy. In this case, skills training and improving the quality of local tourism products can also increase tourism's attractiveness and add value to the region (Zhang et al., 2022).

The development of the path of "green tourism" to minimize impact on the environment (both physical and social environment), will create environmentally friendly leisure options, making responsible travel, saving money, making choices on energy-saving technologies with low impact on the environment. The transition towards a greener economy will be a long and challenging process for tourism as for many other sectors. Tourism, as a transversal sector interacting with many other industries and services, can contribute significantly to the shift towards more sustainable, cleaner and low-carbon economic growth. Innovation is also essential to improve existing products and to develop more sustainable tourism products and experiences.

## 8. Future Work

Various studies have been made in order to better understand the impact of tourism on the natural environment. Nevertheless, to accelerate the transition to a greener tourism economy, to translate commitments into real actions and outcomes, and to embed environmental objectives into tourism policies. In a future study, it is aimed to identify the main variables of the tourism sector which have a statistical significance in the transition towards green economy, such as: tourist perceptions of green tourism, tourist desire to engage in green tourism, etc.

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