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Protected Areas in the Function of Sustainable Tourism Development—A Case of Deliblato Sands Special Nature Reserve, Vojvodina Province

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Abstract: The Deliblato Sands Special Nature Reserve (SNR) is located in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (Northern Serbia). The favorable position implies the proximity to large cities with which it has good traffic connections. Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Croatia, and other countries from the region represent a dispersive zone. The topic of this paper is the function that the SNR has in sustainable tourism development. The objective of this work is the analytical research of the available written data, as well as those obtained after the conducted survey. The basis of the research is to find out how and to what extent the SNR contributes to sustainable tourism development. The research was carried out by measuring the value of sustainable tourism indicators, and examining the attitudes of residents, visitors, and students about the current state of sustainable tourism and the importance of the SNR for future tourism development. Respondents were selected using a random sample method. The authors used qualitative and quantitative methodologies in the paper. This research examined the SNR sustainable development by measuring sustainability indicators and surveying 1884 respondents (714 residents, 620 visitors, and 550 students) about sustainable tourism in the SNR. The obtained data were analyzed and presented with the help of SPSS v. 21 software. The research results can be used to create national and international strategies for sustainable tourism development.

Keywords: AP Vojvodina; sustainable tourism; protected area; Special Nature Reserve; Deliblato Sands; nature-based tourism; ecotourism

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Citation: Trišić, I.; Privitera, D.; Ristić, V.; Štetić, S.; Milojković, D.; Maksin, M. Protected Areas in the Function of Sustainable Tourism Development—A Case of Deliblato Sands Special Nature Reserve, Vojvodina Province. *Land* **2023**, *12*, 487. https://doi.org/10.3390/land12020487

Academic Editors: Richard Smardon and Heesup Han

Received: 21 January 2023
Revised: 12 February 2023
Accepted: 14 February 2023
Published: 16 February 2023

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1. Introduction

The territory of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina has 135 protected natural resources in an area of about 141,044.65 ha. It is 6.56% of the total area of the territory of Vojvodina [1]. The Deliblato Sands Special Nature Reserve (SNR) has a significant share of natural values. Within the protected area, various biocenoses are inhabited by endemic plant and animal species. There are also sensitive ecosystems, wetlands, and parts significant for geodiversity maintenance.

The SNR area extends into the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, in the territory of five municipalities: Kovin, Pančevo, Bela Crkva, Vršac, and Alibunar. The population living near the reserve has a rich cultural and historical heritage. Ethnosocial values represent significant social potential, among which customs, original folk Melos, way of eating and gastronomy, domestic craftsmanship, costume, customs, way of building houses,

and lifestyle stand out [2,3]. Precisely for the mentioned reasons, this protected area has significant tourist potential for sustainable tourism development [4]. Education of the local population and visitors about sustainable development, their engagement in tourism planning and development, proper monitoring, and protection are crucial. The locals could use the economic incomes from tourist consumption and direct them to improve the overall value of this area, which would be one of the main objectives of sustainable tourism development [5]. In addition to the socio-economic and impetus functions, tourism would have a considerable impact on the development and sustainability of the SNR. Properly planned tourism development can contribute to the economic, sociocultural, and, equally important, ecological benefits for the destination [6]. Precisely, the concept of sustainable tourism development is based on this principle [7–10].

The subject of research in this paper is the examination of the function of the SNR in tourism planning and sustainable tourism development. Tourism in protected areas can represent a basis for defining goals, outcomes, and competencies for sustainable development. At the same time, tourism in a protected area also represents a framework for re-examining different strategies for the development of specific forms of tourism [11].

The objective of this paper is the analytical study of written reports and data through desk research, as well as those obtained after the conducted survey. These examinations are performed to obtain answers to the questions in which way and to what extent does the SNR contribute to sustainable tourism development.

Qualitative and quantitative methodologies are used in the paper. The qualitative methodology includes measuring 37 indicators of sustainable tourism development, of which 31 are positive and 6 are negative. The measurement of sustainability indicators can indicate the current state of sustainable tourism [12–14]. It is influenced by the level of nature protection, the level of tourism development, the role of residents, and the degree of tourist infrastructure development, etc. [15,16].

A total of 1884 respondents (714 residents, 620 visitors, and 550 students) were questioned about sustainable tourism in the SNR using the survey technique with the help of a written questionnaire as an instrument. Respondents were selected using a random sample method. The obtained data were analyzed and presented using SPSS v. 21 software (IBM, Armonk, NY, USA).

Since the main objective of this protected area is to preserve natural values, the author's future research will include the analysis of data concerning the importance of management and the establishment of protection levels and regimes in the SNR, which can also represent a significant scientific contribution.

2. Literature Review

According to the research by Marinello et al. [17], today tourism is a very important agent of development and a large growing branch of the economy. It has a very important influence on the development of the destination through environmental, economic, and social impacts. The increase in the number of tourists in certain destinations puts pressure on their carrying capacity, which requires special care about sustainability. This is also the reason for the constant study of the impact of tourism on a destination and its sustainable development. After conducting extensive research, the authors noticed that measurements of indicators of sustainable development are valuable tools when planning and developing tourism in tourist destinations. By analyzing 104 scientific papers and the results of their research, the authors performed an extensive synthesis of all significant elements in the examination of sustainable tourism development. They also carried out a significant comparative analysis, and with the help of that scientific method they concluded that the evaluation and monitoring of sustainable development could be done by analyzing sustainability indicators. The examination of the indicators was conducted using different methods and techniques, which included fieldwork in tourist destinations. Certain indicators pointed to the weaknesses of tourism development, i.e., the current situation that could be improved by significant planning measures. Indicators could also point to important

potentials that should be implemented in tourism planning and development. Equally important, indicators suggested the presence of certain threats that could affect economic, environmental, and social sustainability. Protected areas contribute to the preservation of biological and landscape diversity. They participate in the preservation of ecosystems and specific habitats of plant and animal species [14,15,17]. As tourist destinations, they enable scientific and research work, ecological education, and their acceptable (sustainable) use for recreation and tourism. They indirectly participate in the preservation of the cultural heritage of the local population and contribute to the improvement of the economies of local communities The results of the research by Marinello et al. [17] helped the authors in defining a model for examining sustainability indicators in the SNR and provided guidelines for future research on the function of protected areas in sustainable tourism development.

Tourism and recreation have a significant share in ecological changes in the space where they are carried out. The most remarkable are ecological, sociocultural, and economic impacts on the territory and social community [18]. Some influences change environmental conditions, pollute them permanently, affect the living world, modify the local community attitudes, or make other changes. In the process of area protection, it is necessary to look at all activities, analyze impacts and possible changes, isolate existing and increase new benefits, and determine how some measures will minimize negative influences [19]. Protected areas represent specific territories where many activities are limited, which can change space usage and affect natural processes and the entire living world, including humans. In most of these areas in the world, the protection concept allows the use of resources, but only in a sustainable way on the basis of resource renewability. The state, local community, conservators, scientific-research protagonists, and tourist users should be interested in nature protection and preservation. As the final result of area protection and proper tourism development, the participants can distinguish ecological, economic, sociocultural, and institutional benefits that represent the essential pillar of sustainable tourism development [18].

Numerous pieces of tourism research are focused on examining the economic importance of tourism development and the function of financial institutions in planning and financing tourism entities and their development [20]. The economic effect of tourism development in protected areas as tourist destinations is very important in order to understand the significance of tourism for their continuation. The importance of state and financial institutions in tourism planning and development is exclusively realized through direct financial support. That is why the connection with these entities in tourism is extremely important [21,22]. Over time, when a tourist destination begins to self-finance, it means that one of the postulates of sustainable tourism development has been fulfilled [19,20]. Trišić et al. [23] point out that protected areas can be valuable destinations for sustainable tourism development. By examining the attitudes of visitors and residents of the protected area, we obtained significant results that were related to ecological, economic, sociocultural, and institutional sustainability. As certain factors were not represented to a considerable degree, these four dimensions of sustainability did not have an equal impact on sustainable tourism development. The respondents expressed the point of view that the protected area directly contributed to satisfaction during their visit, but the respondents (residents and visitors) highlighted ecological and sociocultural dimensions more significantly.

Stojanović et al. [10] points out that sustainable tourism in protected areas can only be achieved by including residents in the systems of tourism development planning and area protection, monitoring and controlling tourism development within the protected area. Social values can be a significant part of the tourism proposals. Proper development of specific tourism forms such as ecotourism, nature-based tourism, wine tourism, birdwatching, trips, scientific tourism, etc., can significantly contribute to the sustainable development of protected areas.

According to Winter et al. [5], the reasons why we should protect certain areas are their value for scientific research, wildlife protection, preservation of species, and genetic

diversity. Provision of services, protection of specific natural and cultural forms, tourism and recreation, education, and coordinated use of resources from natural ecosystems must be provided within the protected area. In addition, the preservation of cultural and traditional characteristics of the population living in the proximity of these areas requires our full attention.

Natural predispositions, cultural-historical heritage, and material base are the factors that influence the conception of tourism development in protected areas. Numerous experiences in tourism development are very different, but, generally, tourism is mostly a supporting and often secondary branch that produces development results with huge investments. Different levels of tourism development within protected areas also contribute to different benefits, among which there are significant economic, ecological, and sociocultural ones [24–26].

Frequently, there are cases when tourism in certain destinations does not generate economic income but degrades the space and environment and exploits human labor. Thus, the local community rejects and does not accept tourism [27]. Then it can be said that tourism has negative sociocultural impacts. That is why the implementation of proper tourism development strategies is necessary.

In order to increase tourism benefits and reduce negative impacts on nature, it is necessary to establish a mutual connection between the local community and other tourism subjects (the state and tourists) [28]. Through tourism planning and development, it is extremely important to preserve the cultural values of a destination, as well as the ethnological values of the local population. As cultural tourism is an important part of global tourism [22], nurturing traditions and cultural values is the basis for strengthening the destination's tourism product. By creating a strong cultural interaction between visitors and residents and investing in cultural and ethnic-social values, the socio-cultural importance of the tourist destination is strengthened, which is important from the aspect of sustainable tourism. Sustainable tourism also implies the strengthening of institutions that have direct and indirect connections with the development of tourist destinations and tourist consumption. Their support in the tourism development of a destination contributes to direct benefits for tourism. What goes without saying, but should be emphasized here, is that improving the ecological values of a tourist destination has a wide impact on people's health [21,22]. The mentioned effects of tourism development are not the only ones, but they are among the most important for planning and developing tourism in the SNR.

The local community must be involved in tourism development control by setting its objectives and strategies. It also bears its share of responsibility for possible negative impacts on the tourist destination. The tourists' experience in the destination must be an authentic reflection of the local culture. The local community experiences multiple benefits from the development of tourism. Such benefits can be characterized as positive impacts of tourism on the local community through [29,30]:

1. increase in funds for the preservation and revitalization of cultural assets, as well as for improving the working conditions of cultural institutions;
2. preservation of tradition;
3. promotion of culture;
4. increase in employment of the local population [31];
5. increase in income from tourism;
6. improvement of overall economic activities;
7. better use of communal infrastructure;
8. other social and economic changes.

The successful development of sustainable tourism is based on nature-protection activities, proper tourism development, and the involvement of residents in tourism development [32]. The role of the local population is reflected in making important decisions regarding the tourism strategy, then in employment and in the presentation of their cultural heritage. All these bring material and non-material benefits. When all the stated conditions are met, the development of tourism in protected areas can have the status of sustainability,

and it can be expected that numerous negative impacts on the territory will be eliminated or reduced to a minimum. On the other hand, the satisfaction of visitors, who play a crucial role in tourism development in protected areas, will increase [33].

The mentioned research gave the authors guidelines on examining the function of the SNR in sustainable tourism development and making certain conclusions and recommendations. On the basis of this research, the authors constituted an appropriate research model adapted to the examination of the function of this protected area in sustainable tourism. The adapted research model differed from the mentioned research because it combined the measurement of sustainable tourism indicators with the survey method. By surveying, with the help of a questionnaire as a research instrument, the opinions of the respondents regarding sustainable tourism development in the SNR were examined. Another significant novelty was that, in addition to visitors and residents, the authors examined the attitudes of students who had direct connections with the SNR, and their knowledge about sustainable tourism development.

3. Study Area

This SNR is located in southern Banat (Vojvodina) and covers land and river habitats, with a total area of over 34,829 ha. This vast area is ellipsoidal and is surrounded by agricultural land. The reserve extends from 44°45′ and 45°02′ north latitude and from 20°55′ to 21°20′ east longitude [34,35] (Figure 1). A favorable geographical and tourism position is reflected in its proximity to major cities in Serbia, as well as neighboring countries—Romania, Hungary, Croatia, and Bulgaria—with which it has good traffic connections.

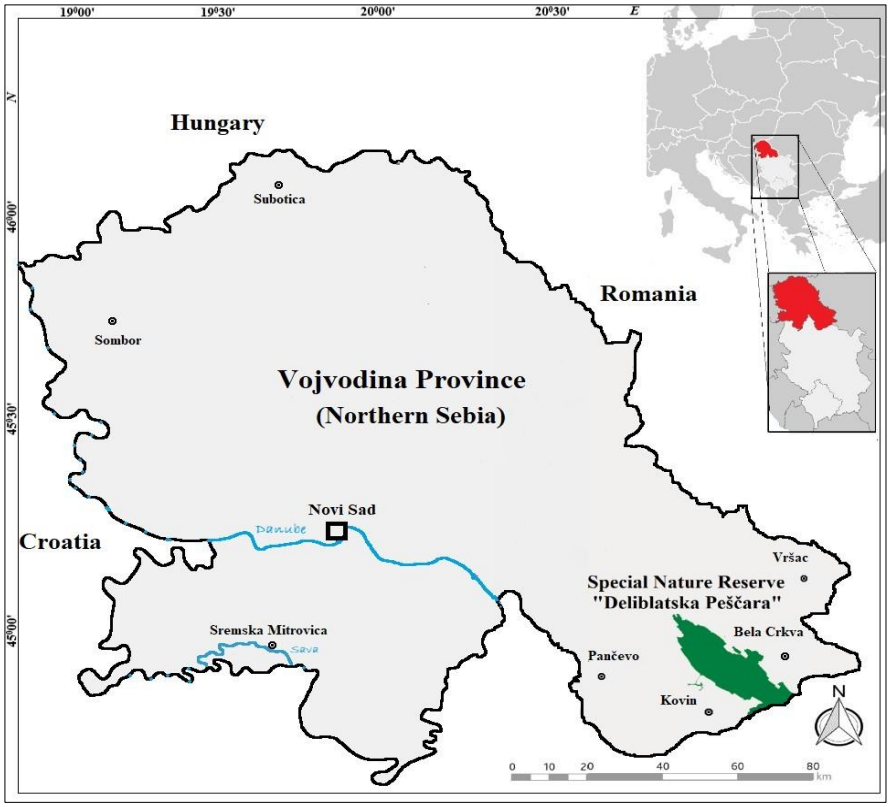


Figure 1. Study area. Source: Trišić et al. [35].

The sandstone was protected in 1965, first as a general nature reserve, and later, with the abolition of this term, it was declared a special nature reserve. The SNR is classified in the fourth category of the IUCN classification, which represents a natural asset of exceptional importance in the first category [36,37], in an area of 34,829 ha. A three-level

protection regime is established in this area: the first level of protection—2354 ha; the second level—8219 ha; and the third level—24,257 ha [35].

Within the SNR, the activities are regulated by three protection zones:

- Zone One (6.76% of the territory) is intended exclusively for the preservation of original natural values, with limited possibility of use in scientific research and limited educational activities;
- Zone Two (23.60%) is organized with the essential purpose of preserving and improving the existing natural values, with the possibility of limited use, including tourism, through ecological forms based on the preservation and improvement of nature;
- Zone Three (69.65%) includes the largest area of this protected area. In this zone, all other types of tourism, which do not have a negative impact on the environment, are allowed [38].

In terms of international regimes and protection status, it should be listed:

1. IBA area, 48,758 ha;
2. IBA area "Labudovo Okno" 6488 ha;
3. IPA area, 35,332 ha;
4. PBA area of 35,496 ha;
5. Ramsar Site "Labudovo Okno", protected since 2007, area 3733 ha;
6. ICPDR area—International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River;
7. DNPA area—Dartmoor National Park Authority;
8. EMERALD 34,829 ha;
9. Potentially, area NATURA 2000 [35,37].

The spatial plan envisages that a nomination to include this SNR into the list of biosphere reserves should be prepared—Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme, UNESCO. Based on the IUCN classification, Deliblato Sands is classified as the fourth category [35].

Deliblato Sands represents the largest national and European area built from aeolian sand deposits with pronounced dune relief and forest-steppe, and sandy habitats. This protected area has a rich flora with more than 900 species, subspecies, and varieties of plants. It abounds in rarities, relics, endemics, and sub-endemics, such as *Peonia officinalis subsp. banatica*, *Artemisia pancici*, *Rider umbellata*, *Prunus tenella*, *Chelichrisum arenarium*, and *Juniperus* sp., as the only wild conifer species of the Pannonian Plain [38]. There are about 40 plant species for whose habitats the regimes of the strictest protection of the first degree are prescribed.

More than 200 animal species live in this space with the status of natural rarities. Among the rarities of the fauna, the types of steppe and sandy habitats stand out: *Cataglyphis* sp., *Falco cherrug, Aquila heliaca, Sicista subtilis, Spermophilus citellus, Spalax leucodon, Mustela eversmanni*, and *Canis lupus*. For some of them, this SNR is the only, or one of the few, remaining habitats in this area. Deliblato Sands represents one of the most important European centers of biodiversity. It is also a European natural rarity and the best preserved sandstone in Europe. Due to the rich flora and fauna, this area represents one of the most vital biodiversity centers of international importance [39].

4. Methods

In this research, the authors used two scientific methods: qualitative and quantitative. The qualitative method was used in the analysis of the scientific results of the research, which examined the influence and function of the tourist destination in sustainable tourism development. The state and level of sustainability in the SNR were examined by measuring the indicators of sustainable tourism, which indicated a certain state, possibilities, and threats for this protected area. The qualitative research involved the analysis of written materials and numerous case studies, which examined the role of the SNR in sustainable tourism development and the measurement of sustainable tourism indicators [16,17,40]. Available written materials included published scientific papers, materials, and informational brochures of local tourism organizations. In addition, the testing of indicators was

carried out directly on the terrain in the SNR. This was done by observing and measuring various phenomena related to the state of factors that contribute to or otherwise affect sustainable tourism development. With the help of the mentioned data sources and field research, a total of 37 selected sustainable tourism indicators were measured (6 of them had a negative connotation). By measuring the selected indicators and analyzing the obtained values, a vision of the sustainable tourism state in the destination can be created [12,14,41].

The quantitative research included surveying as a research technique, using a written questionnaire as an instrument. Three types of questionnaires were designed for three target groups. Questionnaire models for residents, visitors, and high-school students were compiled according to the questionnaires of Scholtz et al. [42], Cottrell et al. [43], and Asmelash and Kumar [33]. They were adapted to examine sustainable tourism in the SNR. Respondents were selected using the random sample method. Respondents ranked the responses to the questions using a 5-point Likert scale, where the answers are rated as 1—strongly disagree, 3—neutral attitude, and 5—strongly agree [2,44–49]. The data were analyzed statistically with the help of SPSS v. 21 software (IBM, Armonk, NY, USA).

Secondary education institutions used to survey students about sustainable tourism were located in Pančevo, Bela Crkva, Vršac, and Kovin. Students who took part attended secondary education in the fields of tourism, hotel management, and economics. The educational profiles of the examined students were directly related to the planning of tourism and hotel business, i.e., to the sustainable development of tourism. The Conceptual model can be seen in Figure 2.

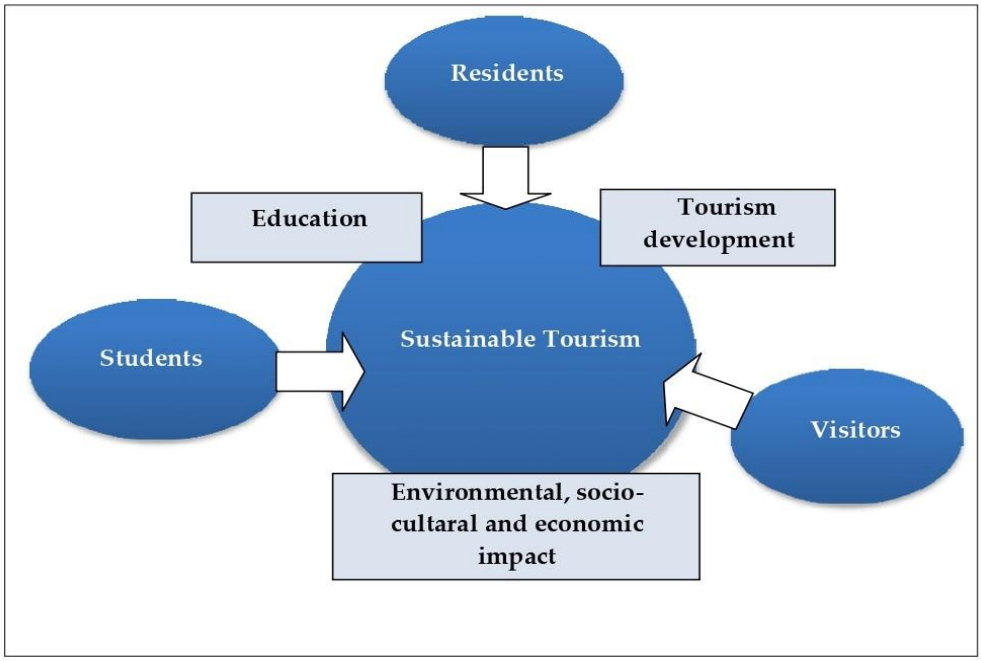


Figure 2. The Conceptual model.

A survey of visitors was conducted when they were visiting this nature reserve.

A poll of residents was carried out on the terrain by visiting Pančevo, Vršac, Kovin, Bela Crkva, and Alibunar, including smaller settlements significant for the SNR.

For the implementation of effective protection measures and the sustainable development of tourism in a protected area, it is necessary to carry out a proper analysis and valorization of the basic elements, and all potential factors, with special reference to the protection and users of the space [16]. When the role of each element is defined, system measures are adopted, and objectives and results are determined [14,20]. The analysis of selected factors of the SNR sustainable tourism development can be used in setting criteria and general development objectives. The factors for the analysis can be the constituent parts of the destination, endangered representatives of flora and fauna, reasons and needs

for protection, level of development and endangerment, anthropogenic factors, management methods, the role and importance of the local community, and sustainable results of proper management [35].

Sustainable tourism development can be beneficial for this special nature reserve in many ways [50]. Firstly, it is an important factor in the protection of natural resources, i.e., the issue of nature protection can also be observed from the perspective of sustainable tourism development. It has multiple benefits for protected areas and people. It helps modern, post-industrial humans to imagine what nature and life looked like before industrialization and humans' generally destructive actions [51]. In other words, sustainable tourism development in protected areas helps people understand what kind of relationship they should have with nature, that is, with the environment. It is an essential factor for protected nature facilities where we think primarily about obtaining various benefits from which economic profits can be obtained by charging for tourist services. It depends on the type and level of permitted activities in the protected area, which further depends on the nature protection policy. Finally, it is a vital factor for the domicile population. It helps to direct immaterial things towards intensifying the role of tourists and representatives of local communities. Its educational component is also up-to-date, which makes protected nature facilities help the environmental education of children and adults [52,53].

5. Results

For the comparative analysis, pre-selected and defined indicators that could serve as a significant sample were taken to specify the state of sustainable tourism development [12,14,16,17,35]. Field data and various written data sources were used to determine the presence of the indicators [17]. The available written sources in this research involved published scientific papers and other scientific materials, including informative brochures from local tourist organizations. The analysis of the values of positive and negative indicators can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Analysis of the state using selected indicators of sustainable tourism.

	Indicators	Status
1.	Favorable position	√
2.	Built traffic infrastructure	√
3.	Adequate protection status	√
4.	International protection status	√
5.	Sufficient number of built supporting facilities	χ
6.	Facilities for accommodation services	χ
7.	Sustainability of species	√
8.	Role of local community	χ
9.	Developed ecotourism	χ
10.	Positive sociocultural impacts of tourism	√
11.	Events	√
12.	Overall positive economic impacts of tourism	χ
13.	Education and schools of sustainable development	χ
14.	Economic profit from tourism	√
15.	Existing visitor center	√
16.	Marked hiking and educational trails	√
17.	Eco trails	√
18.	Implementation of the carrying capacity	χ
19.	Endemic species	√
20.	Reintroduced species	√
21.	Opportunities for excursions	√
22.	School-in-nature	√
23.	Taking photos of rare birds and animals	√
24.	Birdwatching	√
25.	Eliminated the issue of wastewater from the settlements	χ
26.	Financial gains from protection	√

Table 1. *Cont.*

	Indicators	Status
27.	Environmental benefits from protection	√
28.	Availability of funds	√
29.	Hydrographic potentials	√
30.	Existence of ethnic villages or settlements	√
31.	Favorable climate	√
1.	Proximity to a potential polluter	√
2.	Use of natural resources	√
3.	Presence of domestic animals	√
4.	Negative sociocultural influences	χ
5.	Endangered species according to IUCN	√
6.	Proximity to agricultural land	√

Legend: √—indicator shows the presence of the factor to a certain extent; χ—indicator points to the absence of a factor. Indicators marked in red imply negative factors that may be a threat to the protected.

All respondents were selected by random sampling. The research was conducted in the first half of 2022, from March to June. For the purposes of the poll, a total of 1884 respondents were surveyed. All questionnaires were valid for analysis. All respondents were 18 and older. The poll was anonymous. The questionnaires did not contain personal data in any of their parts, nor could the respondents who filled them out be identified. The respondents were not obliged to answer every question and could stop the survey whenever they wanted. They agreed that the responses could be used for scientific research and the publication of scientific works related to the SNR in the questionnaire. There were no restrictions when interviewing respondents.

Out of the total number of respondents (n = 1884), 714 were residents (Table 2) who lived in the SNR sub-area. The cities where residents were surveyed were Pančevo (30%), Kovin (27%), Bela Crkva (17%), Vršac (16%), and Alibunar (10%).

Table 2. Structure of respondents (residents).

Gender	**Frequency**	**Percent**	
male	309	43.27	
female	405	56.73	
total	714	100.0	
Level of Education	**Frequency**	**Percent**	
primary education	51	7.14	
high-school education	496	69.47	
college education	105	14.71	
university education	62	8.68	
total	714	100.0	
age structure		min	max
	714	18	72
	average	std. dev.	
	37.17	13.445	

Out of the total number of surveyed visitors (620), a total of 61% were domestic visitors, while 39% were international visitors. The cities domestic visitors came from were Novi Sad, Belgrade, Zrenjanin, Požarevac, Smederevo, Kikinda, Ruma, Inđija, and others. The international visitors consisted of Romanians (20%), Hungarians (19.7%), Croats (18.3%), Montenegrins (16.9%), Bulgarians (14.8%), Macedonians (5%), Austrians (1.7%), Swiss (0.9%), Ukrainians (0.8%), Slovenians (0.66%), French (0.51), and others (0.73).

There was a total of 550 surveyed students. All surveyed students had contacts with the SNR.

Table 2 shows the demographic structure of residents.

In addition to demographic characteristics, the questionnaire for the local population also contained eight items related to the importance of the SNR in sustainable tourism development.

The responses of the residents are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Responses of residents (n = 714).

Items	α	Mean
The inclusion of the SNR in the tourist offer can contribute to a better life for the local population and increase the quality of the destination	0.659	3.72
Tourists are interested in local products and events	0.792	4.01
I have knowledge about the concept of sustainable tourism development	0.699	3.01
Resources from the SNR are available for use (wood, timber, plants, animals)	0.714	3.69
There are mutual contacts between tourists and local residents (events, education)	0.611	4.02
I would educate tourists about the life of the locals	0.700	4.16
I would educate tourists on how to treat the SNR	0.644	3.99
I would educate tourists about the production and importance of local products	0.633	4.01

Items measured on a 5-point Likert agreement scale α—Cronbach's alpha reliability.

The results obtained from the questionnaire represent a good sample and a significant basis for the analysis of sustainable development in the SNR—protected area. Cronbach's alpha has values above 0.60, which indicates that the responses to the statements are valid [35]. The indices are computed as variable means comprising each independent variable [54]. The motive and awareness of the significance of such tourist destinations were present in all respondents and they represented a significant potential for sustainable tourism development. The local population was not sufficiently informed about what constituted sustainable tourism (3.01). The respondents stated that the reserve resources were relatively available (3.69), which could pose a danger to the SNR if there was an absence of protection measures and control over their use. Uncontrolled or prohibited exploitation of resources from the protected area directly threatened the planning of sustainable destination development. The promotion of ethno-social values was at a satisfactory level (4.02). A large number of respondents declared that they would participate in various tourists' education about the SNR (3.99), the life of the local population (4.16), and the production and importance of local products (4.01). The obtained average values can be seen in the graph (Figure 3).

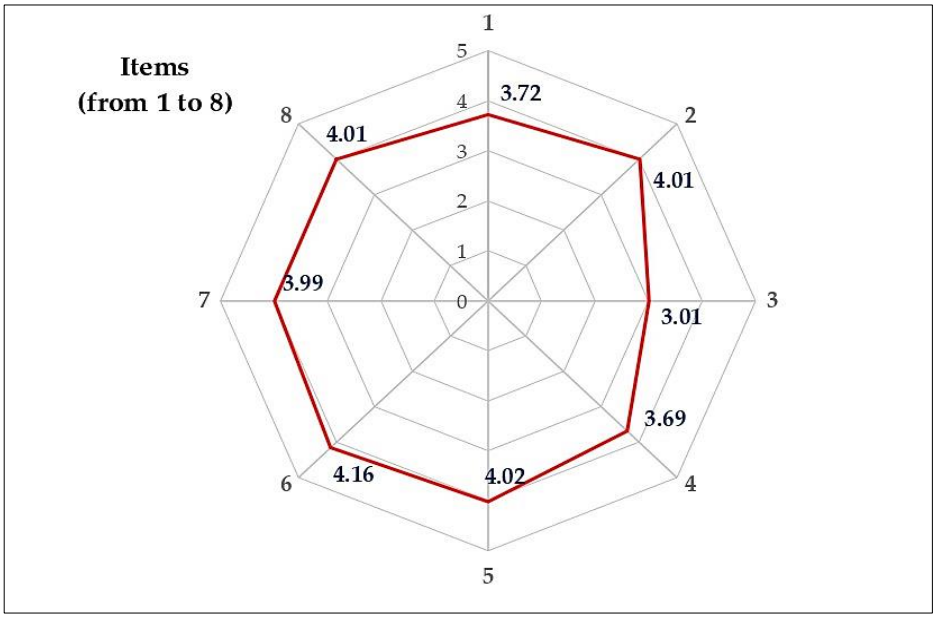


Figure 3. Responses of residents.

In addition to demographic characteristics (Table 4), the questionnaire for surveying visitors about the importance of the SNR in sustainable tourism development also contained 11 items (Table 5).

Table 4. Structure of visitors.

Gender	**Frequency**	**Percent**	
male	270	43.55	
female	350	56.45	
total	**620**	**100.0**	
Level of Education	**Frequency**	**Percent**	
primary education	56	9.03	
high-school education	310	50	
college-level education	159	25.65	
University education	95	15.32	
total	**620**	**100.0**	
age structure		min	Max
	620	18	74
	average		std. dev.
	33.92		17.556

Table 5. Responses of visitors (n = 620).

Items	**α**	**Mean**
Tourists are guided through the protected area by trained guides and representatives of the local population	0.788	3.11
You can visit local brands (wineries, ethnic houses, handicrafts, local firms, etc.)	0.669	4.01
Tourists are educated about the history of the reserve, population, and settlement	0.814	3.21
The local population educates tourists about the importance of sustainable development	0.633	2.44
There are tourist facilities with no impact on the environment	0.711	3.69
Local products are available to visitors	0.800	3.11
You support charging entrance fees to the protected area	0.629	4.22
Visitors make contact with residents	0.755	3.54
Visitors can visit local cultural facilities and events	0.743	3.67
Tourists can visit historical sites	0.700	4.02
Visitors can participate in joint activities with residents	0.863	2.54

Items measured on a 5-point Likert agreement scale α—Cronbach's alpha reliability.

The responses of SNR visitors can be seen in Table 5.

Cronbach's alpha has values above 0.60, which indicates that the responses to the statements are valid [23]. Analyzing the data, we can conclude that the responses given by visitors have relatively average values ranging from 2.54 to 4.22 (mean). The answers to the claims that the locals train tourists on the importance of sustainable development (2.44) and that tourists can participate in joint activities with the local population (2.54) have the lowest values.

The obtained average values can be seen in the graph (Figure 4).

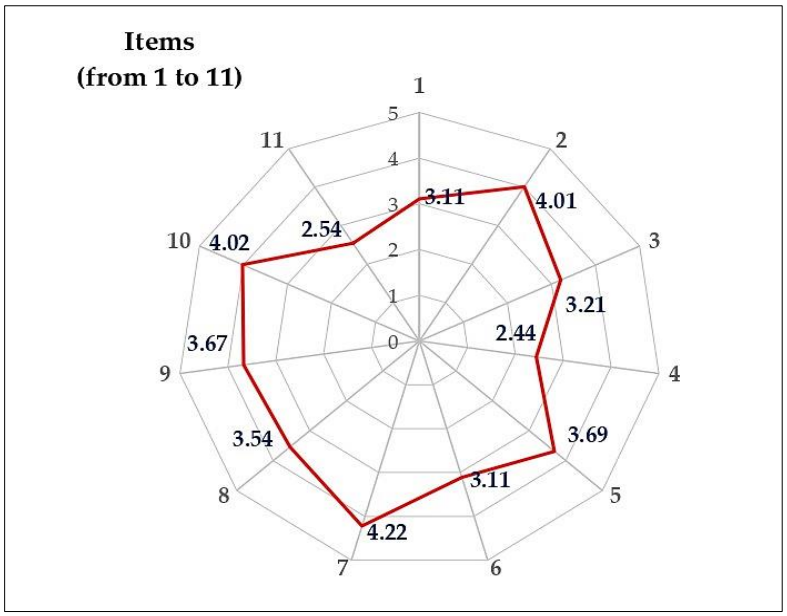


Figure 4. Responses of visitors.

In addition to demographic characteristics (Table 6), the questionnaire for students' surveying also contained 11 items about the function of the SNR in sustainable tourism development (Table 7).

Table 6. Structure of students.

Gender	**Frequency**		**Percent**	
boys	265		48.18	
girls	285		51.82	
total	**550**		**100.0**	
Educational Profile	**Frequency**		**Percent**	
tourism technician	162		29.45	
economic technician	139		25.27	
high school, general major	130		23.64	
chef/waiter	119		21.64	
total	**550**		**100.0**	
age structure	**min**	**max**	**mean**	**std. dev.**
	18	19	18.36	14.991

The students also answered the statements using a 5-point Likert scale.

Table 7. Responses of students (n = 550).

Items	**α**	**Mean**
I was a participant in the school-in-nature in the Deliblato Sands	0.711	3.05
I would like to be a participant in classes in nature more often	0.633	4.75
During education, we learn about sustainable development in certain subjects	0.601	3.09
I have some knowledge about the concept what sustainable development is	0.700	2.13
I would like to participate in education about sustainable development	0.801	3.69
The Deliblato Sands is important to me	0.633	4.11
I would like to educate tourists about the importance of the Deliblato Sands	0.688	4.22
I was a participant or organizer of local events	0.745	3.17
I am a consumer of local products	0.755	4.15
I think that the Deliblato Sands needs greater protection	0.631	4.67
I think believe that tourism can help the Deliblato Sands	0.647	4.02

Items measured on a 5-point Likert agreement scale α—Cronbach's alpha reliability.

The obtained average values can be seen in the graph (Figure 5).

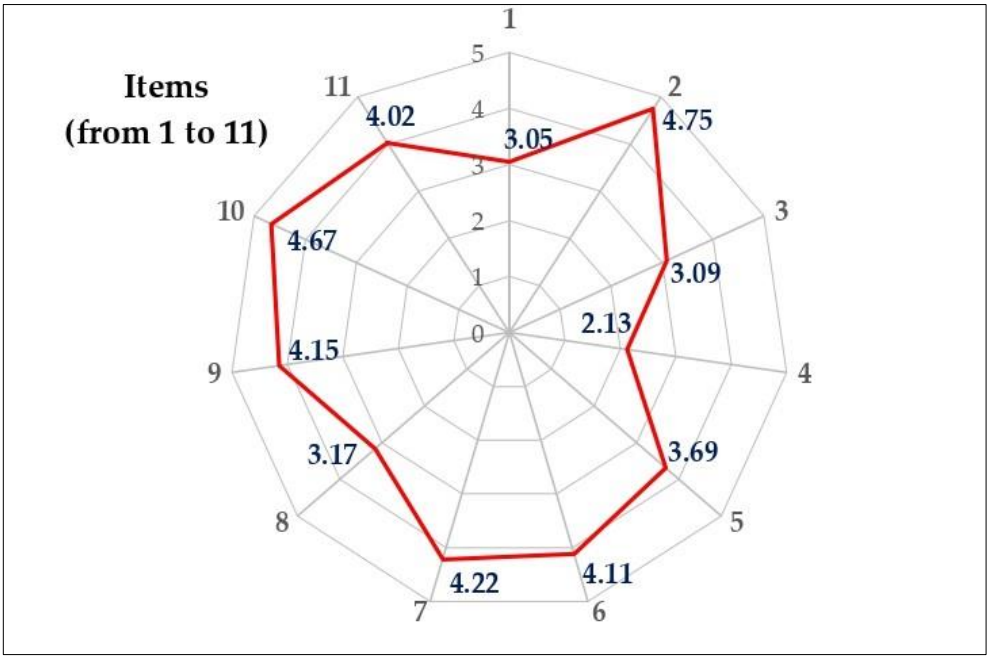


Figure 5. Responses of students.

The answers related to the desire to involve respondents in educational processes in different ways have a high value. The statements that students would like to participate in classes in nature more often (4.75) and the desire to educate tourists about the importance of the SNR (4.22) have the highest values. This indicates very significant potential when creating tourism development strategies. Activating schools-in-nature and educational centers, where the educators are high school students, presents an exceptional value. It is also necessary to involve young people more significantly in planning and organizing local events. The creativity they possess is immeasurable. A small number of surveyed students responded that they had participated in organizing local events (3.17).

6. Discussion

During the research, the authors set themselves certain tasks. First of all, it was extremely important to determine the indicators that could show the true state of the observed protected assets and provide a guide to finding the best variants of development and protection of natural assets. In this way, directions for the development of sustainable tourism in protected natural resources were indicated.

Studying numerous literature on sustainable tourism development in protected areas [12,14,16,17,35], the authors singled out 37 positive and negative tourism development resources, which they investigated in this paper. Out of 31 positive indicators of tourism development, 23 were related to sustainable development, while, out of 6 negative factors, 5 were related to sustainable development. By analyzing the data in Table 1, it can be concluded that there were 23 indicators of sustainable tourism development (out of 31 positive ones selected for examination) and 5 negative ones (out of 6 selected). The results indicate that the potential positive resources of this protected area should be improved in the future [17]. In this regard, it is necessary to develop eco-tourism, include the local community in the process of protection and management, and construction of accommodation facilities or eco-resorts in compliance with the ambient environment. In the case of negative state indicators, we should aim for elimination or minimization. These indicators are: the use of protected area resources (wood, animals, soil), presence of domestic animals (grazing), use of chemical agents on agricultural lands from the surrounding area,

prevention of pollution from surrounding pollutants such as industrial plants (Pančevo refinery), and influence on the increase of endangered plant and animal species.

It is obvious that there are weaknesses in the implementation of some positive indicators that are very important for the sustainable development of protected areas. That is why the authors study the implementation of these indicators in the development and preservation of space.

One of the basic postulates of a destination sustainable tourism development implies the existence of mutual interaction between residents and visitors. Experiences, attitudes, knowledge, and potential opportunities are exchanged, various skills are acquired, socialization is strengthened, and many other benefits are achieved through mutual communication and contacts [10,55,56]. Sustainable tourism planning must intensify mutual social interaction between visitors and residents [10,42].

Research has shown that tourists support charging entrance fees to the protected area, which indicates the possibility of obtaining economic benefits from entrance fees [57,58]. On the other hand, it implies that tourists want to invest money with the awareness that it will produce a multiplier effect, i.e., that it will boost the local economy in a certain way. Tourists are satisfied with the possibility of visiting certain tourist locations that represent protected natural assets. They also want to find out as much as possible about those destinations. Intensifying schools-in-nature would affect the formation of a unique tourism product that would contribute to the sustainable development of the entire region [59,60]. Positive sociocultural, ecological, institutional, and economic benefits for all subjects would be realized with local educators and guides, with mutual interaction and active participation [61].

During this research, a lack of prior knowledge of visitors about sustainable tourism development, as well as the existence of interaction between residents and visitors, was demonstrated. This should be taken into account when adopting local strategies for planning the sustainable development in the SNR. Besides, local products are not sufficiently available to tourists, because the majority of the respondents are neutral about this. This coincides with the result obtained by analyzing residents' responses to the questionnaire (Table 5).

When designing sustainable tourism development strategies, local products must occupy a remarkable place in the tourism offer [56,57]. It is necessary to implement creative workshops in which representatives of the local community provide information and teach tourists about the characteristics of the landscape and the importance of tourism for its development. [58]. By creating such interactions and connections, tourists can accept information in the best way and learn about culture, customs, handicrafts, gastronomy, original folk Melos, the relationship of humans to nature and to resources from nature, and the improvement of natural and social values, etc. [59].

Sustainable tourism development in the SNR should be carried out by promoting the existing/present positive angles, and the most important are favorable position, regulated national and international protection status, hydrographic potential, availability of funds, the existence of ethno-villages or settlements, the presence of endemic plant species, etc. in the table of the checked values. The analysis of written literature and field research shows that there is no significant interaction between visitors and residents from the reserve territory in education about practicing old crafts and creating handicraft products. In addition, tourists do not have the opportunity to become more intensively acquainted with the ethnic-social values of this tourist destination. They can learn about intangible cultural heritage at the National Museum in Pančevo and in Pančevo, Kovin, and Bela Crkva during exhibition activities. Creative tourism tours, aimed at teaching about the social values of the population around the SNR, are not present to a greater extent. It is important to point out that, through the analysis, the presence of negative sociocultural impacts of tourism was not found, i.e., that the development of tourism in this protected area was accepted by the local community. Through sustainable tourism development and using this protected area, positive sociocultural, economic, and ecological impacts can be increased [53].

During the research, we found out that students have little knowledge about the sustainable development of tourism in the studied protected areas. The reason for such a poor rating indicates that secondary education curricula do not contain teaching areas that deal with thematic units on sustainable tourism development sufficiently. This knowledge can help to implement lessons in nature and teaching units dealing with the mentioned contents to a greater extent. This is important because by intensifying this important area through education we can achieve more impressive final results related to the level of knowledge and skills about sustainable development. The low level of students' knowledge on sustainable development coincides with the level of knowledge of residents' representatives. That is why it is extremely important to cover teaching topics from this area in secondary education. This research indicates that the type and method of education must be taken into account for the needs of the development of sustainable tourism in protected areas.

There are over 40 educational institutions within the reserve territory (five municipalities). However, no permanent education on sustainable tourism development exists in any educational institution as part of the curricula. Individual teaching units that contain basic knowledge about sustainable development are studied in secondary vocational and in primary schools as part of certain subjects, but none of them include field exercises and sustainable tourism development. The mentioned educational institutions visit the SNR in an organized manner as part of excursions or schools-in-nature, with an emphasis on recreation and familiarization with the essential elements of nature and its protection. In the reserve, the educational-recreational center "Čardak" is surrounded by health trails with rest areas and viewpoints. You can get basic information and promotional materials about the reserve, and buy authentic souvenirs there. Employees speak German, English, Romanian, Hungarian, and basic Italian. Basic information can also be obtained from municipal tourism organizations. Information points exist in the Educational Center Čardak and in the information centers Šušara, Devojački Bunar, Stara Palanka, and Deliblato.

Present events relating to the territory of the municipalities covered by this nature reserve include certain activities to educate tourists and the local population on sustainable tourism development, which is the vital motive of some events. These events represent an important tourist potential because they promote various complementary tourist content, such as wine tourism, gastronomy, folklore, local crafts, museums and galleries, and cultural-historical monuments, etc.

If we analyze tourist-informative documentation, we can conclude that there are newsletters and other informative materials in all local tourist organizations on the territory of the municipalities in the reserve. Their secondary function is educational in nature on the sustainable development of tourism and its importance. All documentation promotes the natural and social values of the SNR and the protection of nature.

The importance of education about natural resources and the impact on the sustainable development of tourism is extremely important. That is why the authors will devote a special scientific paper to this issue, in which the degree and method of education of the local community, residents, and visitors of protected properties will be investigated. Emphasis should be placed on intensifying schools-in-nature, workshops on sustainable tourism development, a more active role of sustainable development promoters, available local media, and a more active role of residents in planning and controlling tourism development in the SNR.

One of the important conclusions in this paper is that much more attention must be paid to the overall understanding of the reasons for the poor implementation of positive indicators, as well as ways to solve this problem. It will be a challenge for the authors who will continue to deal with this issue, until at least some of these problems are solved. In addition, the strengthening of the positive economic impact of tourism, the application of the carrying capacity concept of space as one of the protection elements, and wastewater regulation as a significant threat should be taken into account

7. Conclusions

Based on the data analysis of the conducted research concerning the existing potential factors of sustainable tourism development, and the obtained results of the survey, we conclude that Deliblato Sands, as a special nature reserve, has significant potential for the development of sustainable tourism. This potential can be considered when planning and developing specific forms of tourism, such as educational tourism, ecotourism, adventure tourism, rural tourism, health tourism, sports, hunting, fishing, or all forms of nature-based tourism. Ecotourism, rural tourism, excursions, and event tourism would become the primary forms of tourism movements in the SNR. For the preservation of this space, ecotourism with ecological and sustainable components would be the most important. Certainly, eco and rural tourism can hardly develop without preserving nature and cooperation with the local community. Therefore, destinations with protected areas are of particular importance for eco and rural tourists [43]. In such a space, tourism creates both benefits and damage, while the effects interact with each other in different ways [62,63]. People develop an awareness of the importance of preserving space and improving the environment and sociocultural values of tourist destinations through tourism. It contributes to an increase in the quality of the destination and has a positive effect on the environment because awareness of the importance of a healthy environment is built through tourism. It protects nature, natural functions, and space. It also improves the overall aesthetic quality of the environment [64,65].

Successful implementation of ecological components, protection of the environment and tourists, and giving preference to those products that are organized following ecological standards, are imperative in the future implementation of marketing activities in tourism of this protected area. Sustainable tourism is one of the most widely accepted forms of using space because it produces positive results at the level of overall sustainable development [66,67]. By opening and promoting educational facilities and educational paths, tourism has only recently emerged as one of the directions and safe models of SNR sustainable development. The tourism offer of this protected area includes the mentioned educational and recreational health trails, which further enrich visiting the reserve.

Active measures for the protection and control of their application can be provided by constructing visitor centers and creating brochures containing the mentioned ethical codes in the SNR. Those codes should point out certain sustainable activities, and their behavior toward natural and social values. Carrying capacity control by the administration and involvement of users in direct protection activities are especially important [68–70]. The introduction of eco-workshops and ecotourism based on the example of similar protected areas is also recommendable [71–75].

Limitations and Future Studies

The results of this work will be useful to the authors in future research on protected areas. Upcoming papers will examine the impact of visitor satisfaction on the creation of destination tourism products. The authors will also study in more detail the role of residents in the planning and development of sustainable tourism. The results of such research will provide future guidelines for defining adequate models for the inclusion of the local population in the implementation of tourist development. This would include various forms of tourism that could be developed in the area. In this way, a synergy of natural and anthropogenic resources and the local community would be achieved. The existing and created potentials of the destination would influence the development of specific forms of tourism for which there would be resources in the studied areas.

In any research, there are always certain limitations that the authors have to explain and overcome. Above all, there are numerous risks that exist. In this research, there were certain limitations that the authors encountered.

First, we collected the data through a random sampling of national and international visitors so the findings might not directly apply to other countries or areas where consumers might have different attitudes toward eco-friendly products and sustainable tourism.

In the selection of indicators, previous studies mostly discussed the development status, problems, and countermeasures of sustainable tourism from the perspective of economics, and to a lesser extent other angles such as ecological and cultural factors. Therefore, it is difficult to fully adjust for the actual situation of residents and tourists when screening driving factors and their components.

In addition, our study made a few contributions to sustainability and service research. It extended the current understanding of how to attract and retain residents and visitors for newly introduced services in a sustainable way in protected areas.

In writing this paper, the authors managed to overcome some limitations, such as COVID-19. However, in recent times, these risks have reflected natural, health, economic, political and socio-psychological influences on tourism development. As all these risks significantly affect the sustainable development of tourism, the authors will have to deal with them as part of their research. In future work, the authors will need to consider and solve the risks that are present in the studied destinations.

The results obtained in this research can contribute to creating sustainable development strategies and tourism development in this part of Vojvodina. Given that sustainable tourism development in Vojvodina is not sufficiently presented, these research results can enormously affect the improvement of nature-based tourism. Educational tourism in Deliblato Sands can be an example for other tourism types or classes in nature. Researchers, pupils, and students can practice planned study forms and field exercises on the terrains of the SNR as a basis for their research work. All the mentioned forms of tourism, together with a proper tourism strategy, can improve the area, its management, and its protection. The overall impacts for the SNR would have sociocultural, economic, ecological, and institutional benefits, which build the creation of a positive model of sustainable tourism development.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, I.T., D.P., V.R., S.Š., D.M. and M.M.; methodology, I.T., D.P., V.R., S.Š. and M.M.; software, I.T., D.P., S.Š. and M.M.; validation, I.T., D.P., V.R., S.Š., D.M. and M.M.; formal analysis, I.T., V.R., D.M. and M.M.; investigation, I.T., V.R., S.Š., D.M. and M.M.; resources, I.T., D.P., V.R., S.Š., D.M. and M.M.; data curation, I.T., D.P., V.R., D.M. and M.M.; writing—original draft preparation, I.T., D.P., V.R., S.Š., D.M. and M.M.; writing—review and editing, I.T., D.P., V.R., S.Š., D.M. and M.M.; visualization, I.T., D.P., V.R., S.Š., D.M. and M.M.; supervision, I.T., D.P., V.R., S.Š. and M.M.; project administration, I.T., D.P., S.Š. and D.M.; funding acquisition, I.T., D.P., V.R. and M.M. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The data that support the findings of this study are available upon reasonable request from the authors.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript; or in the decision to publish the results.

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