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Can sustainability drive tourism development in small rural areas? Evidences from the Adriatic

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Abstract

This study explores how sustainability can constitute a driver of tourist demand in small areas, at the early stage of tourism development. Feasible methods and scales are proposed to analyze the perceived value of rural tourism and visitor perceived sustainability, where the low tourist demand and the touch-and-go nature of the typical visit imply measurement and modeling problems. The advantages of ordinal SEM in our empirical setting are compared to the standard model. Results indicate that a good state of conservation of the cultural heritage is the most important indicator of perceived sustainability, followed by a well-protected natural environment. We disentangle the relationship between tourism and sustainability, showing that the latter is perceived as a limitation directly, but it turns out to be a driver of destinations' competitiveness thanks to its strong influence on the perceived value, that moderates its contribution to destination image, satisfaction and intention to recommend.

Supplemental data for this article is available online at <http://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2021.1931256>.

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