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Understanding the Tourists' Perspective of Sustainability in Cultural Tourist Destinations

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Received: 29 September 2020; Accepted: 23 October 2020; Published: 24 October 2020



Abstract: Considering the tourists' viewpoint when creating a sustainable destination is crucial since marketing may be the driving force behind many sustainability initiatives. However, most of the literature has followed a supply-based perspective, ignoring the way that tourists view sustainability attributes. Therefore, this research attempts to address this gap in the literature by analyzing tourists' perceptions concerning sustainability attributes in tourist destinations. This research aims to determine which of these traits are seen as most important by the tourists and to ascertain their willingness to pay for these aspects. The study is quantitative, based on an online questionnaire administered to Turkish cultural tourists. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses are used to obtain insights into how tourists consider sustainability aspects in tourist destinations. Thus, this research concludes that tourists view sustainability from a more varied perspective than that embraced by the classic definition of the concept, which comprises economic, environmental and socio-cultural dimensions. The findings of the study also determine that tourists favor sustainability attributes that are instrumental in enhancing their own tourist experiences. This information may be useful for destinations, providing guidance about how to market sustainable tourist destinations and encourage responsible tourism choices.

Keywords: sustainable destination; sustainability attributes; importance given to sustainability; willingness to pay for sustainability; marketing sustainability; tourist perspective; cultural tourist destination

1. Introduction

The rising trend towards buying and consuming more sustainable products is leading organizations to consider sustainability as a requisite to gain competitive advantage and to include the needs of future generations in their marketing strategies [1,2]. Tourism organizations are not exempt from this trend, and destinations, in particular, are considering how their efforts to develop within sustainability principles may be used for marketing purposes [2,3]. However, using sustainability practices to market a destination assumes that the potential tourist will react favorably to marketing messages that highlight the sustainable nature of the destination. Thus, the question arises of whether tourists consider sustainability in their choices concerning tourist destinations.

While some literature has covered sustainable consumption within the general marketing field, this is an area that is relatively recent where tourist destinations are concerned [4]. Moreover, most of the literature on sustainability of tourist destinations has followed a supply-based perspective. Considering the tourists' point of view when fashioning sustainable destinations is relevant, the ability to market the place as sustainable may often be a crucial catalyst for sustainable tourism development [5]. However, while a large number of studies have examined the attributes that make a

destination more sustainable, little is known about how the visitors experience and feel these traits. As such, many features of sustainability may not be directly visible to the tourists [4]. In addition, the extent to which individuals consider sustainability attributes in their choices of destinations or the question of whether they are willing to pay for more sustainable destinations is not clear [6]. Emerging research, such as that of Tölkes [7], also questions the way that sustainability is communicated to potential customers, and whether these individuals are able to distinguish and value sustainable tourism products. Villarino and Font [8] state that the current marketing of sustainability is myopic, communicating information on what the business does rather than putting the customer at the center of the experience. Hanna, Font, Scarles, Weeden and Harrison [9] affirm that communicating sustainability to a potential customer should focus on those aspects of the sustainable destination that contribute to creating memorable tourism experiences.

Thus, this study aims to contribute to the literature by investigating sustainability from a demand-based perspective. By analyzing tourists' perceptions concerning sustainability attributes in tourist destinations, this research attempts to determine which sustainability traits are seen as most important by tourists and to ascertain their willingness to pay for these aspects. The focus of this research is on obtaining a greater understanding of sustainability from the tourists' point of view that may be useful to market sustainable tourist destinations and encourage responsible tourism choices. This study is carried out within the context of cultural tourist destinations, since sustainable tourism development is particularly important for these places, which are defined by cultural elements that are often fragile and in need of protection [10].

2. Literature Review

A considerable amount of research has been carried out on determining how to apply sustainability principles to the management of tourist destinations. One intrinsic problem is that there appears to be no standard definition of a sustainable destination [11]. Nevertheless, the general consensus is that sustainability of tourist destinations includes aspects of resource preservation, opportunities for the local economy, benefits for the community and proper management of the destination [12]. In order to achieve these, measurement tools are needed, and a considerable portion of the academic literature has been devoted to derive lists of indicators that may be used to assess the degree of sustainability of a tourist destination [13].

In order to encourage sustainable tourism practices (STPs) and derive more practitioner-oriented guiding principles, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), among other institutions, has strived to develop guidelines for sustainable tourism, such as the "Guidebook on Indicators of Sustainable Development for Tourism Destinations" [14]. In addition, the Tourism Sustainability Group (TSG) was created by the European Commission at the end of 2004 to contribute efforts to the sustainability of European tourism. In 2007, the TSG created a report that was endorsed by the European Commission [15]. On the basis of this work and the European Destinations of Excellence initiative [16], the European Commission has developed the European Tourism Indicators System (ETIS) for Sustainable Management at Destination Level, intended to be used by tourism destinations to supervise, manage, measure and enhance their sustainability performances [17].

Another initiative addressing the promotion of STPs is that of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). The GSTC is an independent, international body comprising sustainable tourism experts and supported by both individuals and organizations like the UNWTO. While adopting a code of diverse global sustainable tourism principles, it has compiled and created global instruments and training capabilities to support sustainability practices in tourist destinations [18].

While these initiatives are valuable in that they encourage STPs, they do not take into consideration the point view of the tourists. Although it is important for destinations to develop their products within a sustainable perspective, it is also essential that they are able to sell those products to potential tourists. According to Font and McCabe [19], sustainable development can only be achieved when it is supported by more responsible behavior of consumers, since individuals need to be willing to purchase sustainable

products rather than their less responsible alternatives. However, in order to ensure that consumers act in a way that supports sustainable practices, it is important to consider that different markets have varied needs and perceptions of sustainability [20]. Tourists are one of the key stakeholders of sustainable tourism development, since they can influence local economies, societies, cultures and environments through their choices [21]. Thus, tourism scholars, such as López-Sánchez and Pulido-Fernández [22], Jeong, Zielinski, Chang and Kim [23] and Choi, Kim, Sawitri and Lee [24], have focused on identifying segments of responsible tourists, with the aim of specifically targeting these individuals with sustainable tourism products. However, no consensus has been achieved on the profile of a sustainable consumer type [25]. Nevertheless, previous researchers show that the ratio of the tourists who would consume sustainable tourism products or behave responsibly towards the residents is considerably low [26,27]. Rather than targeting only responsible travelers, destinations may benefit from marketing sustainability in a more covert way that emphasizes attributes of the destination that, in addition to contributing to sustainability, also have the potential to create more pleasurable tourism experiences [9].

In order to encourage more responsible behaviors of the tourists, we need to understand their perceptions concerning sustainability-related characteristics of destinations and the importance that they give to these attributes. There is a need for integrating tourist attitudes into management systems that make decisions for sustainable tourism [28]. In this regard, one of the destinations' main concerns is that of conveying the sustainable nature of the place to its visitors, since in order for sustainable tourism development to be successful it needs to be marketed [19]. However, communicating sustainability is difficult for destination managers, as most sustainability attributes cannot be experienced directly by the tourists [4]. In addition, even when the visitors experience the traits that make a destination sustainable, to what extent do they care about these aspects of the place [6]? Tourists' needs and expectations shape the development of destinations; thus, their perceptions concerning sustainability should also be understood if they are to guide the creation of a truly sustainable tourist destination [29].

Despite the need to better understand the tourists' view, research done on perceptions of sustainability has mostly focused on the residents' point of view. Tourists' perceptions on the impacts of tourism may differ from those of the local community [30]. Weaver and Lawton [31] and Raymond and Brown [32] examine both locals' and visitors' attitudes toward tourism growth and recognize that tourists have a more positive attitude towards development that is based on sustainability principles. Among the studies that follow, the tourists' viewpoint is the focus of Nicholas and Tapa [33], who examine the tourists' perspective of sustainable tourism based on their environmental, economic and social attitudes towards a specific World Heritage Site. These authors also find that more positive opinions towards sustainable tourism increase the level of support for sustainable development [33]. However, in the study of Cottrell, Van der Duim, Ankersmid and Kelder [34], tourists are found to be not always knowledgeable about the concept of sustainable tourism development, an issue that reduces their capacity for valuing a destination's sustainability attributes. Another study that examines visitor perceptions is that of Ngamsomsuke, Hwang and Huang [35], who determine that when evaluating sustainability attributes in historic sites, the visitors care most about the urban design and the preservation of the architectural character of the destination.

In addition, a few studies have also investigated the willingness of tourists to pay for sustainability in tourist destinations, albeit with contradictory results. A group of studies reveal a positive relationship between the concern of customers about sustainability issues and their willingness to pay. According to Creyer [36] and Simon [37], customers are willing to pay more for a firm that exhibits ethical behavior and engages in a cause of concern. Similarly, in Dodds et al.'s [6] study, visitors to two destinations in Thailand and Indonesia expressed their willingness to pay tax to support conservation and sustainability in these places. Likewise, in Law and Cheung's [38] research, tourists claim to be ready to spend more in order to improve the environmental conditions of the destination. However, other studies show that positive attitudes of the customers towards sustainability do not always lead to a higher willingness to pay. For example, Manaktola and Jauhari's [39] investigation on green practices in hotels concludes that, despite the consumers' stated interest in environmentally responsible practices,

they are unwilling to pay more to have them implemented. Budeanu [40] also points to the gap between environmentally friendly attitudes of tourists and their lack of responsible consumption choices, stating that the visitors' low level of support hinders the development of sustainable tourist destinations. In addition to socio-demographic factors such as age, gender and educational level [41], several factors, including personal values, attitudes, motivation, knowledge, ability and opportunity to engage in sustainability practices, play an important role in determining customers' willingness to pay more for environmentally friendly tourism products [39,42–44]. In addition, willingness to pay more is not always translated to actual behavior, although it may provide an indication of the individual's concern for sustainability [45]. Thus, as discussed above, studies such as those of Dodds et al. [6], Law and Cheung [38], Budeanu [40], Hultman et al. [42], Meleddu and Pulina [44] have concerned themselves with whether tourists care and are willing to pay more for sustainability, albeit with mixed results. A better understanding of the topic as well as studies that also examine specific aspects and attributes of the destination are needed.

Thus, the current study aims to contribute to the literature by investigating, from the perspective of the tourists, the various attributes that make a cultural destination sustainable, identifying which ones are considered as most important. In addition, the research examines the willingness of tourists to pay more for these sustainability attributes at cultural tourist destinations.

3. Methodology

In order to examine the sustainability of tourist destinations from the demand side—that is, from the point of view of the visitors—this research draws on the literature concerning the attributes of a sustainable destination, while trying to adapt these to the perspective of the tourists. This study is carried out within the context of Turkish consumers, using a sample of Turkish cultural tourists.

An exploratory study was first conducted to better comprehend the topic. This qualitative investigation was based on the analysis of online user-generated reviews in TripAdvisor concerning a cultural tourist destination. This exploratory research sought to determine the extent to which sustainability aspects of the destination are mentioned in these online reviews, as an indication of their visibility and their consideration. In addition, interviews were conducted with three cultural tourism travel experts, chosen through judgmental sampling due to their extensive knowledge on cultural tourism, sustainability and tourist attitudes. These individuals were questioned about their experiences with tourists in cultural destinations, and they provided their opinions concerning those aspects of the destination that visitors are able to judge and are most concerned about. This exploratory phase of the research helped provide a more thorough understanding of the tourists' perspective and shape the quantitative facet of the study. The conceptual model derived through a review of the literature and portrayed in Table 1 was thus refined through the qualitative exploratory study, leading to the design of the survey instrument used in the research.

Table 1. Conceptual model: Sustainability attributes of a cultural tourist destination.

Economic Attributes	
Capital leakage and linkage	• Availability of local products for purchase by tourists for the benefit of the local people
	• Services at the destination are provided by the local people as opposed to international chain/non-local providers
Capital formation in the community/ investment	• The destination charges adequate pricing that allows it to sustain itself in the future
	• Money paid by the tourists to experience/view/interact with cultural attractions is used for the conservation of the destination
Local career opportunities	• Local employment/Local people employed not only in lower-paid jobs, but also in higher-paid jobs in the tourist labor market
	• Women and minorities getting equal opportunities
Ease of access to cultural destinations	• Convenient access to cultural destinations
Nature of demand	• Seasonality of cultural tourism
Infrastructure/superstructure	• Availability and quality of facilities and services at cultural destinations
Socio-cultural Attributes	
Respect for culture and local values	• Destination is developed with respect to the local community's culture and values
	• Local authorities act with respect for the local community's culture and values
Criminality and other negative behaviors at cultural destinations	• Crime, vandalism, drug usage, alcoholism rates are not increased due to tourism
Access of local community to tourism resources at the destination	• Local people are able to benefit from facilities which tourists come to enjoy
	• Local people are able to visit the attractions at the destination together with the tourists
Cultural exchange	• The destination offers cultural exchange between tourists and hosts
Quality of life	• The local community's quality of life at the destination is increased because of tourism
Knowledge	• Interpretation/knowledge about the history and culture of the destination received through the visit

Table 1. *Cont.*

Environmental Attributes	
Preservation of natural resources	• Protection of green areas, fauna and flora
	• Urbanization and level of building at the cost of green areas is controlled for
Preservation of historical and cultural resources	• Protection of historical/cultural resources
	• Cultural/historical site preservation conditions
	• Overall architectural character of the location surrounding the cultural destination is protected
Pollution of the environment	• Level of pollution of the environment, water and air in cultural tourist destinations
Reuse/recycling	• Renewable resources being used and recycling being applied
Capacity/limit to tourism growth	• Tourist overcrowding and congestion at cultural destinations is addressed
	• The destination puts emphasis on limiting the growth of tourism

The questionnaire used in the quantitative phase of the research included a measure of the importance given by the respondents to various sustainability attributes at cultural tourist destinations, assessed through a 5-point importance rating scale. In addition, the individual's willingness to pay more for these attributes was measured using a 5-point Likert scale, applied on a summarized list of the sustainability attributes, to reduce the overall length of the questionnaire. The last part of the survey encompassed questions to determine the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

An online questionnaire was applied by posting links in relevant social media platforms to reach the target sample, which includes Turkish tourists that travel to cultural tourist destinations in Turkey or abroad. The respondents' interest and knowledge of sustainability were not assessed beforehand, since the focus of the research was on accessing a sample of cultural tourists, irrespectively of their concern for sustainability. This is in line with the objective of the study that aims to get a better understanding of the tourists' point of view in order to find practical information that may be used to encourage more responsible tourist choices, even when those individuals are not initially concerned with sustainability. Thus, links leading to the research survey in Turkish were posted on social media tourism groups such as Gezipin, Gezimanya, Gezi Bloglari, etc., which are Facebook travel groups focused on cultural tourism. Sustainability is not explicitly mentioned as a topic of interest in any of these groups. In total, 353 respondents were reached. The profile of the sample is shown in Table 2.

To summarize, the study's methodology was based on the following phases: (1) Review of the literature on sustainability and sustainable tourist destinations to develop the research's conceptual model shown in Table 1; (2) qualitative study, including an analysis of the comments concerning a cultural tourist destination in Tripadvisor and interviews to three experts, which were used to create the survey's instrument employed in the next step of the research; (3) quantitative study with data collection carried out via an online questionnaire administered to Turkish cultural tourists accessed through Facebook travel groups.

Table 2. Demographic profile of the respondents (n = 353).

Demographic Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	140	41.1
Female	201	58.9
Age		
Less than 25	17	4.8
26–35	117	33.1
36–45	96	27.2
46–55	68	19.3
More than 55	55	15.6
Marital Status		
Married	196	58.2
Single/Widower/Divorced	141	41.8
Education		
High School or less	28	8.1
Associate Degree	23	6.6
Undergraduate Degree	172	49.4
Postgraduate Degree	125	35.9
Net monthly Income		
Less than 2000 TL	46	13.6
2000–5000 TL	141	41.8
5001–10,000 TL	121	35.9
More than 10,000 TL	29	8.6

4. Findings

In line with the purpose of the study, the analyses that were carried out focused on understanding how important the various aspects of a sustainable destination are to cultural tourists, and how willing these tourists are to pay more for certain attributes of sustainability. As a first step, the dimensionality of the constructs—importance given to and willingness to pay for the various attributes of sustainability—was examined via exploratory factor analyses of the scales. Factor analyses using the principal component method were carried out using the IBM SPSS (version 25) software to describe and better understand the dimensions of the scales.

The suitability of the items and the strength of the inter-correlations among them were checked based on several well-recognized statistic indicators. The results of the Barlett's test of sphericity show us that the analyses were highly significant ($p < 0.001$). The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was above 0.91 in both analyses, exceeding the recommended value of 0.5 [46]. Varimax rotation was used to produce a simpler factor structure and meaningful interpretation by maximizing the variances of loadings for the factors.

The exploratory factor analysis of the importance given to sustainability, as shown in Table 3, identified six factors with eigenvalues greater than one: cultural and environmental protection, local community related issues, services and facilities, reuse/recycling, local products and providers, and limits to tourism growth. These factors explained over 71% of the variation, although the first factor, cultural and environmental protection, encompassed over 41% of it.

The exploratory factor analysis concerning the attributes of sustainability for which the tourists are most willing to pay yielded a 3-factor solution that encompassed the willingness to pay for the local quality of life (QOL), for the environment and for quality (refer to Table 4). These factors all had eigenvalues greater than one and explained over 76% of the variation, with the first one explaining over 33% of it, while the other two factors were found to explain over 26% and 19% of the variation, respectively.

Table 3. Exploratory factor analysis: Importance given by tourists to sustainability.

Items	Factor Loading	Mean [a]	Eigen-Value	Total Rotated SS [b]	Variance Explained (%)	Cronbach's Alpha
Factor 1: Cultural and environmental protection		4.73	9.448	4.678	41.08	0.92
Preservation of historical and cultural resources	0.856	4.82				
Protection of green areas, fauna and flora	0.800	4.77				
Protection of overall architectural character of the location surrounding the cultural destination	0.786	4.75				
Urbanization and level of building at the cost of green areas	0.767	4.74				
Level of pollution of the environment, water and air in cultural tourist destinations	0.670	4.64				
Interpretation / Knowledge about the history and culture of the destination received through the visit	0.650	4.64				
Factor 2: Local community related issues		4.22	2.033	3.981	8.84	0.89
Local people are able to visit the attractions at the destination together with the tourists	0.833	4.08				
Local people are able to benefit from facilities which tourists come to enjoy	0.826	4.1				
The local community's quality of life at the destination is increased because of tourism	0.646	4.2				
Local authorities act with respect to the local community's culture and values	0.622	4.5				
The destination offers cultural exchange between tourists and hosts	0.612	4.16				
Local people are employed not only in lower-paid jobs, but also in higher-paid jobs in the tourist labor market	0.583	3.89				
Destination is developed with respect to the local community's culture and values	0.524	4.59				
Factor 3: Services and facilities		3.99	1.626	2.68	7.07	0.80
Availability of facilities at cultural destinations	0.847	4.11				
Quality of services at cultural destinations	0.814	4.27				
Convenient access to cultural destinations	0.726	4.08				
Destination being a place visited not in certain periods but continuously	0.657	3.51				
Factor 4: Reuse/recycling		4.27	1.208	1.877	5.25	0.86
Renewable resources being used	0.783	4.3				
Recycling being applied	0.762	4.24				
Factor 5: Local products and providers		4.01	1.064	1.655	4.62	0.65
Availability of local and traditional products for purchase by tourists	0.833	3.96				
Services at the destination are provided by the local people as opposed to international chain/non-local providers	0.789	4.05				
Factor 6: Limits to tourism growth		3.89	1.028	1.536	4.47	0.67
The destination not being overcrowded by the tourists	0.887	3.57				
The site puts emphasis on limiting the growth of tourism	0.710	4.22				
Overall scale					71.33	0.93

Varimax rotation was used; Kaiser–Meyer—Olkin = 0.912; Barlett's test of sphericity—significance = 0.000. Factor loadings smaller than 0.5 are not included. [a] Items measured on a 5-point scale (1, lowest importance level; 5, highest importance level). [b] Sum of squares.

Table 4. Exploratory factor analysis: Willingness to pay for sustainability.

Items	Factor Loading	Mean [a]	Eigen-Value	Total Rotated SS [b]	Variance Explained (%)	Cronbach's Alpha
Factor 1: Willingness to pay for local QOL		3.43	8.376	4.682	33.44	0.93
Willingness to pay more for a destination where local people are being employed in higher-paid jobs	0.828	3.11				
Willingness to pay more for a destination in which tourism increases the local community's quality of life	0.825	3.71				
Willingness to pay more for a destination in which local people are able to benefit from facilities which tourists come to enjoy	0.818	3.31				
Willingness to pay more for a destination developed with respect for the culture and values of the local community	0.733	3.57				
Willingness to pay more for a destination offering cultural exchange between tourists and hosts	0.709	3.52				
Willingness to pay more for a destination where services are being provided by the local people as opposed to international chains and non-local providers	0.699	3.52				
Willingness to pay more for a destination where local products are sold rather than mass produced ones	0.651	3.55				
Factor 2: Willingness to pay for the environment		3.69	1.297	3.685	26.32	0.92
Willingness to pay more for a destination where green areas, fauna and flora are protected	0.826	3.70				
Willingness to pay more for a destination with a lower level of pollution of the environment, water and air	0.808	3.84				
Willingness to pay more for a destination where its historical and cultural resources are preserved	0.788	3.79				
Willingness to pay more for a destination where renewable resources are being used and recycling is being carried out	0.751	3.46				
Factor 3: Willingness to pay for quality		3.59	1.034	2.341	16.72	0.84
Willingness to pay more for a destination which is more convenient to access	0.883	3.38				
Willingness to pay more for a destination offering higher quality of services	0.846	3,71				
Willingness to pay more for a destination where tourism does not cause negative behaviors	0.560	3.67				
Overall scale					76.48	0.95

Varimax rotation was used; Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin = 0.931; Barlett's test of sphericity— significance = 0.000. Factor loadings smaller than 0.5 are not included. [a] Items measured on a 5-point scale (1, lowest willingness to pay; 5, highest willingness to pay). [b] Sum of squares.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using AMOS (version 25) was carried out to confirm the dimensionality of both scales. The goodness-of-fit indexes in both analyses exceeded the critical recommended values [46], as seen in Tables 5 and 6. The CFA analysis performed on the importance given to sustainability attributes of the destination scale corroborated the dimensions obtained in the exploratory factor analysis. The composite reliability (CR) for all of the aspects was above 0.7, while the average variance extracted (AVE) showed values above 0.5 for all dimensions, except for local community issues, which was close to this critical figure. Thus, the analysis provides guidance concerning the aspects for which the tourists would evaluate different sustainability attributes of the destination. In parallel, the CFA analysis on the willingness to pay for sustainability scale corroborated the dimensionality of this measure as encompassing three main aspects: willingness to pay for local QOL, willingness to pay for the environment, and willingness to pay for the destination's quality. As seen in Table 6, the CR and AVE figures for all dimensions were above the critical values of 0.7 and 0.5, respectively. Therefore, as the analysis shows, tourists consider three main aspects of the willingness to pay for sustainability: two of them are related to the quality of the destination or consider features that may increase its overall enjoyment, such as issues related to the environment, and the last aspect concerns the quality of life of the local community.

Once the dimensionality of the constructs was ascertained, descriptive statistics based on mean analyses were conducted to determine which sustainability attributes are considered most important when visiting a cultural tourist destination (refer to Table 3). Among the six factors listed in Table 3, factor 1—cultural and environmental protection—was found to be the most important by the tourists (mean = 4.728), followed by factor 4 (reuse/recycling, with mean 4.271) and factor 2 (local community related issues, with mean 4.217); whereas factor 6—limits to tourism growth—was the least important (mean of 3.894).

When the items concerning the importance given by the tourists to various sustainability attributes are compared, preservation of historical and cultural resources is seen to have the highest mean (4.82). In fact, all items under factor 1, cultural and environmental protection, had means higher than any of the other items in the scale. However, tourists do not pay attention to the destination being a place visited not in certain periods but continuously (3.51), the destination not being overcrowded by the tourists (3.57), and the local people being employed not only in lower-paid jobs, but also in higher-paid jobs in the tourist labor market (3.89).

Descriptive statistics based on mean analyses were also used to determine which sustainability attributes tourists are willing to pay more for when visiting a cultural tourist destination. The factor concerning the willingness to pay for the environment had the highest mean, indicating that the tourists are prepared to pay more (3.69) for these aspects when compared with those that refer to quality (3.59) and local QOL (3.43). When the items are compared, "willingness to pay more for a lower level of pollution of the environment, water and air" had the highest mean (3.84), followed by "willingness to pay for a destination where its historical and cultural resources are preserved" (3.79). These items all belong to the dimension related to the protection of the environment. In contrast, "willingness to pay more for a destination where local people are being employed in higher-paid jobs" had the lowest mean (3.11), followed by "willingness to pay more for a destination in which local people are able to benefit from facilities which tourists come to enjoy" (3.31). Thus, according to the findings, respondents showed the lowest willingness to pay for aspects related to the local community's QOL.

Table 5. Confirmatory factor analysis of importance given to sustainability.

Construct: Importance Given to		Item	Std. Beta	SE	*t*-Value	*p*
Cultural & environmental protection	→	Preservation of historical and cultural resources	0.744	—	—	—
Cultural & environmental protection	→	Protection of green areas, fauna and flora	0.772	0.073	14.610	0.000
Cultural & environmental protection	→	Protection of overall architectural character	0.825	0.070	15.638	0.000
Cultural & environmental protection	→	Urbanization and level of building	0.787	0.076	13.778	0.000
Cultural & environmental protection	→	Level of pollution of the environment, water and air	0.859	0.066	16.408	0.000
Cultural & environmental protection	→	Interpretation / Knowledge about the history and culture	0.865	0.063	16.433	0.000
Local community issues	→	Local people are able to visit the attractions at the destination	0.686	—	—	—
Local community issues	→	Local people are able to benefit from facilities	0.694	0.114	11.543	0.000
Local community issues	→	The local community's quality of life is increased because of tourism	0.711	0.104	11.774	0.000
Local community issues	→	Local authorities act with respect to the local community's culture and values	0.737	0.067	17.279	0.000
Local community issues	→	The destination offers cultural exchange between tourists and hosts	0.799	0.105	12.491	0.000
Local community issues	→	Local people are employed in higher-paid jobs in the tourist labor market	0.673	0.107	11.321	0.000
Local community issues	→	Destination is developed with respect to the local community's culture and values	0.699	0.108	11.670	0.000
Services & facilities	→	Availability of facilities at cultural destinations	0.495	—	—	—
Services & facilities	→	Quality of services at cultural destinations	0.580	0.120	8.899	0.000
Services & facilities	→	Convenient access to cultural destinations	0.872	0.141	9.236	0.000
Services & facilities	→	Destination being a place visited not in certain periods but continuously	0.869	0.158	9.235	0.000
Reuse & recycle	→	Renewable resources being used	0.878	—-	—	—
Reuse & recycle	→	Recycling being applied	0.857	0.055	16.674	0.000
Local products & providers	→	Availability of local and traditional products for purchase by tourists	0.833	—	—	—
Local products & providers	→	Services at the destination are provided by the local people	0.574	0.114	6.410	0.000
Limits to tourism growth	→	The destination not being overcrowded by the tourists	0.825	0.040	18.234	0.000
Limits to tourism growth	→	The site puts emphasis on limiting the growth of tourism	0.656	0.040	18.234	0.000
Goodness-of-Fit Indexes		Chi Square $_{208}$	438.860			
		CFI	0.95			
		GFI	0.91			
		RMSEA	0.06			
Validity and Reliability of the constructs			CR	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha	
		Cultural & environmental protection	0.89	0.58	0.92	
		Local community issues	0.72	0.45	0.89	
		Services & facilities	0.85	0.58	0.80	
		Reuse & recycle	0.75	0.60	0.86	
		Local products & providers	0.79	0.66	0.65	
		Limits to tourism growth	0.78	0.65	0.67	

Note: Based on the maximum likelihood method. Std. Beta = standardized beta; SE = standard error; CFI = composite fit index; GFI = goodness-of-fit index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation; CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted.

Table 6. Confirmatory factor analysis of willingness to pay for sustainability.

Construct: Willingness to Pay for		Item	Std. Beta	SE	*t*-Value	*p*
Willingness to pay for local QOL	→	Willingness to pay more for a destination where local people are being employed in higher-paid jobs	0.735	—	—	—
Willingness to pay for local QOL	→	Willingness to pay more for a destination in which tourism increases the local community's quality of life	0.761	0.047	21.415	0.000
Willingness to pay for local QOL	→	Willingness to pay more for a destination in which local people are able to benefit from facilities	0.833	0.073	15.674	0.000
Willingness to pay for local QOL	→	Willingness to pay more for a destination developed with respect for the culture and values of the local community	0.904	0.069	17.027	0.000
Willingness to pay for local QOL	→	Willingness to pay more for a destination offering cultural exchange between tourists and hosts	0.777	0.069	14.466	0.000
Willingness to pay for local QOL	→	Willingness to pay more for a destination where services are being provided by the local people	0.803	0.069	15.058	0.000
Willingness to pay for local QOL	→	Willingness to pay more for a destination where local products	0.757	0.072	14.121	0.000
Willingness to pay for the environment	→	Willingness to pay more for a destination where green areas, fauna and flora are protected	0.793	—	—	—
Willingness to pay for the environment	→	Willingness to pay more for a destination with a lower level of pollution of the environment, water and air	0.886	0.057	18.907	0.000
Willingness to pay for the environment	→	Willingness to pay more for a destination where its historical and cultural resources are preserved	0.832	0.049	21.046	0.000
Willingness to pay for the environment	→	Willingness to pay more for a destination where renewable resources are being used and recycling is being carried out	0.905	0.056	19.374	0.000
Willingness to pay for quality	→	Willingness to pay more for a destination which is more convenient to access	0.898	—	—	—
Willingness to pay for quality	→	Willingness to pay more for a destination offering higher quality of services	0.687	0.061	12.947	0.000
Willingness to pay for quality	→	Willingness to pay more for a destination where tourism does not cause negative behaviors	0.613	0.064	11.340	0.000
Goodness-of-Fit Indexes		Chi Square 67	150.276			
		CFI	0.98			
		GFI	0.94			
		RMSEA	0.06			
			CR	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha	
Validity and Reliability of the constructs		Willingness to pay for local QOL	0.90	0.57	0.93	
		Willingness to pay for the environment	0.87	0.63	0.92	
		Willingness to pay for quality	0.73	0.60	0.84	

Note: Based on the maximum likelihood method. Std. Beta = standardized beta; SE = standard error; CFI = composite fit index; GFI = goodness-of-fit index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation; CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted.

5. Discussion

According to the analyses done in order to better understand the dimensionality of the constructs, the importance given to sustainability of a destination from a tourist perspective yields six aspects of the concept: cultural and environmental protection, local community related issues, services and facilities, reuse/recycling, local products and providers, and limits to tourism growth. This categorization of the various issues concerning the sustainability of the destination from the point of view of the tourists goes beyond the classical grouping of sustainability in economic, socio-cultural and environmental dimensions and may be used in future studies since it provides further insights into the topic.

The mean analyses of the factors in the importance given to sustainability scale also show that cultural and environmental protection is considered most critical, since it was the dimension with the highest mean. Among all of the items, "preservation of historical and cultural resources" is what

the tourists gave greatest importance to, followed by "protection of green areas, fauna and flora" and "protection of overall architectural character of the location surrounding the cultural destination". In this way, the study supports the findings of Ngamsomsuke, Hwang and Huang [35], who state that visitors are most concerned by the spatial design and the conservation of the architectural characteristics of the destination. These are the attributes of sustainability that are easily visible to tourists and which will directly affect the experience of the visitors. Thus, for the tourists, elements of protection that contribute to the attractiveness of the destination through the quality of its environment are essential.

This research also investigates another important topic, namely the extent to which tourists are ready to pay higher prices for a more sustainable destination. The tourism industry is being pressured to become more responsible; however, whether or not customers are willing to pay additional charges for more sustainable destinations remains unclear. Previous research carried out on this topic within the context of the tourism industry mainly concerns hotels [39,47] and generally considers only environmental aspects of sustainability [6,40].

Therefore, the current study is valuable as it provides more detailed information, including specific traits of sustainable destinations that tourists are most willing to pay for, from a wider perspective that includes not only environmental elements but also social ones. In addition, this research shows that tourists consider their willingness to pay for sustainability in relation to three main aspects: the environment, the destination's quality and the QOL of the community. Looking at the tourists' willingness to pay for sustainability from this perspective provides additional insights into the topic.

According to the results of this research, tourists claim to be less willing to pay for sustainability attributes even though they give a higher importance to them. Thus, as with other studies [39], the results of our research also point to a gap between the tourists' perceived importance of sustainability and their commitment to bear the monetary responsibility of sustainable practices. The feature that they are most willing to pay for is the lower level of pollution of the environment, water and air. Thus, tourists are found to be more willing to pay more for the environment, and then for quality, whereas they are less willing to pay for aspects that relate to the local community's quality of life.

6. Conclusions and Implications

Sustainable tourism is an ongoing process that needs constant academic investigation to identify issues and gaps in existing practices, as well as fitting solutions. Although there are several guidelines elaborated by international organizations for the sustainable tourism development of destinations, as well as academic research that discusses sustainability indicators, most of these studies focus on the supply side, neglecting the point of view of the visitors. Since obtaining the support of the tourists is essential for the success of sustainability initiatives at destinations [40], there is a need to understand how these individuals view the different aspects of sustainability. Given the scarce number of both theoretical and practical investigations on the topic, the current research is designed to address this gap. Thus, the current study contributes to the literature by investigating, from the perspective of the tourists, the various attributes that make a cultural destination sustainable, identifying which ones are considered as most important. In addition, the research examines the willingness of tourists to pay more for sustainability attributes at cultural tourist destinations.

The study provides a different perspective to the development of sustainable destinations, establishing the need to rethink sustainability initiatives in a way that also incorporates the viewpoint of the tourists. Especially, the research points to a potential gap between what is considered important for sustainability by the destination's managers and suppliers, and what is seen as relevant by the tourists. From a theoretical perspective, the study indicates the need to revise the definitions and conceptualizations of the sustainable destination in a way that also takes into consideration the views of the tourists. Furthermore, connecting sustainability to the tourism experience is found to be critical in this research, in support of Hanna et al. [9].

This research may also provide guidance for destination management organizations (DMOs) on how to communicate sustainability practices to tourists, focusing on those aspects that tourists

give most importance to and addressing those that are deemed less critical. The analysis shows that tourists care most about the cultural and environmental protection, with the highest importance given to the preservation of historical and cultural resources, protection of green areas, fauna and flora, and protection of overall architectural character of the location surrounding the cultural destination. In light of these results, sustainability initiatives that are marketed to tourists need to be tied to environmental attributes mostly focusing on the benefits that the tourists may obtain from these sustainability practices in terms of a more attractive, culturally unique and less polluted environment.

Tourists could also be educated by the DMOs and travel agents with which they come into contact with on those characteristics of the sustainable destination that do not seem so visible or important to them. This would raise the target market's awareness of sustainability and assist the progress of tourists' sustainable attitudes and practices [48,49]. However, awareness is not enough, and destination managers need to be able to tie these attributes to specific benefits for the tourists [50], as mentioned above, thus increasing their willingness to bear the costs of sustainability. In this sense, this research supports Hanna et al.'s [9] conclusion concerning the need to communicate sustainability to tourists as related to the creation of pleasurable tourism experiences. In addition, education on aspects that may be considered less important, or that the tourists are less willing to spend money on, may be given by travel agencies that work on cultural tourism, focusing on their importance in creating a high-quality destination that the tourists will enjoy. Thus, the emphasis should be on encouraging the tourists to spend money on destinations that create a high quality of life for the locals, while also designing better tourism experiences for the visitors.

In light of these results, DMOs may also need to manage the perceptions of value to the customer that are created by sustainability initiatives at the destination level. Thus, destination managers may justify to potential tourists the higher prices at the destination, triggered by costly sustainability initiatives, through highlighting the increased attractiveness of the destination as a result. For example, this may be a way to address the low willingness of Turkish cultural tourists, as found in this research, to pay for those aspects of sustainability that increase the quality of life of the local community, including their being employed in higher-paid jobs and being able to benefit from the tourism facilities. DMOs should find ways to link the increase in the quality of life of the community through sustainability initiatives to an improved tourism product. For example, use of the touristic facilities by the locals can be portrayed as a way to interact with the residents and to obtain a more authentic local experience that may commend a higher price. Thus, as destination suppliers may be encouraged to provide more sustainable products by being shown the increased advantages and reduced costs of such initiatives, so should the tourists be convinced to support sustainable tourism options because of their increased value to them. Sustainability practices, and their associated costs to the tourists, can be linked to the specific benefit of an improved tourism experience.

The results of the research can also provide practical insights to managers of tourist generated-review sites for destinations. Online platforms have a great potential in guiding consumers to more sustainable choices [51]; however, there are only few such review systems, such as the Tripadvisor's GreenLeader program and Directflights' Smart Score, which have the potential to give additional information on sustainability. Since individuals are becoming more conscious about responsible tourism options, user-generated review websites can be a catalyst for change by allowing different aspects of sustainability to be rated by the tourists through their systems. The findings obtained in this research provide a better understanding of the elements of sustainability that tourists consider most important and can guide the creation of a tourist-based sustainability model to be used by online review sites. Thus, any such tourist-generated review system for destinations should first focus on elements of sustainability that directly affect the tourist's experience, such as conservation of the environment and the local culture. Other elements of sustainability that are considered less important by tourists, such as the locals being employed in higher-paying jobs, may be included in such a review system by pointing to the potential value that the tourist may derive from this practice, i.e., more motivated service providers that deliver a higher level of service.

7. Limitations and Further Research

As with all research, the current study is not exempt from limitations, especially in relation to its restricted generalizability as a result of the particular focus of the investigation. The results obtained in this research give us an indication concerning sustainability in cultural destinations from the point of view of the tourists. However, these findings may change when other types of destinations, such as nature-based, sea, sun and sand, etc., are considered. In these cases, varied traits may be deemed more important to visitors, and they may be willing to pay for different aspects of sustainability. In addition, the current study also focuses on the perceptions of Turkish cultural tourists. Other customer segments may have diverse priorities and be willing to pay for other different sustainability attributes. Therefore, further research should be carried out, since understanding consumers' views concerning the sustainability of tourist destinations is crucial in order to support responsible tourism practices.

In addition, the study concludes that communicating sustainability to tourists in a way that focuses on the benefits they would obtain from these initiatives is paramount. However, to date there is little known concerning the format and tools that should be used to communicate sustainability practices used at tourist destinations to the tourists. In this sense, future studies should investigate the best instruments that could be used to convey these schemes and to make more visible to visitors the various attributes of the sustainable destination.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, B.A. and M.D.A.; methodology, B.A. and M.D.A..; software, B.A.; validation, B.A. and M.D.A.; formal analysis, B.A. and M.D.A.; investigation, B.A. and M.D.A.; data curation, B.A.; writing—original draft preparation, B.A. and M.D.A.; writing—review and editing, B.A. and M.D.A.; supervision, M.D.A. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research was funded by the Boğaziçi University Research Fund grant number 9400.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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