HOW DO CITIES OF DIFFERENT SIZES IN EUROPE WORK WITH SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT?

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ABSTRACT

Today, competition between cities to attract inhabitants, companies and tourists is strong and cities must be up-to-date in terms of development to succeed. One way for smaller destinations to achieve sustainable development is by being creative with respect to tourism. Some destinations are in the shadow of others and need to stand out in some way. The purpose of this paper is to study European cities of different sizes and their work on sustainable development. The following research questions are addressed: How do different cities work on sustainable development? How does the size of the city influence its work on sustainability? How can a city be influenced by surrounding areas in its sustainability work? The study uses a qualitative method. Data were collected from 34 small cities, towns and villages in Europe. The destinations were selected using non-probability sampling. The data were analysed using an interpretative approach. The results show that the local community plays a key role in contributing to the sustainable development of small destinations. It is also of great importance for a place to have an identity and to reach different types of stakeholders. The conclusion is that local communities must be engaged in the sustainable development of smaller destinations. It is also important to focus on the environment since today's tourists are more aware of environmental sustainability. Several of the cities can be seen as shadow destinations since they are included in larger regions and are dependent on other destinations that are more famous. Finally, successful rural destinations offer value to the tourist, have a strong identity and include stakeholders in the development process.
Keywords: creativity, identity, rural, small city, sustainable, sustainable development.

1 INTRODUCTION

There is strong competition today between cities to attract inhabitants, companies and tourists, and destinations must be up-to-date in their development. This is particularly difficult for smaller villages and rural towns. The focus of this study is cities, towns and villages. One way for smaller destinations to achieve sustainable development is by being creative and exploiting tourism niches [1]. Sustainable development is defined in many ways, but the most frequently quoted definition is from the 1987 Brundtland Report [2], which states, *'Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'*. Another dimension of sustainable development is that it consists of three pillars, namely economic, social and environmental sustainability. Middleton and Clarke [3] identify a need to find a balance between these three dimensions of sustainability. Today, the concept of sustainable development is found in all types of industries and research fields, but there is still a contradiction between development and sustainability [4]. It is challenging to achieve both economic growth and environmental protection in cities.

Sustainable development is an important issue for cities in Europe and around the world. Cities have to take care of their inhabitants as well as attracting tourists. Previous research has shown that the principle of sustainability is widely recognised but its implementation is more limited [5] [6] [7] [8]. Companies at the destination may be willing to apply the concept of sustainability for their own benefit as long as it increases their revenue and improve their public relations and does not cost them much. Sustainability can often be used as a marketing strategy, a phenomenon known as greenwashing [9]. The concept of sustainable development

is trendy and can create goodwill for a company and even a whole destination. Investing in energy-saving measures and water reduction systems can also enable a company to save money. Creativity is important for sustainable cities, and one way to gain economic growth is through tourism. Richards [10] argues that tourism nowadays is creative in many ways. Creative tourism influences a place's identity, shaping what the place stands for in the minds of both tourists and inhabitants.

Research has shown that different countries define cities differently based on a wide range of criteria. *'These criteria often include population size and density, but also more functional or historic ones such as having urban functions, being a recipient of national urban policy funds or having received city rights through a charter sometime between the Middle Ages and today. Comparing the number of cities based on national definitions across countries is hopelessly distorted by difference in methodology* [11].'

This study defines cities as follows:

1. Village – a village is a human settlement or community that is larger than a hamlet but smaller than a town (0–999 inhabitants).
2. Town – a town has a population of 1,000 to 9,999.
3. City – a city has a population of 10,000 to 50,000.

This paper uses the words 'place', 'destination' or 'city' when the sense is general and employs the above terms when size (village, town or city) is relevant. A particular type of destination has received little attention from researchers. These destinations are situated close to high-profile tourist attractions (such as cities) but do not always benefit fully from this proximity. Hudman and Jackson [12] argue that destinations that are situated near popular attractions may be affected by the shadow effect: *'The shadow effect refers to destinations that are near other major destinations. The concept comes from a geographic term 'rain shadow'. Some localities get less rain because the precipitation is diverted by mountains or wind patterns. Thus, one destination may be in the shadow of another destination, which is the preferred destination. Because they are close to the preferred destination, tourists will also visit the shadow destinations, but stay less time'* [12]. Tourists that visit a certain attraction might also want to experience other attractions in the nearby region. Tourists often see a destination as one unit, despite the fact that it is a complex network that involves a large number of actors [13]. Another problem is how to determine a destination geographically, i.e. where a destination starts and finishes, particularly in the minds of tourists. The importance of treating a destination as a unit has resulted in a large amount of research focusing on issues related to destination development [13]. Destinations that are situated geographically close to a famous destination can benefit from the strong brand of the well-known destination and use this to increase its own tourist numbers [14]. Ashton [15] states that *'brand is considered as a powerful instrument in creating a successful destination'*. Destinations with strong brands have a clear identity. Tourists recognise them and, therefore, experience a feeling of familiarity. Shadow destinations can, therefore, develop relationships with famous destinations close-by and benefit from their branding. Research has not yet addressed the issue of sustainable development of cities to any great extent. The main focus is often on companies and their work on sustainability. By contrast, this study focuses on the sustainable development of cities. The purpose of this paper is to study European cities of different sizes and their work on sustainable development.

RQ1: How do different cities work on sustainable development?

RQ2: How does the size of the city influence its work on sustainability?

RQ3: How can a city be influenced by surrounding areas in its sustainability work?

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework is structured around three areas, namely (1) sustainable development, (2) creativity and (3) identity.

2.1 Sustainable development

As previously mentioned, the starting point of sustainable development was the 1987 Brundtland Commission Report [2]. The issue is often discussed in relation to the three pillars of economic, social and environmental sustainability (see Fig. 1 below). The idea is that these three areas are tied together within the concept of sustainable development. However, previous studies have shown that some destinations focus more on one of the dimensions rather than focusing equally on all three [4].

Since the Brundtland Commission Report, work on sustainable development has continued through measures such as the Agenda 21, Rio Declaration and the recent establishment of 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs): *'The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries – developed and developing – in a global partnership. They recognise that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests'* [17].

The main obstacle for sustainable development is how to operationalise it at a practical level [18]. Sustainable development as a concept has developed in several ways since 1987.
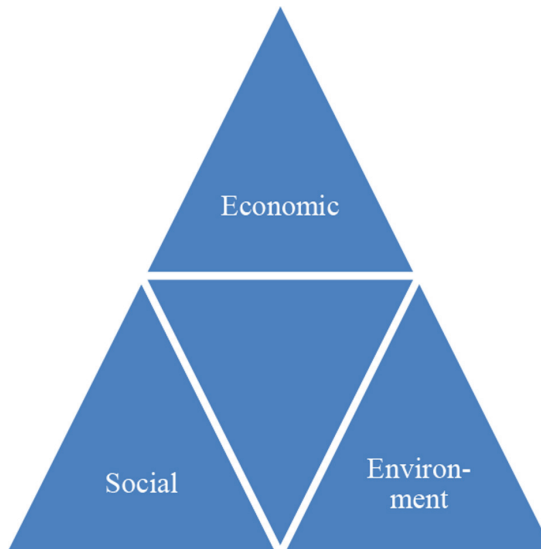

Figure 1: Dimensions of sustainability.
Source: [16].

Lam and Yap [19] identify several sustainability frameworks in the literature (see Table 1 below). These different frameworks can be seen as structures to study sustainable development. They can also be helpful in structuring information for reporting and communication. The first framework is defined as 'driving force-state-response' and refers to the pressure created by society through the implementation of policies to control the impact of human activities on the environment [19]. The second framework is labelled the 'theme framework'

Table 1: Existing Sustainability Frameworks.

Framework	Description
Driving Force-State-Response (DSR)/ Pressure State-Response (PSR) Framework	Human activities exert pressure on the environment, causing changes in the state of the environment or the quality and quantity of resources through emissions and consumption. Society then responds to these changes by instituting policies, which, in turn, mitigate the pressure. It was adopted by the European Environmental Agency (EEA) and the European Statistical Office in 1997.
Theme Framework	The thematic framework compiles a comprehensive list of indicators concerning various themes or issues related to sustainability. It facilitates the monitoring of progress towards goals and is flexible so that indicator sets can be adjusted to new policies.
Capital Framework	The capital framework calculates national wealth as a function of the sum of and interactions among different kinds of capital, including financial capital, capital goods produced and natural, human, social and institutional capital expressed in monetary terms.
Systems Analytical Framework	Within the systems analytical framework, sustainable development indicators (SDIs) are chosen based on their ability to provide answers to a set of questions with regard to the sustainability of a system.
System of Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting (SEEA) Framework	Pioneered by various international bodies (the United Nations Statistical Commission with the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the European Commission and the OECD), the SEEA facilitates the construction of a common database from which common economic and environmental SDIs can be derived consistently.
Global Reporting Initiative (GRI)	The GRI (launched in 1997 by the United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP] and the United States NGO, Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economics [CERES]) was launched with the aim of enhancing the 'quality, rigor and utility of sustainability reporting.' The GRI uses a hierarchical framework in three areas—social, economic and environmental.

Source: [19].

and relates to economic, social and environmental dimensions. These three dimensions are also used by the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), which is responsible for the sixth framework listed in the table. Sustainability reporting can be conducted in many ways but the most frequently used guidelines for sustainability reporting are those of the GRI. The GRI is a non-governmental organization (NGO) founded in Boston in 1997 with the aim of helping companies to produce sustainability reports (i.e. in relation to the economic, social and environmental dimensions). Many other guidelines exist, but research has shown that the GRI's guidelines are the most commonly used in many countries [20]. They is, therefore, regarded as the current standard. The third framework is the 'capital framework,' which is based on monetary terms. From the perspective of this framework, sustainability can be calculated. However, some researchers claim that expressing capital in monetary terms has limitations. The fourth framework is the 'systems analytical framework,' which refers to dependence on the system. According to this framework, sustainable development is based on the system's ability. The fifth framework is the 'System of Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting (SEEA) framework,' which was established by the United Nations to collect sustainability information consistently in a database [19].

This table shows the numerous frameworks relating to sustainable development. The most commonly used framework is based on the three dimensions (economic, social and environment). Nowadays, cities are becoming more creative in terms of sustainable development.

2.2 Creativity

Creative solutions can help destinations to develop sustainably. Research on cities has shown that creativity plays a role in development [10]. Nowadays, it is a common perception that creative places attract creative people. These ideas are also entering the field of destination development. Creativity can contribute to tourism and destination development in a number of ways by adding atmosphere to a place, developing tourism products and providing economic spin-offs for creative development. Ashworth and Page [21] argue that there is a paradox in the relationship between tourism and tourist destinations, namely the more attractive a destination becomes, the more its inhabitants are influenced.

Richard [10] argues that creativity manifests in three ways, namely creative industries, creative cities and creative class (see Table 2 below).

Creative cities often focus on capital and on the social dimension of sustainability. For creative cities, tourism has become a competitive strategy to stimulate growth [22]. The cities need to identify opportunities and be prepared to act. A focus on sustainability issues can be a competitive advantage. Growing competition between destinations has led to the development of new themes and branding strategies. Nowadays, destinations must have a strong brand and

Table 2: Key conceptual approaches to creativity in cities.

	Creative industries	**Creative cities**	**Creative class**
Focus	Creative production	Creative milieu	Creative consumption
Form of capital	Economic	Social and Cultural	Creative
Creative content	Arts, media, film, design, architecture, etc.	Creative places, artistic production	Atmosphere and 'cool'

Source: [10].

an identity that attract tourists. Creativity brings a number of advantages for destination branding in terms of targeting both tourists and people who want to live in the area [10].

2.3 Identity

Nowadays, the importance of branding for successful tourism destinations is well known to researchers [23] [24] [25]. Although researchers have not yet accepted a common definition, it is argued that 'brand identity development is a theoretical concept best understood from the supply-side perspective' [26]. Kapferer [27] argues that brand identity is not just a supply-side factor and states, '*before knowing how we are perceived, we must know who we are*'. According to his statement, the tourist destination, rather than the tourists, should define both the destination's brand and character.

Aaker and Joachimsthaler [28] discuss the term brand identity and state that the term specifies what the brand wants to represent to its main target audience and that brand identity acts in many ways. A brand strategist comes up with ideas about what the brand should be associated with and find ways of creating these perceptions. The brand identity also represents a vision of what associations the brand should project to its target audience. This builds a relationship between a brand and its target audience. The brand identity helps the brand to become a valued choice by having its audience associate the brand with benefits and credibility. It is important for a shadow destination to create its own unique brand. A shadow destination can benefit from a neighbouring key destination but still need to determine and build its own brand. When creating and building up a brand, it is important to consider factors such as brand identity, brand image and brand personality. With regard to tourist destinations, Ashton [15] states that it is important to focus on the iconic features of a destination. The brand image presents and establishes these features in the mind of the tourist. When branding a destination, the environment and resources are the basis for branding. In order to create a popular destination, having a brand identity and brand image is important [29] [30]. When creating a strong brand, it is important for a destination to generate brand loyalty among tourists.

3 METHOD

This study takes a qualitative approach involving 34 cases. The cases were selected using non-probability sampling on the basis that they were peripheral, largely rural destinations in Europe with tourist attractions. These selection criteria were chosen due to limited earlier research on sustainability with these kinds of cases. The initial data were collected with the help of bachelor students under the supervision of the authors. Additional data were also collected from secondary sources, including web pages and written materials. As previously explained, this study divides places into three groups: villages (up to 999 inhabitants), towns (with a population of 1,000 to 9,999), and cities (with a population of 10,000 to 100,000). These three groups were used for the data collection. In the dataset, the largest city has a population of around 32,000. The data set consists of 7 villages, 12 towns and 15 cities, including 16 destinations in Sweden, 8 destinations in Germany and 10 destinations in other European countries. For an overview of the destinations, see Table 3 below.

For most of the studied destinations, the main attraction is related to nature or history. Four of the destinations are UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The data were analysed using an interpretative approach based on the three sustainability dimensions (based on the 'theme framework' presented in Table 1). The concepts of creativity and identity are included in sustainability.

Table 3: Description of the selected villages, towns and cities.

Village/Town/City	Country	Inhabit-ants	Village/Town/City	Main attraction
Arjeplog	Sweden	1785	Town	Nature & Car testing
Arvika	Sweden	14023	City	History & Art
Berg	Sweden	1281	Village	Canal & History
Blieskastel	Germany	20770	City	Nature & UNESCO
Bodenmais	Germany	3459	Town	Nature & Ski
Droux	France	420	Village	Hyperloop Tunnel
Finspång	Sweden	13279	City	History
Gällivare	Sweden	10329	City	Nature
Gällö	Sweden	722	Village	Camping & Ski tunnel
Hattem	Netherlands	12108	City	History & Museum
Lescar	France	10393	City	History
Lienz	Austria	11844	City	History & Nature
Lycksele	Sweden	8572	Town	Zoo & Nature
Maratea	Italy	12108	City	Sea & Nature
Meckenheim	Germany	24661	City	History & Nature
Motala	Sweden	31385	City	Canal & History
Mörsdorf	Germany	581	Village	History & Nature
Norrtälje	Sweden	20721	City	Sea & History
Nynäshamn	Sweden	14864	City	Sea & Port City
Parkstetten	Germany	3158	Town	Nature & History
Porto Venere	Italy	4041	Town	Sea & UNESCO
San Gimignano	Italy	7774	Town	History & UNESCO
Sandhornoya	Norway	345	Village	Nature
Sankt Englmar	Germany	1861	Town	Nature & Religion
Sankt Goarshausen	Germany	1280	Town	Nature & UNESCO
Sassnitz	Germany	9435	Town	Sea & Port Town
Stora blåsjön	Sweden	200	Village	Nature
Storlien	Sweden	74	Village	Nature & Shopping
Trelleborg	Sweden	30436	City	Sea & Port City
Vadstena	Sweden	5764	Town	Religion & History
Valle del Jerte	Spain	11123	City	Spa & Nature
Visby	Sweden	24272	City	History & Sea
Vuokatti	Finland	6183	Town	Nature & Ski
Åkersjön	Sweden	100	Village	Nature & Snowmobiling

Source: own creation

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this part, we use the term place or destination for all three types (i.e. village, town or city). It is only when we write about a certain group that we use these three subgroups.

4.1 Economic sustainability and identity

For all of the studied destinations, attracting tourists is important to earn income. Villages must have functioning businesses to make money. Economic sustainability is about revenue, market shares and indirect economic impact. If people want to live in a certain place, they must be able to make money somehow. In cities, there is often more choice for inhabitants with regard to finding a job or running a business. In smaller towns or villages, there are fewer options. Therefore, small villages are more dependent on visitors. However, there are so many tourist destinations, so competition among European cities is tough. Therefore, it is beneficial to create an identity and a brand that sticks in the minds of tourists and gives them a reason to travel to the destination. An identity makes a destination known for something. Nowadays, both visitors and inhabitants look for creative environments. Creative cities are often focused on social and cultural dimensions, but there is first a need for economic sustainability.

All of the destinations studied seem to work on different layers of sustainability. All of them want tax revenues and income from visitors. When they have some sort of economic sustainability they are able to focus on the next step, which is the social dimension. The larger cities have achieved economic sustainability and are, therefore, also able to work on the social and environmental dimensions of sustainability. These dimensions are discussed below. Many of the destinations studied are part of larger destinations at the regional or county level. They are, therefore, in the shadow of more famous destinations or dependent on larger regional destinations. For example, the town of Bodenmais is part of the Bavarian Forest, which is a more famous destination with a stronger identity. Four of the destinations have a strong identity as they are part of the UNESCO network. Research has shown that the UNESCO label is a well-established brand that can be used in to communicate a strong identity.

4.2 Social sustainability and network

Regarding social sustainability, the local community is a key actor for a destination's survival. From the destination's perspective, the social dimension starts with the inhabitants. All places have a local culture, which is strongly connected with the inhabitants. Visitors want to experience the local culture, and, if too many visitors come, this can influence the local culture. Many of the cities studied, and some of the towns, have policies on social issues in their sustainability plans.

The results show that cooperation is often found within a destination, where different types of service providers work together and build networks. It is often the main actors at the destination that cooperate. The results also show that villages are more aware of the importance of cooperation. As they are small communities, it is necessary to cooperate to be able to meet the needs of tourists. The role of the community is a key success factor for the sustainable development of villages, towns and cities. One example is Sankt Englmar, where there is significant cooperation between hotel owners, the mayor and activity companies. Voukatti in Finland is another example of a destination where there is strong cooperation between politicians, companies and sports clubs. They focus on maintaining existing relationships rather than reaching new visitors. The result is loyal customers who come back year after year.

The study indicates that smaller villages see each other as competitors as well as partners. Their mentality is to support each other, and they are highly dependent on each other. Another finding is that the villages regard themselves as part of larger communities. It can be a tourism region or a brand of a region. Åre is the largest ski resort in Sweden and is situated around 61 km from Storlien. When tourist in Åre visit the web page for Åre [31], information about Storlien can be found. This is one example of a village (Storlien) that benefits from belonging to a larger 'social' community.

4.3 Environmental sustainability and geography

Environmental sustainability is less of a focus among smaller villages, even though their main attraction is nature. As shown in Fig. 2, the environment is the third and last sustainability dimension that destinations focus on. Many of the destinations studied, regardless of their size, are most famous for a natural attraction. For these places, nature is the main attraction for tourists. The prerequisites for nature attraction vary depending on the places location, for example, if they are located by the sea or inland by the mountains. This is also something that destinations can use to strengthen their identity. For example, Bodenmais highlights its unspoiled nature as it has one of the last two 'jungles' in Europe. Sustaining the environment is important; inhabitants and visitors are no longer accepting of pollution and unnecessary waste. Inhabitants are often more aware of the environment in their home than when visiting a destination. However, visitors will not visit a polluted city. A destination can benefit economically from focusing on environmental sustainability measures, such as energy and water consumption. Lower consumption lowers a city's costs. The results are summarised in the following Table 4 below.

In summary, the larger the city, the more they formal its sustainability plans. The economic dimension of sustainability is a foundation for working on the social dimension and, lastly, the environmental dimension (see Fig. 2). Networking and creativity and establishing a strong identity are more important for villages to prevent them from becoming shadow destinations. The dependence of the ones in their geographical area influences their sustainability work.
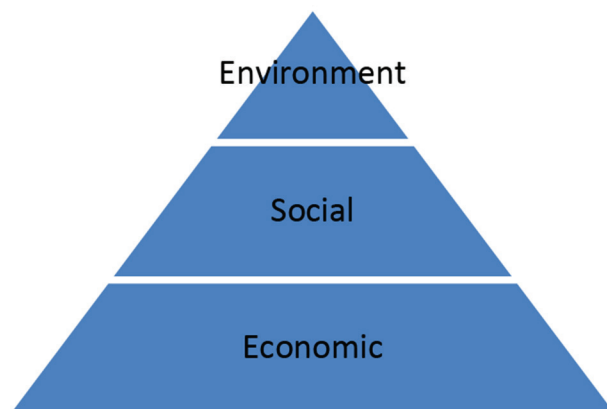

Figure 2: The layers of sustainability in cities.

Source: own creation.

Table 4: Different types of destinations and sustainable development.

	Sustainable Development of the City
Villages	• Do not have sustainable development to any larger extent in public written form • The community of great importance • Are often 'shadow destinations' and are therefore part of larger destinations, areas or regions
Towns	• Often focus on social sustainability, whereby the inhabitants and their wellbeing are prioritised • Are eager to satisfy their inhabitants in order to gain tax revenues • When towns develop, they focus on the environment
Cities	• Have formal and structured sustainability programmes and documented policies • Are often the capital city in the municipality • Environmental sustainability is often strongly linked to the local environment (e.g. cities by a lake or sea focus on water quality)

Source: own creation.

4.4 Theoretical contribution

This study has generated a model that can be used by shadow destinations for sustainable development. This builds on a model developed by Bogren *et al.* [16]. It incorporates not only the three dimensions of sustainable development but also includes factors that influence the sustainable development of shadow destinations (e.g. identity, network and geography).

The interaction between a place's identity and its network are addressed using the Destination Management Organisation (DMO). The findings of the study show that DMO plays an important role in promoting a region or area. The results also show that identity and geographical region play key roles. As previous research has shown, tourists may see a certain area as a destination even though, in reality, it may comprise two different cities or areas. The identity of
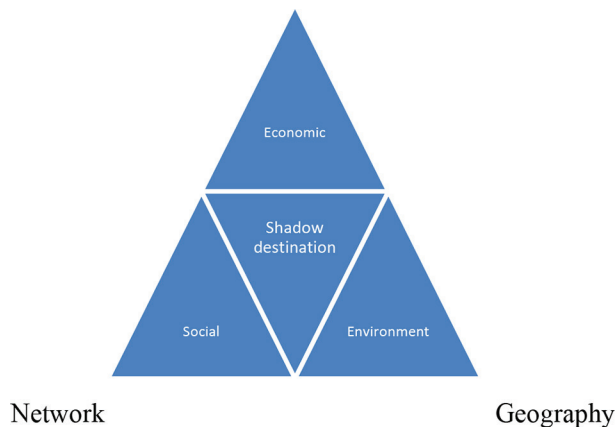

Figure 3: Key Success Factors for Sustainable City Development.

Source: own creation based on [16].

a place (e.g. destination) plays a key role in relation to the geographical area. This is particularly interesting for destinations that are in the shadow of a more well-known destination with a strong identity. The third relation is between network and geography. The results show that the local community of a destination plays a key role in sustainable development. Another aspect of great importance is infrastructure, i.e. how easy the destination is for tourists to access. This model can be used by shadow destinations in their work towards sustainable development.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The main conclusion is that the cities work on sustainable development in a more structured way than villages and towns. It is also found that the size of a destination influences its work on sustainable development. Smaller villages do not carry out any sustainability work of their own but rather depend on nearby towns, cities or regions (often the municipality's capital). In this regard, they can be seen as shadow destinations, and their sustainable development is dependent on others. The conclusion is that the local community must be engaged in sustainable development of smaller rural areas. It is also important to focus on the environment since today's tourists are more aware of environmental sustainability. Finally, successful rural destinations offer value to tourists, have a strong identity and include stakeholders in the development process.

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