

The Impact of Sustainable Tourism Perception on Accommodation Preferences: A Study on Turks Living in Germany

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Abstract

Sustainable tourism is essential for protecting environmental, economic, and cultural resources for future generations. Moreover, applying sustainability practices in accommodation businesses plays a key role in managing the long-term impacts of tourism. Türkiye welcomes millions of tourists every year, making it one of the major global destinations. Within this context, Turkish citizens living in Germany represent an important target group for the tourism industry due to their cultural ties and economic contribution. Therefore, this study aims to explore how Turks living in Germany perceive sustainability when they return to Türkiye for vacation.

Interviews were conducted with 20 participants, and the data were analyzed through content analysis. One notable finding indicates that participants, who demonstrate a high level of sustainability awareness in their daily lives in Germany, tend to largely overlook these values during their holidays in Türkiye. This behavior appears to be influenced by a sense of cultural comfort, the psychological relaxation associated with being on vacation, and the absence of strict social norms. Additionally, another significant finding reveals that participants primarily associate sustainability with environmental issues, while displaying limited awareness of its social and economic aspects.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism, Perception, Accommodation, Turks in Germany, Sustainability

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1. Introduction

Tourism is among the world's fastest-growing industries, making a substantial contribution to economic development while simultaneously exerting considerable pressure on the environment, local cultures, and social structures. With the expansion of global tourism, concerns regarding its long-term sustainability have grown increasingly prominent. The concept of sustainable tourism has emerged in response to these concerns, emphasizing the need to balance economic benefits with the preservation of environmental resources and cultural heritage. The Brundtland Report (WCED, 1987) defines sustainable development as meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own. In the context of tourism, this approach entails promoting environmentally responsible practices, supporting local communities, and ensuring that cultural and natural assets are protected for future use.

In recent decades, the accommodation sector has been identified as a pivotal component of sustainable tourism due to its extensive consumption of energy, water, and materials, as well as its potential for implementing eco-friendly initiatives. Hotels and other lodging facilities play a central role in shaping tourists' experiences and influencing their behaviors. Integrating sustainability principles into accommodation operations is therefore essential not only for minimizing environmental impacts but also for enhancing the competitiveness and reputation of destinations (UNWTO, 2020). Moreover, the growing awareness among travelers regarding sustainability has led to noticeable shifts in expectations and preferences, encouraging tourism businesses to adopt green certifications, waste reduction strategies, and community-based initiatives.

Although sustainable tourism has received significant global attention, perceptions and practices related to sustainability can vary across cultural and social contexts. Migrant communities, such as Turks residing in Germany, present a particularly insightful case, as they navigate two distinct cultural and environmental systems. Living in a country where sustainability is deeply embedded in daily life may shape their attitudes and behaviors; however, these practices may change when they travel back to their homeland for holidays. Understanding this behavioral shift provides valuable insight into how sustainability perceptions are shaped, internalized, and applied across different social and cultural environments.

This study aims to explore how Turkish residents living in Germany perceive sustainability when traveling to Türkiye for vacation and how these perceptions influence their accommodation preferences. Through qualitative interviews with 20 participants, the research examines the factors that shape their sustainable tourism attitudes and behaviors. The findings reveal a discrepancy between sustainability awareness and actual practice: while participants exhibit strong environmental consciousness in Germany, they tend to deprioritize sustainable actions during holidays in Türkiye.

The contribution of this study lies in its focus on a transnational group that bridges two cultural and environmental systems. By examining Turks living in Germany, the research adds to the growing body of literature on sustainable tourism by highlighting how cultural comfort, the psychological effects of leisure travel, and contextual factors influence sustainable behavior. The study also offers practical implications for accommodation businesses and policymakers in Türkiye, emphasizing the importance of developing targeted sustainability strategies that address both cultural and behavioral dimensions of tourism.

2. Literature Review

Sustainable Tourism

Sustainability refers to a balance where natural resources are used without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It emphasizes maintaining environmental health, economic progress, and social equity simultaneously (Özmehmet, 2008:1855). Sustainable tourism is designed to meet the needs of visitors and host regions while safeguarding the natural environment, biodiversity, and cultural heritage. It also seeks to enhance the quality of life for residents and provides meaningful visitor experiences (UNEP & UNWTO, 2005). Türkiye shows that local residents value sustainable tourism principles but perceive their current implementation as insufficient, especially regarding the protection of biological diversity. It can emphasize the need for greater involvement from local people in tourism decision-making to improve the effectiveness of sustainable tourism activities (Akıncı & Öksüz, 2022).

The World Commission on Environment and Development's (WCED) 1987 release of the Brundtland Report, officially named *Our Common Future*, marked a critical turning point in the development of sustainable tourism. The Brundtland Report emphasized achieving a balance between social fairness and economic prosperity, laying the groundwork for sustainable tourism practices. (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987).

Information about sustainable tourism practices and options is more easily shared thanks to online channels. Social media has enabled tourists to advocate for sustainable tourism and share their experiences, influencing others' decisions (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Another element driving the expansion of sustainable tourism is the increased demand for it. More tourists are paying attention to how their travel decisions affect the environment and society. They look for ecofriendly lodging, events, and experiences (Weaver & Lawton, 2010).

The tourists prefer the destinations with strong sustainability policies; thus, awareness campaigns are likely to increase the share of eco conscious travel (Köseoğlu & Okumuş, 2019). More businesses in the tourism industry, companies that adopt sustainable culture are gaining the attention of consumers. (Han, Hsu, & Sheu, 2010). Businesses increase customer satisfaction and loyalty while encouraging environmentally conscious behavior (Steinhorst & Beyerl, 2021). Providing more education and highlighting certifications for green practices can help people make better choices when they travel (Lee & Wing, 2023). Reliable and accessible information helps encourage responsible behaviors, leading

destinations to improve their environmental practices and attract green-minded visitors (Lopes, 2023).

Climate change awareness influences what tourists seek. Many people are now looking for places that reflect their environmental ideals, such as destinations that offer ecofriendly lodgings and activities. (Tamuliene, 2024). Marketing sustainable tourism has become essential. Strategies like green certifications and eco labels influence customer decisions. (Park et al., 2024). Consumers today care a lot about sustainability, especially when it comes to reducing waste and recycling. (Satır, 2023). Marketing strategies that highlight sustainability also play a big role in shaping what consumers buy (Yükselen, 2020).

Accommodation Facilities

Accommodation is an essential part of any travel experience, providing options that cater to various needs, budgets, and preferences. This guide explores the different types of places to stay, from traditional accommodations to more unique and adventurous choices (OpenStax, 2018). Hotels are a commonly chosen option, offering a range of luxuries and facilities depending on the property. Resorts, designed with relaxation and recreation in mind, provide more all-encompassing experience with services such as dining, activities, and wellness centers. All-inclusive resorts can simplify travel planning, but it's important to be aware of extra charges like resort fees, which can add to the overall cost (Veesko, 2024). B&Bs offer a homier and more intimate experience, often with hosts who treat guests like family. This type of lodging typically includes personalized recommendations from the owners, creating a welcoming atmosphere. (South Tours, 2024).

For travelers seeking something out of the ordinary, options like treehouses, yurts, igloos, and even bubble tents are available. These unusual accommodations offer a memorable experience that combines adventure with comfort, providing a distinctive way to enjoy a getaway (Veesko, 2024). All-inclusive hotels are designed to provide guests with a seamless and stress-free experience. These establishments typically bundle accommodation, meals, drinks, entertainment, and various activities into the cost of the stay, eliminating the need for additional expenses during the vacation. They are especially popular with families or travelers looking for a relaxing and budget friendly holiday (Cvent, 2023). Green hotels, known as ecofriendly hotels, prioritize reducing their environmental impact through sustainable practices. These hotels implement ecofriendly initiatives such as using solar power, conserving water, recycling, and sourcing organic and locally produced goods. Many green hotels also earn certifications like Green Key or LEED, which validate their commitment to sustainability (Condé Nast Traveler, 2023).

Accommodation offers the essential rest and relaxation that tourists need. After a day full of exploration, travelers require a comfortable space to unwind and recharge. Whether it's a hotel, resort, or vacation rental, accommodation provides a range of comfort levels to meet different preferences and budgets. The quality of a place to stay can greatly affect the overall experience, playing a crucial role in the

enjoyment and success of the trip (Ferguson, 2024). Accommodation plays an essential part in supporting other elements of the tourism industry, including transportation, dining, and entertainment. A consistent supply of quality accommodation helps attract tourists, benefiting the local economy. Moreover, many accommodations offer additional amenities such as restaurants, spas, and events, further enriching the traveler's stay by providing convenience and offering a taste of the local culture (AP PGECET, 2024).

These show that accommodation is far more than just a place to sleep; it is a crucial element that shapes the overall tourism experience. It provides comfort, convenience, cultural connection, and supports other industries, making it a key component of the tourism sector. Understanding its importance helps both travelers and industry professionals appreciate the vital role accommodation plays in successful travel. (Ferguson, 2024).

The Relationship Between Accommodation Preferences and Sustainability

The relationship between sustainability and accommodation choices has gained increasing significance in the hotel industry. Travelers are becoming more aware of the environmental, social, and economic impacts of their decisions, and many are now willing to pay a premium for environmentally responsible accommodations due to concerns about climate change and environmental degradation (Boronat-Navarro & Pérez-Aranda, 2020). This trend is particularly pronounced among younger generations, such as Gen Z, who tend to favor brands demonstrating genuine commitment to addressing climate issues. In response, hotels have introduced sustainable options, including reducing carbon footprints and offering eco-friendly food choices, to align with customer priorities (Naguib, 2024).

Hotels not only respond to consumer demand but also recognize the long-term operational benefits of sustainability. By conserving energy, using resources efficiently, and striving for carbon neutrality, hotels can reduce costs over time while attracting environmentally conscious guests (Shirmer, 2024). From the traveler's perspective, sustainability increasingly influences accommodation choices. Guests often prefer hotels with eco-certifications or those that clearly communicate their sustainability initiatives. Establishments emphasizing waste reduction, energy efficiency, and responsible resource management are more likely to appeal to environmentally aware tourists (Boronat-Navarro & Pérez-Aranda, 2020).

Eco-friendly hotels, often referred to as green or sustainable accommodations, are gaining popularity as travelers pay closer attention to environmental and social concerns. Tourists increasingly favor hotels that implement sustainable practices, such as waste reduction, energy conservation, and the use of eco-friendly materials, while supporting local communities and safeguarding cultural and natural resources (Canbay, 2011). Nevertheless, implementing sustainability is not without challenges. High upfront costs for green technologies and limited knowledge regarding certifications can hinder adoption. Despite these obstacles, investing in sustainable practices often enhances customer

loyalty, strengthens reputation, and contributes to long-term success, while benefiting local communities by preserving cultural heritage and creating economic opportunities (Dewhurst & Thomas, 2003).

Sustainability in tourism is also closely linked to the growing interest in slow tourism. Contemporary travelers increasingly seek meaningful experiences that emphasize eco-consciousness and authenticity (Kucukergin & Ozturk, 2020). Countries such as Türkiye are taking significant steps to incorporate sustainable practices into their hospitality sectors. In 2023, Türkiye launched the National Sustainable Tourism Programme in collaboration with the Global Sustainable Tourism Council, encouraging certified hotels to reduce waste, improve energy efficiency, and promote local products (Green Forum, 2024). Effective implementation depends on hotel management, as leaders who prioritize sustainability are more likely to adopt energy-saving technologies, reduce water consumption, and minimize waste. Staff training and guest participation are equally critical, with many hotels educating employees and guests on practical actions, such as conserving water and recycling (Yılmaz & Seyhan, 2010).

In the Turkish hospitality industry, corporate social responsibility has evolved into more than just a buzzword, as it increasingly shapes how hotels operate and engage with their communities. By adopting green and sustainable practices, many hotels are not only reducing operational costs but also fostering trust and loyalty among guests and other stakeholders (González-Rodríguez et al., 2019). This shift reflects a broader trend in which sustainability initiatives are integrated into business strategies, emphasizing both environmental stewardship and social responsibility. However, widespread adoption of sustainable practices faces several challenges, particularly financial limitations for smaller businesses. Independent and budget-friendly hotels often struggle to invest in green technologies due to limited resources (Hobson & Essex, 2001). Nonetheless, the momentum for sustainability in Türkiye's accommodation sector is growing, driven by corporate initiatives, governmental support, and evolving market demands. While regulatory and financial barriers remain, the sector is positioned to become a leader in sustainable tourism (Köseoglu et al., 2016).

Sustainability is receiving increasing attention from hotels and resorts worldwide, reflecting a recognition of the importance of environmental protection and alignment with the expectations of eco-conscious travelers (World Economic Forum, 2023). The Global Sustainable Tourism Council provides guidelines to ensure that certifications are credible and transparent, mitigating greenwashing and confirming that hotels' efforts are substantive rather than purely promotional (Font & Ekinici, 2003). Sustainable hotels utilize strategies such as employing furniture made from reclaimed wood, organic cotton, and biodegradable materials to reduce environmental impacts (Cvent, 2024). Large-scale studies indicate that tourists are often willing to pay more for hotels that prioritize sustainability, with key factors including the presence of eco-certifications, consumer education, and positive past experiences (Boronat-Navarro & Pérez-Aranda, 2020). Local context also matters; research in Indonesia and Türkiye shows that tourists are willing to pay a premium for hotels with credible green certifications, especially in highly visited

destinations, and favor accommodations that minimize environmental impact while supporting local communities (PLOS ONE, 2020; Çevik & Giritli, 2022). Survey evidence from Antalya Airport (n=360) further suggests that environmentally conscious tourists—particularly women and those with higher education levels—are more likely to select eco-friendly hotels, with perceived eco-friendliness often outweighing general environmental awareness in influencing choice (Yıldız & Kılıç, 2016).

3. Methodology

This study aims to examine how Turkish residents living in Germany perceive sustainable tourism and how these perceptions influence their accommodation choices and spending when traveling to Türkiye. A qualitative research design was employed to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' behaviors, attitudes, and experiences (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2003, p. 15).

The population of the study consists of Turks living in Germany. Turkish people living in Germany account for one of the largest segments of foreign tourists visiting Türkiye annually. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK, 2023), these tourists play an important role in Türkiye's economy through their spending on accommodations, food, shopping, and other tourism services (TÜİK, 2023). However, most research on this group has not focused much on how their accommodation choices affect the economy. This study examines the sustainable tourism preferences of Turkish tourists from Germany and investigates how these preferences influence their spending and contribute to Türkiye's tourism.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted between November 2024 and January 2025. A total of 20 participants were recruited using snowball sampling, which is frequently preferred in qualitative research to reach participants who are directly relevant to the research aim. Snowball sampling is often used to study groups that are not easy to reach or have unique characteristics. It works by starting with a small number of participants, who then refer to others, allowing the sample to grow (Browne, 2005). Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and was conducted face-to-face, allowing participants to fully express their experiences and perspectives (Johnson, 2018).

The collected data was examined using content analysis. The analysis was carried out with the aid of MAXQDA software, which facilitates the systematic coding and organization of qualitative data. Content analysis is a methodical examination of data to find patterns, themes, and insights that may not be immediately obvious (Brown & Miller, 2020). As the content analysis phase began, special attention was paid to the validity and reliability of the research. In qualitative research, the reliability of content analysis heavily depends on the process of coding. Reliability, in this context, relates to the consistency of coders whether different coders interpret the same data similarly or whether the same coder produces consistent results at different times. In addition, clearly defined and transparent categories are essential for ensuring coding accuracy and consistency (Bilgin, 2006).

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, two independent academic experts were asked to generate codes and group them under relevant themes using a sample of the interview data. The results were then compared with the codes and themes developed by the researcher. Any inconsistencies were discussed, and consensus was reached before finalizing the coding structure. The researchers relied on content validity as a central criterion for ensuring internal validity throughout this process (Bilgin, 2006).

4. Findings

This section presents the findings of the research conducted. Firstly, descriptive data of the participants are provided. Then, analytical findings obtained in line with the aim of the research are presented, supported by visual representations and direct quotations from the participants.

Descriptive Data of Participants

A total of 20 participants involved in the research were coded as P1, P2, P3, ..., P20. The descriptive information of the participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Information

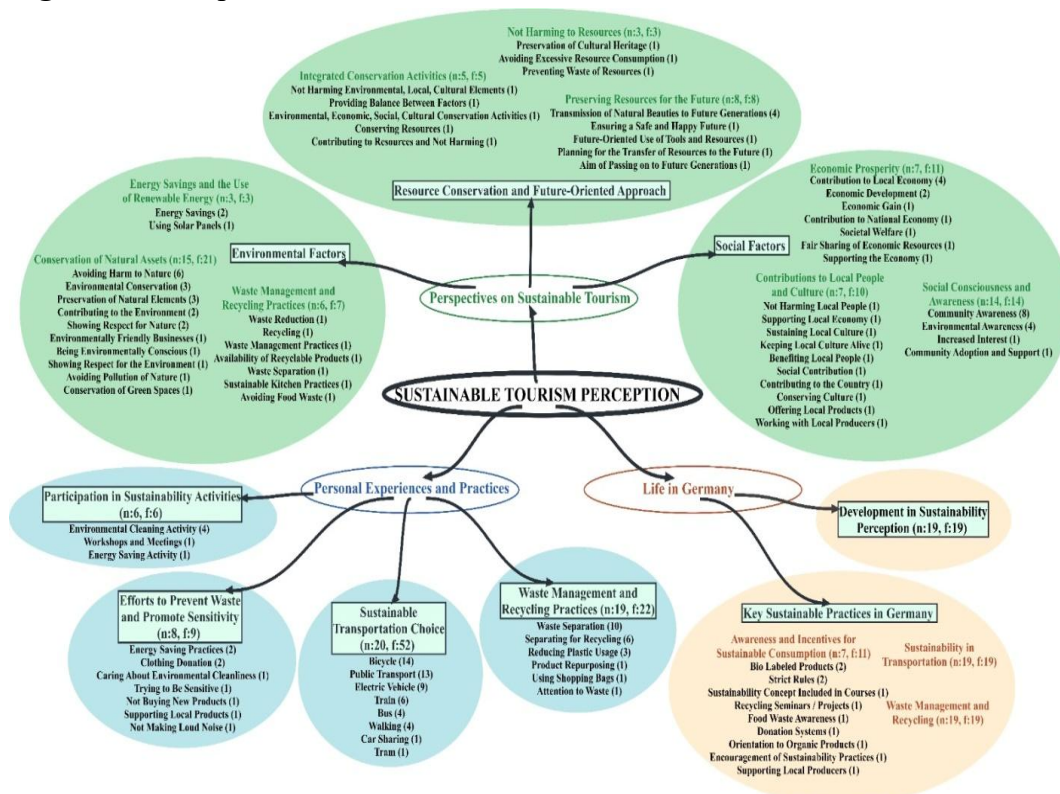
Participant Code	Gender	Age	Education Level	Duration of Residence in Germany	Frequency of Visits to Türkiye
P1	Male	22	Bachelor's	3 years	Twice a year
P2	Male	51	Bachelor's	48 years	Twice a year
P3	Male	30	Bachelor's	4 years	Twice a year
P4	Female	27	Bachelor's	3 years	Twice a year
P5	Male	26	Bachelor's	4 years	Four times a year
P6	Male	58	Bachelor's	33 years	Once a year
P7	Male	29	Bachelor's	3 years	Once a year
P8	Male	23	Bachelor's	3 years	Once a year
P9	Male	27	High School	3 years	Once a year
P10	Male	28	Master's	4 years	Once a year
P11	Female	27	High School	6 years	Once a year
P12	Male	26	Associate degree	5 years	Once a year
P13	Male	35	Bachelor's	30 years	Once a year
P14	Female	50	Master's	16 years	Three times a year
P15	Male	23	Bachelor's	3 years	Once or twice a year
P16	Female	28	Master's	3.5 years	Once a year
P17	Male	30	Bachelor's	5 years	Once a year
P18	Male	30	Master's	5 years	Once a year
P19	Male	30	Bachelor's	6 years	Once a year
P20	Male	25	Master's	19 years	Once a year

As shown in the table, participants' ages ranged from 22 to 51, with the majority being male (n=16) and predominantly within the 25–30 age range. Most participants were university graduates and had resided in Germany for at least three years, while a subset (n=5) had lived there for more than 15 years. The majority of participants traveled to Türkiye once per year.

Perceptions of Sustainable Tourism

This section presents the findings regarding participants' perceptions of sustainable tourism. The data were systematically analyzed using coding, categorization, and thematic development. Each identified theme is illustrated and discussed in detail. Figure A provides a summary of participants' perceptions of sustainable tourism.

Figure A. Perceptions of Sustainable Tourism



According to Figure A, three main themes shape participants' perceptions of sustainable tourism:

1. **Perspectives on Sustainable Tourism**
2. **Personal Experiences and Practices**
3. **Life in Germany**, encompassing social, cultural, and environmental aspects of participants' daily lives.

Each theme consists of multiple categories and subcategories derived from the coding process. Frequency analysis indicated that participants often articulated overlapping concepts. The following sections provide a detailed elaboration of each theme.

Perspectives on Sustainable Tourism

This theme summarizes participants' perspectives on sustainable tourism. Based on the content analysis conducted, the theme is explained through three main categories: Environmental Factors, Resource Conservation and Future Oriented Approach, and Social Factors. Each category consists of three subcategories.

The Environmental Factors category indicates that participants associate sustainable tourism with environmental components. In this context, they relate the concept to preserving natural resources, waste management, and the use of renewable energy. Commonly emphasized elements include not harming the environment, showing respect for nature, and conserving natural resources. For instance, the participants stated:

"I believe sustainable tourism aims to continue in an environmentally sensitive manner." (P15)

"For me, it means traveling in a way that respects the environment." (P20)

In addition to references to natural resources, participants most frequently associated sustainable tourism with waste management. They also mentioned energy conservation practices. For example:

"Sustainable tourism is about saving energy, preserving green areas, avoiding food waste, and not harming nature. It means protecting our environment." (P13)

The Resource Conservation and Future-Oriented Approach category emphasizes that participants see sustainable tourism as the preservation of current resources to ensure they are available for future generations. Moreover, they perceive sustainable tourism as a holistic concept rather than one focused on a single area. As one participant explained:

"Sustainable tourism means maintaining activities in the long term while preserving environmental, economic, and socio-cultural balances... Ensuring tourism resources are not depleted is important for the future of the industry and the welfare of society." (P14)

The Social Factors category is the most emphasized by participants. Under this category, participants linked sustainable tourism with local elements, raising public awareness, and economic welfare. For example:

"Tourism can spread environmental awareness to broader audiences and contribute to the economic welfare of local communities." (P4)

Personal Experiences and Practices

This theme illustrates that participants' perceptions of sustainable tourism are shaped by their personal lives, daily practices, and individual experiences. It is

structured into four main categories: participation in sustainability-related events, efforts to reduce waste and be environmentally conscious, use of sustainable transportation, and recycling practices.

Participants provided examples of their practices:

"I'm interested in recycling. I try to make things in my own workshop and and join environmental clean-up events." (P17)

"I pay attention to recycling, donate clothes I no longer use, and take my own bag when shopping to avoid plastic." (P16)

"To support sustainability, I try to use public transport and minimize car use. Germany has a waste separation system, which I follow as much as possible." (P5)

"I try to be sensitive to the environment, local people, and historical sites and monuments, both at home and when traveling." (P18)

These statements demonstrate that participants' understanding of sustainable tourism extends beyond theoretical knowledge and is actively reflected in concrete, real-life practices.

Life in Germany

This theme highlights that living in Germany significantly influenced participants' perceptions of sustainable tourism. Beyond personal practices, the country's structure and lifestyle emerged as important factors, categorized into awareness and promotion of sustainable consumption and sustainable transportation and recycling systems.

Participants emphasized the following:

"Public transportation is widely used in Germany, and the recycling system is very effective. Organic products are easily accessible and encouraged. There is both awareness and action in all these areas." (P20)

Similarly, 19 out of 20 participants stated that living in Germany had contributed positively to their personal sustainability awareness:

"To be honest, my awareness increased here because people pay more attention to energy saving and recycling." (P11)

"Living in Germany affected us in terms of energy use, cleanliness, and the preservation of tourist attractions. Damaging historical sites is strictly forbidden, ensuring sustainable tourism practices." (P13)

However, one participant expressed that living in Germany had not changed their perspective:

"It's something that comes from within. If you love nature, you can live the same way anywhere. Living in Germany didn't change us in this respect. What matters is being ethical and respectful." (P2)

These findings suggest that the cultural and infrastructural context in Germany reinforces sustainable behaviors, although personal values also play a crucial role in shaping participants' perceptions.

Sustainability in the Context of Germany and Türkiye

Participants evaluated the current situation in Germany in terms of sustainability while also reflecting on their experiences and observations in Türkiye. The prominent sustainability components in Germany, as highlighted by participants, include regulations and enforcement (f=7), recycling practices (f=7), public awareness and sensitivity (f=7), and public transportation practices (f=3).

Participants emphasized that sustainability in Germany is systematically supported by clear regulations and well-functioning systems, with legal enforcement playing a key role. For instance:

"To cut a tree in the forest or even in my own yard, I need to get permission. Laws are strict and clear here, even for waste disposal, which is very different from Türkiye." (P6)

"Sustainability in Germany is very systematic and rule based. Everyone feels obligated to be part of the system, whereas in Türkiye more individual effort is required." (P17)

"Germany is more climate-friendly because strict penalties exist for harming the environment. In Türkiye, beaches are polluted, and monitoring is limited." (P13)

"Rules in Germany are stricter, and recycling is habitual. In Türkiye, awareness is developing, but legal support and stricter enforcement are needed." (P3)

Participants also acknowledged positive developments in Türkiye, particularly regarding local culture and products. For example:

"Türkiye is strong in supporting local products and preserving cultural heritage. Recycling is still developing, but important steps are being taken to raise sustainability awareness." (P4)

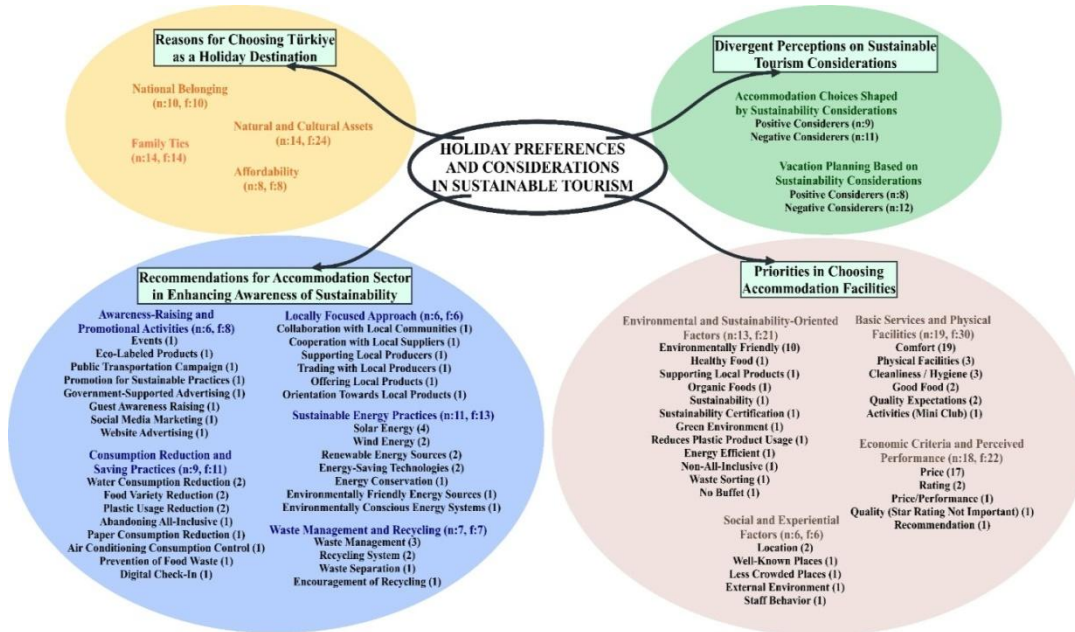
"In Germany, systems are well established. In Türkiye, individual awareness is lower, but initiatives like promoting local products show progress. The main difference is functional recycling and public transport in Germany." (P16)

These findings indicate that Germany provides a structured, rule-based environment supporting sustainable behaviors, whereas in Türkiye, sustainability relies more on individual effort, though recent initiatives show promising development.

Holiday Preferences and Considerations in Sustainable Tourism

This section presents participants' holiday preferences within the framework of sustainable tourism, as well as the practices they believe should be implemented to support it. The data obtained from participants were coded, and similar codes were grouped to form categories and themes. The results of the content analysis are summarized in Figure B.

Figure B. Holiday Preferences and Necessary Practices in Sustainable Tourism



As shown in Figure B, participants' holiday preferences and their recommendations for sustainable tourism practices are organized under four main themes. Each theme includes several categories, some of which contain subcategories and codes derived from participants' statements. The frequencies of these codes are also displayed. The analysis indicates that participants frequently emphasized multiple interrelated concepts, reflecting the multidimensional nature of sustainable tourism. Each theme is discussed in detail below.

Reasons for Choosing Türkiye as a Holiday Destination

This theme explains the reasons why participants choose Türkiye for their holidays. The findings show that the majority (n=14) prefer Türkiye due to its rich diversity of natural and cultural attractions. Within this category, Turkish gastronomy and the country's overall tourism potential were particularly emphasized.

For example, one participant expressed:

"The biggest reason is the wide range of tourism options — sea, cultural, nature, or health tourism. Each offers excellent destinations. Türkiye's historical richness, such as the fairy chimneys of Cappadocia, the

magnificent waters of the Aegean or the plateaus of the Black Sea, always attracts me. Turkish cuisine is diverse, and hospitality is exceptional.”(P4)

In addition to natural and cultural richness, many participants (n=14) indicated that they choose Türkiye because of family ties and a sense of national belonging. Emotional connection to the homeland and increased purchasing power in Türkiye were also highlighted.

“The primary reasons are that it’s my homeland and that my family and friends live there.” (P19)

“We live in an incredibly beautiful country, and this is the country where I was born and raised. That alone is a sufficient reason for me to visit Türkiye for holidays.” (P12)

“My reasons are mainly being Turkish and seeing my family there. Of course, economic factors also play a role.” (P5)

“The first reason is financial. Current economic conditions in Türkiye make holidays more affordable, and our family is there.” (P8)

Overall, the findings reveal that participants’ holiday preferences for Türkiye are influenced by emotional, cultural, and economic factors, with natural and cultural diversity reinforcing the country’s attractiveness as a destination.

Divergent Perceptions on Sustainable Tourism Considerations

This theme explores how individuals integrate sustainability elements into their holiday planning and accommodation preferences. The findings indicate a diversity of opinions among participants. While some participants stated that sustainability considerations influenced their vacation planning (n=9) and accommodation choices (n=8), others reported that such factors played little or no role in their decision-making processes

Participants who did not prioritize sustainability emphasized that financial constraints and personal preferences are more decisive. For example:

“I generally don’t consider sustainability factors when planning vacations. The main reason is, of course, financial. What I usually pay the most attention to is the price in relation to what the holiday destination offers. Besides that, I don’t have much knowledge about sustainable tourism, so I wouldn’t even know what to consider.” (P15)

Still, several participants stated that although sustainability was not a primary criterion, environmentally friendly practices could have a positive influence on their preferences:

“Financial factors may come first in my planning. But of course, places surrounded by nature or powered by solar energy might interest me. Yet, I wouldn’t say they are my main selection criteria.” (P18)

“I don’t really consider sustainability factors, to be honest. But if I consider the long term, I do try to choose clean hotels that don’t harm the environment.” (P3)

Among those who considered sustainability, some deliberately avoided destinations or accommodation perceived as environmentally harmful:

“There have been many forest fires recently, especially in the Aegean and Mediterranean regions of our country. Personally, when such areas are later developed into hotels, I avoid them. I prefer peaceful, nature-friendly places. I research carefully, even checking online reviews to see if anything has happened there before. Then I make my decision accordingly.” (P2)

“When planning a vacation, I always check the pictures of the hotel. If it was built by cutting down forests or if it’s an all-inclusive hotel with food and drink waste, I see that as wasteful.” (P20)

Participants who incorporated sustainability considerations into their accommodation preferences were generally more inclined toward alternative forms of lodging:

“Instead of hotels, I prefer apartment-style places. This way, I reduce my consumption and don’t contribute to the waste often seen in hotels.” (P1)

“I usually stay in Airbnbs. They tend to be more environmentally friendly.” (P12)

“I try to choose boutique hotels that support the local community. I also like staying in restored historical buildings. Instead of building new hotels, I think restoring old ones is more sustainable, and I try to support such initiatives.” (P16)

In summary, while sustainability was not a universal consideration among participants, there was a growing awareness of its importance, particularly among those who valued environmental responsibility and authenticity in their travel experiences.

Priorities in Choosing Accommodation Facilities

This theme explores the criteria participants consider when selecting accommodation facilities. The findings were grouped under four categories: Environmental and Sustainability-Oriented Factors, Social and Experiential Factors, Basic Services and Physical Facilities, and Economic Criteria and Perceived Performance.

Across all categories, comfort (n=19) and price (n=17) emerged as the most frequently mentioned priorities, followed by a preference for eco-friendly establishments (n=10). As one participant stated:

“Frankly, price and comfort are my top priorities. After that, I care about whether it’s eco-friendly. So being eco-friendly ranks third on my list.” (P11)

Other participants expressed similar thoughts:

“For me, price comes first, then comfort. Eco-friendliness comes after that. But of course, if a hotel engages in eco-friendly practices, I would consider that a plus as long as it doesn’t compromise price and comfort.” (P8)

“Price, location, comfort, and ratings are much more important to me. Unfortunately, sustainability is not at the top of my list, but I do view eco-friendly hotels positively.” (P5)

Although half of the participants (10 out of 20) indicated that eco-friendliness influences their accommodation choices, a slightly higher number (n=12) stated that sustainability does not play a decisive role in their decisions. This may be related to participants’ limited knowledge and awareness of sustainable tourism.

As one participant explained:

“To be honest, I didn’t grow up with this awareness, so it’s not a priority for me. Also, hotels don’t usually advertise this aspect. If booking platforms clearly labeled eco-friendly hotels, I would definitely try to choose those.” (P5)

Similar views came from others:

“If I become more aware, I’ll definitely support it. I can say I have a positive attitude toward the issue. I believe that as my awareness increases, the importance I give to sustainability and my preference for eco-friendly facilities will also increase.” (P3)

“Right now, sustainability doesn’t significantly affect our choice of accommodation. The reason is that we don’t have enough information on the topic, and when on vacation, we mostly focus on comfort and fun. But as we gain more knowledge, preferring environmentally conscious hotels could become a priority.” (P17)

Overall, the findings indicate that participants’ accommodation preferences are primarily shaped by economic and comfort-related considerations rather than sustainability concerns. While some participants expressed a positive attitude toward eco-friendly establishments, their limited awareness and lack of accessible information prevented sustainability from becoming a key determinant in their decision-making processes. This suggests that enhancing sustainability communication and increasing public awareness could strengthen the integration of environmental considerations into tourists’ accommodation choices.

Recommendations for the Accommodation Sector in Enhancing Awareness of Sustainability

This theme explores participants' recommendations regarding the role of the accommodation sector in promoting sustainability awareness. The theme is structured into four categories, reflecting various aspects emphasized by participants. The analysis indicates that most participants highlighted multiple dimensions in their suggestions, including raising awareness through promotional campaigns, reducing resource consumption, adopting sustainable energy practices, improving waste management and recycling, and supporting local-oriented initiatives. For example:

"This perception should be marketed through social media. What influences my purchasing decisions most are not brand advertisements, but posts shared by individuals. If such messages were emphasized, people would be more careful in their purchases. (P1)

Others stated:

"Environmentally friendly energy systems, reducing paper use, moving to digital check-in these kinds of steps are really important. They could attract more attention and more customers. Frankly, I'd be impressed if they implemented such practices. And it would boost their profits too, not just their sustainability efforts." (P11)

"They could switch their energy sources to alternatives like solar power and separate waste properly. This awareness could be extended to all guests and rooms. It might require compromising a little on comfort, but the variety of food offered, and potential waste could be reduced." (P18)

"First, they should use technologies that save energy and switch to renewable energy sources. For water conservation, low-consumption showerheads and faucets could be installed. Waste management is very important, including recycling policies and minimizing single-use plastics. They should collaborate with local suppliers, favoring local and organic products. Guests should also be educated, e.g., through brochures explaining energy saving or suggesting environmentally friendly activities. Awareness-raising events could also be organized." (P4)

Beyond these categories, some participants made unique suggestions:

"Hotels should not even be built in the first place. If it's a forest area, don't build a hotel. I think not building a hotel can also be a contribution to sustainable tourism." (P7)

Another participant emphasized:

"People who are economically constrained do not always consider the environment when seeking affordable vacation options. I think this is closely tied to economic conditions." (P14)

Participants emphasized that the accommodation sector can promote sustainability awareness through practices such as resource conservation, renewable energy use, waste management, and collaboration with local suppliers. Raising awareness via social media and guest education, including brochures or activities, was also highlighted. Some noted that economic constraints may limit guests' attention to environmental issues, while others suggested that avoiding development in sensitive areas can support sustainable tourism.

Final Evaluations of the Participants

At the conclusion of the interviews, participants were invited to provide any additional reflections. The majority expressed views consistent with those already presented. However, a small number of participants (n=3) reported that their personal awareness of sustainability had increased because of the interview, and they further indicated that they would consider sustainability factors more carefully in their future holiday decisions. Their statements are as follows:

“For us, a holiday means spending quality time with family and enjoying the beauty of our homeland. I now think being more conscious of sustainability and planning eco-friendly vacations is important. We will pay more attention to this in future holidays.” (P17)

“Before answering these questions, I didn't really prioritize sustainability in my travel and accommodation preferences. But now, I will try to consider it more carefully, including evaluating hotels' sustainability features. It really made me more aware.” (P5)

The participants' statements suggest a growing recognition of the importance of sustainability, which is considered a noteworthy outcome of the study.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

This study explored how Turkish individuals residing in Germany perceive and engage with sustainable tourism practices when traveling to Türkiye. A key finding is that participants' sustainability perceptions were shaped less by holistic understanding and more by context-specific factors. While many expressed positive attitudes toward environmentally friendly accommodations, these preferences did not consistently translate into behavior. Environmental sensitivity appeared somewhat superficial, driven primarily by general values rather than comprehensive knowledge of sustainability.

Another significant insight concerns the influence of cultural and emotional contexts on tourist behavior. Participants often adopted more relaxed attitudes when visiting Türkiye compared to their environmentally conscious practices in Germany. This shift may be attributed to the perceived emotional comfort of being "at home," a reduced sense of obligation, or residual behavioral patterns from earlier life in Türkiye. Although participants had internalized many sustainable practices

in Germany, such as recycling and using public transportation, price, comfort, and convenience were often prioritized in travel decisions. These findings highlight that sustainable behavior in tourism is shaped not only by knowledge but also by cultural norms, emotional attachments, and situational factors.

When compared with existing studies, the findings of this research both support and extend prior work. For example, Yıldız and Kılıç (2016) found that perceptions of environmentally friendly hotels strongly influenced German tourists' behavioral intentions. While this study aligns with their conclusions, it extends the discussion by considering a broader array of sustainable behaviors beyond accommodation, including waste management, transportation, and cultural interaction. Moreover, it introduces a unique perspective by examining long-term residents of Germany, whose practices are shaped by both German environmental policies and Turkish cultural heritage.

Similarly, Oğuz and Yılmaz (2019), who focused on university students' preferences for green-certified hotels, found a strong link between environmental values and hotel selection. This study confirms that pattern but examines a more demographically diverse sample in terms of age, background, and lifestyle. Furthermore, it shifts the focus from single-dimension preferences to multi-layered behaviors, providing a more comprehensive understanding of how sustainability is integrated or overlooked across different stages of travel decision-making.

This research also contrasts with the metaphor analysis conducted by Saatci Savsa et al. (2024), which assessed German tourists from the perspective of service providers. While that study portrayed German tourists as structured yet emotionally distant, the present research shows that Turkish residents in Germany demonstrate cultural sensitivity and sustainable intentions in their tourism behavior, thereby challenging prevalent stereotypes.

Finally, in contrast to Ertaş et al. (2016), who examined the lack of environmental communication on Turkish hotel websites, this research focuses on the demand side, highlighting tourists' expectations regarding sustainability, particularly among environmentally conscious diaspora groups. These comparisons collectively reveal critical mismatches between industry communication and actual traveler priorities.

This research fills a vital gap in the sustainable tourism literature by focusing on a diasporic population, namely Turkish individuals living in Germany, who have been largely overlooked in previous studies. Most prior research focuses either on tourists currently residing in Türkiye or on foreign tourists from Western countries. By integrating perspectives shaped by cross-cultural experiences, this study introduces a novel dimension to understanding sustainability in tourism. It broadens the discourse beyond accommodation preferences and emphasizes the layered nature of sustainable tourism behavior, including cultural, emotional, and institutional influences.

The widespread impact of this study lies in guiding the tourism industry to understand customer expectations and integrate sustainable practices into operational and marketing strategies, while also providing insights into the behavior of diaspora groups to enhance the accuracy of targeting strategies in international markets.

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. First, all participants resided in Germany, while the researcher was located in Türkiye. Consequently, face-to-face interviews were not possible, which may have limited the depth of dialogue and the richness of the qualitative data. Additionally, financial and time constraints restricted both the number of participants and the overall scope of the study. With greater resources, future studies could include comparative samples from Germany and Türkiye, as well as employ longitudinal designs to track behavioral changes over time.

Future research can build on this study in several ways. First, adopting quantitative or mixed-method approaches would allow for a larger participant base, resulting in more generalizable findings. Time-series designs may provide insights into whether current sustainability attitudes lead to long-term behavioral changes. Moreover, expanding the scope beyond accommodation to include transportation, food consumption, and cultural engagement could offer a more holistic view of sustainable tourism practices. Investigating other diaspora groups across different host countries may further enrich our understanding of how sustainability values are shaped by diverse cultural and regulatory contexts.

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