НАУЧНИ ТРУДОВЕ НА УНСС (5) 2025, АКАДЕМИЧНО ИЗДАТЕЛСТВО УНСС
ISSN (online): 2534-8957; ISSN (print): 0861-9344; http://unwe-research-papers.org/
DOI: https://doi.org/10.37075/RP.2025.5.03

RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT IN TOURISM

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Abstract

Tourism is one of the main economic sectors in Europe, contributing a significant share of the gross domestic product of many countries and providing millions of jobs. Despite the economic benefits, the rapid growth of the tourism sector is putting significant pressure on transport infrastructure and the environment. The intensive use of transport means, such as planes, cars and ships, significantly increases carbon dioxide emissions and air pollution, which has a serious impact on climate change. In addition, tourist destinations, especially those with mass tourism, are faced with problems such as overexploitation of natural resources, water pollution and soil erosion. This raises the need for new, sustainable tourism management models that minimize negative impacts on the environment.

Keywords: sustainable development, transport, tourism, efficient systems, environment

JEL: L83, Z32, Q56

Introduction

The importance of the topic is linked to the growing need to balance the economic benefits of tourism with environmental protection. The decisions taken today will determine the sustainable future of tourism and transport in Europe.

The object of the study is the tourism industry in Europe, considered in the context of the interaction between tourism, transport and the environment. Tourism is directly dependent on the transport infrastructure, which provides access to destinations and mobility of tourists. This interaction is of particular importance for the sustainable development of tourism, as transport represents one of the main sources of pollution and carbon emissions, which have a negative impact on the environment.

The study focuses on European tourist destinations where pressure on infrastructure and natural resources is particularly high. Attention is paid to the impact of transport systems and solutions to reduce their environmental footprint.

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In this context, the subject of the study is not only tourism, but also its relationship with transport infrastructure and environmental protection measures.

The research will examine the interaction between tourism and transport systems in Europe, with a focus on sustainability. The different modes of transport – air, rail, road and sea – and their impact on tourism flows and the environment will be examined. Special attention will be paid to the opportunities for reducing carbon emissions through the implementation of sustainable transport solutions.

The role of public transport in tourist destinations will be analyzed, as well as good practices for integrating alternative forms of transport, such as electric vehicles and bicycles. An important aspect will be the assessment of European Union policies aimed at promoting sustainable transport and tourism, including the Green Deal program.

The aim of this article is to examine the interaction between transport and tourism in Europe, focusing on environmental factors.

To achieve the main goal, the following tasks have been formulated:

- To review existing theoretical concepts and models related to the sustainable development of tourism and transport, with a focus on the environmental challenges faced by these sectors.
- To analyze the European Union's policy and regulatory frameworks aimed at promoting sustainable transport and tourism, including the Green Deal program.
- To explore examples of good practices from different European countries where innovative transport solutions are implemented to reduce carbon emissions and protect the environment in tourist destinations.
- To explore the possibilities for integrating sustainable transport systems into tourist sites by examining specific case studies of destinations with successful transport and environmental strategies.
- To propose recommendations for improving transport infrastructure and reducing the environmental footprint of tourist travel, emphasizing the need for collaboration between the public and private sectors.

Identifying key issues in sustainable tourism

Sustainable transport continues to gain traction in the tourism sector in 2024, driven by both consumer demand and regulatory requirements. Key trends include the growing consumer preference for environmentally friendly transport options, the implementation of EU sustainable transport policies, and the tourism industry's response to environmental challenges.

In response to these challenges, the European Union is developing a number of initiatives aimed at the sustainable development of tourism and transport. The EU Green Deal aims to reduce carbon emissions by at least 55% by 2030, with a particular focus on the transport and tourism sectors. These policies aim to introduce sustainable transport solutions such as electric vehicles, bicycles and more efficient public transport systems in tourist regions.

More and more tourists are choosing eco-friendly travel and transportation solutions, driven by growing awareness of climate change and the need to reduce their carbon footprint. This is confirmed by various studies that show that sustainable tourism is becoming a major criterion when planning trips.

On the other hand, the EU is tightening its transport regulations with the aim of "achieving a 55% reduction in emissions by 2030" (Government of Netherlands, 2025), within the framework of initiatives such as the EU Green Deal and the "Fit for 55" programme. This is encouraging the implementation of green technologies in tourist transport, such as electric buses and zero-emission trains, which are seen as a vital part of the future of tourism.

The tourism industry also plays an important role in the transition to sustainable transport, integrating these technologies and proposals to reduce environmental impact, as well as to meet the increasing demands of consumers.

These trends outline the future of tourism in 2024, where sustainable transport solutions will be an integral part of tourism offerings.

In 2024, tourists are becoming increasingly aware of the environmental impact of their travels and are showing a clear preference for sustainable transport solutions. According to recent research, "over 50% of travelers consider carbon emissions as a key factor when choosing their transport" (Leenoi, 2024). This trend is particularly visible in the tourism sector, where consumers are actively seeking travel options that reduce their environmental impact.

Studies show that electric buses, high-speed trains and ride-sharing services are emerging as the most popular transport options among tourists. Consumers are increasingly choosing trains over planes for short distances due to lower CO_2 emissions, while electric buses are becoming the preferred choice for urban transport, especially in environmentally-friendly destinations (Euromonitor International, 2023).

In addition, a large proportion of tourists are looking for operators that offer services with a "smaller ecological footprint", such as the use of sustainable fuels or renewable energy. These changes in consumer behavior are leading to significant investments in green technologies by transport operators and government initiatives aimed at incentivizing more environmentally friendly solutions.

According to Statista, 83% of global travelers consider sustainable tourism important (Statista, 2024), indicating a strong demand for sustainable tourism

practices worldwide. Tourism in Europe is recovering and growing, especially in the context of international tourism and the introduction of sustainable practices. The global sustainable tourism market reached a value of 3.12 trillion US dollars in 2024, with significant growth expected until 2034 (European Tourism, 2024). These figures highlight the importance of sustainable practices in both the global and European tourism industries, with an emphasis on integrating environmentally responsible solutions into travel.

Methods

Empirical evidence highlights several critical areas where improvements are needed to successfully implement sustainable transport strategies in the tourism sector. In this study, the selection of sources was based on clearly defined criteria, including the relevance to sustainable transport, the credibility of institutional reports (e.g., OECD, UNWTO, European Commission), and the presence of measurable empirical data. Analytical methods such as comparative policy analysis, thematic content analysis, and cross-regional benchmarking were applied to identify common trends and discrepancies in policy implementation across different tourism destinations.

One of the main problems identified through this analytical process is the lack of consistency in how sustainable transport policies are implemented across regions. For example, some destinations have successfully integrated public transport with tourist attractions, making it easier for visitors to get around in a sustainable way. However, other regions are still lagging behind in providing such a seamless experience. According to the OECD, coordination between local authorities and tourism operators is essential to overcome these differences and make sustainable transport options more accessible to tourists.

Another important recommendation is to provide stronger financial incentives for companies in the tourism sector to implement green technologies. This includes promoting the use of electric buses, partnering with green transport service providers, and investing in sustainable transport infrastructure such as charging stations for electric vehicles. Empirical studies – selected based on methodological rigor, sample size, and replicability – highlight that subsidies or tax breaks for companies that invest in sustainable practices can accelerate the transition to greener transport. This is particularly important for regions heavily dependent on tourism, where the initial costs of green infrastructure could otherwise be prohibitive.

Finally, policymakers need to focus on long-term economic viability by incorporating green technologies into tourism development plans. The success of these initiatives will depend on sustained support from governments, industry

stakeholders, and transport operators. The analytical framework used in this study – combining trend analysis with scenario evaluation – shows that focusing on the scalability of green technologies and their integration into existing systems will ensure that the transition to sustainable tourism transport remains financially and environmentally viable in the long term.

Results

The European Union continues to implement significant measures to promote sustainable transport, which play a central role in achieving the climate goals set out in the Green Deal. In this context, the "Fit for 55" plan is a key instrument aimed at reducing net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030. Part of this plan includes transforming the transport sector, which accounts for around 25% of total emissions in the EU.

Key sustainable transport policies include the development of high-speed rail networks and the introduction of low-emission zones in major tourist destinations. These infrastructure projects not only facilitate cleaner mobility, but also improve connectivity between cities, while reducing traffic and air pollution.

An additional important aspect is the strengthening of funding for the electrification of public transport, which is part of the EU's efforts to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. This strategy aims to make transport more accessible, cost-effective and sustainable in the long term.

One key approach is innovation in technologies and products aimed at reducing carbon footprints and other environmental impacts. Many large corporations are investing significant resources in research and development to develop new solutions that meet global climate goals. For example, companies in the transportation sector are integrating more efficient energy use methods, electric vehicles, and more sustainable logistics networks. Large companies such as Tesla and Volvo are investing in the development of electric trucks and buses to replace traditional diesel and gasoline cars. This innovation not only reduces carbon dioxide emissions, but also improves the efficiency of transportation, especially in urban areas.

Many businesses are also partnering with environmental organizations and government agencies to create a common framework for sustainable development. These partnerships often involve sharing best practices and joint projects for sustainable resource use. For example, programs such as the European Green Deal provide guidance to businesses on environmentally friendly operations and investments in green technologies.

Another important aspect is employee engagement. Companies often conduct internal training and campaigns aimed at raising awareness of environmental challenges and the possibilities to address them. This helps organizations create

a culture of sustainability and integrate green policies into their daily operations. Large hotel chains, such as Accor Hotels, often organize internal training for their employees aimed at raising awareness of environmental challenges. For example, they conduct campaigns to reduce water and energy consumption in hotels, encouraging staff to use resources more efficiently. In addition, employees are encouraged to actively participate in initiatives such as "Planet 21", which includes recycling waste, reducing plastic products and implementing sustainable practices in customer service.

These measures show how businesses are actively responding to environmental challenges through innovation, collaboration and internal transformation.

One of the key solutions for sustainable transport is the development of infrastructure to support environmentally friendly means of transport, such as cycle paths, electric vehicle infrastructure and improved public transport. In countries such as Norway and Sweden, these initiatives are already a reality. For example, Norway is leading the way in the use of electric cars, with 78% of all new car registrations in 2023 being electric. This is due to strategic incentives from the government, which include tax breaks and subsidies for electric vehicles.

Another example of successful practices is Sweden, which is pursuing a national strategy for sustainable tourism and transport. This strategy focuses on reducing harmful emissions from the transport sector by investing in green technologies and encouraging more public transport and shared rides. Sweden is actively working on the integration of electric buses and zero-emission railways, which significantly improves air quality and reduces congestion (Sweden, Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation, 2022).

In addition, digitalization and "smart" transport systems play an important role in increasing efficiency and reducing the carbon footprint. The INNOAIR project in Sofia focuses on implementing innovative transport solutions that meet user demand and strive for cleaner air. The system combines electric buses and on-demand transport services, thus offering sustainable and efficient public transport. This project shows how modern technologies can be integrated into the transport system to achieve environmental goals.

Some of the leading European countries, such as Norway and Sweden, have extremely successful practices for sustainable transport and tourism.

Norway is among the world's pioneers in sustainable mobility, with a strong focus on electric vehicles. Oslo, the capital of Norway, aims to become the first carbon-neutral city by 2030. Since 2020, the city has removed over 1,000 parking spaces in the city center, replacing them with cycle paths and green spaces. Oslo is also actively investing in charging infrastructure for electric buses and trucks, with the first 6 stations for heavy-duty electric vehicles installed in early 2023. The city also has a long-term strategy to transition to a fully electric public

transport network by the end of 2023, including buses, trams and trains. By 2020, 54% of all registered passenger cars in the country will be electric, and bicycle traffic in Oslo has increased by 77% from 2014 to 2020 (City of Oslo, Statistics Norway, European Cyclist' Federation, Arcadis, 2020).

Sweden is also making serious efforts in the field of sustainable transport. The country aims for 40% of all motorized trips to be made by public transport by 2030, although in 2022 this share reached only 28%, down from 32% before the pandemic. At the same time, Sweden is actively promoting active mobility, with replacing car trips with cycling being able to reduce emissions by 67%. However, this requires significant investment in cycle infrastructure and public services, especially for vulnerable groups (Yang, 2023).

Sustainable transport systems in Norway and Sweden have had a positive impact on tourism by promoting sustainable travel and reducing negative environmental impacts. Norway, for example, has introduced "city green agreements" that require cities to meet specific environmental targets, including improving public transport and reducing car traffic. This makes tourist destinations more accessible and environmentally friendly, attracting more visitors looking for sustainable travel.

Sweden is also a leader in sustainable transport, combining strong transport policies with the development of eco-tourism. The country is actively working to improve the infrastructure for bicycles and electric cars, which further attracts tourists who prefer eco-friendly travel. As a result of these efforts, Sweden is establishing itself as a destination for responsible tourism, supporting the development of local communities.

These practices also contribute to increasing tourist flow to the Nordic countries by offering more sustainable transport solutions and reducing negative effects on the environment.

Environmentally friendly transport plays a key role in sustainable urban development and tourism. Various means such as trains, bike paths and cruise ships contribute to reducing the carbon footprint.

– Trains:

Rail transport is recognized as one of the most efficient and environmentally sustainable methods of long-distance travel. European high-speed trains, such as those in France and Germany, offer a significant contribution to reducing carbon emissions, particularly when they use electricity from renewable sources. This technology plays a key role in the EU's ambitions for carbon neutrality by 2050, with the transport sector set to reduce its emissions by 90% by that date.

High-speed trains such as Thalys and Eurostar not only achieve convenience and speed, but also sustainability by minimizing energy consumption per passenger carried. Experts emphasize that trains are among the most environmentally friendly forms of public transport, especially in countries that rely on clean energy for the electrification of railway networks (Kwilinski, Lyulyov, Pimonenko, 2024).

Continuing investment in rail infrastructure and promoting this mode of transport is essential for the sustainable development of the transport sector and the reduction of the EU's carbon footprint.

Rail transport is also recognized for reducing congestion and air pollution in cities. Electrified trains have better energy efficiency and pollution performance, especially when renewable sources such as wind and solar power are used to generate electricity. Such practices result in a significant reduction in carbon footprint compared to traditional fossil fuel-powered transport.

The innovative potential of MAGLEV (magnetic levitation) trains for achieving sustainability, highlighting their role in reducing energy consumption and minimizing carbon emissions. Energy-efficient MAGLEV technology represents a cleaner alternative to traditional rail systems, making it a key factor in the future of sustainable transport. In the context of tourism, such innovations can have a significant impact on environmentally friendly travel by providing faster and more environmentally friendly options for long-distance travel, in line with global trends for more sustainable and responsible tourism practices. By investing in such technologies, tourist destinations can reduce their environmental footprint while offering improved, high-speed connectivity that enhances the tourist experience and supports environmental goals (Qadir et al., 2021).

– Bike paths

Cycle lanes are a key part of sustainable transport infrastructure that significantly improves the quality of life in cities. Copenhagen and Amsterdam are examples of successful models where well-designed and extensive cycle lane networks are integrated with other transport systems. This not only reduces traffic and travel times, but also contributes to cleaner air and less noise pollution. Cycle lanes encourage people to choose bicycles as their primary means of transport in cities instead of cars, especially for short distances.

Research shows that cycle paths can reduce carbon dioxide emissions associated with urban transport, while increasing physical activity in the population. This contributes to better public health and significantly reduces the risks of diseases associated with a sedentary lifestyle. According to scientific publications, good design and maintenance of cycle path networks is essential for their efficiency and safety, with cities such as Copenhagen accounting for up to 40% of total traffic.

Another advantage of bike lanes is their role in creating more sustainable and resilient cities. They can be used in combination with other forms of sustainable transport, such as electric scooters and public transport, creating a multimodal transport system that meets the needs of modern city dwellers. Successful bike lane projects in European cities show that investments in green infrastructure not only improve mobility, but also stimulate greener and healthier lifestyles.

– Cruises

The cruise industry is actively adapting to the needs of sustainable development by investing in technologies that reduce carbon emissions and improve the energy efficiency of ships. For example, the use of liquefied natural gas (LNG) instead of traditional fuels leads to a significant reduction in pollution. LNG has a better hydrogen-carbon balance, which makes this type of fuel more environmentally friendly, reducing both CO2 emissions and air pollutants such as nitrogen oxides and sulfur compounds. In addition, LNG does not contain particles, which further reduces the impact on the environment (Iannaccone et al., 2020).

Many cruise lines are already implementing hybrid technologies that combine LNG with electric propulsion. Hybrid systems allow ships to reduce or completely eliminate emissions during port calls or in environmentally sensitive areas. This is especially important for cities where cruise ships contribute to high levels of pollution, such as Venice and Barcelona. The use of hybrid engines also improves the overall energy efficiency of ships.

In addition to sea cruises, river cruises are also focusing on reducing emissions and environmental impacts. Ships sailing on European rivers such as the Danube and Rhine are also implementing LNG and hybrid technologies. Some companies are also introducing electric ships that run entirely on batteries on shorter routes. These innovations are supported by regulatory initiatives in the European Union aimed at achieving more sustainable water mobility.

To improve their sustainability, tourism companies can adopt various strategies that promote environmental impact reduction and social responsibility. One of the main approaches is the implementation of technologies that reduce the carbon footprint of operations. For example, the use of renewable energy sources, such as solar or wind power, to power tourism facilities can significantly reduce dependence on fossil fuels and greenhouse gas emissions.

Implementing resource management technologies is also key to sustainability. Hotels and other tourism facilities can implement water and waste management systems that optimize resource consumption. For example, water reuse technologies or smart lighting and air conditioning control systems that reduce unnecessary energy consumption are good examples of sustainable innovations in tourism (Gupta et al., 2024).

Another opportunity for businesses in the tourism sector is to promote sustainable practices among their customers. This could include awareness campaigns on reducing the carbon footprint of travel or the use of environmentally friendly means of transport, such as bicycles and electric scooters, to get around tourist destinations. Such strategies can create a positive image for the business and attract environmentally conscious consumers.

Finally, developing partnerships with local communities and environmental organizations can help tourism businesses increase their social impact. By

collaborating with local providers of environmentally friendly products and services, tourism companies can promote sustainability and support the local economy while reducing their negative environmental impacts.

An assessment of current policies related to sustainable transport in tourism reveals both successes and areas for improvement. Policymakers have introduced several initiatives that aim to reduce carbon emissions, promote the use of alternative fuel technologies and promote multimodal transport systems. However, the effectiveness of these policies is not the same across all EU Member States, and continuous monitoring and review of strategies is crucial to achieving long-term sustainability goals. This section will assess the progress made, identify challenges and propose recommendations for action based on empirical evidence.

By 2030, sustainable transport in tourism is likely to be closely linked to the European Union's carbon neutrality objectives, as set out in the European Green Deal. The EU's decarbonization strategy prioritizes reducing emissions from sectors such as transport, where tourism plays a significant role. The drive towards greener mobility will include increased investment in electric vehicles (EVs), alternative fuels such as hydrogen and the expansion of clean energy public transport systems such as electric buses and high-speed trains. European cities and tourist hotspots are expected to transition to cleaner transport infrastructure that more widely integrates low-emission options, ensuring a sustainable mobility model (Council of the European Union, 2022).

A key part of this transition involves adapting maritime transport in tourism, especially cruises. As cruises are often energy-intensive, new fuel systems such as liquefied natural gas (LNG) and hybrid propulsion technologies are being implemented, which can significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions. With projections indicating that by 2030 more than half of all tourism-related transport could be powered by renewable sources, the tourism sector is likely to create 'green corridors' between major tourist destinations, minimizing the environmental footprint.

Despite progress, challenges remain, particularly in integrating these sustainable systems across regions and tourism activities. Policymakers, businesses and stakeholders need to ensure that sufficient investment in infrastructure is made to support this transition. In addition, new policies will need to focus on balancing environmental sustainability with economic growth, ensuring that tourism continues to thrive while reducing its environmental impact.

Discussion

Experts, stakeholders and policymakers agree that the shift to greener transport systems in tourism requires a multi-pronged approach combining cooperation, policy reform and public engagement. Policymakers stress the need for closer

cooperation between government authorities, the private sector and transport operators to streamline the uptake of sustainable transport solutions. This could include integrating green technologies such as electric and hydrogen vehicles into tourism infrastructure and providing incentives for companies that make these investments. According to the European Commission, these joint efforts are essential to achieving the ambitious goals set out in the European Green Deal and other sustainability frameworks (European Travel Commission, 2024).

Stakeholders also highlight the importance of raising public awareness of the benefits of sustainable transport. Tourist destinations that have successfully implemented green transport options often benefit from reduced traffic congestion, improved air quality and increased tourist satisfaction. This requires not only technological investment but also community involvement. Engaging local communities ensures that sustainable transport initiatives not only reduce emissions but also create economic opportunities, especially in green job sectors such as ecotourism and electric vehicle maintenance.

Policymakers are focusing on long-term economic and environmental viability by including green transport systems in national and regional tourism strategies. To be successful in the long term, empirical research shows that sustainability must be financially viable for both businesses and governments. This includes offering subsidies, tax breaks or public-private partnerships that reduce the economic burden of the transition to sustainable transport. Furthermore, regulatory frameworks need to be designed to ensure that green infrastructure is scalable and adaptable to future technological advances, allowing tourism destinations to remain competitive and sustainable in the future.

Conclusion

Transport, as a key factor in the accessibility of tourist destinations, requires significant efforts to reduce its environmental footprint, especially in the context of the objectives of the European Green Deal. Within the framework of sustainable development, the use of innovative transport technologies, such as electric cars, high-speed trains and bicycle systems, represents one of the main paths to achieving environmentally balanced tourism growth.

The analysis shows that coordinated interaction between the transport and tourism sectors is essential for the success of these efforts. The examples from Copenhagen and Spain illustrate how the development of sustainable transport models can combine economic growth with environmental protection, while at the same time creating better tourism experiences for visitors. This shows that sustainable transport not only minimizes negative impacts, but also increases the attractiveness of destinations, which is important for the long-term development of the tourism sector.

Furthermore, the European Union plays a key role in promoting sustainable transport through various initiatives and programmes that support the integration of green technologies in transport. The targets for reducing carbon emissions by 2030 and climate neutrality by 2050 provide a clear framework for future actions in the field of sustainable tourism. To successfully achieve these goals, it is necessary to continue supporting innovation as well as implementing good practices in the field of sustainable transport and tourism.

In conclusion, sustainable transport is not only a necessity to reduce environmental impacts, but also an opportunity for innovation and improvements in the tourism industry that can create more sustainable and attractive destinations for future generations.

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