

Article

The Role of Sustainable Leadership in Promoting the Visibility of the Territories Represented by the Tourism Information Centres of Latvian State Cities

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to carry out an analysis on the implementation of the principles of sustainable leadership in the tourism information centres of Latvian State cities in order to promote the visibility of the territory they represent. This article presents an analysis of the literature on sustainable leadership and visibility of the territories, and provides characteristics of the sector represented by the tourism information centres of Latvian State cities. To identify the possible solutions to the improvement of sustainable leadership principles in the tourism information centres of Latvian State cities, we analysed the following: the implementation of sustainable leadership principles; and the views of the cooperation partners on the visibility of the tourism information centres in their areas, and the promotion of the territory they represent. The results of the study indicate that, based on the assessment of the cooperation partners, the principles of sustainable leadership are generally applied in only three (out of ten) tourism information centres. It was concluded that the application of sustainable leadership principles in the tourism information centres would promote smooth entry into priority target markets and the fastest possible initiation of promotion activities in secondary target markets, which soon could potentially rank on the list of priority target markets, in order to replace one audience with another due to the changing geopolitical situation in the world.

Keywords: sustainable leadership; territorial visibility; tourism information centres



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1. Introduction

Today, tourism is considered one of the most important industries of the national economy, which makes a significant contribution to the national economy and the benefit of its residents. Tourism is an important source of export revenues for the country, a provider of jobs, and a popular way of spending free time. It is an industry that makes contributions to various areas: it allows for awareness of the importance of nature conservation, promotes the positive recognition of certain places, and promotes small- and medium-sized businesses and the availability of services. Tourism affects the social, cultural, and economic life of national states and their regions, which is an important factor in their development. It is one of the industries that makes a significant contribution to the global economy. In 2019, for example, the total contribution of travel and tourism to the global gross domestic product (GDP) amounted to 9.63 trillion U.S. dollars [1], but both were severely impacted by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic that began in early 2020. For example, the number of international travellers in 2019 was 1465.9 million people, compared to 2020 when this number significantly decreased and reached only 404.5 million people [2]. The tourism industry suffered significantly and in 2020 an estimated 62 million people in this sector lost their jobs. As a result, in 2020 the contribution of the tourism industry to the global economy decreased significantly to 4.77 trillion U.S. dollars [1].

It is important to note that in 2021, the tourism industry started to recover gradually. Worldwide, the number of international tourist arrivals rose by approximately nine percent and the global gross domestic product (GDP) rose by 21.7 percent in 2021 over the previous year, after declining sharply in 2020 due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. In 2021, the leading countries and territories in the travel and tourism development index (TTDI) were Japan, the United States, and Spain, receiving a score of 5.2 points each out of seven. That year, France and Germany followed behind, with a TTDI score of 5.1 [3].

Latvia is an emerging tourism destination, with many natural resources and a rich cultural heritage. For this reason, the tourism industry has had an impact on the national economy of Latvia for the last twenty years and is an important source of export revenue and a key contributor to GDP in Latvia. Before the pandemic, the share of the tourism industry in the national economy reached a historically high level of 4.8% of GDP [4].

As in other countries, the tourism and hospitality industries and related companies in Latvia have been significantly affected by coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic events. Some companies were forced to reduce their number of employees, adapting to the restrictions in force. Social life slowly returned to its usual rhythm, and in 2021 the tourism industry experienced some improvements. Nonetheless, according to the TTDI 2021, Latvia was ranked 48th among the 117 countries [3]. According to the forecast by the Executive Director of the UNWTO (World Tourism Organization and UN Specialized Agency), Manuel Butler, “pre-pandemic 2019 levels will be reached in between two and a half and four years, depending on different scenarios” [5].

Effective management of the tourism industry is implemented at several levels, thereby ensuring cooperation between various industries. At the central level of national tourism management, management of the entire tourism industry is executed, and cross-sectoral cooperation is promoted, while targeted involvement of local governments in shaping the supply of tourism services is organized as well as professional associations and academic institutions are consulted at the regional level. To identify an optimal approach to developing the tourism industry, increasing competitiveness, and ensuring sustainability, are important to promote the development of tourism in the regions [6–8]. Rural and regional tourism provides an opportunity to use resources rationally and to distribute tourism-related benefits spatially and evenly throughout the country. According to the OECD Tourism Trends and Policies 2020, tourism already has a much broader framework and plays an important role in the development of national economies, not only in terms of tourism attractions as destinations, but also in terms of their impact on employment, business development, and cultural promotion [4]. In Latvia, tourism industry management is carried out at the regional level by tourism information centres/offices [9–18].

It is very important to stress that there is a significant dearth of previous research related to the tourism information centres and the way they apply sustainable leadership principles at the regional level, as well as the effects and probable solutions, which can only be inferred from another relevant research. Therefore, the aim of this study is to carry out an analysis on the implementation of the principles of sustainable leadership in the tourism information centres of Latvian State cities in order to promote the visibility of the territory they represent.

Within the framework of this article, two research questions have been raised:

1. Do the tourism information centres of Latvian State cities promote the visibility of the territory they represent based on the principles of sustainable leadership?
2. Is the implementation of sustainable leadership principles by the tourism information centres of Latvian State cities associated with the visibility of the territory in primary target markets, thereby promoting the attraction of new cooperation partners and the flow of tourists from the target markets?

The sustainable development of the tourism industry largely depends on managerial talents and their ability to manage the organization and its personnel, bear the responsibility of making the most important decisions, introducing innovations to achieve operational goals, and assuming both responsibility and risk. A leader is someone who not only focuses

on achieving existing goals and targets, but also changes them or sets new ones according to internal or external challenges. [19]. This means that managers of organizations should pay attention to the process and the way in which to develop the organization so it can become sustainable [20]. However, the sustainable development of a company depends on the manager's ability to provide sustainable leadership, maintaining continuous attention and efforts in the search for progress and keeping in mind the economic, environmental, and societal factors.

Within this context, we are obligated to search for the answers to the questions on how to explain the meaning of sustainable leadership.

2. The Theoretical Basis of the Study

In this study, the concept of leadership is viewed within the context of sustainability. To describe the term leadership that is associated with sustainability, the literature refers to various terms: sustainability leadership, leadership for sustainability, and sustainable leadership. This section does not intend to examine all these terms. In this study, we aim to identify the theoretical background of the concept of sustainable leadership and to create the basis for a practical solution to implement the principles of sustainable leadership.

2.1. The Concept of Sustainable Leadership

Sustainable leadership consists of two components: sustainability and leadership. In this section, we intend to present only a general overview of these concepts. At first, it is important to understand the concept of leadership. The term leadership is widely used and has been defined in different ways. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the concept of leadership is defined as the capacity to lead [21], while the Oxford and Cambridge Dictionary define leadership as the action of leading a group of people or an organization, the state or position of being the leader [22–24].

It must be mentioned that Mehmed Zahid Çögenli has summarized leadership definitions based on findings from various authors' publications from 1902 to 1997. After summarizing the findings, he concluded that the concept of leadership was defined in different forms and that there was no single standard definition that all scientists used [25]. Ten years later, a study published in 2007 by author Mary A. Ferdig radically expanded the understanding of the concept of leadership to include a broader base of everyday leaders in all walks of life [26].

A more detailed description of the concept of leadership was offered by other authors. For example, Muhammad Abid Malik and Sameen Azmat define "leadership as a process in which a person or persons inspire(s) and motivate(s) the people to meet the shared goals or objectives which may be changed or added as per the needs and challenges. Leadership connects with the people beyond superficial or formal level, and creates a bond that motivates them to do things rather than forcing them" [19]. Some authors [27] closely associate leadership with the ability to inspire, influence, and help achieve set team goals. Put simply, leadership is about taking risks and challenging the status quo [28]. Thus, the concept of leadership can be characterized by a wide range of roles that have a profound influence on the world [29].

In regard to the concept of sustainable, according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, historically it was first used in 1924 and defined as capable of being sustained. It means that it is necessary to maintain the development at a steady level with minimal long-term effect [29]. According to Mehmed Zahid Çögenli, this word can generally be defined as the continuation of a process or situation for an indefinite period of time in order to maintain sustainability in organizations [25]. Taking into account the business contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals, the United Nation Global Compact carried out the world's most comprehensive research in 2019, interviewing and surveying more than 1000 chief executives from 99 countries. The research results indicated the importance of sustainability for future business success and found that core business leaders emphasised the importance of sustainability in comparison to large, global companies [30].

To achieve long-term success, it is important for business managers to make decisions with particular attention to sustainable development. To understand how sustainable development can be introduced into the workplace via leadership, we need to clarify what sustainable leadership means.

Examining the special literature shows that various types of approaches to the explanation of the concept of sustainable leadership may be found therein. For example, Hargreaves and Fink state that “sustainable leadership means planning and preparing for succession—not as an afterthought but from the first day of a leader’s appointment” [31]. Other authors consider sustainable leadership as a source of competitive advantage for organizations. They link the concept of sustainable leadership with influence on business, creating current and future profits by reducing costs and increasing potential revenue for an organization while improving the lives of all who are concerned [32,33]. Furthermore, Mccann and Holt defined ten fundamentals of sustainable leadership ([32], pp. 207–208), but Suparak Suriyankietkaew and Gayle Avery developed a list of sustainable leadership practices (in total 23), which links them to other leadership approaches for organizational sustainability [34]. Studies by Yaohua Liao also pointed out that recently, empirical analyses by scholars have mainly linked the outcomes of sustainable leadership to organizational sustainability, and that sustainable leadership had a positive impact on sustainable performance [35]. Moreover, Bilal Ahmad has defined sustainable leadership as a mindful action that embraces a global worldview to realize the link between humanity and the planet; resulting in personal and organizational decisions that impact society and the environment positively [36]. In addition, most studies on the sustainable leadership have focused on education to better prepare graduates with a new set of sustainable leadership skills [37].

Even though there is no single standard definition of sustainable leadership that all scholars use, the authors consider that a comprehensive definition of sustainable leadership was offered by Šimanskienė and Župerkienė. Their research has emphasized that sustainable leadership is about responsibility to individuals, groups, and organizations by assessing ecological, social, and economic principles of sustainability in the context of a group, organization, and community and supporting the efficient management of sustainability thoughts [20]. In addition, Šimanskienė and Župerkienė, and Mehmed Zahid Çögenli and Kumar, provide the main characteristics of sustainable and non-sustainable leadership from different aspects [20,25,38]. Based on the views of various authors, Yaohua Liao analysed sustainable leadership at three levels: at the individual, organizational, and cross levels, and from five perspectives: individual characteristics of leaders, organizational culture, strategic orientation and human resource development, and interaction between individuals and organizations [35]. Researchers Gerard et al. have analytically summarized the research published by leading authors which have examined the concept of sustainable leadership. After summarizing the findings, the authors have developed a theoretical framework, revealing the main aspects of the concept of sustainable leadership, as well as the internal and external factors affecting it [33].

Thus, it is possible to say that sustainable leadership can be characterized by many criteria, depending on the aspect in which it is considered.

2.2. Principles of Sustainable Leadership

In specific literature, a number of different principles of sustainable leadership can be found. Some authors provide the five principles of sustainable leadership [36,39]. Other authors, e.g., Hargreaves and Fink, as well as Lynch, have developed the seven principles of sustainable leadership [31,40] (Table 1).

Table 1. Principles of Sustainable Leadership.

The Five Principles of Sustainable Leadership [36] *, [39] **	The Seven Principles of Sustainable Leadership [40]	The Seven Principles of Sustainable Leadership [31]
1 * Stay focused 1 ** Recognize how systems are connected	1. Sustainable Leadership Lasts	Sustainable leadership creates and preserves sustaining learning
2 * Think holistically 2 ** Consider the big picture and the future	2. Sustainable Leadership Spreads	Sustainable leadership secures success over time
3 * Seek out partnerships 3 ** Defend both the environment and humanity	3. Sustainable Leadership Is Socially Just	Sustainable leadership sustains the leadership of others.
4 * Adapt proactively 4 ** Change the way things are done	4. Sustainable Leadership Is Resourceful	Sustainable leadership addresses issues of social justice
5 * Be authentic 5 ** Set a good example	5. Sustainable Leadership Promotes Diversity	Sustainable leadership develops rather than depletes human and material resources
	6. Sustainable Leadership Is Activist	Sustainable leadership develops environmental diversity and capacity
	7. Systems Must Support Sustainable Leadership	Sustainable leadership undertakes activist engagement with the environment

Table 1 summarises the research performed on the principles of sustainable leadership by various authors, and it is important to mention that the authors identified quite different principles of sustainable leadership in the literature. However, there is still no consensus among the authors about the principles of sustainable leadership. Consequently, further comparative studies and consideration of the practical aspects of the principles of sustainable leadership could be problematic.

Our position on the principles of sustainable leadership identified by various authors could be supported in general. At the same time, the authors consider that the seven principles of sustainable leadership developed by Hargreaves and Fink [31] are the more authentic and practical principles. Therefore, these principles will be used for a practical solution to the research problem.

3. Research Methodology and Participants

To achieve the research aim—to carry out an analysis on the implementation of the principles of sustainable leadership in the tourism information centres of Latvian State cities in order to promote the visibility of the territory they represent and answer the questions raised: (1) Do the tourism information centres of Latvian State cities promote the visibility of the territory they represent based on the principles of sustainable leadership? (2) Is the implementation of sustainable leadership principles by the tourism information centres of Latvian State cities associated with the visibility of the territory in primary target markets, thereby promoting the attraction of new cooperation partners and the flow of tourists from the target markets? The study used two survey questionnaires, which were developed based on the knowledge and findings obtained in the theoretical part, as well as a theory developed by Hargreaves and Fink on the seven principles of sustainable leadership [31]:

1. Sustainable leadership creates and preserves sustaining learning.
2. Sustainable leadership secures success over time.
3. Sustainable leadership sustains the leadership of others.
4. Sustainable leadership addresses issues of social justice.
5. Sustainable leadership develops rather than depletes human and material resources.
6. Sustainable leadership develops environmental diversity and capacity.
7. Sustainable leadership undertakes activist engagement with the environment.

The first questionnaire was developed for the personnel (employees and managers) of tourism information centres of 10 State cities (hereinafter—TICs) with the aim of identifying:

- the opinions of employees and managers regarding the observance of the principles of sustainable leadership at the TICs representing them;

- and TIC priority target markets and activities to promote the visibility of the territory represented by the TICs.

The questionnaire consisted of 44 questions: six demographic questions (age, gender, length of service, position, TIC location—the region and the city); 26 questions—ratings on a four-point Likert scale (agree, partly agree, partly disagree, and disagree) about the implementation of sustainable leadership principles in TIC operation; five questions—ratings on a four-point Likert scale (agree, partly agree, partly disagree, and disagree) about the principles of the code of ethics implemented in the activities of TIC managers; seven questions (one multiple response question, four ratings on the Likert scale, and two open questions) about the priority target markets of TICs, and about the activities carried out to promote the visibility of the territory represented by the TIC. Twenty employees participated in the survey (67% of the average number of TIC employees, as the number of employees varied, depending on the tourist season) from nine (out of ten) TICs Latvian State cities and seven (out of ten) TIC managers of Latvian State cities. The age of the surveyed TIC personnel was from 18 to 64 years, 70% of the personnel were aged 25–44, 95% were women, the personnel's length of service at the TICs of Latvian State cities ranged from less than one year to 20 years, 48% of the personnel's length of service was from 1 up to 5 years. The largest number of respondents were from the Kurzeme region (41%), followed by Vidzeme (29%), Latgale (15%), and Zemgale (15%).

The second questionnaire was developed for tourism associations and institutions in Latvia and Europe ($n = 7$) to identify their opinions on the implementation of sustainable leadership principles at TICs. A questionnaire was sent to the Nordic Tourism Association, the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia, the tourism associations of Kurzeme, Vidzeme, Zemgale, and Latgale and the association of tourism information organizations "LATTŪRINFO". The questionnaire consisted of 11 questions: one question was about a TIC of a Latvian State city that was a cooperation partner/member of the tourism associations and institutions involved in the study; three questions were about the participation of TICs in events held by tourism associations for the promotion of visibility of the territory and improvement in professional skills and knowledge; seven questions were about the observance of sustainable leadership principles at TICs of the 10 State cities of Latvia.

The research data were collected from March 2022 to May 2022. MS Excel 2019 was used for data processing. Both surveys were created and distributed using Google Forms.

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

4. Research Findings

4.1. Do the Tourism Information Centres of Latvian State Cities Promote the Visibility of the Territory They Represent Based on the Principles of Sustainable Leadership?

To answer the first question, the authors surveyed the employees and management of 10 tourist information centres (TIC) of Latvian State cities in order to determine how the Seven Principles of Sustainable Leadership suggested by Hargreaves and Fink [31] were applied by the centres.

The survey data on the first principle "Sustainable leadership creates and preserves sustaining learning" revealed that the ratings by all the TIC employees and managers surveyed were different. Only one question—whether the TIC provided equal opportunities for training and professional development to all employees: both employees (80%) and managers (100%)—received the highest rating, and the answers were very similar. Regarding whether the TIC had also considered personnel training, qualification raising, and improvement in professional skills in the future in accordance with the development of the services provided by TICs and trends in the target market at that time in the industry, the numbers of both employees (40%) and managers (57%) who rated the question as "agree" were almost similar (Table 2). However, the answers of employees and managers to other questions were different. For example, the ratings of a question on whether the qualifica-

tion and the documentary evidence received for the development or improvement thereof was important to the manager when they began their professional career in their current position, the employees (75%) believed that it was important, whereas the managers had a different opinion, only 43% of them gave a positive rating. An even larger difference in positive ratings by the employees and managers was observed for the question of whether TICs offered to attend personal development training related to balancing the mental, emotional, internal environments (20% employees; 72% managers). However, the answers to the question of whether my manager selects personnel for qualification raising and development according to his/her personal discretion were more negative than positive, only 20% of employees and 14% of managers gave a rating “agree” (Table 2).

Table 2. Sustainable leadership creates and preserves sustaining learning (%).

1st Principle	Employees/Managers				Total
	Disagree	Partly Disagree	Partly Agree	Agree	
The manager selects personnel for qualification raising and development based on the personal discretion	55/14	15/0	10/72	20/14	100/100
The TIC has also considered personnel training, qualification raising and improvement in professional skills in the future in accordance with the development of the services provided by TICs and trends in the target market at that time in the industry	10/0	5/29	45/14	40/57	100/100
The TIC has offered to attend personal development training related to balancing the mental, emotional, internal environments	25/14	15/0	40/14	20/72	100/100
The TIC provided equal opportunities for training and professional development to all employees	0/0	0/0	20/0	80/100	100/100
The qualification and the documentary evidence received for the development or improvement thereof was important to the manager when I began the professional career in the current position	10/0	0/0	15/57	75/43	100/100

The survey data on the second principle “Sustainable leadership secures success over time” revealed that the ratings by all the TIC employees and managers surveyed were similar. Both believed that it was important to share knowledge in the team and that it should occur at all levels of the TIC team to be able to replace each other in case of need. However, when asked whether someone from the personnel could replace the management, a total of 25% employees did not believe it could be achieved (15% disagreed, 10% partially disagreed), while 40% employees could only partially confirm (Table 3). The reason could be due to the employee’s lack of knowledge and information to be able to replace the manager in his/her absence.

Table 3. Sustainable leadership secures success over time (%).

2nd Principle	Employees/Managers				Total
	Disagree	Partly Disagree	Partly Agree	Agree	
TIC employees can replace each other in case of need	0/0	0/0	30/14	70/86	100/100
The TIC has a member of personnel who can replace the management in their absence	15/0	10/0	40/57	35/43	100/100
The management supports knowledge sharing to be able to replace a colleague in his/her absence	0/0	5/0	10/0	85/100	100/100
Knowledge sharing is very important and should occur in the TIC at all levels of the team	0/0	5/0	15/0	80/100	100/100

The ratings of questions pertaining to the third principle “Sustainable leadership sustains the leadership of others” were important because they provided an opportunity to identify whether employees had been given an opportunity to raise their qualifications so that they were competent to make decisions on their own within the scope of their direct duties without the involvement of management. In any case, competent employees could also replace managers because this was possible only if the company had highly qualified and appropriately skilled personnel, along with personal qualities, such as curiosity and independently acquired knowledge and skills, which were of great importance. Therefore, it was important to provide all employees with an opportunity to build up their competence, provide the necessary information about the decisions made, as well as involve them together with the management in the development the regulatory documents of the TIC: the strategy, plan, goals, vision, and mission etc. However, according to the survey data, less than half of the employees or 40% gave an affirmative answer that they were involved in the development of documents necessary for the core business. However, 80% of employees gave affirmative answers to the question of whether I have all the necessary information at my disposal to perform my direct duties (Table 4).

Table 4. Sustainable leadership sustains the leadership of others (%).

3rd Principle	Employees/Managers				Total
	Disagree	Partly Disagree	Partly Agree	Agree	
I have all the necessary information at my disposal to perform my direct duties	0/0	5/0	15/29	80/71	100/100
The regulatory documents of the TIC: the strategy, plan, goals, vision, and mission are created by the management together with the personnel	10/0	5/0	45/14	40/86	100/100
The TIC management provides greater authority to act without management involvement to perform the direct duties	5/0	10/0	25/29	60/71	100/100
The management ensures that during their absence the personnel can replace the management	15/0	15/0	30/14	40/86	100/100

According to the survey data, the ratings of questions pertaining fourth principle “Sustainable leadership addresses issues of social justice” by the employees were “agree” or “partly agree” (Table 5), except for the ratings of remuneration equivalent to the contribution to the performance of the TIC. Moreover, a more negative rating has been given to this question by the managers of all the TICs—only 14% of them gave a positive rating. Attention should also be drawn to the fact that only 50% employees could claim that their suggestions were mostly considered and used to solve problems.

Table 5. Sustainable leadership addresses issues of social justice (%).

4th Principle	Employees/Managers				Total
	Disagree	Partly Disagree	Partly Agree	Agree	
My suggestions are mostly considered and used in solving problems at the TIC	0/0	5/0	45/29	50/71	100/100
My remuneration is equal to my contribution to the performance of the TIC	10/14	5/14	40/57	45/14	100/100
My opinion on the operational quality and improvement of the TIC is considered	0/-	5/-	35/-	60/-	100/-
The TIC provides equal professional development opportunities for all employees	5/0	0/0	30/29	65/71	100/100

An analysis of the ratings of questions pertaining to the fifth principle “Sustainable leadership develops rather than depletes human and material resources” revealed that the answers of employees and managers to all the questions asked were very similar, except for the ratings of the question of whether I receive feedback on my professional contribution to the TIC. Only half or 50% (Table 6) of the employees believed that they received it, yet the managers had a different opinion, and their ratings were significantly higher (71%), stating accordingly that the feedback they provided to the employees was sufficient.

Table 6. Sustainable leadership develops rather than depletes human and material resources (%).

5th Principle	Employees/Managers				
	Disagree	Partly Disagree	Partly Agree	Agree	Total
I receive feedback on my professional contribution to the TIC	0/0	5/0	45/29	50/71	100/100
For the TIC, doing the right thing should be more important than making a profit	0/0	5/0	30/29	65/71	100/100
The TIC’s financial and material resources are used for appropriate purposes that contribute to the development of the TIC	5/0	0/0	15/14	80/86	100/100

The sixth principle “Sustainable leadership develops environmental diversity and capacity” reflects the opinions of employees on whether the management promotes the mutual transfer of experience and various skills between the employees, as well as continuously contribute to the performance of the TIC by adapting to the market situation. The results of the survey revealed that there was a contradiction in the opinions of employees and managers regarding the creation of a mutual cooperation network for TIC personnel for sharing their various skills and education aimed at improving the performance and development of the TIC: all the interviewed TIC managers were sure that they provided it, whereas only 55% employees could confirm it. It was also found that the managers were confident (86%) about continuous improvements at the TIC aimed at development, whereas the employees were not so sure about it (Table 7).

Table 7. Sustainable leadership develops environmental diversity and capacity (%).

6th Principle	Employees/Managers				
	Disagree	Partly Disagree	Partly Agree	Agree	Total
The TIC supports the mutual transfer of experience and practice with the intention of learning from experience	0/0	0/0	20/0	80/100	100/100
At the TIC, continuous improvements are encouraged for operational development and adaptation to the current market situation	0/0	20/0	15/14	65/86	100/100
The management of the TIC creates or promotes mutual cooperation networks for personnel for sharing their various skills and education aimed at improving the performance and development of the TIC	10/0	0/0	35/0	55/100	100/100

The seventh principle “Sustainable leadership undertakes activist engagement with the environment”, according to the employees, was only partially implemented at their TICs. Most respondents (80% employees and 100% managers) agreed that the TICs had their cooperation partners, which contributed to their development. However, only 30% employees believed that the TIC management actively involved external cooperation partners who shared their experience and education in the operation of the organization, as well as that the TIC management created cooperation networks with external partners to solve the issues/problems of the TIC (Table 8). Almost all the managers surveyed believed that their cooperation with external partners was successful.

Table 8. Sustainable leadership undertakes activist engagement with the environment (%).

7th Principle	Employees/Managers				Total
	Disagree	Partly Disagree	Partly Agree	Agree	
The TIC has its own cooperation partners (tourism businesses, associations, agencies) for the development and improvement of the TIC	0/0	5/0	15/0	80/100	100/100
The TIC management actively attracts external cooperation partners who provide their experience and education to improve the performance of your organization	10/0	10/0	50/0	30/100	100/100
The TIC management is aimed at TIC development and improvement and creates cooperation networks with external cooperation partners to solve TIC operational issues/problems	15/0	10/0	45/14	30/86	100/100

The survey established how the principles of the code of ethics were implemented in the management of TICs. All the questions were generally answered affirmatively by TIC personnel, except that the TIC management should always explain the decisions made and the circumstances under which they were made (Figure 1).

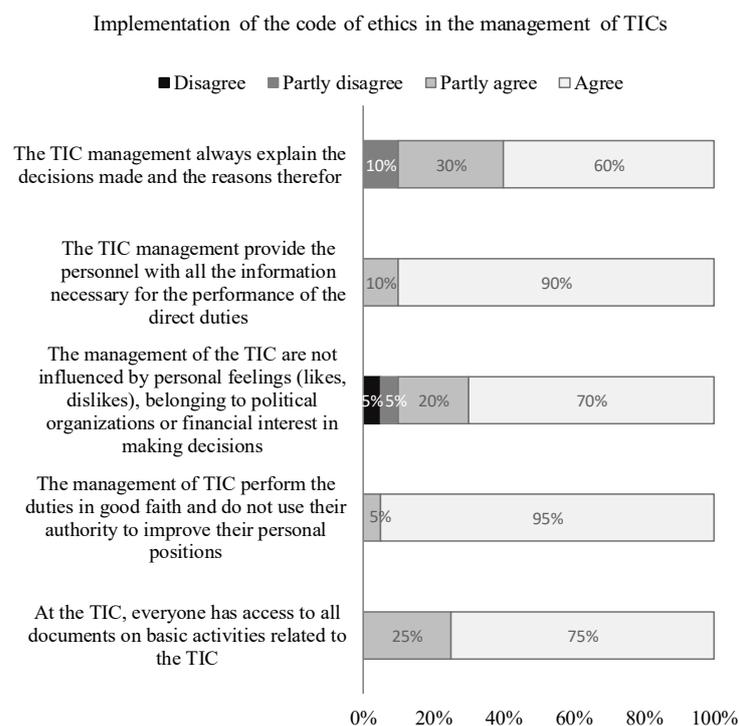


Figure 1. Implementation of the code of ethics in the management of TICs: TIC personnel answers (%).

4.2. Is the Implementation of Sustainable Leadership Principles by the Tourism Information Centres of Latvian State Cities Associated with the Visibility of the Territory in Primary Target Markets, Thereby Promoting the Attraction of New Cooperation Partners and the Flow of Tourists from the Target Markets?

To answer the second question of the survey, the TIC employees and managers were asked about the priority target markets for their TIC, as well as what was being done to promote the territorial visibility of the TIC they represented. An analysis of the survey data showed that the Baltic States were the priority target market for almost all the TICs, followed by the domestic market, Germany, and the Scandinavian countries (Figure 2).

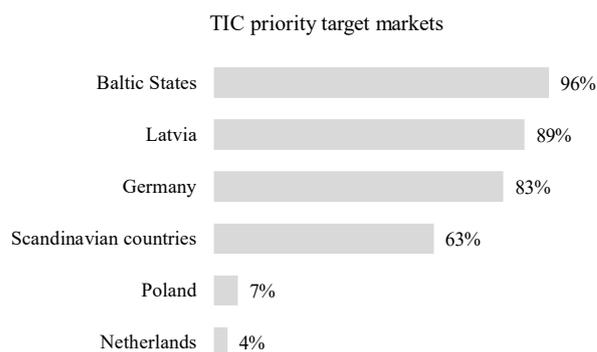


Figure 2. Priority target markets for the TICs of Latvian State cities: answers of employees and managers (multiple response question, n = 27).

An analysis of priority target markets for the TICs by region—Kurzeme, Zemgale, Vidzeme, or Latgale—revealed that all the target markets presented in Table 9 were important only to the Kurzeme and the Vidzeme TICs. The TICs of the Latgale region had indicated only Poland and the Netherlands as priorities, while the activity of the TICs of the Zemgale region was focused only on two priority target markets: the Baltic States and Latvia. Behind the Baltic States and Latvia, the target markets for the TICs of the Kurzeme, Latgale, and Vidzeme regions were the Scandinavian countries in third place and Poland in fourth place. The TICs of the Kurzeme region bordering the Baltic Sea and the Gulf of Riga, unlike the other TICs, Germany and the Netherlands were also the target markets.

Table 9. Participation of the TICs of Latvian State cities in activities promoting territorial visibility, according to the cooperation partners (number).

	Industry Experience Sharing Trips	Tourism Conferences	International Tourism Exhibitions	International Contact Establishment Events	Presentation Events of the Region Abroad	Tourism Agency Familiarization Visits	Media Familiarization Visits	Tourism Promotion Activities
TIC 1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1
TIC 2	3	2	1	1	1	1	2	1
TIC 3	2	2	1	1	1	1	2	1
TIC 4	3	2	2	1	1	2	2	1
TIC 5	3	3	3	2	2	3	3	1
TIC 6	3	2	2	1	1	2	2	1
TIC 7	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1
TIC 8	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
TIC 9	3	2	2	1	1	2	2	1
TIC 10	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	1
Total	25	20	18	14	14	18	20	10

One way of promoting the visibility of a territory is the implementation of advertising campaigns in the desired target markets. Research studies have found that information is available in several languages: the Baltic, English, German, and other languages, as well as various advertising campaigns for target markets are held in digital and printed media in Latvia and abroad. For example, special advertising in Baltic Outlook, Delfi.ee, Postimees, Ecolines, EXIT RIGA marketing activities, advertising in newspapers, TV, radio, etc. However, the survey data showed that the employees who dealt with target market engagement and advertising had insufficient communication with the rest of the personnel to inform them about the activities that were carried out to promote the visibility of the territory represented by the TIC in the relevant target market, and there was also

insufficient communication about whether, and how, target markets learned about the territory represented by the TIC.

The survey established that the TIC cooperation partners had a unanimous opinion on the role of management succession in fostering cooperation, referring to the fact that strengthening cooperation over a long period of time with long-term goals is better than starting cooperation every time when the management changes. The above was emphasized by the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia stating that “personal contact and acquaintance are very important in tourism. With frequent changes in the managements of TICs, there is a risk that the established communication chain is broken, each time a contact changes, it takes time to renew the initial success and inform the partner about the kinds of cooperation and projects, which can complicate and prolong mutual communication.” However, identifying the opinions of TIC cooperation partners about TIC participation in improvement and development activities held by the cooperation partners, it was established that only two to three partners could claim the participation of each TIC in any of these activities (out of seven) (Figure 3).

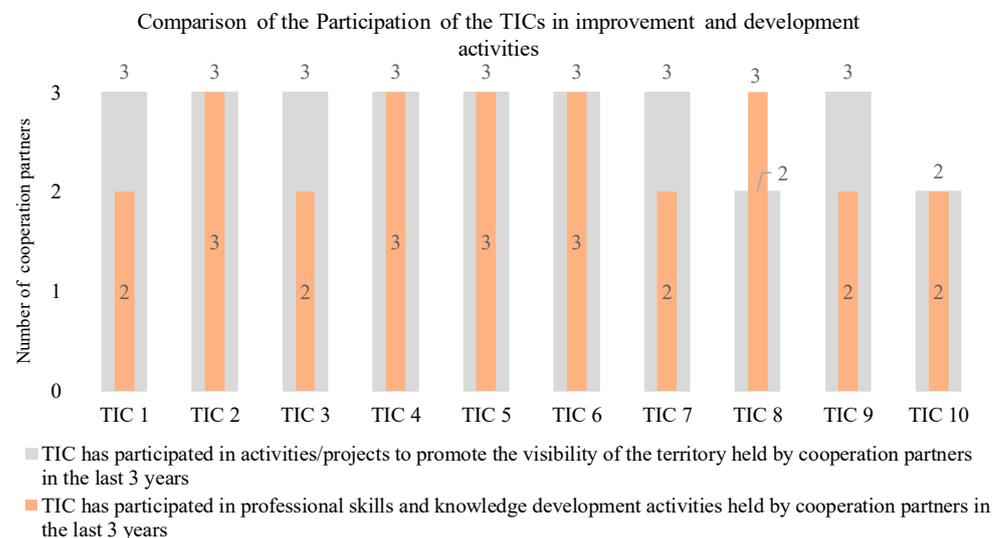


Figure 3. Participation of the TICs of Latvian State cities in improvement and development activities held by the cooperation partners (number).

The survey requested the TIC cooperation partners to indicate which TICs had participated and how often they had participated in the activities held by the cooperation partners in promoting the visibility of a territory represented by the TIC. The survey showed that the TICs of the Kurzeme region (TIC 5 and TIC 10) were the most active in contributing to their territorial visibility, as TIC 5 participated in a total of 20 regional, national, and Nordic activities, and TIC 10 participated in 16 events (Table 9). The advantages of a relatively larger tourist flow for the TIC of this region related to the geographical location of the region, namely the long and wide picturesque and tourist-attractive Baltic Sea coastal zone. The data collected also showed that the TICs of the region had participated in tourism promotion actions, international contact establishment events, and regional presentation events abroad, in the least.

To obtain data on the role of impact of sustainable leadership on the visibility of the territory represented by the TIC, questions were included in the questionnaire for cooperation partners about the implementation of the principles of sustainable leadership at the TIC their organization cooperated with. The successful implementation of the principles was a good basis for a potential commitment to sustainable cooperation to promote the territory in the target markets for the TIC. The survey (Table 10) revealed that, according to the cooperation partners, the first principle that sustainable leadership creates and preserves sustaining learning, i.e., the TICs promoted continuous knowledge acquisition, and the fifth

principle that sustainable leadership develops rather than depletes human and material resources, i.e., correct actions done at the TIC are more important than profit making, were most implemented at the TICs of Latvian State cities. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that for the majority of Latvian State cities, profit making was not the main goal of the TICs. According to the cooperation partners, the second principle of sustainable leadership was also implemented at the TICs in connection with the fact that the TIC had a member of personnel who could replace the management in their absence (according to the principle that sustainable leadership secures success over time). At the same time, the cooperation partners were the least convinced that the TIC management provided greater authority to act without management involvement to perform the direct duties (third principle: sustainable leadership sustains the leadership of others). In the opinion of the cooperation partners, the seventh principle was also insufficiently implemented at the TICs (sustainable leadership undertakes activist engagement with the environment), and the TIC management would need to create more external cooperation networks, thereby involving new cooperation partners for sharing knowledge and skills to solve operational issues or problems at the TIC, which was also reinforced by the opinion of TIC employees that such cooperation networks were not created.

Table 10. Application of the seven principles of sustainable leadership by the TIC of Latvian State cities, according to the cooperation partners (number).

	1. Continuous Learning Is Encouraged	2. The Management Ensures That During Their Absence The Personnel Can Replace The Management	3. The Management Provides Greater Authority to Act Without Management Involvement to Perform the Direct Duties	4. There Are Equal Professional Development Opportunities for All Employees	5. For the TIC, Doing the Right Thing Should Be More Important than Making a Profit	6. Continuous Improvements Are Encouraged for Operational Development and Adaptation to the Current Market Situation	7. The Management Actively Attracts External Cooperation Partners Who Provide Their Experience and Education to Improve the Performance of the TIC	Total
TIC 1	1	1	0	1	3	1	1	8
TIC 2	2	3	1	2	1	3	1	13
TIC 3	2	2	1	2	3	0	2	12
TIC 4	3	2	0	1	3	1	2	12
TIC 5	5	4	3	3	2	4	2	23
TIC 6	3	2	0	2	2	2	1	12
TIC 7	3	2	2	2	3	2	0	14
TIC 8	3	1	0	2	2	2	1	11
TIC 9	4	2	2	2	2	3	1	16
TIC 10	4	2	0	1	3	1	1	12
Total	30	21	9	18	24	19	12	

The results of the survey of cooperation partners (Table 10) showed that only TIC 5 received the most positive ratings from the cooperation partners regarding the application of sustainable leadership principles. In addition, TIC 5 was also the most active in promoting its territorial visibility, participating in the activities held by 20 regional, national, and Nordic cooperation partners.

5. Discussion

The Latvian policy documents emphasise that the overall goal of Latvian tourism policies is to ensure the sustainable growth of the sector by facilitating competitiveness of tourism services in export markets. To achieve the goal, the Action Plan for Tourism Development in Latvia for 2021–2027 sets three main priorities: (1) increasing international competitiveness and promotion of exports; (2) promotion of local tourism; and

(3) improvement in tourism management, education, and research. For the implementation, it is planned to carry out various development-promoting activities within 11 lines of action: development of business, health, culture, and nature tourism [6,7]. Some local governments, for example, Riga, have established an “investment and tourism agency”, whose main purpose is to ensure sustainable and transparent promotion of investment and tourism in the world [9]. After examining the performance of 10 regional tourist information centres (in Daugavpils, Jurmala, Jekabpils, Jelgava, Liepaja, Ogre, Rezekne, Riga, Valmiera, and Ventspils), the authors concluded that the basic product supplied to the market involved contributing to the visibility of the territory represented for increasing the flow of tourists, information dissemination, tourism business development, the development of new tourism products, and the development and improvement of current tourist facilities, thereby promoting the municipality as an excellent tourist destination—a cultural, sports, and business tourism centre with natural areas and a cultural and historical heritage, active recreation and wellbeing for both domestic and foreign tourists [9–18]. In order to promote the development of the tourism industry, it is important to implement its effective leadership, which would result in the development of tourism companies and entry into new target markets so as to achieve much higher growth in the industry by 2026 than it was in 2020. This means that the supply of tourism services in Latvia should be made more competitive [6,7]. Sustainable leaders must develop sustained relationships with internal and external stakeholders [41]. The study found that, according to the cooperation partners of TICs, sustainable leadership has a significant role in promoting territorial visibility, justifying it by strengthening cooperation over a long period of time with long-term goals, and not starting cooperation every time there is a change in management. The importance of leadership in the tourism industry is confirmed by a quantitative survey of 292 hotels and resorts conducted in Australia, which found “that the innovation-enhancing leadership behaviours relate positively and significantly to employees’ creativity and innovation” [42], which, in turn, indicates an opportunity for industry practitioners to develop on innovative and sustainable organizational strategies in the competitive tourism industry [42]. This is essential given that “creativity and innovation are considered the most relevant capabilities for all organizations that wish to seek competitive advantage” [43] and “any organisation that wishes to maintain its position in the market has to innovate” [44].

Research by the European City Destinations Alliance shows the importance of partners in promoting destinations [45]. If regional, national, and international tourism agencies and associations see the activities of Latvian TICs as a destination promotion organization in the target markets, then the territory represented by these TICs will become more visible as a tourist destination. This is in the context of the seventh principle “Sustainable leadership undertakes activist engagement with the environment”, which involves not only fostering collaborative partnerships, attracting new external partners in the development of TICs activities, but also peer-to-peer networks to share the diverse skills and education of staff in the processes of improving TICs operations and development. Unfortunately, the results of the study revealed that the seventh principle of sustainable leadership is not fully applied in the activities of Latvian TICs. The weakest aspect was the creation of cooperation networks for the sharing of skills and education of TICs employees and the creation of cooperation networks of external cooperation partners in matters of development and improvement of TICs. Sustainable leadership includes all aspects of people-oriented management [46] and uses the organization’s resources to address environmental and social issues [47] and “can provide opportunities for employees to implement sustainable behaviours, such as providing relevant training and development opportunities and shaping a sustainable organizational culture” [25]. Unfortunately, the results of the study revealed the different views of employees and managers regarding the implementation of sustainable leadership in TICs activities. The employees believed that the TICs did not offer possibilities to attend personal development training related to balancing the mental, emotional, and internal environments, whereas the TICs managers, on the contrary, believed that they did offer this to personnel. The managers also believed that they provided greater authority to

act without management involvement to perform the direct duties, as well as that they together with the employees worked on the regulatory documents of the TICs: the strategy, plan, goals, vision, and mission, whereas the employees had an opposite opinion. The management also did not believe that there was an employee at the TICs who could replace them in their absence due to a lack of information and authority. However, the survey data showed that there was insufficient communication among the TICs personnel about the activities that were carried out to promote the visibility of the territory represented by the TICs in the relevant target market.

In order to maintain the visibility of TICs in target markets in a rapidly changing global health and geopolitical environment, it is important to be aware of all the tools that contribute to this, including the impact of sustainable leadership on promoting visibility. The authors of the article consider that the application of sustainable leaderships principles in TICs would facilitate the steady uptake of priority target markets and the earliest possible launch of promotional activities in secondary target markets, which could potentially become priority target markets in the near future, replacing those target-area countries that are currently unable to relocate due to the geopolitical situation.

6. Conclusions and Future Research Recommendations

6.1. Contributions to Theory

The research findings show that the concept of sustainable leadership can be defined using a wide range of criteria. Similarly, the authors identified quite different principles of sustainable leadership in literature. Summarizing the research performed on the principles of sustainable leadership authors concluded that there is still no consensus among the authors about the principles of sustainable leadership. It means that further comparative studies and consideration of the practical aspects of the principles of sustainable leadership could be problematic. From a theoretical point of view, this article adds the theoretical background which can be used as the basis for a practical solution to implementing the principles of sustainable leadership. This makes it possible in our study which applied an original questionnaire.

6.2. Contributions to Practice

From a practical point of view, this is a specific research study that expands and provides insights into the situation in Latvia regarding the implementation of the principles of sustainable leadership in the tourism information centres of Latvian State cities in order to promote the visibility of the territory they represent. It is important for Latvia because the study related to the tourism information centres and the way they apply sustainable leadership principles at the regional level has not been conducted thus far. The findings presented in this paper indicate the desirability of applying sustainable leadership principles in the tourism information centres of Latvian State cities.

6.3. Conclusions

An analysis of the survey data of the opinions of TIC employees and managers in the context of the observance of the principles of sustainable leadership at the TICs representing them and TIC priority target markets and activities to promote the visibility of the territory represented by the TICs allows concluding that the opinions of TIC employees and managers differed significantly on several aspects of the principles of sustainable leadership. Firstly, the employees believed that the TIC did not offer them the opportunity to attend personal development training related to balancing the mental, emotional, and internal environments, whereas the management, on the contrary, believed that the TIC they led did offer that opportunity. Secondly, the management believed that they provided greater authority to act without management involvement to perform the direct duties, as well as that they together with the employees worked on the regulatory documents of the TIC: the strategy, plan, goals, vision, and mission, whereas the employees had an opposite opinion. Third, the management did not believe that there was an employee at

the TIC who could replace them in their absence due to a lack of information and authority. Fourth, the survey data showed that there was insufficient communication among the TIC personnel about the activities that were carried out to promote the visibility of the territory represented by the TIC in the relevant target market. Fifth, the Baltic States were the priority target market for almost all the TICs, followed by the domestic market, Germany, and the Scandinavian countries and there was insufficient promotion to the territorial visibility of the TIC they represented.

Regarding the implementation of principles of sustainable leadership at TICs, according to the ratings by the cooperation partners, only three out of the ten interviewed TICs of Latvian State cities implemented all seven principles of sustainable leadership (TIC 2, TIC 5, and TIC 9). The respondents gave higher ratings to the implementation of the first principle (related to creation and preserving a sustaining learning) and the fifth principle (related to development rather than depleting human and material resources) at the TICs. However, in the opinion of the cooperation partners, the seventh principle was also insufficiently implemented at the TICs (sustainable leadership undertakes activist engagement with the environment).

Several improvements are essential for the successful development of the tourism sector: Firstly, it is important to provide opportunities for TICs employees to improve their professional competences in the field of tourism, to create both internal and external cooperation networks for sharing knowledge and skills to apply innovation, for creativity and new ideas in solving TICs operational development improvement problems. Secondly, ensuring sustainable leadership, entering new markets, and promoting territorial visibility largely depends on the broader use of digital technologies: AI, IoT, VR, and AR and big data in the tourism industry, as well as the build-up of necessary knowledge and digital skills [48]. Effective tourism management results from collecting large data sets and implementing smart city solutions [49]. This in turn requires more cooperation in the tourism ecosystem, including public-private partnerships, as well as improving communication between tourism and technology companies. The private sector can be particularly encouraged to take part in financing if the tourism product is sustainable and innovative [50]. To implement the digital transformation in the tourism industry and to build up a new set of sustainable leadership skills, it is also necessary to improve cooperation with educational institutions. Third, due to the development of new technologies and for sustainable leadership, social media will play an increasingly important role in tourism activities. Already, tourists are more and more willing to use social media at various stages of their journey, including planning, realising, and sharing of travel experiences [51]. Moreover, the application of sustainable leadership principles in the tourism information centres would promote smooth entry into priority target markets and the fastest possible initiation of promotion activities in secondary target markets, which in the near future could potentially rank on the list of priority target markets, in order to replace one audience with another due to the changing geopolitical situation in the world.

6.4. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

To describe the term leadership that is associated with sustainability, the literature refers to various terms: Sustainability Leadership, Leadership for Sustainability, and Sustainable leadership. Due to the wide scope of the above-mentioned terms, the present research is limited and focuses on an analysis of the concept of sustainable leadership. Summarising the research performed on the Principles of Sustainable Leadership by various authors, there were quite different Principles of Sustainable Leadership identified in the literature. In this study, the authors did not examine all these principles. To create the basis for a practical solution, this research used the seven Principles of Sustainable Leadership developed by the Hargreaves and Fink. Regarding the improvement in sustainable leadership by using more digital technologies: AI, IoT, VR, and AR, as well as big data in the tourism industry in Latvia in the future, it is advisable to conduct in-depth research into these fields, and researchers must elaborate recommendations to policymak-

ers on the possibilities to facilitating cooperation within the tourism ecosystem, including public-private partnerships.

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