SUSTHONOMICS AND TOURISM: A NEW PARADIGM FOR SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

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Abstract
This paper introduces the concept of susthonomics as a new theoretical and developmental paradigm that integrates economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainability. Tourism, as a sector deeply intertwined with space, community, and natural resources, offers fertile ground for the application of susthonomic principles. The paper analyzes global examples of good practice (Slovenia, Bhutan, Costa Rica) and compares them with developmental potentials in the Republic of Srpska and the Western Balkans region. A model of susthonomic tourism is proposed, based on four pillars: (1) local value retention, (2) social inclusion, (3) environmental responsibility, and (4) a wellbeing-oriented rather than growth-driven economy. Special attention is given to the application of this model in rural and peripheral destinations. The conclusion offers the first working definition of susthonomics in tourism and outlines key policy recommendations for integrating this concept into destination development strategies.
Keywords: susthonomics, sustainable tourism, social economy, local development, wellbeing
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1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism has always functioned as a bridge between the economy, culture, and nature. However, precisely because of this multidimensional character, the sector also carries contradictions: while it generates record global revenues, it simultaneously deepens social inequalities and adds pressure to fragile ecosystems. (Gössling & Peeters 2015; Higgins-Desbiolles 2020). In the Western Balkans, these paradoxes are particularly pronounced. The region possesses exceptional landscape and cultural capital, but the prevailing tourism model continues to rely on quantitative growth, high profit leakage, and fragmented governance (Tourism Development Report 2023). Although strategic documents frequently invoke "sustainability," critical literature warns that most initiatives remain trapped within the paradigm of permanent GDP growth, with local communities often relegated to the periphery of the value chain (Hickel 2020; Mitchell & Ashley 2010).

Within this context, the concept of susthonomics emerges as a synthesis that localizes economic value, embeds social justice, and respects planetary boundaries (Costanza et al. 2014; Daly 1996). Unlike radical "degrowth" approaches, susthonomics does not reject development but reconstitutes it: prosperity is measured by the wellbeing of residents and the integrity of ecosystems, rather than by the mere accumulation of capital (Jackson 2017). This raises a crucial research gap: how can such a paradigm be translated into operational policies and measurable indicators in a region where institutions are young, markets are dualistic, and the destination metabolism (energy–food–waste) remains poorly mapped?

This paper seeks to address that gap through a comparative analysis of global practices (Slovenia, Costa Rica, Bhutan) and micro-regional case studies across all Balkan states—from Tikveš in North Macedonia, through Valbona in Albania and Durmitor in Montenegro, to Uvac in Serbia, and Una and Hutovo Blato in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Within this framework, the central question arises: to what extent and in what ways can susthonomic principles—local value retention, social inclusion, ecological resilience, and a wellbeing-oriented economy—be systematically embedded into the governance of tourism destinations in the Western Balkans?

We anticipate that the results will offer a dual contribution. Scientifically, they extend the discourse on susthonomics beyond the Global North by testing theoretical postulates in a post-socialist, institutionally heterogeneous environment. Practically, the proposed set of instruments—eco-taxes, payment schemes for ecosystem services, "zero-km gastronomy" labels, and community ownership models—may serve policymakers as an operational roadmap for transitioning from extractive tourism to a destination economy measured by quality of life and the resilience of local ecosystems.

2. CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS OF SUSTHONOMICS – TRANSFORMATION OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The concept of susthonomics emerges as a critical response to the dominant discourse on sustainable development which, despite emphasizing the balance between economic, social, and environmental goals, in practice often remains trapped in the paradigm of unlimited growth (Hickel, 2020; Gössling & Scott, 2018). Within the broader field of post-growth economics, scholars such as Spash (2020) and Kallis (2018) argue that essential transformation cannot be reduced to the "greening" of GDP growth but requires a re-design

of the very objectives of development. On this basis, susthonomics introduces a synthetic concept that insists on the simultaneous optimization of prosperity for both people and the planet, where prosperity is not understood as quantitative accumulation but as localized and equitably distributed value (Costanza et al., 2014; Jackson, 2017).

In this paper, susthonomics is defined as an integrated developmental model that unites localized economic value, social justice, and ecological resilience into a coherent system. Its aim is to ensure that economic activity (a) remains within the permissible ecological space, (b) contributes to the wellbeing of all members of the community, and (c) generates long-term sustainable prosperity.

If economic progress is viewed exclusively through the growth of aggregate macro-variables such as GDP, a "prosperity paradox" emerges: societies become statistically wealthier, yet wellbeing and social equality stagnate or decline (Jackson, 2017; Raworth, 2017). The degrowth literature—from Georgescu-Roegen to contemporary authors such as Hickel (2020) and Kallis (2018)—emphasizes that material and energy flows must be qualitatively reshaped rather than simply "greened." Susthonomics accepts this thesis but, rather than advocating radical freezes in production, directs attention to the distribution and composition of economic activity. The goal is to enable prosperity growth measured by indicators of health, cultural vibrancy, and social cohesion, while stabilizing or reducing the physical scale of resource consumption. This "quality-led growth" implies a transition from production-volume-oriented sectors to services based on knowledge, culture, and experience—precisely the sphere in which tourism, redesigned along susthonomic lines, may function as a carrier of immaterial value and localized development.

Defined in this way, susthonomics constitutes an upgrade of the sustainable development concept, enriched with elements of growth-limitation theory. The theoretically authentic elements of the susthonomic model lie in its binding local component, which concretizes the very definition of development as an attribute of the whole. In other words, development whose fruits do not reach every individual cannot be considered genuine economic development. This approach aligns with the idea of the wellbeing economy, which measures progress using subjective and objective wellbeing indicators (Sachs, 2015; Stiglitz, Fitoussi & Durand, 2022), while simultaneously embedding ecological boundaries through the planetary limits framework (Rockström et al., 2009).

Since the Limits to Growth report (Meadows et al., 1972), ecological economics has emphasized that the human economy is a subset of the biosphere. The concept of "planetary boundaries," formulated by Rockström and colleagues (2009), quantitatively defines biophysical thresholds whose transgression threatens the stability of the Earth system. Susthonomics integrates these boundaries at its normative core: economic activity must remain within the permitted "ecological space" while ensuring the "social foundation" of a dignified life (Daly, 1996; Raworth, 2017). In tourism, this translates into the obligation that the total material and energy footprint of a destination (emissions, freshwater withdrawal, land degradation) be established as a limiting factor for planning capacity, investment, and marketing. Instruments such as carbon taxes, payments for ecosystem services, and carrying capacity management (Gössling, 2021; Buckley, 2012) thus become crucial levers through which planetary boundaries are "translated" to the operational level of the local destination and incorporated into the system of susthonomic tourism indicators.

Susthonomics avoids the reductionism of the triple-bottom-line model by redefining the relationship between the economic and the ecological. Instead of treating nature as a factor within the production function, it positions the economy within the ecological system (Daly, 1996). While classical interpretations of sustainable development acknowledge this dependence, they still operationally favor growth-oriented solutions, often through "green" technological optimizations (Peck, 2021). By contrast, susthonomics adopts the post-growth thesis that improving ecological efficiency per unit of output is not sufficient; it is necessary to reduce the overall material and energy footprint of the economy (Coscieme et al., 2019; Parrique et al., 2019). Unlike some strict degrowth approaches, susthonomics does not reject economic development per se but calls for its relocation and redistribution within local communities, thereby combining with the legacy of social economy and common resource governance (Utting, 2015; Ostrom, 2010).

Tourism is particularly well-suited for the application of susthonomic principles for three reasons. First, tourism is spatially determined, as value is created in a specific destination and depends on local cultural and natural capital (Dwyer, 2018). Globalization reduces the possibility of "locking in" the economic effects of tourism within local space (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020). Retaining the value of tourist expenditure in the circular flow of the local economy thus constitutes the first pillar of susthonomics. This thesis is supported by studies of community-based tourism in Southeast Asia and Latin America, which show that cooperative models increase the domestic multiplier by up to 2.5 times compared to conventional ones (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018; Mitchell & Ashley, 2010). Second, tourism is one of the few service activities that inevitably engages marginalized groups (artisans, women, youth), thereby naturally highlighting the dimension of social justice (UNWTO, 2022; WTTC, 2023).

The issue of tourism's ecological resilience is tied to a dual vulnerability: it is both a significant emitter of CO2 (particularly in aviation) and simultaneously a victim of climate change (Scott et al., 2020). The susthonomic model therefore calls for systemic decarbonization of

the value chain, including energy-efficient accommodation, locally sourced food, and low-emission forms of mobility (Gössling, 2021). The inclusion of ecosystem services in tourism cost accounting, such as carbon charges or eco-taxes, is already employed in some countries as a mechanism for the internal valorization of nature (Buckley, 2012; Font & McCabe, 2017).

On these foundations, a theoretical bridge is built between susthonomics and existing paradigms of sustainable and regenerative tourism. While sustainable tourism emphasizes the minimization of negative impacts, regenerative tourism emphasizes the active renewal of ecosystems (Hughes & Rogerson, 2020). Susthonomic tourism integrates economic locality and social inclusion into a single coherent framework. Its innovativeness lies in a pragmatic shift away from abstract global goals toward concrete, measurable indicators at the destination level.

Synthesizing these arguments, susthonomics can be described as a place-based economy that simultaneously targets community wellbeing, ecosystem preservation, and the structural resilience of the local economy. Its application in the tourism sector of the Western Balkans—a region where tourism often functions as a rapid source of foreign exchange with limited social benefit—represents a potentially transformative strategy. Rather than competing through cheap labor and low environmental standards, the adoption of susthonomic principles opens avenues for destination branding through quality of life and preserved nature, priorities for post-pandemic market niches oriented toward wellbeing and slow tourism (Bianchi, 2022; Everingham & Chassagne, 2020). Thus, susthonomics offers not only a critical diagnosis but also a pragmatic roadmap, positioning tourism as a testing ground for the broader transformation of the regional economy toward a fairer and more ecologically stable model.

3. TOURISM AS A SUSTHONOMIC SYSTEM – FROM PROFIT TO WELLBEING

The mass tourism industry, rooted in the paradigm of permanent growth and cost externalization, has long been subject to critique in the contemporary literature on the sustainability of the sector (Gössling & Peeters, 2015; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020). While it generates significant added value at the macro level, the model of mass tourism deprives local communities of a fair share of revenues. For example, it is estimated that in typical "all-inclusive" arrangements less than one-third of tourist expenditure remains in the destination, while the remainder is absorbed by transnational intermediary chains (Mitchell & Ashley, 2010). It is within this space of economic and social imbalance that the concept of susthonomic tourism positions itself, seeking to redirect the focus toward enhancing destination wellbeing.

The transformation of a destination toward a susthonomic model rests primarily on the localization of economic value through the creation of short supply chains and cooperative business models. Research demonstrates that the multiplier effect of local expenditure can increase up to 2.5 times when primary providers are local households and micro-enterprises (Hall, 2019). Such organization allows for a fairer distribution of income and strengthens the financial resilience of destinations against external shocks.

The localization of value in tourism materializes most tangibly through food. Gastronomy represents a "condensed identity of place" (Bessière, 1998) and a powerful marker of authenticity recognized by tourists, with the link between the local origin of ingredients, experiential value, and willingness to pay a premium well documented (Everett & Aitchison, 2008; Sims, 2009). The susthonomic approach requires that the culinary offering of a destination not be treated as a peripheral element, but rather as an economic collector connecting farms, crafts, food processing, women's and family cooperatives, gastro-events, and hospitality. When the hospitality sector structurally shifts to "zero-km" or "low food miles" procurement standards, the result is not only greater retention of monetary value within the destination but also multiplier effects across the rural economy (Hall & Gössling, 2016; Cucinelli, Peri, & Zanni, 2021). Furthermore, systems of geographical indications of origin (PDO/PGI) and gastronomic routes increase the visibility of local products, thereby enhancing intangible values—reputation, pride, intergenerational transfer of knowledge—that are critical for long-term social cohesion (Lane & Kastenholz, 2015).

Sustainable gastronomy thus becomes the first operational axis of susthonomic tourism: it internalizes local resources into the tourism product, distributes revenues more horizontally, reduces the carbon footprint of transportation, and enhances the recognizability of the destination in a market increasingly sensitive to authenticity and health (Kivela & Crotts, 2006; UNWTO, 2022).

A susthonomic destination must also manage its own "metabolism"—the inflows and outflows of matter and energy through the tourism system (Farrell & Twining-Ward, 2004; Becken & Patterson, 2006). Whereas conventional sustainable tourism measures emissions or water consumption at facilities, the susthonomic approach integrates the entire value chain: from agricultural practices supplying gastronomy, through the energy mix of accommodation, to the management of organic waste as a resource for composting or biogas. In closed mountain systems, such as ski resorts with limited water resources, linking wastewater treatment to irrigation of local farms can simultaneously reduce environmental pressures and stimulate local food production for the tourism supply (Scott et al., 2020; Gössling, 2021). Similarly, organic waste from hotels and restaurants can be redirected into local farms—closing the nutrient cycle and reducing dependence on imported inputs. This "circular loop" expands the economic base of the destination beyond classical tourism services and

builds systemic resilience to supply crises (cf. Girard & Nocca, 2017).

The key epistemological shift introduced by susthonomics in tourism governance is the replacement of one-dimensional indicators (arrivals, overnight stays, GDP) with wellbeing and boundary-based indicators. An "infrastructural bridge" is needed between global agendas (SDGs, Paris Agreement) and local destination practice (Hall, 2019). In practice, this means supplementing classical economic indicators with the LM3 local multiplier of tourist expenditure; an index of social distribution (share of women/youth in tourism revenues); the ecological footprint per arrival; and a subjective index of resident satisfaction with tourism (Costanza et al., 2014; Stiglitz, Fitoussi & Durand, 2022). When published transparently, these indicators become regulatory mechanisms: destinations that degrade ecosystems or exclude local groups lose their susthonomic label and access to public incentives.

A systemic observation of tourism through the lens of susthonomics reveals it as a sector with high networking capacity—linking land and landscapes, labor and services, culture and narratives, gastronomy, infrastructure (energy, water), and finance (taxes, fees). When these flows are aligned with local development priorities, tourism evolves into a testing ground for a broader economic transition toward wellbeing-oriented and ecologically bounded models (Bianchi, 2022; Everingham & Chassagne, 2020). It is precisely in this role that susthonomic tourism positions itself: not as a niche eco-segment, but as a pivotal sector capable of swinging the pendulum from profit toward wellbeing across the entire local economy.

4. SUSTHONOMIC PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE

Recent experiences from some of the world's most visited countries demonstrate that susthonomic principles—local value retention, social inclusion, ecological resilience, and wellbeing orientation—are increasingly permeating mainstream tourism policies, albeit with variations in scope and institutional environments. France, for example, has developed the Occitanie Slow Tourism program in the Occitanie region, which subsidizes exclusively small domestic households, cooperative accommodation facilities, and thematic cultural routes with limited daily visitor quotas. Research by the regional development agency shows that in the past three years the local expenditure multiplier has doubled, while pressures on the most sensitive natural sites have declined by one-third (Occitanie Tourisme, 2023).

A similar logic has been adopted in the Basque Country of Spain through the Basque Zero-Km Gastronomy label. Restaurants sourcing at least seventy percent of their ingredients within a radius of one hundred kilometers recorded a 21% increase in turnover, along with a 30% reduction in supply-chain emissions (Basque Culinary Center, 2023). Thus, short supply chains, mandatory contracts with women's and family cooperatives, and reduced carbon footprints have become constitutive elements of the region's brand identity.

In Italy, susthonomic experiments are twofold. In the north, the Trentino Ecomuseum Network integrates mountain households, agricultural cooperatives, and micro-accommodation facilities into a collective "village of wellbeing"; in the south, the borghi autentici network revitalizes historic rural cores through a combination of sustainable tourism, creative industries, and community ownership of cultural infrastructure. Both models have contributed to slowing demographic decline and increasing youth participation in local entrepreneurship (BAI, 2022; Trentino Sviluppo, 2022).

In Germany's Baden-Württemberg region, the Fair Trade Tourism label was launched, obligating hotels to use renewable energy, incorporate local supply chains, and reduce the share of seasonal labor. Preliminary results show that participating establishments have reduced energy intensity by 40% while maintaining competitiveness in international markets (Regierung BW, 2023). On the Isles of Scilly, part of the United Kingdom, the Community Land Trust introduced a "sustainable tourism tax," with revenues directly reinvested into affordable housing and small-scale renewable energy projects, thereby mitigating the pressure of secondary housing and encouraging the return of younger residents (Scilly CLT, 2022).

The susthonomic concept has also gained traction in non-European countries with high tourism intensity. In Hawai'i, the Community-Based Subsistence Tourism initiative restricted access to the most sensitive beaches and trails, introduced a reservation system, and channeled revenues into indigenous cooperatives managing coastal ecosystem protection. Similarly, in Mexico, the Maya Ka'an destination enabled Mayan communities to retain full control over accommodation and products, with revenues returned via a common fund to education and forest conservation (Pagiola, 2020).

Thailand's Doi Tung Development Project integrates mountain tourism with organic coffee production and weaving crafts, reinvesting profits into funds for women and youth, while strict carbon management tracks the entire value chain (Mae Fah Luang Foundation, 2021). Particularly illustrative is the case of Costa Rica, where a long-term Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) system enabled the rehabilitation of most national forests, while tourism remained the leading source of foreign exchange (Pagiola, 2020). At the opposite scale, Bhutan, through its restrictive "high value – low volume" policy and linking of tourism contributions to the Gross National Happiness index, has subordinated the sector entirely to social and cultural wellbeing.

Ultimately, these examples—from Occitanie to the Himalayas—demonstrate that susthonomic principles are not reserved for marginal destinations but are successfully implemented even in highly competitive markets, provided that public policies orient tourism toward

a place-based economy and sustainable ecology. Their common denominator is the abandonment of one-dimensional growth metrics in favor of wellbeing and ecosystem preservation indicators, thus laying the foundation for a new developmental matrix in which tourism becomes an instrument of socio-ecological transformation rather than a mere generator of revenue.

5. OPPORTUNITIES FOR APPLYING THE SUSTHONOMIC CONCEPT IN THE TOURISM OF THE WESTERN BALKANS

Within the Western Balkans, the susthonomic concept of tourism has not yet been institutionally codified. However, the complex combination of natural resources, cultural diversity, and underutilized local market niches indicates substantial development potential. When examining the countries of the region from southeast to northwest, one can identify different starting positions but also a common baseline: the need to shift tourism away from a paradigm of cost externalization toward a model prioritizing localized value, social inclusion, and ecological resilience.

In North Macedonia, the Tikveš wine region and the mountain municipalities of Kruševo and Mavrovo already feature cooperatives of winegrowers and small-scale accommodation providers. Yet, integration of these actors into a coherent tourism product remains partial (Ministry of Economy of North Macedonia, 2023). The creation of a regional label "Tikveš – zero-km wine tourism" could, according to ministry simulations, raise the local expenditure multiplier from the current 1.6 to 2.3, while reducing the carbon footprint of food transport by 18%.

Albania, following extensive growth along its coastline, now faces ecosystem degradation and growing social inequalities. Mountain areas such as Valbona and Theth have established the beginnings of community-based tourism organizations managing accommodation and trails, but they lack a financial mechanism for maintaining alpine pastures (Albanian Sustainable Tourism Initiative, 2022). Introducing payments for ecosystem services, supported by IPA III grants, would allow revenues from hiking fees to directly finance restorative measures, thereby fulfilling the susthonomic postulate of internalizing external costs.

In Montenegro, whose tourism profits are concentrated on the coast, northern municipalities already implement rural tourism programs through IPARD funding (Government of Montenegro, 2023). Still, analyses show that 55% of the revenues from Durmitor National Park flow to international tour operators. Establishing a "Local Value Durmitor" certificate, obliging hospitality providers to source at least 50% of supplies from local producers, would retain significantly more value within the community while strengthening the social capital of rural households.

In Serbia, the Rural Tourism Development Fund in 2023 directed incentives toward women's cooperatives and circular supply chains in Western Serbia (Tourism Development Report, 2023). In the Uvac area, a pilot project for a carbon-neutral destination has been announced: by introducing a €1 eco-tax per visitor, part of the funds would be invested in solarization of eleven registered eco-camps, reducing emissions by 340 tCO2 within just five years.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly in Republika Srpska, diverse natural and cultural resources contrast with limited coordination of development policies. The Drina basin near Foča generates around €2.5 million in annual rafting revenues, but more than half of that value leaks away through external arrangements (Municipality of Foča, 2023). Establishing an Eco-Services Fund, financed by a €0.5 environmental tax, would secure over €120,000 for erosion control and cooperative ownership of campsites. In Sutjeska National Park, restructuring gastronomic supply chains could retain an additional €380,000 in the municipality, while lowering the carbon footprint by 1.7 tCO2 per ton of goods (JP "NP Sutjeska," 2023). Jahorina, as the most commercialized mountain destination, would benefit from the introduction of an "Olympic Table" label, whereby at least 60% of products sourced from Romanija would increase farm incomes and reduce transport costs. At the same time, a €1 surcharge per ski pass could serve as a flexible decarbonization tool—from investments in Nearly-Zero Energy hotel retrofits to the establishment of an electric shuttle line Pale–Trebević.

The Semberija region holds potential as an agrotourism hub: integrating twenty family farms into the "Banja Dvorovi" culinary route could generate an additional 15,000 high-quality overnight stays and create seventy permanent jobs. According to an IUP study (2023), 65% of the initial investments in renewable energy and value-added chains would be covered by IPA III "Nature-based Tourism SMEs" grants.

In the Federation of BiH, the beginnings of practices aligned with susthonomic principles are already visible, though lacking systematic networking and clear regulatory support. In the Neretva Valley, the project "Hutovo Blato – Nature Pays Back" (UNDP BiH, 2023) introduced a voluntary €2 "bird-watching fee," with 70% of revenues directed to wetland restoration and the remainder to local beekeepers supplying traditional honey as part of the tourism package. In Una National Park, a co-management scheme for rafting corridors was established, whereby local cooperatives retain 60% of gross revenues and 40% is reinvested into water ecosystem monitoring and training of young guides (WWF Adria, 2022).

Meanwhile, in the Central Bosnia Canton, the Via Dinarica Green Corridors foundation developed a pilot "zero-km gastronomy" certification for mountain lodges on Vlašić. Initial results show an increase in domestic procurement from 22% to 55% within a single season (GIZ, 2023). Finally, in the Old Town of Mostar,

the "Crafts 4 Heritage" initiative connects artisanal workshops (jewelers, coppersmiths, leatherworkers) with tourist guides through a digital voucher system. Each purchased voucher includes a €1 contribution toward the conservation of the Old Bridge and co-financing training for women's cooperatives producing souvenirs from recycled textiles (Mostar Tourism Cluster, 2024). These scattered yet promising projects indicate that the Federation possesses a critical mass of local actors, particularly in gastronomy, crafts, and nature-based activities, who—if integrated into a unified susthonomic framework—could significantly increase the local expenditure multiplier while simultaneously funding ecosystem conservation and strengthening social inclusion.

At the regional level, the key obstacle remains scarce intersectoral coordination. Yet, the perspective of the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism fund from 2027 and new IPA III instruments foresee significant financing lines for "nature-positive" and "community-owned" tourism models. If local communities in Republika Srpska adopt cooperative ownership, payments for ecosystem services, and "zero-km" gastronomy, the region's tourism could evolve from an extractive logic to a susthonomic model that measures success by achieved wellbeing and ecosystem preservation.

6. CONCLUSION

The analytical framework of this paper began with the question of to what extent susthonomic principles—local value retention, social inclusion, ecological resilience, and wellbeing orientation—can be embedded into tourism practice in the Western Balkans. Comparative analysis of global projects demonstrated that destinations which systematically support short supply chains, community ownership, and mechanisms of financial valorization of ecosystem services succeed simultaneously in increasing local revenues, reducing social inequalities, and lowering ecological footprints. In the Balkan context, case studies—from the wine region of Tikveš and the mountain area of Valbona, to the Drina river corridor and rural Semberija—confirmed the existence of a critical mass of actors and resources for such a transformation, while also exposing institutional weaknesses: fragmented jurisdictions, incomplete statistics, and dependence on external tour operators.

Accordingly, the following levers of action are of priority:

1. Legal recognition of cooperatives and community-based ownership as key drivers of tourism development;
2. Introduction of mandatory eco-taxes and payment schemes for ecosystem services as stable sources of funding for nature conservation;
3. Integration of local farms, artisans, and women's entrepreneurial initiatives into the gastronomic and cultural products of destinations.

These measures are not merely an ethical imperative; they also constitute a competitive advantage in the post-pandemic era of demand oriented toward authenticity, wellbeing, and low-carbon footprints.

Future research should deepen the quantification of the social dividends of inclusive models, test the long-term financial viability of ecosystem service funds, and assess how different forms of local branding (e.g., "zero-km gastronomy") influence visitor and resident perceptions. Yet even now it is evident: by embracing a susthonomic approach, tourism in the Western Balkans can move from an extractive phase to a place-based economy that measures success through human wellbeing and ecosystem preservation, positioning the region as a leader of "quality-led growth" within the European tourism space.

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