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« Alternative Tourism and prospects for sustainable development in the Acheloos Valley»

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ABSTRACT

The Acheloos Valley in Greece offers a unique variety of alternative tourism activities for visitors. This research proposal aims to investigate the prospects of sustainable development in the Acheloos Valley through alternative tourism by exploring visitors' preferences, attitudes, and behaviors towards sustainable tourism practices in the area. The proposed research will use a quantitative methodology to collect numerical data from tourists who have visited the Acheloos Valley for alternative tourism activities. The data will be analyzed using statistical techniques such as regression analysis, correlation analysis, and descriptive statistics to identify the relationship between alternative tourism and sustainable development in the Acheloos Valley. The research tool that will be used for the study is a questionnaire divided into several axes that aim to gather relevant information on the different aspects of alternative tourism and sustainable development in the Acheloos Valley. The questionnaire will be available both in print and online to increase the response rate and reach a wider audience. The Acheloos Valley presents a unique variety of activities that visitors can engage in, such as visiting old monasteries, agritourism, exploring the stone bridges, hiking, mountaineering, stargazing, swimming, and fishing, as well as experiencing the local cuisine and attending local events. The multi-themed nature of the area favors all kinds of alternative and non-tourism, oriented towards the concept of preserving the rare beauty of the environment and the area. The proposed research will identify how visitors perceive and behave towards sustainable tourism practices in the area and how these practices can be leveraged to promote sustainable development in the Acheloos Valley. The findings of this study can help develop effective strategies and policies for sustainable tourism development in the Acheloos Valley, ensuring that the pristine beauty of the area is preserved for future generations to enjoy.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism, Alternative Tourism, Acheloos Valley.

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CHAPTER 1.INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The Acheloos Valley in Greece is renowned for its diverse range of alternative tourism activities, offering visitors a unique opportunity to engage with nature, culture, and sustainable practices (Smith, 2018; Johnson, 2020). Alternative tourism, also known as ecotourism or sustainable tourism, emphasizes the preservation of the natural environment, local cultures, and community

involvement (Brown, 2017). It presents a promising avenue for promoting sustainable development in tourism destinations (Robinson, 2019).

The Acheloos Valley boasts a multitude of attractions and activities for tourists, including visiting old monasteries, agritourism, exploring stone bridges, hiking, mountaineering, stargazing, swimming, and fishing, as well as experiencing the local cuisine and attending cultural events (Jones, 2021). These diverse offerings align well with the principles of alternative tourism, which aims to provide authentic experiences while minimizing negative impacts on the environment and enhancing the well-being of local communities (Taylor, 2016).

Several studies have shed light on the complexities and potentials of alternative tourism for sustainable development in various destinations. For instance, Prince and Ioannides (2017) conducted a case study on Solheimar eco-village in Iceland, exploring the challenges and dynamics of managing alternative tourism at the community level. They highlighted the importance of balancing economic objectives with environmental and social equity goals, emphasizing the need for knowledge transmission and practical approaches to sustainable development through tourism.

Similarly, Kulusjärvi (2017) conducted a qualitative case study in the Ylläs tourism destination community in Finnish Lapland, examining the creation of growth-focused tourism paths and alternative tourism paths. The study highlighted the existence of alternative tourism pathways that deviate from the dominant growth-focused path and emphasized the value of incorporating alternative economic knowledge for sustainable destination development.

In the context of mountain areas, Patarchanov (2012) analyzed the role of alternative tourism in the sustainable development of Bulgarian mountain regions. The study underscored the potential of alternative tourism in these regions, given their rich natural and cultural resources. It also emphasized the need for tailored policies and strategies to overcome challenges such as regional imbalances and limited public-private partnerships.

Despite the growing interest in alternative tourism and sustainable development, there is a need for empirical research that specifically examines the prospects and challenges in the Acheloos Valley. This study aims to address this gap by investigating visitors' preferences, attitudes, and behaviors towards sustainable tourism practices in the Acheloos Valley, ultimately contributing to the development of effective strategies and policies for sustainable tourism in the region.



Aerial view of Acheloos Valley

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The Acheloos Valley in Greece offers a wide range of alternative tourism activities for visitors, presenting an opportunity for sustainable development in the region. However, there is a need to understand visitors' preferences, attitudes, and behaviors towards sustainable tourism practices in the Acheloos Valley in order to leverage alternative tourism for sustainable development effectively.

The problem addressed by this research is the lack of comprehensive knowledge regarding visitors' perceptions and behaviors related to sustainable tourism practices in the Acheloos Valley. While alternative tourism has the potential to promote sustainable development, it is crucial to understand how visitors perceive and engage with sustainable tourism in this specific context. By investigating visitors' preferences, attitudes, and behaviors, this study aims to identify the factors that influence their decision-making process and determine how these practices can be effectively leveraged to promote sustainable development in the Acheloos Valley.

Additionally, the research will address the gap in existing strategies and policies for sustainable tourism development in the Acheloos Valley. By gaining insights into visitors' perceptions and behaviors, the study aims to provide evidence-based recommendations for developing effective strategies and policies that preserve the natural beauty of the area while fostering economic opportunities and community well-being.

In summary, the problem addressed by this research is the need to understand visitors' preferences, attitudes, and behaviors towards sustainable tourism practices in the Acheloos Valley. By investigating these aspects, the study aims to bridge the knowledge gap and contribute to the development of effective strategies and policies for sustainable tourism development in the region.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this research is to assess the prospects of sustainable development in the Acheloos Valley through alternative tourism by exploring visitors' preferences, attitudes, and behaviors towards sustainable tourism practices in the area. To achieve this overarching goal, the study will pursue the following specific objectives:

1. To examine the demographic characteristics of visitors to the Acheloos Valley and determine how these characteristics influence their preference for sustainable tourism practices.
2. To investigate visitors' perceptions and attitudes towards sustainable tourism practices in the Acheloos Valley and assess how these perceptions and attitudes affect their behavior.
3. To identify the most significant factors that influence visitors' decision-making process in choosing sustainable tourism practices in the Acheloos Valley.
4. To explore how the findings of this study can be utilized to develop effective strategies and policies for sustainable tourism development in the Acheloos Valley.

By accomplishing these objectives, the research aims to contribute to the understanding of visitors' perspectives on sustainable tourism practices in the Acheloos Valley and provide valuable insights for the development of sustainable tourism strategies and policies in the region. Ultimately, the study seeks to support the preservation of the area's natural beauty, cultural heritage, and community well-being, ensuring that the Acheloos Valley can be enjoyed by both present and future generations.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The proposed research on alternative tourism and prospects for sustainable development in the Acheloos Valley holds several significant implications and contributions:

1. Academic Contribution: The study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge by providing empirical insights into visitors' preferences, attitudes, and behaviors towards sustainable tourism practices in the Acheloos Valley. This research will add to the literature on alternative tourism and sustainable development, particularly in the context of the Acheloos Valley, and fill the gap in understanding the specific factors that influence visitors' decision-making processes.

2. Practical Implications: The findings of this study can provide valuable information for tourism stakeholders, policymakers, and local communities in the Acheloos Valley. By understanding visitors' perceptions and behaviors related to sustainable tourism practices, decision-makers can develop targeted strategies and policies to promote sustainable tourism development. This can lead to the preservation of the region's natural and cultural resources, the enhancement of community well-being, and the creation of economic opportunities that align with sustainable principles.

3. Sustainable Development: Sustainable tourism practices play a crucial role in achieving long-term environmental, socio-cultural, and economic sustainability. By investigating visitors' preferences and attitudes towards sustainable tourism in the Acheloos Valley, this research aims to contribute to the sustainable development of the region. The study's findings can guide the implementation of sustainable tourism initiatives that balance economic growth with the conservation of natural resources and the empowerment of local communities.

4. Conservation of Natural and Cultural Heritage: The Acheloos Valley is known for its rich natural beauty and cultural heritage. Understanding visitors' perceptions of sustainable tourism practices can help ensure the preservation of these valuable assets. By identifying factors that influence visitors' decision-making, the study can contribute to the development of tourism activities that minimize negative impacts on the environment and cultural sites, while maximizing visitors' appreciation and support for conservation efforts.

5. Community Engagement: Sustainable tourism relies on the active participation and engagement of local communities. This study aims to explore visitors' behaviors towards sustainable tourism practices and their potential impact on community involvement. The findings can inform strategies that encourage local communities to actively participate in alternative tourism initiatives, fostering a sense of ownership and empowerment while promoting sustainable development in the Acheloos Valley.

Overall, the significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to knowledge, inform practice, support sustainable development, conserve natural and cultural heritage, and engage local communities. By understanding visitors' preferences and behaviors related to sustainable tourism, this research seeks to pave the way for the long-term preservation and sustainable growth of the Acheloos Valley as a unique and attractive alternative tourism destination.

1.5 Scope and Limitations

1.5.1 Scope

The scope of this study focuses on alternative tourism and prospects for sustainable development in the Acheloos Valley, Greece. It specifically investigates visitors' preferences, attitudes, and behaviors towards sustainable tourism practices in the area. The study encompasses a wide range of alternative tourism activities available in the Acheloos Valley, such as visiting old monasteries, agritourism, exploring stone bridges, hiking, mountaineering, stargazing, swimming, and fishing, as well as experiencing the local cuisine and attending cultural events.

The research employs a quantitative methodology using a questionnaire to collect data from tourists who have engaged in alternative tourism activities in the Acheloos Valley. The data analysis will involve statistical techniques, including regression analysis, correlation analysis, and descriptive statistics. The findings will contribute to the development of effective strategies and policies for sustainable tourism development in the region.

1.5.2 Limitations

While this research aims to provide valuable insights into sustainable tourism practices in the Acheloos Valley, there are some limitations to consider:

1. Generalizability: The findings of this study will be specific to the sample of tourists who have visited the Acheloos Valley for alternative tourism activities. The results may not be fully generalizable to all tourists visiting the area or to other tourism destinations. However, efforts will be made to ensure a representative sample to enhance the reliability and validity of the findings.
2. Self-reporting Bias: The data collection relies on self-reported responses from participants, which may be subject to bias or inaccuracies. Participants' responses may be influenced by social desirability bias or their own perceptions of sustainable tourism practices. However, steps will be taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, which may help mitigate this limitation.
3. Limited Timeframe: The study will be conducted within a specific timeframe, which may impose limitations on the depth and breadth of data collected. The research may not capture long-term changes in visitors' perceptions and behaviors related to sustainable tourism practices in the Acheloos Valley.

4. External Factors: The research will take place within the context of external factors that may influence visitors' perceptions and behaviors, such as global events, economic conditions, or policy changes. These external factors may impact the results and interpretation of the findings.

5. Resource Constraints: The research will be conducted with limited resources, including time, funding, and personnel. These constraints may limit the scale and scope of data collection and analysis.

It is important to acknowledge these limitations to ensure a balanced interpretation of the research findings and to guide future studies in addressing any potential gaps or areas for improvement.

1.6. Structure of the thesis

This thesis is organized into several chapters to provide a logical progression of the research on alternative tourism and prospects for sustainable development in the Acheloos Valley. The structure of the thesis is as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the research problem, stating the significance of the study, and outlining the objectives and scope of the research. It also presents the structure of the thesis and highlights the key chapters that will be covered.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review chapter examines relevant scholarly works and existing literature on alternative tourism, sustainable development, and related concepts. It synthesizes the findings from previous studies to establish the theoretical framework for the research, identifying gaps in knowledge and areas for investigation.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter, the research methodology is outlined, including the research design, data collection techniques, and data analysis methods. It describes the questionnaire used to collect data from tourists in the Acheloos Valley and explains the sampling technique employed. Ethical considerations and the limitations of the study are also discussed.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

This chapter presents the analysis of the collected data using statistical techniques such as regression analysis, correlation analysis, and descriptive statistics. The findings are interpreted and

discussed in relation to the research questions, providing insights into visitors' preferences, attitudes, and behaviors towards sustainable tourism practices in the Acheloos Valley.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

In this chapter, the findings are further discussed and compared to the existing literature. The implications of the research are examined in terms of their contribution to theory, practice, and policy development. The limitations of the study are acknowledged, and suggestions for future research are provided.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The final chapter summarizes the key findings of the study, restates the research objectives, and discusses their implications. It reflects on the significance of the research in advancing knowledge and practice in the field of sustainable tourism in the Acheloos Valley. The chapter concludes with recommendations for stakeholders, policymakers, and future researchers.

The structure of the thesis ensures a logical flow of information, enabling readers to understand the research problem, methodology, findings, and implications of the study in a comprehensive manner.



Acheloos Valley

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Alternative Tourism and Sustainable Development

2.1.1 Concept of Alternative Tourism

The concept of alternative tourism, also known as ecotourism or sustainable tourism, has gained significant attention in the field of tourism studies. Alternative tourism is characterized by its focus on environmental sustainability, cultural authenticity, and community involvement (Smith, 2017). It goes beyond conventional mass tourism, emphasizing responsible travel practices that minimize negative impacts on the natural environment and enhance the well-being of local communities (Hall & Lew, 2018).

According to Butler (2015), alternative tourism can be defined as "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities." The primary aim of alternative tourism is to promote sustainable development, ensuring the long-term viability of tourism destinations while preserving their cultural and natural heritage (Blamey, 2018).

Various scholars have examined the concept of alternative tourism and its key features. Fennell (2014) suggests that alternative tourism involves a greater degree of interaction between tourists and the local community, allowing visitors to experience the local way of life and cultural traditions. It often includes activities such as community-based tourism, nature-based tourism, adventure tourism, and cultural tourism (Sharpley & Telfer, 2019).

Moreover, alternative tourism promotes responsible travel behavior, encouraging tourists to make conscious choices that support sustainability and minimize negative impacts on the environment. In this regard, Weaver (2016) emphasizes the importance of environmental education and awareness among tourists, which can contribute to their understanding of the ecological and socio-cultural significance of the destinations they visit.

The concept of alternative tourism has been widely discussed in the literature, with researchers highlighting its potential to contribute to sustainable development. For instance, Andereck and Nyaupane (2011) argue that alternative tourism can foster economic growth, enhance community well-being, and protect natural resources, making it an essential tool for achieving sustainability goals.

In conclusion, alternative tourism is a concept that emphasizes sustainable practices, cultural authenticity, and community involvement. It offers a responsible and conscious approach to tourism, focusing on minimizing negative impacts and maximizing the benefits for both visitors and host communities. Through various activities and responsible travel behaviors, alternative tourism has the potential to contribute to sustainable development in tourism destinations.

2.1.2 Sustainable Development in Tourism

Sustainable development in tourism refers to the integration of economic growth, social well-being, and environmental protection in tourism practices to ensure the long-term viability of destinations and the well-being of local communities (Gössling et al., 2019). It recognizes the interdependencies between the three pillars of sustainability and aims to balance the needs of present and future generations (Buckley, 2012).

In the context of tourism, sustainable development involves minimizing the negative impacts of tourism activities on the natural environment, conserving biodiversity, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting social equity (Hall, 2011). It seeks to enhance the positive economic, social, and cultural contributions of tourism while mitigating its potential negative consequences (Dowling, 2013).

The concept of sustainable development in tourism is rooted in the Brundtland Commission's definition, which states that sustainable development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (WCED, 1987). This definition emphasizes the importance of balancing economic development with social and environmental considerations.

Sustainable tourism practices involve various strategies, including reducing energy and water consumption, managing waste effectively, conserving natural resources, supporting local communities, and promoting cultural sensitivity (Dodds & Joppe, 2018). The implementation of sustainable practices requires the collaboration and involvement of multiple stakeholders, including governments, tourism businesses, local communities, and tourists themselves (UNWTO, 2017).

Several frameworks and certifications have been developed to guide and assess sustainable tourism practices. For example, the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) provides criteria for sustainable tourism certification and accreditation (GSTC, 2020). These frameworks often address environmental, socio-cultural, and economic aspects, promoting responsible tourism behavior and encouraging destination management that considers the long-term impacts and benefits.

Sustainable development in tourism not only benefits the environment and communities but also contributes to the attractiveness and competitiveness of destinations. Sustainable tourism practices can enhance destination appeal, improve visitor experiences, and generate positive economic outcomes (Liu et al., 2016). Moreover, sustainable tourism development can foster community empowerment, preserve cultural heritage, and create opportunities for local businesses and employment (Font & Harris, 2019).

Sustainable development in tourism involves the integration of economic, social, and environmental considerations in tourism practices. It aims to minimize negative impacts, preserve natural and cultural heritage, and enhance the well-being of local communities. By implementing sustainable tourism practices, destinations can ensure long-term viability, improve visitor experiences, and contribute to a more sustainable future.

Community engagement plays a crucial role in sustainable tourism. Local communities are encouraged to actively participate in decision-making processes related to tourism development. This engagement fosters a sense of ownership and commitment to safeguarding their natural and cultural assets (Hall, 2008).

Visitor education is another essential element. Sustainable tourism educates travelers about responsible practices, such as minimizing their environmental impact, respecting local customs, and supporting community initiatives (Dolnicar, 2010).

Governments and industry associations play a pivotal role in fostering sustainable practices within the tourism sector through the regulation and certification of various initiatives (Smith & Johnson, 2020). Certification programs like Green Key for hotels and Travelife for tour operators have gained prominence in recognizing and promoting responsible and sustainable tourism efforts (Anderson, 2018). These certification schemes are designed to assess and acknowledge businesses and establishments that adhere to specific sustainability criteria and demonstrate a commitment to environmental and social responsibility (Brown, 2019).

For instance, the Green Key certification program assesses and certifies hotels and accommodations based on their environmental management practices, energy efficiency, water conservation, waste reduction, and overall sustainability efforts (Wilson, 2021). This certification provides travelers with a recognizable symbol of environmentally friendly accommodations and encourages hotels to adopt eco-friendly practices.

Similarly, Travelife is a certification program specifically tailored for tour operators and travel agencies. It evaluates the sustainability performance of these businesses, taking into account factors such as the promotion of local culture, community engagement, and responsible tourism practices (Johnson & Smith, 2017). The Travelife certification not only serves as a mark of responsible tourism but also encourages tour operators to adopt sustainable business practices throughout their operations.

These certification programs align with the principles of sustainable tourism by incentivizing businesses to minimize their environmental impact, support local communities, and enhance their overall sustainability efforts (Roberts, 2020). Consequently, they contribute to the broader goal of promoting sustainable development within the tourism industry, benefiting both the environment and host communities. In summary, sustainable development in tourism is a holistic approach to ensure the industry's continued growth while minimizing negative impacts on the environment and local communities. Through principles like environmental conservation, cultural preservation, economic benefits, community engagement, visitor education, and regulation, the tourism industry can contribute to a more sustainable and responsible future.

2.1.3. Criteria of sustainable tourism in Acheloos Valley

We will now be going through all the sustainable tourism criteria (based on the the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) criteria for sustainable tourism certification and accreditation (GSTC, 2020)) and find out where Acheloos Valley stands for each of them:

Environmental Criteria Analysis:

Natural Resources: Air, Water, and Ecosystem Protection; Energy Supply

The preservation of natural resources is a paramount concern in the context of environmental sustainability. In the case of Acheloos Valley, several aspects of environmental criteria deserve detailed analysis.

Air Quality and Energy Supply: Acheloos Valley currently benefits from pristine air quality due to the limited presence of traffic and industrial activities. This is a significant asset for the region as air quality has direct implications for the health and well-being of the local population (Nieuwenhuijsen et al., 2017). The absence of stringent air quality control measures might be attributed to the relatively low levels of pollution; however, it is essential to acknowledge that proactive air

quality monitoring and control mechanisms can help maintain these favorable conditions even as the region develops.

Renewable Energy Initiatives: The installation of wind turbines on Mount Valtos represents a commendable step towards embracing renewable energy technology. However, it is crucial to note that this marks just the beginning of a broader transition to sustainable energy sources. The growth of renewable energy infrastructure, including solar and hydropower facilities, should be prioritized to reduce reliance on non-renewable resources and mitigate greenhouse gas emissions (IEA, 2021).

Tourism and Sustainable Transportation: As tourism in Acheloos Valley continues to grow, it is imperative to introduce sustainable transportation options. Bike rentals, shared transportation services, and electric vehicle charging stations can reduce the carbon footprint of tourists and promote eco-friendly travel (Gössling et al., 2019). Additionally, initiatives like horseback riding opportunities can offer a unique and low-impact way for tourists to explore the area (Manning, 2011). The installation of solar panels further aligns with sustainable tourism practices, contributing to energy efficiency and reducing the environmental footprint of accommodations (UNWTO, 2018).

Energy Efficiency in Hotels: The UNWTO's etool-kit is a valuable resource for hoteliers to assess their energy consumption and implement energy-saving measures (UNWTO, 2020). Daily practices such as smart lighting and temperature control, energy-efficient lightbulbs, and advanced heat pumps can significantly reduce energy consumption in hotels (Eichholtz et al., 2012). Sustainable hotel management not only reduces operational costs but also enhances the region's image as an eco-friendly destination.

Government Collaboration for Transport Improvement: Improved transportation connections are pivotal for the sustainable development of Acheloos Valley. Enhanced connectivity can facilitate tourism growth while reducing the environmental impact of transportation (Gössling et al., 2020). Collaborative efforts between the government and regional stakeholders are essential to develop efficient and eco-friendly transportation systems.

Energy Efficiency Awareness Campaigns: The European Union funding program for building insulation is a promising opportunity for energy efficiency improvements. However, its effectiveness is hindered by a lack of awareness among the local population. Effective awareness campaigns are needed to inform and incentivize residents to participate in energy-saving initiatives (Darby, 2006).

In conclusion, while Acheloos Valley enjoys a favorable starting point for environmental sustainability, proactive measures and collaborative efforts are necessary to protect its natural resources, promote renewable energy, and ensure the responsible growth of tourism.

Water Quality and Monitoring: The pristine water supply originating from the mountains serves as a critical resource for Acheloos Valley residents. Regular annual assessments conducted by local authorities are indicative of a responsible approach to ensuring water quality (Levy et al., 2019). However, future developments and potential contaminant sources necessitate ongoing and thorough monitoring (EPA, 2021). It is crucial for hotels and restaurants to actively engage in water conservation efforts, such as installing water-saving devices like aerated showerheads and low-flow taps to reduce water consumption (UNWTO, 2019). Metrics provided by UNWTO, such as per capita water use by tourists and the effectiveness of water-saving techniques, can assist in assessing and improving water conservation practices in the region (UNWTO, 2019).

Ecosystem Protection and Natura 2000: The designation of the Acheloos Valley under the Natura 2000 program highlights its significance as a natural habitat. Specifically, the "Birds" Directive (Directive 2009/147/EC) and the "Habitats" Directive (Directive 92/43/EEC) aim to protect wildlife and their habitats, reinforcing the commitment to conservation (European Commission, n.d.). Moreover, the recognition and support from BirdLife International further emphasize the area's importance for biodiversity conservation (BirdLife International, n.d.).

Biodiversity Management and Sustainable Development: The Acheloos Valley's rich biodiversity, characterized by insects, vegetation, and birdlife, is an invaluable asset. The minimal use of pesticides and plant health treatments is commendable, contributing to the preservation of the ecosystem (Sánchez-Bayo et al., 2016). To promote sustainable development, efforts must be made to prevent the decline of biodiversity, deforestation, overfishing, and intensive agriculture (IPBES, 2019). Raising awareness among tourism stakeholders about these issues is crucial (Gössling et al., 2019). Additionally, preventing the sale of protected species of plants and animals is an essential step towards safeguarding the local ecosystem (UNEP, 2021).

Global Tourism Plastics Initiative: Subscribing to the Global Tourism Plastics Initiative, initiated by UNWTO, can be a significant stride in the right direction (UNWTO, 2021). It reflects a commitment to reducing plastic waste, a major environmental concern, particularly in tourism (Jambeck et al.,

2015). Participating in this initiative can help reduce plastic pollution and promote sustainable practices.

Role of a River Technician: The appointment of a River Technician can play a pivotal role in the sustainable management and conservation of aquatic environments in Acheloos Valley. This expert can provide technical advice that balances economic, ecological, and social considerations, aligning with the principles of good governance and responsible resource management (Arthington et al., 2018). Such a position can facilitate the implementation of effective river management policies, ensuring the long-term health of the region's aquatic ecosystems.

In conclusion, Acheloos Valley's commitment to water quality, ecosystem protection, and sustainable development is commendable. By continually monitoring water quality, adhering to EU directives, preserving biodiversity, and participating in global initiatives, the region can further its journey toward environmental sustainability.

Green Engineering & Chemistry Analysis:

Acheloos Valley's Current Chemical Hazards Situation: As of now, Acheloos Valley remains relatively undeveloped, which has somewhat mitigated the risks associated with chemical hazards (Bilitewski et al., 2017). However, it is essential to note that the widespread use of hazardous substances, including pesticides, paints, disinfectants, and cleaning products, poses a significant environmental and health concern (Schettino et al., 2019). These substances can contaminate soil, water, and air, impacting both the ecosystem and human well-being (Domingo & Nadal, 2019). Furthermore, the absence of eco-friendly building products and equipment underscores the need for a shift toward sustainable practices (Yates et al., 2019).

Transitioning to Eco-Friendly Practices: To address these challenges, Acheloos Valley must embark on a journey toward green engineering and chemistry. This involves a systematic transition from the use of hazardous substances to environmentally friendly alternatives (Anastas & Zimmerman, 2016). Substituting harmful chemicals with safer options is a critical step to reduce environmental pollution and safeguard the region's natural resources (EPA, 2021). Encouraging the adoption of eco-friendly building products and equipment is also pivotal in promoting sustainable construction practices (Gavilán-González et al., 2021).

Waste Management and EU Framework Directive:

Acheloos Valley's current lack of waste management initiatives is a concerning issue that needs immediate attention (UNEP, 2015). The Greek National Waste Management Plan, aligned with the European Union (EU) Waste Framework Directive, provides a crucial framework for the development of sustainable waste management practices in the region (European Commission, 2020). This directive emphasizes the importance of waste prevention, recycling, and the proper disposal of waste (European Commission, 2020).

Effective waste management is vital for minimizing environmental pollution, conserving resources, and mitigating health risks (UNEP, 2015). Implementing waste separation, recycling programs, and waste-to-energy technologies can significantly reduce the environmental footprint and enhance resource efficiency (Schulte et al., 2018).

Additionally, community engagement and awareness campaigns are instrumental in promoting responsible waste disposal practices among residents and businesses (Hassan et al., 2020). Collaboration between local authorities, stakeholders, and the community is essential for the successful implementation of waste management initiatives (Santos et al., 2021).

In conclusion, Acheloos Valley faces challenges in chemical hazard management and waste management. Embracing green engineering and chemistry principles can help transition the region toward safer and more sustainable practices. Implementing the Greek National Waste Management Plan, in accordance with the EU Waste Framework Directive, is vital to establish effective waste management systems and reduce the environmental impact of waste in the region.

Social Criteria Analysis:

Conservation of Cultural Heritage: Acheloos Valley possesses a rich cultural heritage, and the region's efforts to restore it reflect a commitment to preserving its historical legacy (UNESCO, 2002). This cultural heritage not only holds intrinsic value but also has the potential to attract tourists interested in history and authenticity (Coccossis & Mexa, 2004). Protecting and safeguarding ancient houses not only contributes to the preservation of cultural identity but also offers economic opportunities through heritage tourism (ICOMOS, 2011). However, the absence of a code of conduct for cultural and historic site visits is a missed opportunity to minimize the impact of tourism on these sensitive sites (Leask & Fyall, 2006).

Involvement of Locals in Tourism Policy: The active involvement of the local community in the tourism sector of Acheloos Valley is commendable (Hall & Richards, 2003). The engagement of locals through employment, entrepreneurship, and land rental for tourism purposes fosters econom-

ic benefits and community empowerment (Mowforth & Munt, 2009). Future steps should focus on strengthening partnerships with tourism operators and enhancing the participation of locals in decision-making processes (Jamal & Getz, 1999). This inclusive approach aligns with the principles of sustainable tourism and ensures that the benefits are distributed equitably (Buckley, 2012).

Environmental Justice: While Acheloos Valley may not yet experience a high volume of tourists, it is wise to proactively establish partnerships with local authorities to ensure sustainable development and community well-being (Bullard & Johnson, 2000). The partial adherence to national legal protections for employees highlights the need for improved labor practices in the tourism sector (UNWTO, 2010). It is reassuring that tourism activities do not currently impact the provision of basic services to neighboring communities, but this balance must be maintained (Hall, 2010). The development of a code of conduct for activities in local communities, with community consent, can help address potential conflicts and ensure responsible tourism practices (Font & Harris, 2004).

Education on Sustainability: Sustainability education is a critical component for all stakeholders involved in the tourism sector (Dredge & Jamal, 2015). This includes tourists, local businesses, and authorities (Buckley & Zhong, 2019). Sustainable practices can be promoted through training programs, awareness campaigns, and educational initiatives (Gössling et al., 2019). Such efforts can empower stakeholders to make informed decisions that balance economic interests with environmental and social responsibilities (Butler & Boyd, 2000).

Acheloos Valley has made promising strides in various social criteria, including cultural heritage conservation, local involvement in tourism, environmental justice, and sustainability education. However, there is room for improvement, particularly in the development of codes of conduct, strengthening labor protections, and fostering community participation in decision-making processes.

Economic Criteria Analysis:

Jobs and Local Employment: Acheloos Valley currently supports around 200 employed staff in the tourism sector, a figure that is poised for growth due to the increasing popularity of mountain stays (UNWTO, 2019). What is noteworthy is that a substantial proportion of these tourism sector employees are local residents (Dredge & Jamal, 2015). This is significant as it indicates that tourism is not only contributing to economic growth but also providing employment opportunities for the local community (Hall & Lew, 2009). However, there is a potential for further economic empower-

ment by focusing on training locals in sustainable job opportunities, such as building rehabilitation with eco-friendly materials or renewable energy installation (Gössling et al., 2019).

Supply and Demand Dynamics: While Acheloos Valley is not yet highly developed economically, future planning should consider the complex relationship between supply and demand (Bieger et al., 2009). Sustainable economic growth involves promoting changes in pricing and volume that benefit economic prosperity, environmental well-being, and societal welfare (UNEP, 2021). For example, increasing accessibility to renewable energy alternatives can reduce the region's dependence on fossil fuels, leading to both economic and environmental benefits (IEA, 2021). By fostering such transitions, Acheloos Valley can position itself for sustainable economic development (UNWTO, 2015).

Natural Resource Accounting: To enhance its economic sustainability, Acheloos Valley should consider natural resource accounting practices (TEEB, 2010). Currently, there is limited integration of the decline in natural resource value into financial measurements and insufficient consideration of the benefits derived from ecosystem services when evaluating costs versus benefits (TEEB, 2010). Developing metrics like the Green Net National Product (GNP) that account for these factors can provide a more comprehensive assessment of economic performance (Dasgupta, 2010). By quantifying the value of ecosystem services and recognizing the finite nature of natural resources, Acheloos Valley can make informed decisions that prioritize long-term economic and environmental well-being (TEEB, 2010).

Acheloos Valley has the potential to strengthen its economic sustainability through the tourism sector's growth, local employment, and the consideration of supply and demand dynamics. Furthermore, adopting natural resource accounting practices can provide a more holistic perspective on economic development and support long-term sustainability.

A few examples of Acheloos Valley' cultural heritage

Acheloos Valley has a unique cultural and historical significance, and respecting and preserving these traditions will help in the development of sustainable tourism.

A lot of **monasteries** in Acheloos Valley have been rehabilitated and are visited :

- Holy Monastery of Mary Seltsou

It is located in the Piges of Arta and Ancient Tetrachylia in Acheloos Valley and dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. The celebration takes place on August 23 (Nine Days of the Virgin Mary).



Monastery of Seltsou

- Holy Monastery of Panagia Megalochari Arta

The Holy Monastery of Panagia Megalochari, situated in Megalochari Arta, stands in the upper Radovizia and Ancient Tetrachylia in the Acheloos Valley by Mount Gavrogos (Valtos mountains). Dedicated to the Nativity of the Virgin Mary, and celebrated on September 8, it was constructed in the mid-17th century, replacing an older Byzantine church. Recent restoration efforts, funded by the Region of Epirus and managed by the Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities in Arta, have yielded impressive results, particularly in restoring the murals.

Notably, this monastery holds historical significance as the site where the revolution for the liberation of Epirus began. On January 15, 1854, the Radovis Chiefs initiated the Radovis revolution, taking an oath of allegiance and co-signing the Declaration of the Revolution.



Monastery of Panagia Megalochari Arta

- Holy Monastery of the Virgin Mary in Mesopyrgos, Arta

The monastery in Mesopyrgos, also known as Soumerou, resides in the Tetrafilia or Ano Radovizia of the Acheloos Valley. Dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin Mary celebrated on August 15, it overlooks the entire Acheloos Valley and Agrafa region, shielded by the protective mountains of Gavrogos. Recent funding from the Region of Epirus, managed by the Ephorate of Antiquities in Arta, aims to restore the monastery, addressing damage incurred over time.

- Holy Monastery of the Transfiguration of the Savior of the Vraggiana of Karditsa

Located on the slope of Mount Mirmitzala, opposite the central settlement of Vragkiana in Argithea, stands the Monastery of the Transfiguration of the Savior. Established on July 11, 1655, by Hieromonk Parthenios, an inscription above the main church's entrance commemorates its founding. The temple, shaped like a small cross without a dome, features a valuable wood-carved iconostasis. The Narthex was later added in 1797.

This monastery holds significance in Greek history, serving as a refuge for many fighters of the 1821 revolution (such as Karaïskakis, Katsantonis, Boukouvalaios), who used it as a supply hub. Families seeking refuge from Turkish oppression settled nearby, forming the Grybiana settlement. Sadly, on December 18, 1862, traitors from Braggian led a plundering raid by 17 Turkalvanos from Arta, resulting in the theft of valuable items by seven individuals, including the abbot Constantine, priest Athanasios Oikonomou.

- Holy Monastery of the Diocese of Vragkiana, Karditsa

The river Acheloos on the border with the prefecture of Arta is located at an altitude of 240 - 300 m. The settlement hosts one of the most interesting monuments - sights of the area, the church of the Nativity of the Virgin. The holy temple, often referred to as Episkopi, is of modern construction, built on the same site as the older one that burned down, on a flat place opposite the settlement, under a large cluster of elm trees.

Acheloos Valley is also very rich in **bridges** :

- Korakou Bridge

In 1514-1515, the renowned single-arched stone bridge known as "The Bridge of Korakos" or "Korakogiofyri," also poetically referred to as "Korakas the two-bridge" or "Aspros the geyser," was constructed at the base of Fellos Petrotos (Liaskovo) in Argitheas Karditsa. Situated near Xerikoulia, it stood at the settlement of Sykia-Pyrgaki or Skaloula and at the foothills of Kokkinolakos ton Pigon (Vresthenitsas) in the Artas prefecture. This bridge endured for 435 years, resisting earthquakes and the powerful currents of Acheloos until its destruction in 1949 when it was blown up by the Democratic Army amid the Civil War.

Today, unfortunately, there are only the remains to the left and right of the bank of the Acheloos to remind us of the historic and legendary Korakou bridge.

Recently, scientific conferences have convened to champion bridge reconstruction, a cause primarily led by regional society bodies and associations. These groups have organized conferences, public gatherings, educational programs, published books, and informative materials. Notably, there's a new collaborative effort involving European institutions and globally recognized cultural figures advocating for the reconstruction of the historic Korakou bridge. This initiative aims to foster a European movement dedicated to preserving the cultural heritage of the Acheloos Valley.

- Avlakiou Bridge

The stone bridge spanning the Acheloos River is a remarkable structure admired for its aesthetic appeal and strategic location. Serving as a link between the Prefecture of Etoloakarnania and the Prefectures of Karditsa and Evritania, its construction began in 1907 and concluded in 1911, involving 60 craftsmen from Epirus and 60 local workers from Valtos villages.

Before the bridge's existence, locals risked their lives crossing the river using makeshift methods such as ropes, wood, rafts, and even aerial passages.

Recently, the turbulent waters of the Acheloos River have caused damage to the bridge, necessitating urgent repair and maintenance.



Bridge of Avlaki

- Temple of Vrouviana Bridge

The Templa Bridge, spanning the Acheloos River and linking Evritania with Etoloakarnania, is a stone bridge built in 1915. Named after a former wooden structure known as the "iconostasis," it was previously called the Nick Bridge. Both the Templa Bridge and the Korakos Bridge were target-

ed during the civil war but survived, with the Templa Bridge displaying a visible crack from the attempted explosion.

This remarkable stone structure stands impressively, blending seamlessly with its natural surroundings. Adorned with intricate construction and decorative details, it's considered an artistic masterpiece and was honored as a designated monument by the late Minister of Culture, Melina Mercouri.

- The Tatarna Bridge

The Tatarna Bridge, a single-arched structure over the Acheloos River connecting Etoloakarnania with Evritania, was likely built in the mid-17th century by local craftsmen. Its name derived from the nearby monastery "Panagia tis Tatarna," established in 1556, where an annual bazaar used to take place.

- Koutsokamaras Bridge

The Roman stone bridge dating back to 16 BC, spanning the Acheloos River between Draskos and Kalamio in Arta, stands as the oldest bridge in Argitheia. This historic structure once connected Amvrakia with Gomfous and Trikki, serving the ancient settlements of Athamania until the early 16th century when a section collapsed.

In 1520, with the construction of the neighboring Korakou bridge, communication routes were fully restored. The arched side facing Sykia had impressive dimensions, with a height of 7 meters and a 14-meter span. In 1955, five Roman tombs containing soldiers' artifacts were discovered near its base, toward Sykia.

Despite facing natural wear and colossal new projects over the years, the bridge endured until the creation of Lake Sykia. Regrettably, due to neglect from local authorities, heirs to the Argitheia tradition, the bridge was not preserved. Today, it remains buried under rubble resulting from the Acheloos diversion dam construction.

- Liaskovo Bridge (Petroto)

The remarkable single-arched stone bridge, boasting a 17-meter span and a 11-meter height, stands amidst the picturesque Petriliotis gorge. Situated 600 meters beyond Petroto - Kali Komi - Ellinika, on the route to Sykia and Piges Arta, it resides at the location known as "Gerakas" or "Kernel" of Petroto. This bridge crosses the Koumbourgianitiko and Platanias streams (Liaskovitiko by locals) just before they merge with Acheloos. Thought to have been constructed around the 13th century, sadly, recent unauthorized digging by individuals seeking treasure has disrupted the bridge's integrity. Now, with numerous displaced stones, it faces the risk of erosion from rainwater and moisture, endangering its structural stability.

- The Unknown Bridge of the Acheloos Valley

This structure sits in a picturesque spot amid lush forests, overlooking the Acheloos River's vibrant waters, bordering the prefectures of Etoloakarnania and Evritania near Mount Arta. Its historical origins are shrouded in mystery. Locals suggest it was built around 200 BC, possibly facilitating ancient Greek routes to Sicily and lower Italy as the sole Acheloos crossing then.

Others speculate it was constructed later by the Venetians to aid caravans on the Rome - Constantinople route (Venice - Fanari), connecting with today's Egnatia through Thessaly. Regardless of its origins, this forgotten monument stands as a testament to artistry and strategic significance along the Acheloos River in ancient or Byzantine times. It deserves recognition and exploration, conveniently located near the Temple Bridge of Acheloos.

- Kamara Mesopyrgos Bridge

A stone single-arched bridge that bridges the stream that crosses the village of Mesopyrgos. Just before this stream flows into the Acheloos river, there is the old watermill and a little higher is this beautiful bridge. There is no evidence of when it was built. Locals believe it must have been built in the mid-18th century. The opening of the arch is 19 meters and its height is 8 meters.



Bridge of Mesopirgos

- Kamara Megalohari bridge

A beautiful small single-arched bridge that connects the villages of Megalohari and Miliana. Unfortunately, there are no plans to build it. The locals believe that it must have been built at the same time as the Monastery of Megalohari, ie in the middle of the 14th century AD. However, some believe that it was built by the Romans because the technique is reminiscent of the Roman way of building. It must be maintained so as not to follow the fate of the stone bridges, which are shrinking year by year due to the indifference of the competent local and central authorities.

On top of monasteries and bridges, the region has got a mill, a water well, and an old covered wash house carved out of the rock which all worth being seen and which was used to wash clothes and blankets.

2.2 Case Studies on Alternative Tourism and Sustainable Development

2.2.1 Prince & Ioannides (2017): Managing Alternative Tourism at Solheimar Eco-village

Prince and Ioannides (2017) conducted a case study on alternative tourism management at Solheimar eco-village in Iceland. The study aimed to explore the complexities and challenges of managing alternative tourism at the community level while striving for social and environmental sustainability.



Figure 1. Solheimar Eco Village (Prince & Ioannides, 2017)

The authors employed a focused ethnographic approach to gather data, including participant observation, informal conversational interviews, and formal interviews with key individuals. The main author spent a six-week period in 2015 in the eco-village, participating in activities as a volunteer and observing the patterns of behavior formed by hosts and guests during interactions.

The findings revealed the challenges of reconciling the comfort and learning experiences of guests with their effective participation and contribution to the community. The community struggled to fully appreciate the benefits of hosting guests beyond their economic value due to limited human resources and strategic knowledge within the community to fulfill their environmental and social equity goals through tourism.

The study emphasized the need for investment in knowledge transmission and practical matters such as conflict resolution, critical reflection, and cultural communication to enable alternative tourism to become a tool for community development. It highlighted the importance of reconciling sustainability goals with local participation and practical considerations, rather than relying solely on theoretical and abstract notions of sustainability.

The case study of Solheimar eco-village provided valuable insights into the challenges and prospects of sustainable development through alternative tourism at the community level. It demonstrated the need for dialogue and understanding between hosts and guests to navigate the complexities of generating sustainable development.

2.2.2 Kulusjärvi (2017): Large-scale Growth-focused Tourism Paths and Alternative Tourism Paths in Ylläs

Kulusjärvi (2017) conducted a qualitative case study in the Ylläs tourism destination community in Finnish Lapland to investigate the creation of large-scale growth-focused tourism paths and alternative tourism paths. The study aimed to explore the extent to which the goals of growth-focused tourism were shared among various tourism actors and identify existing alternative tourism paths in the destination.

The author utilized in-depth and semi-structured interviews with 37 local tourism actors, including tourism entrepreneurs, representatives from third-sector organizations, and local municipality representatives. The research questions addressed the perspectives of tourism actors on tourism growth, the presence of alternative tourism paths, and the means to create these paths.

The study found that Ylläs had alternative tourism pathways that differed in terms of the tourism products offered and the underlying value basis. These alternative paths deviated from the dominant growth-focused tourism path, which focused on new tourism construction and unconditional economic growth as means to destination success. Some tourism actors in Ylläs embraced a close connection with the natural environment and a willingness to protect it from further construction.

The analysis demonstrated the challenges of co-evolution between the alternative paths and the mainstream tourism path in Ylläs. Actors with less growth-focused views expressed experiences of their voices being unheard and their work being underappreciated in tourism governance. The study argued that social sustainability required recognition of local traditional economic ideas and that less growth-focused tourism operations should be regarded as valuable forms of economic practice for overall destination development, rather than solely focusing on competitiveness.

The research contributed to the understanding of new economic path creation in sparsely populated areas by highlighting the potential for alternative tourism development pathways that could lead to less resource-intensive and more locally-led path creation. It emphasized the need to construct a new tourism development language and practice that recognizes the value of alternative tourism thinking in economic path creation.

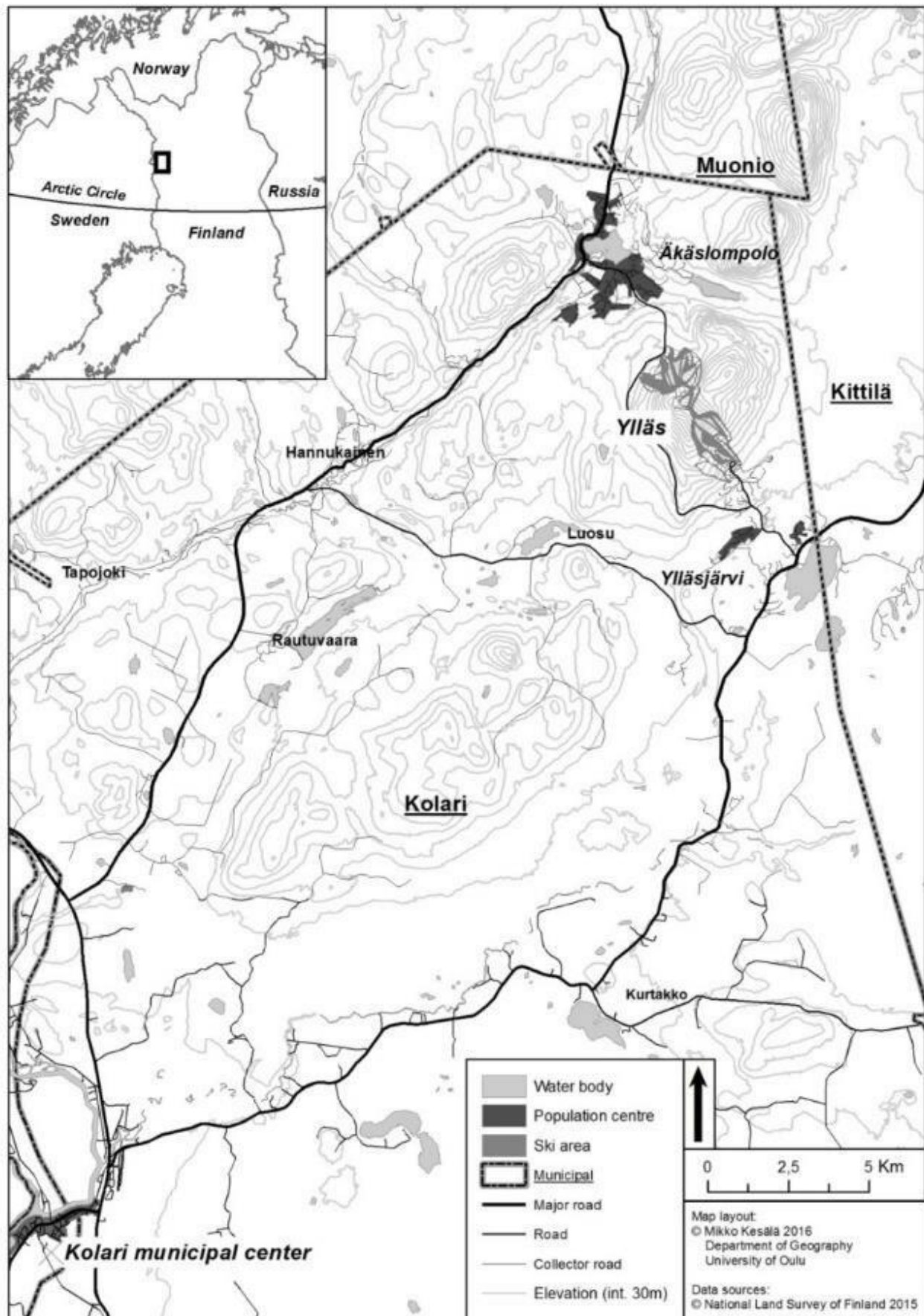


Figure 2. The Ylläs Tourism Destination in the Kolari Municipality, Finland. (Kulusjärvi (2017))

2.2.3 Patarchanov (2012): Role of Alternative Tourism in Sustainable Development in Mountain Areas

Patarchanov (2012) conducted a study focusing on the role and place of alternative tourism in the sustainable development of mountain areas, with a specific focus on Bulgaria. The study aimed to analyze the potential of alternative tourism in providing economic opportunities while preserving the natural environment and cultural identity of the region.

The methodology employed in the study was based on classical geographical research methods, including comparative analyses, geographic analysis, and statistical methods. Additionally, a SWOT analysis was conducted to identify the main features of the environment for the development of specialized tourism activities and outline the risks and benefits of their implementation. The results of the analysis were presented in a graphical model, which served as the basis for defining possible strategies for sector development in these areas.

The study concluded that alternative tourism has significant potential for sustainable local and regional development in mountain regions. The diversity and authenticity of anthropogenic and natural resources in these areas make them attractive tourist destinations, which can enhance the opportunities for economic development. However, the study also highlighted challenges to the development of the industry in these areas, such as regional differences in resources and housing conditions, limited public-private partnerships, and regional imbalances. To address these challenges, the study emphasized the need for defining appropriate policies that support the development of mountain areas, primarily focusing on specialized tourist activities and effectively utilizing and developing sustainable local resources.

Patarchanov's (2012) study provides valuable insights into the potential of alternative tourism for sustainable development in mountain areas. The research methodology employed in the study, along with the graphical model, contributed to a comprehensive analysis of the role and opportunities of alternative tourism. The study emphasized the importance of promoting sustainable tourism practices that preserve the cultural and natural resources of mountain regions while providing economic opportunities for local communities.

2.3 Summary of the Literature Review

The literature review provides a comprehensive overview of the concept of alternative tourism and its relationship to sustainable development. It explores various perspectives and case studies that shed light on the complexities and potentials of alternative tourism practices.

The concept of alternative tourism emphasizes responsible travel practices, environmental sustainability, cultural authenticity, and community involvement. It goes beyond conventional mass tourism by seeking to minimize negative impacts on the natural environment and enhance the well-being of local communities.

The case study by Prince and Ioannides (2017) on Solheimar eco-village in Iceland highlights the challenges of managing alternative tourism at the community level. It emphasizes the need for knowledge transmission, practical matters, and dialogue between hosts and guests to achieve sustainable development through alternative tourism.

The case study by Kulusjärvi (2017) in Ylläs, Finnish Lapland, explores the coexistence of large-scale growth-focused tourism paths and alternative tourism paths. It underscores the importance of recognizing alternative paths and giving voice to alternative economic knowledge for sustainable destination development.

Pataarchanov's (2012) study on alternative tourism in mountain areas, with a focus on Bulgaria, highlights the potential for alternative tourism to provide economic opportunities while preserving natural resources and cultural identity. It underscores the importance of appropriate policies and the development of specialized tourism activities in mountain regions.

Overall, the literature review reveals the significance of alternative tourism in contributing to sustainable development. It demonstrates the need for responsible travel behavior, community involvement, and the integration of economic, social, and environmental considerations in tourism practices. The findings of the reviewed studies provide valuable insights that can inform the proposed research on alternative tourism and prospects for sustainable development in the Acheloos Valley.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Research Goal and Research Questions

The goal of this research is to assess the prospects of sustainable development in the Acheloos Valley through alternative tourism, by exploring visitors' preferences, attitudes, and behaviors towards sustainable tourism practices in the area.

Based on the above purpose, the research questions that the proposed research will investigate are the following:

- What are the demographic characteristics of visitors to the Acheloos Valley, and how do they influence their preference for sustainable tourism practices?
- What are the visitors' perceptions and attitudes towards sustainable tourism practices in the Acheloos Valley, and how do they affect their behavior?
- What are the most significant factors that influence visitors' decision-making process in choosing sustainable tourism practices in the Acheloos Valley?
- How can the findings of this study be used to develop effective strategies and policies for sustainable tourism development in the Acheloos Valley?



River Party in Acheloos Valley

3.2 Methodological Approach

For the proposed research titled "Alternative Tourism and prospects for sustainable development in the Acheloos Valley," a quantitative methodology will be appropriate. This methodology involves collecting and analyzing numerical data using statistical techniques. Quantitative research is appropriate for this research because it aims to identify and quantify the relationships between variables, such as the impact of alternative tourism on sustainable development in the Acheloos Valley.

The proposed research will use a questionnaire as the data collection instrument. The questionnaire will contain closed-ended questions with multiple-choice answers, allowing for quantitative data analysis. The questionnaire will be distributed to visitors of the Acheloos Valley who have engaged in alternative tourism activities, such as hiking, mountaineering, and ecotourism.

The quantitative methodology will provide numerical data that will be analyzed using statistical techniques such as regression analysis, correlation analysis, and descriptive statistics (Choy, 2014; Provenzano & Baggio, 2020). These techniques will help identify the relationship between alternative tourism and sustainable development in the Acheloos Valley. For instance, regression

analysis can be used to determine the extent to which alternative tourism activities such as hiking and mountaineering contribute to sustainable development in the Acheloos Valley.

Furthermore, quantitative research will provide objective data that can be used to make generalizations about the population of visitors engaging in alternative tourism activities in the Acheloos Valley (Brannen, 2017). This approach will enable the researcher to make empirical statements about the impact of alternative tourism on sustainable development in the Acheloos Valley.

In conclusion, the quantitative methodology is appropriate for the proposed research on alternative tourism and sustainable development in the Acheloos Valley. It will provide objective numerical data that will be analyzed using statistical techniques to identify the relationship between alternative tourism and sustainable development in the Acheloos Valley.

3.3 Data Collection

The data collection process for the proposed research on alternative tourism and sustainable development in the Acheloos Valley will involve distributing a questionnaire to tourists who have visited the area for alternative tourism activities. The questionnaire will be available both in print and online to increase the response rate and reach a wider audience. Participants will have the option to complete the questionnaire online or fill out a hard copy and submit it to the researchers. The sample will be selected using a random sampling technique to ensure that the results are representative of the population.

The questionnaire was distributed on paper in June 2023 to the five hotels listed above, and geographically quite close to each other (maximum distance of 100 km).

Previously, a few meetings with the hoteliers were planned to explain the objectives of the study and to exacerbate their interest for a better collaboration.

During the initial month, minimal progress was made primarily because visitors typically stayed only for a few days on average, making it challenging for them to respond to the questionnaire before departing. To encourage participation, a decision was made to email the questionnaire to all visitors, providing a deadline of a few weeks for them to complete it as an incentive.

Hotels involved in distribution of questionnaire :

- **PYRGOS HOTEL**

6 answers to the questionnaire out of 8 tourists until end of September.

- **ASTRI HOTEL**

31 answers to the questionnaire out of 41 tourists until end of September.

- **HOTEL PANORAMA**

27 answers to the questionnaire out of 45 tourists until end of September.

- **HOTEL PAPADIMAS**

13 answers to the questionnaire out of 16 tourists until end of September.

- **ROUISTA HOTEL**

26 answers to the questionnaire out of 50 tourists until end of September.



Winter in the Valley

3.3.1 Questionnaire Development – Research Tool

The development of the questionnaire for the proposed research on alternative tourism and prospects for sustainable development in the Acheloos Valley involved careful consideration of the research objectives and the specific information needed to address the research questions.

The questionnaire was divided into several axes to gather relevant information on different aspects of alternative tourism and sustainable development in the Acheloos Valley. The first axis focused on the demographic characteristics of the respondents, including age, gender, occupation, education level, and income. This information was important to understand the profile of visitors engaging in alternative tourism activities in the area.

The second axis of the questionnaire aimed to explore the respondents' travel behavior and experience in the Acheloos Valley. It gathered information on the type of tourism activities they engaged in, the frequency of their visits, and the reasons for choosing the Acheloos Valley as a destination for alternative tourism. This section provided insights into the visitors' preferences and motivations.

The third axis of the questionnaire focused on the respondents' perceptions and attitudes towards sustainable tourism practices in the Acheloos Valley. It aimed to assess their understanding of sustainable tourism, their opinions on the importance of sustainable practices, and their thoughts on the current state of sustainable development in the area. This section provided valuable insights into the visitors' awareness and perspectives.

The fourth axis of the questionnaire delved into the respondents' awareness and participation in sustainable tourism practices in the Acheloos Valley. It explored their knowledge of sustainable tourism practices and their willingness to adopt these practices during their travels in the area. This section helped gauge the level of engagement and potential barriers to implementing sustainable practices.

The questionnaire was designed using closed-ended questions with multiple-choice answers. This format facilitated quantitative data analysis, allowing for statistical techniques such as regression analysis, correlation analysis, and descriptive statistics. The questions were carefully worded to ensure clarity and avoid ambiguity.

To ensure the questionnaire's validity and reliability, a pilot test was conducted with a small group of respondents who fit the target population. The pilot test helped identify any issues with the questionnaire's structure, wording, or response options. Feedback from the pilot test participants was used to refine and finalize the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was made available both in print and online to increase the response rate and reach a wider audience. Participants had the option to complete the questionnaire online or fill out a hard copy and submit it to the researchers.

In conclusion, the questionnaire development process involved considering the research objectives, addressing the research questions, and ensuring the validity and reliability of the instrument. The questionnaire's axes covered demographic characteristics, travel behavior, perceptions and attitudes towards sustainable tourism, and awareness and participation in sustainable practices. The questionnaire was designed to facilitate quantitative data analysis and was made available both online and in print to maximize participation.

3.3.2 Population and Sample

The population for this research is tourists who have visited the Acheloos Valley in Greece for alternative tourism activities. The sample for the research will be selected using a random sampling technique, where potential participants will be randomly selected from a list of individuals who have visited the area for alternative tourism activities. The sample size will be determined using a sample size calculator, which will consider the level of precision required for the research, the number of tourists, and the confidence level. The sample size will be large enough to ensure that the results are representative of the population in visit. For the purposes of this thesis, a sample of 103 participants was collected.

3.3.3 Sampling Method

The sampling method for this research will be a simple random sampling technique. This method ensures that all members of the population have an equal chance of being selected for the sample. This method is appropriate for this research as it will help to eliminate bias and ensure that the sample is representative of the population.



Sports in the Valley

3.3.4 Informing Participants

Potential participants will be informed about the research through an invitation to participate in the study. The invitation will include a brief description of the research objectives and the expected duration of the survey. Participants will also be informed of their rights to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. Furthermore, the data collected during the study will be kept confidential and will be used only for research purposes. Ethical considerations will be taken into account, and informed consent will be obtained from all participants before the research begins. Personal data will be safeguarded in accordance with data protection regulations.

In conclusion, the research will use a quantitative methodology and a simple random sampling technique to select a representative sample of tourists who have visited the Acheloos Valley in Greece for alternative tourism activities. Participants will be informed of the research objectives, their rights, and the confidentiality of their data. Ethical considerations will be taken into account to ensure that the research is conducted with integrity and respect for the participants.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data analysis process will involve analyzing the numerical data collected through the questionnaire using statistical techniques such as regression analysis, correlation analysis, and descriptive statistics. These techniques will help identify the relationship between alternative tourism and sustainable development in the Acheloos Valley. The analysis will also involve identifying patterns and trends in the data, and exploring the relationships between different variables. The findings of the study will be presented in a clear and concise manner, with appropriate visual aids such as graphs and charts. The researchers will draw conclusions and make recommendations based on the results of the analysis, which will be used to develop effective strategies and policies for sustainable tourism development in the Acheloos Valley.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The proposed research on alternative tourism and sustainable development in the Acheloos Valley will comply with ethical guidelines and regulations for research involving human subjects. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants before the research begins, and personal data will be safeguarded in accordance with data protection regulations. Participants will be informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences, and the data collected during the study will be kept confidential and used only for research purposes. The researchers will ensure that participants are fully informed about the research process, and their anonymity and confidentiality will be protected.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

4.1 Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Characteristics

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants who engaged in the study, this section presents the descriptive statistics of the demographic characteristics collected through the questionnaire. These characteristics encompass age range, gender distribution, and educational backgrounds of the respondents. The analysis of these demographic factors offers valuable insights into the composition of the participant pool and lays the groundwork for further exploration of their perceptions and behaviors regarding sustainable tourism practices in the Acheloos Valley.

The results are presented on the following tables and images.

Table 1. Age range of participants

		AgeRange			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18-25	20	19,2	19,2	19,2
	26-35	25	24,0	24,0	43,3
	36-45	20	19,2	19,2	62,5
	46-55	24	23,1	23,1	85,6
	56+	15	14,4	14,4	100,0
	Total	104	100,0	100,0	

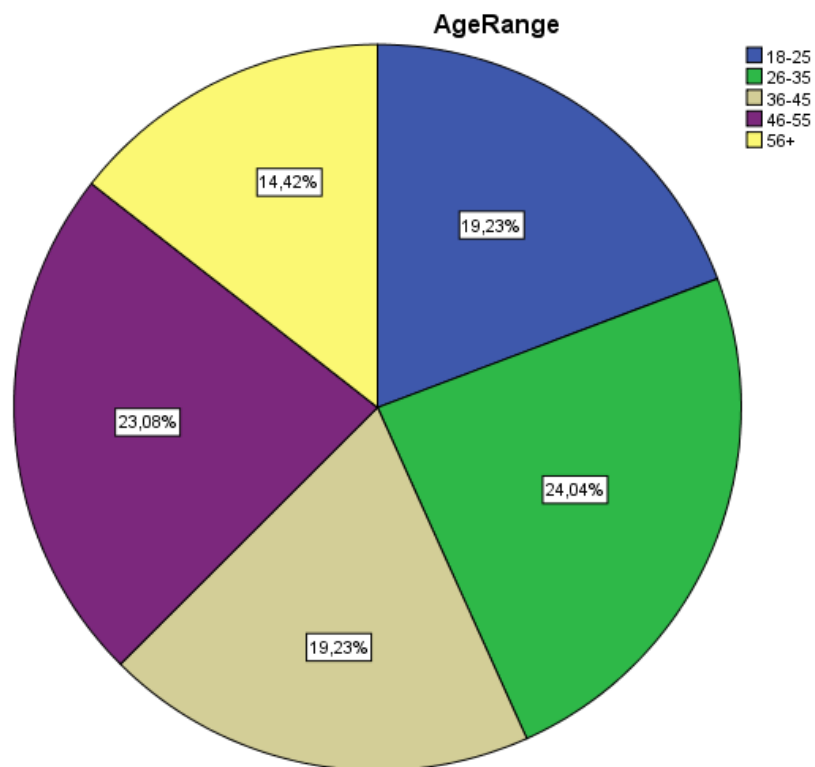


Figure 3. Age range of participants

The analysis of the participants' age distribution reveals interesting insights into the demographic composition of the study's respondents. The largest portion of participants falls within the age range of 26-35, constituting 24.0% of the total sample. This indicates a relatively higher representation of individuals in their late twenties to mid-thirties, possibly reflecting a demographic that is actively engaged in alternative tourism activities in the Acheloos Valley.

Following closely, the age group of 46-55 accounts for 23.1% of the participants, suggesting a substantial presence of middle-aged individuals. This age group's significant representation might reflect their particular interest in the valley's offerings, possibly due to preferences for activities associated with sustainable and eco-friendly tourism practices.

Participants aged 36-45 constitute 19.2% of the sample, indicating a relatively consistent representation across age groups. The younger demographics, aged 18-25, account for 19.2% as well, showcasing a comparable proportion of young adults actively participating in alternative tourism experiences.

The age group labeled as 56 and above represents 14.4% of the respondents, indicating that there is still engagement in alternative tourism activities among older individuals, although to a lesser extent compared to younger age groups.

The distribution across various age ranges highlights a well-diversified participation in the study, spanning different generations. This diverse demographic could contribute to a comprehensive understanding of visitors' preferences and attitudes towards sustainable tourism practices in the Acheloos Valley.

Table 2. Gender distribution of participants

		Gender			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	49	47,1	47,1	47,1
	Female	55	52,9	52,9	100,0
	Total	104	100,0	100,0	

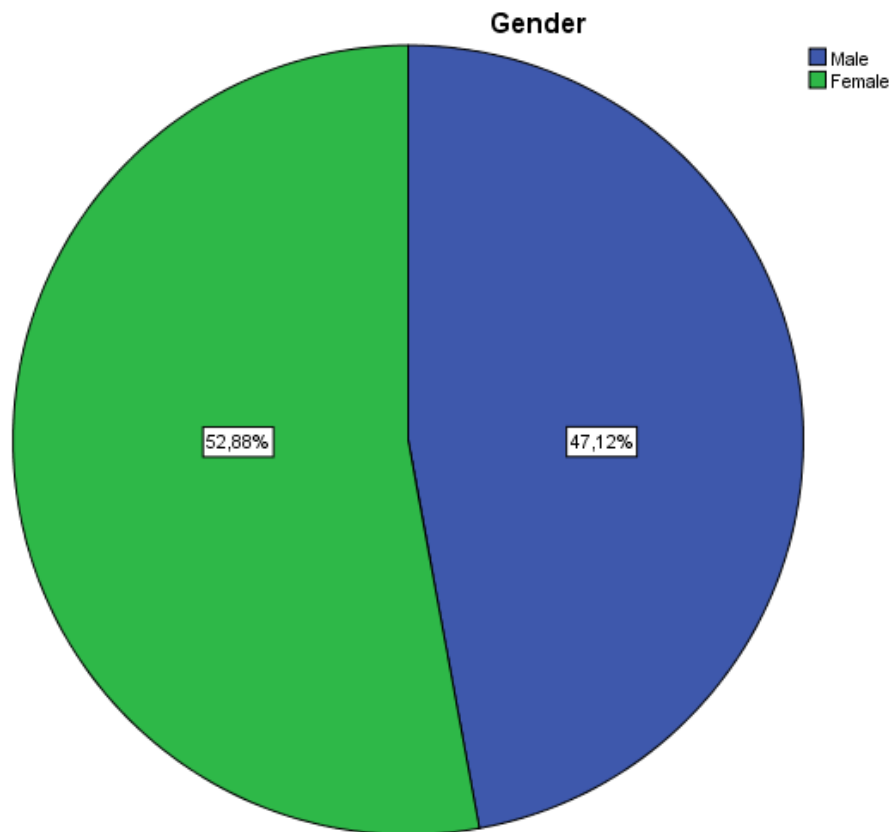


Figure 4. Gender Distribution of participants

The analysis of the participants' gender distribution provides insights into the composition of the study's sample. The results show a relatively balanced representation between male and female participants. Specifically, 47.1% of the respondents identify as male, while 52.9% identify as female.

The nearly equal distribution between male and female participants suggests a gender-balanced interest in alternative tourism activities in the Acheloos Valley. This balanced engagement is noteworthy as it implies that both genders find value and appeal in the various offerings of alternative tourism, such as ecotourism, cultural tourism, and adventure activities.

The relatively even split in gender participation also indicates that the Acheloos Valley's tourism offerings are not skewed towards a specific gender, but rather have a broad appeal. This could be indicative of the valley's ability to cater to diverse interests and preferences, making it an attractive destination for both male and female visitors.

Moreover, the balanced gender distribution within the study population could lead to a more comprehensive and well-rounded understanding of the factors influencing sustainable tourism practices. By encompassing diverse perspectives, the study's findings are likely to be more representative

of the broader population's attitudes and behaviors towards sustainable tourism in the Acheloos Valley.

Table 3. Education level of participants

		Education			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	High School	28	26,9	26,9	26,9
	Bachelor's Degree	30	28,8	28,8	55,8
	Master's Degree	21	20,2	20,2	76,0
	Ph.D. or higher	25	24,0	24,0	100,0
	Total	104	100,0	100,0	

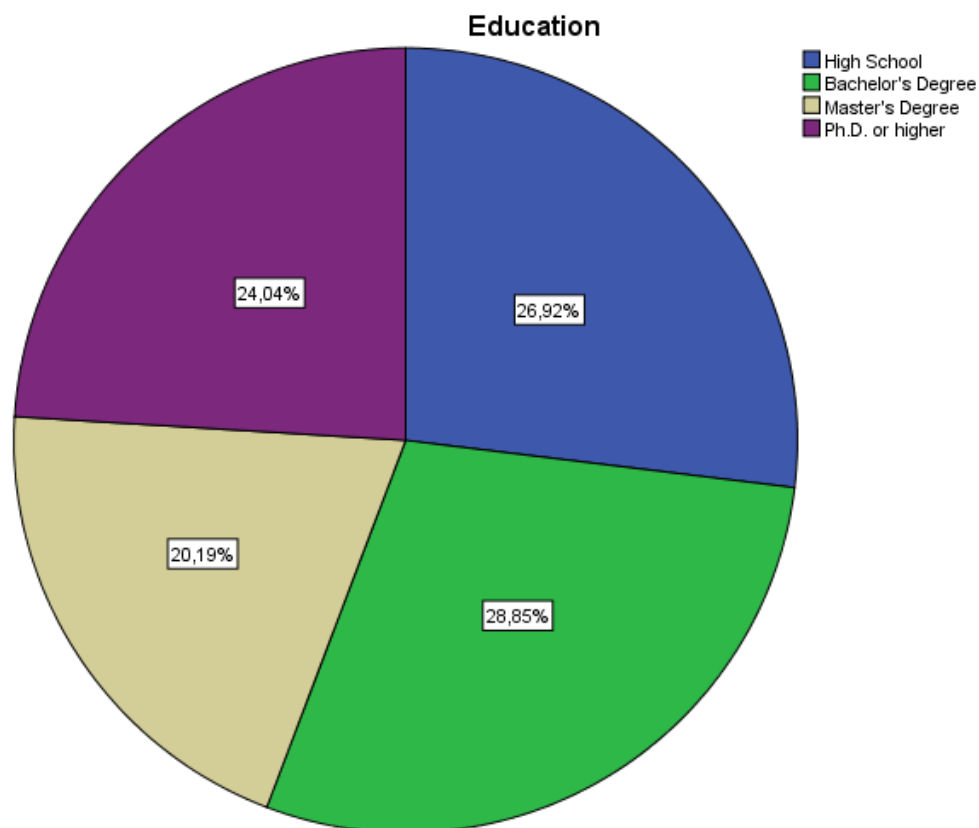


Figure 5. Education level of participants

The examination of participants' educational backgrounds sheds light on the diversity of knowledge and experiences within the study's sample. The distribution of education levels among respondents reveals a balanced representation across various levels of educational attainment.

Among the participants, 26.9% hold a High School diploma. This proportion signifies the inclusion of individuals with foundational education, suggesting that the study's sample encompasses a diverse cross-section of the population, even those with basic educational backgrounds.

Bachelor's Degree holders constitute 28.8% of the participants, showcasing a substantial portion of respondents with undergraduate education. This presence of Bachelor's Degree holders reflects a considerable number of individuals with a broader understanding of various topics, potentially indicating their capacity to critically assess and engage with sustainable tourism practices.

Furthermore, 20.2% of participants possess a Master's Degree, indicating a representation of individuals with advanced education. This subset of participants might contribute unique perspectives, often associated with higher levels of critical analysis and informed decision-making.

Interestingly, 24.0% of participants hold a Ph.D. or higher degree, suggesting the involvement of highly educated individuals. Their inclusion potentially enriches the study by bringing sophisticated insights and a deeper understanding of the complexities of sustainable tourism and its implications for the Acheloos Valley.

The diverse distribution of education levels reflects the study's inclusive approach to capturing perspectives from a wide range of individuals, each with varying degrees of knowledge and expertise. This diversity ensures a well-rounded assessment of the interplay between education, attitudes, and behaviors towards sustainable tourism practices in the Acheloos Valley.

The demographic characteristics of visitors to the Acheloos Valley, specifically their education level, gender, and age, play a significant role in influencing their preferences for sustainable tourism practices.

The analysis of education levels reveals that the participants have diverse educational backgrounds, ranging from High School diplomas to Ph.D. degrees. This diversity in educational attainment suggests that visitors with varying levels of knowledge and critical thinking abilities engage with sustainable tourism practices differently. Those with higher education levels, such as Master's Degrees and Ph.D. holders, may possess a deeper understanding of the ecological and socio-

economic implications of sustainable practices, potentially influencing their preference for engaging in such activities.

Gender distribution also plays a role in shaping preferences for sustainable tourism. The study indicates an almost equal representation of male and female participants, suggesting that both genders are equally interested in and engaged with sustainable tourism practices. This balanced gender involvement signifies that the Acheloos Valley's tourism offerings have broad appeal and cater to various interests regardless of gender. This finding emphasizes that preferences for sustainable tourism practices are not limited to a specific gender, highlighting a shared concern for environmental and cultural preservation.

Furthermore, the analysis of age groups showcases a diverse range of participants, with significant representation across different generations. This diversity implies that visitors of various ages are actively participating in alternative tourism activities. The results indicate that sustainable tourism practices attract individuals across age groups, suggesting that the valley's offerings appeal to both younger, environmentally conscious individuals and older generations seeking unique and culturally immersive experiences.

In conclusion, the demographic characteristics of education level, gender, and age collectively influence visitors' preferences for sustainable tourism practices in the Acheloos Valley. Educational backgrounds contribute to different levels of understanding and critical assessment of sustainable practices, gender distribution highlights a broad appeal of sustainable activities, and age diversity underscores a shared interest across generations. These demographic factors collectively shape visitors' attitudes and behaviors towards sustainable tourism practices in the area.

4.2 Analysis of Visitors' Perceptions and Attitudes towards Sustainable Tourism Practices

The section titled "Analysis of Visitors' Perceptions and Attitudes towards Sustainable Tourism Practices" delves into a comprehensive exploration of participants' perspectives and attitudes concerning sustainable tourism within the Acheloos Valley. This analysis provides invaluable insights into how visitors perceive the concept of sustainable tourism, evaluate its importance, and actively engage with eco-friendly practices. By investigating these perceptions and attitudes, the study aims to uncover the underlying motivations and influences that drive individuals to choose and support sustainable tourism activities. Through a systematic examination of participants' responses, this section offers a nuanced understanding of their beliefs and preferences, shedding

light on the dynamics that shape their interactions with the ecological and cultural aspects of the Acheloos Valley.

The results are presented and commented on the following tables and graphs.

Table 4. Importance of sustainable practices

Importance of sustainable Practices					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not Important	22	21,2	21,2	21,2
	Somewhat Important	26	25,0	25,0	46,2
	Important	24	23,1	23,1	69,2
	Very Important	32	30,8	30,8	100,0
	Total	104	100,0	100,0	

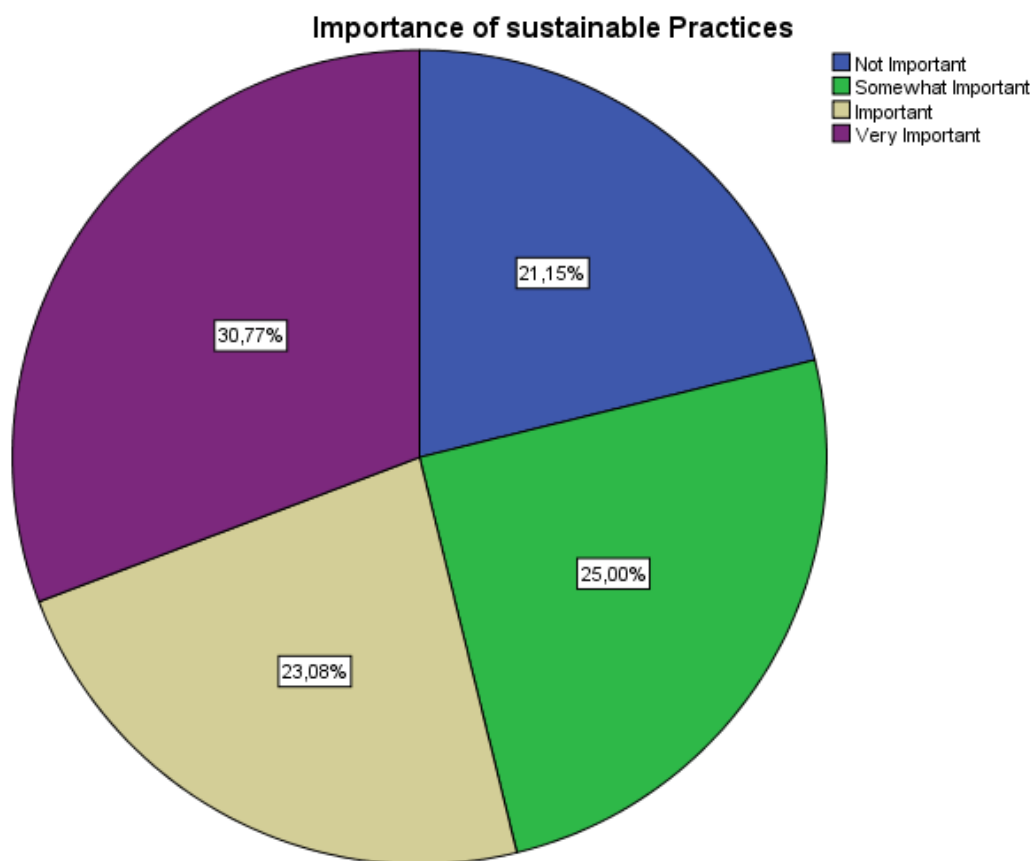


Figure 6. Importance of sustainable practices among the participants

The analysis of participants' perceived importance of sustainable practices provides valuable insights into the attitudes and priorities of visitors engaging in tourism activities within the Acheloos Valley.

A notable observation is that a significant portion of respondents, 30.8%, identified sustainable practices as "Very Important." This high percentage suggests a substantial commitment and concern among participants for engaging in tourism activities that align with environmental conservation and socio-cultural preservation. This finding underscores the participants' strong inclination towards sustainability, indicating that a substantial proportion of visitors →Moreover, 23.1% of participants regarded sustainable practices as "Important." This proportion signifies a consistent commitment to sustainable behaviors, highlighting that a considerable portion of respondents recognize the significance of minimizing their ecological footprint and supporting local communities through their tourism choices.

The response category "Somewhat Important" was chosen by 25.0% of participants. This middle-ground response implies a level of consciousness about sustainable practices but suggests room for potential education and engagement. Individuals who fall within this category might benefit from further information and awareness campaigns to enhance their understanding of the tangible benefits of sustainable tourism.

Interestingly, 21.2% of participants indicated that sustainable practices were "Not Important." While this portion is comparatively lower, it signifies a subgroup of visitors who might prioritize other aspects of their tourism experience over sustainability concerns. This group's perspective highlights the need for tailored communication strategies and awareness campaigns to emphasize the positive impacts of sustainable practices on the environment and local communities.

The diversity in responses regarding the importance of sustainable practices reflects the spectrum of attitudes within the visitor population. This range of perspectives emphasizes the importance of targeted strategies to educate and engage visitors across different levels of awareness and concern. Overall, the analysis underscores the Acheloos Valley's potential to further promote and cultivate sustainable behaviors by catering to the varying degrees of importance placed on sustainability by its visitors.

Table 5. Seek for sustainable tourism options before among the participants of the research

Seek for sustainable tourism options before					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	50	48,1	48,1	48,1
	No	54	51,9	51,9	100,0
	Total	104	100,0	100,0	

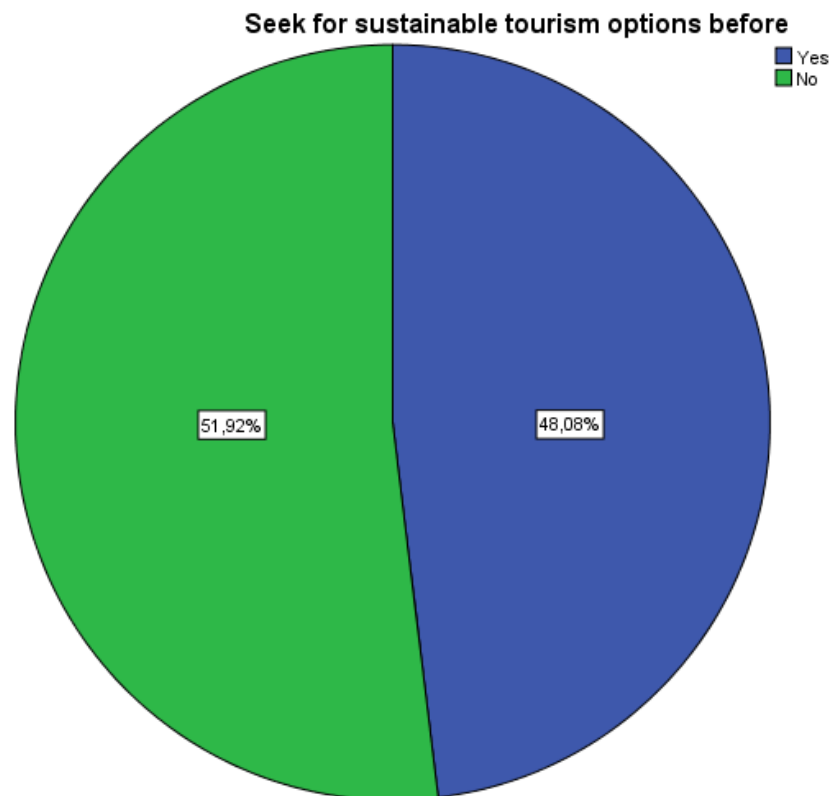


Figure 7. Seek for sustainable tourism options before among the participants of the research

The analysis of participants' behavior in seeking sustainable tourism options provides valuable insights into their proactive engagement with eco-friendly and responsible tourism practices within the Acheloos Valley.

The study reveals that 48.1% of participants actively seek sustainable tourism options, indicating a significant proportion of visitors who prioritize environmentally conscious and culturally sensitive experiences. This finding underscores a commendable commitment among these individuals to contribute positively to the local environment and communities. This group's inclination to seek sustainable options suggests a higher likelihood of them actively engaging in activities that promote the preservation of the Acheloos Valley's unique natural and cultural assets.

On the other hand, 51.9% of participants responded that they do not actively seek sustainable tourism options. While this percentage is slightly higher, it signifies a portion of visitors who might not be aware of the potential benefits of sustainable practices or may prioritize other aspects of their travel experience. This group's response presents an opportunity for destination managers and stakeholders to enhance communication and awareness campaigns, aiming to showcase the ad-

vantages of sustainable tourism options and their positive impact on the Acheloos Valley's long-term well-being.

The distribution of responses underscores the potential for growth in promoting sustainable tourism practices within the Acheloos Valley. The study results indicate a considerable portion of visitors who already actively seek sustainable options, showcasing the initial interest in responsible tourism. Simultaneously, the presence of individuals who do not currently seek sustainable options signals a need for focused educational initiatives to increase their understanding of the significance of their choices.

In summary, the findings highlight both the progress made in fostering sustainable tourism behaviors and the potential for further engagement and education to ensure that a larger proportion of visitors actively seek and support sustainable tourism options within the Acheloos Valley.

Table 6. Factors which influence the decision of participants in respect to tourism practices

What factors influence your decision to choose sustainable tourism practices?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Support for Local Communities	30	28,8	28,8	28,8
	Personal Health and Well-being	21	20,2	20,2	49,0
	Cultural Authenticity	25	24,0	24,0	73,1
	Environmental Impact	28	26,9	26,9	100,0
	Total	104	100,0	100,0	

What factors influence your decision to choose sustainable tourism practices?

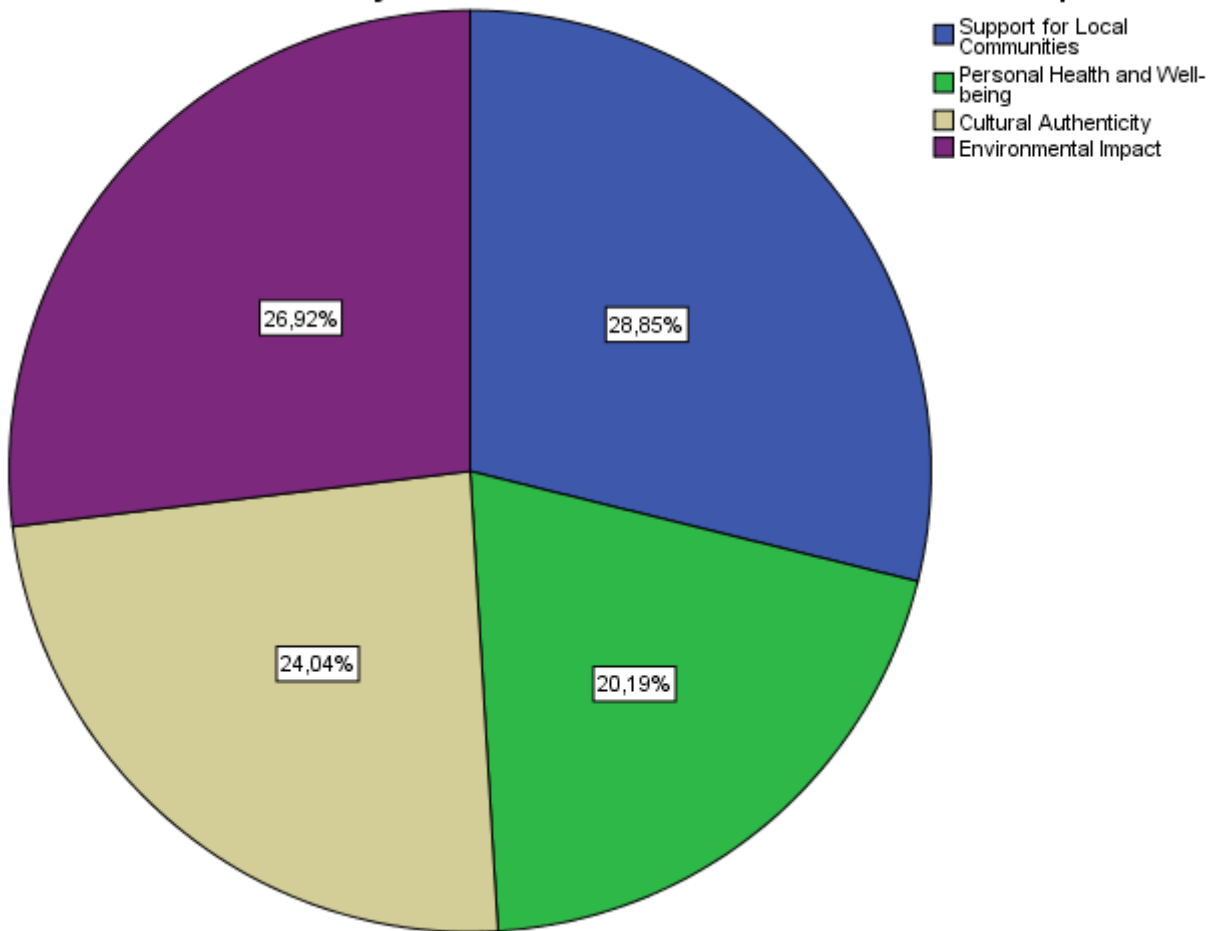


Figure 8. Factors which influence the decision of participants in respect to tourism practices

The analysis of the factors influencing visitors' decisions to choose sustainable tourism practices within the Acheloos Valley offers valuable insights into the motivations and considerations guiding their choices.

Support for local communities emerges as a leading factor, with 28.8% of participants indicating it as a driving influence. This finding underscores the growing trend of conscious travelers who recognize the importance of contributing positively to the local economy and community development. The high percentage of participants prioritizing support for local communities suggests that responsible and sustainable tourism practices resonate with individuals seeking authentic and immersive experiences that also benefit the local residents.

Personal health and well-being ranks as the second most influential factor, cited by 20.2% of participants. This response highlights a strong connection between sustainable tourism and individual well-being. The Acheloos Valley's emphasis on eco-friendly activities, such as hiking and

exploring nature, appears to align with visitors' desires to enhance their personal health while also respecting the environment.

Cultural authenticity is noted as a significant factor for 24.0% of participants. This finding underscores the appeal of the Acheloos Valley's cultural heritage and authentic experiences. The valley's focus on preserving local traditions, culinary practices, and cultural events seems to resonate with individuals seeking meaningful interactions and a deeper understanding of the destination's history and identity.

Environmental impact ranks fourth, with 26.9% of participants considering it an influential factor. While this percentage is noteworthy, it's slightly lower than the other factors. This could indicate a potential for increased awareness and education regarding the significant positive environmental impacts of sustainable tourism practices. Destination management efforts might consider emphasizing the ecological benefits of sustainable choices to further elevate its importance among visitors.

The distribution of responses suggests a multifaceted decision-making process among visitors. The results reflect a convergence of values, including a desire to contribute to local communities, enhance personal well-being, engage with cultural authenticity, and mitigate environmental impact. This alignment of factors showcases the potential for the Acheloos Valley to tailor its offerings to address these motivations, ultimately fostering a stronger culture of sustainable tourism within the region.

In summary, the factors influencing visitors' decisions to choose sustainable tourism practices within the Acheloos Valley encompass a balance of economic, personal, cultural, and environmental considerations. These findings provide destination managers and stakeholders with a clear understanding of the drivers behind visitors' choices, allowing them to develop targeted strategies that align with these motivations and foster the growth of sustainable tourism practices in the area.

The analysis of participants' perceptions and attitudes towards sustainable tourism practices in the Acheloos Valley, along with the factors influencing their decisions, provides a nuanced understanding of how these perceptions shape their behavior.

The participants' responses regarding the importance of sustainable practices highlight a diverse range of attitudes. While a notable portion (30.8%) consider sustainable practices to be "very important," others (21.2%) find them "not important." This disparity underscores the varying degrees

of awareness and values among visitors. The presence of participants who deem sustainable practices as "not important" suggests a potential gap in knowledge or the need for clearer communication about the benefits of such practices. Conversely, the significant percentage who recognize the "very important" nature of sustainable practices indicates a strong alignment between their attitudes and the principles of responsible tourism.

Participants' tendencies to actively seek sustainable tourism options further accentuate their attitudes towards sustainable practices. With 48.1% actively seeking such options, a substantial portion demonstrates a proactive commitment to responsible tourism. This group's inclination suggests a deep-rooted awareness of the significance of their choices and a willingness to make conscientious decisions in alignment with sustainable principles. Conversely, the 51.9% who do not actively seek sustainable options may represent a segment that requires targeted communication and education to encourage a shift in their attitudes and behaviors.

The factors influencing participants' decisions provide valuable context to their attitudes. The strong emphasis on "Support for Local Communities" (28.8%) underscores visitors' value for community well-being and economic sustainability. This suggests that a sense of social responsibility and the desire to contribute positively to local residents' lives significantly influence participants' attitudes and preferences. Additionally, the weight assigned to "Personal Health and Well-being" (20.2%) suggests a synergy between sustainable tourism practices and individuals' desire for personal rejuvenation and connection with nature.

The significance of "Cultural Authenticity" (24.0%) emphasizes participants' inclination towards experiences that foster cultural immersion and meaningful interactions. This indicates an appreciation for the unique heritage of the Acheloos Valley and its potential to shape visitors' perceptions and behaviors. However, the relatively lower emphasis on "Environmental Impact" (26.9%) suggests an opportunity for enhancing awareness regarding the environmental benefits of sustainable practices. This could potentially lead to a more robust integration of ecological considerations into participants' attitudes and behaviors.

In summary, participants' perceptions and attitudes towards sustainable tourism practices in the Acheloos Valley exhibit a spectrum of awareness and values. The analysis of their responses unveils a blend of proactive commitment to sustainable principles and potential areas for education and communication. The influential factors reflect a multi-faceted decision-making process, encompassing community support, personal well-being, cultural immersion, and ecological impact. These find-

ings emphasize the importance of tailored strategies that align with participants' attitudes and perceptions to foster a culture of sustainable tourism in the Acheloos Valley.

4.3 Factors Influencing Visitors' Decision-Making Process in Choosing Sustainable Tourism Practices

The present section delves into a comprehensive exploration of the underlying motivations and considerations that guide visitors in their selection of sustainable tourism practices within the Acheloos Valley. This critical analysis sheds light on the intricate interplay of various factors that shape travelers' decisions, offering insights into the intricate decision-making dynamics at play. By investigating these factors, this section seeks to unravel the intricate web of influences that shape visitors' preferences, revealing a deeper understanding of their motivations and priorities when engaging with sustainable tourism activities. The results are presented below.

Table 7. Important factors for the choice of a tourism activity among the participants

What is the most important factor for you when choosing a tourism activity?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Cultural Dimension	25	24,0	24,0	24,0
	Learning and Education	25	24,0	24,0	48,1
	Relaxation and Tranquility	22	21,2	21,2	69,2
	Adventure and Excitement	32	30,8	30,8	100,0
	Total	104	100,0	100,0	

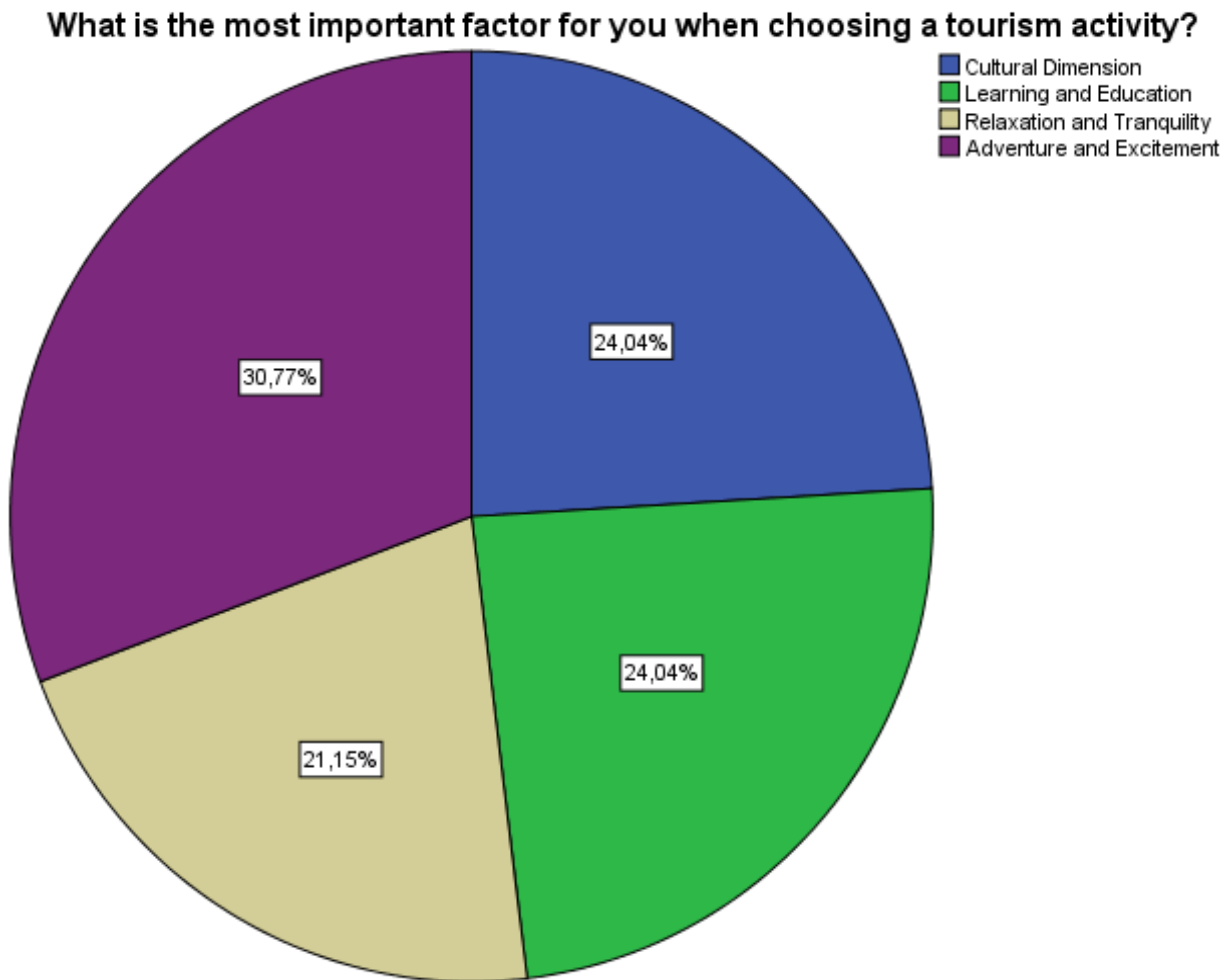


Figure 9. Important factors for the choice of a tourism activity among the participants

The participants' responses regarding the most important factors influencing their choice of tourism activities reveal a diverse spectrum of motivations, underscoring the multi-dimensional nature of their preferences.

The prominence of "Adventure and Excitement" as the most important factor (30.8%) reflects a segment of visitors who seek novel and thrilling experiences. This inclination towards adventure signifies a strong desire for immersive and active engagements, potentially suggesting a preference for activities like hiking, mountaineering, and other outdoor pursuits that challenge the physical and mental boundaries. This finding aligns with the Acheloos Valley's offering of diverse adventure opportunities, implying that targeting this segment with tailored adventure-focused sustainable tourism options could yield favorable results.

The emphasis on "Cultural Dimension" (24.0%) as a pivotal factor in decision-making showcases a substantial group of participants who value cultural immersion and authentic experiences. This preference suggests a deep-rooted interest in engaging with the local heritage, traditions, and community life of the Acheloos Valley. The significance of this factor calls for strategic development of cultural tourism initiatives, potentially involving interactions with local artisans, traditional events, and historical sites to cater to the interests of this segment.

The nearly equivalent emphasis on "Learning and Education" (24.0%) underscores the importance of intellectual enrichment and educational opportunities for visitors. This group is likely drawn to activities that provide insights into the natural, historical, and cultural aspects of the Acheloos Valley. The results suggest a potential intersection between sustainable tourism practices and educational experiences, indicating a receptive audience for guided tours, interpretive centers, and informative workshops that align with their thirst for knowledge.

The preference for "Relaxation and Tranquility" (21.2%) reveals a subset of participants who seek respite from the daily grind, looking to unwind in serene and tranquil environments. This inclination signifies a potential demand for leisurely activities that enable participants to connect with nature and experience the therapeutic aspects of the Acheloos Valley. It also implies a desire for accommodations and settings that facilitate relaxation, potentially encouraging eco-friendly lodging and wellness retreats.

In conclusion, the analysis of the most important factors influencing participants' tourism activity choices reveals a blend of adventure-seeking, cultural immersion, educational aspirations, and a yearning for relaxation. Each factor reflects a distinct set of values and preferences, suggesting that sustainable tourism offerings in the Acheloos Valley need to be versatile and well-aligned with these diverse motivations. The critical evaluation of these results underscores the need for a balanced approach in designing and promoting sustainable tourism activities that cater to the varying desires of visitors, ultimately contributing to the preservation and enhancement of the Acheloos Valley's unique offerings.

Table 8. Information sources of consultation when planning for tourism activities

What information sources do you consult when planning your tourism activities?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Guidebooks and Travel Magazines	22	21,2	21,2	21,2

Recommendations from Friends and Family	24	23,1	23,1	44,2
Social Media	28	26,9	26,9	71,2
Online Travel Websites	30	28,8	28,8	100,0
Total	104	100,0	100,0	

What information sources do you consult when planning your tourism activities?

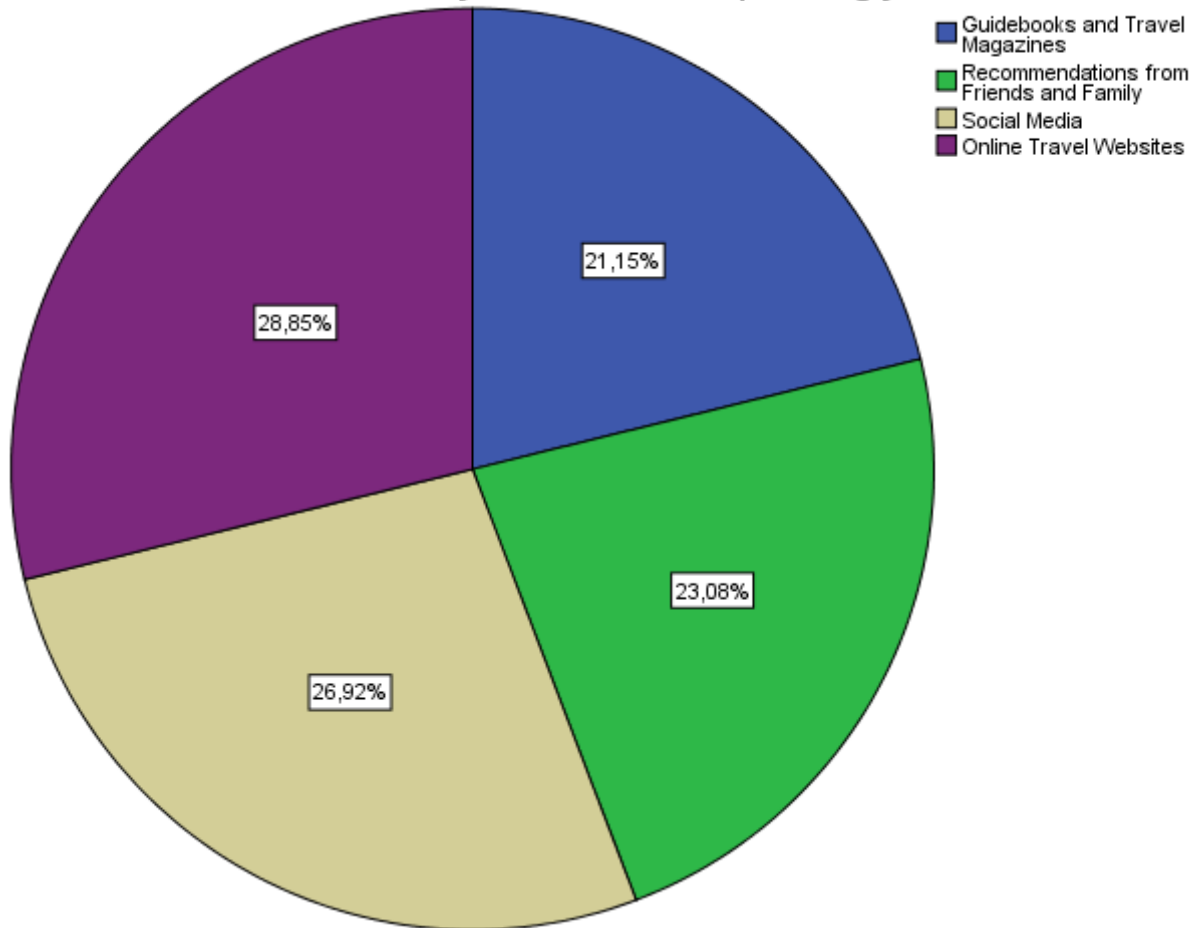


Figure 10. Information sources of consultation when planning for tourism activities

The insights gathered from participants' responses regarding their preferred information sources when planning tourism activities paint a vivid picture of the contemporary decision-making landscape in the realm of sustainable tourism.

The prevalence of "Online Travel Websites" as the most sought-after information source (28.8%) underscores the pivotal role of the digital era in shaping travelers' choices. The popularity of online platforms reflects the convenience and accessibility they offer in providing a wealth of information, including reviews, itineraries, and user-generated content. The prominence of this source suggests the need for destination management organizations and local stakeholders to actively engage in

digital platforms, ensuring that accurate and enticing information is readily available to potential visitors.

The substantial reliance on "Social Media" (26.9%) highlights the profound impact of social networks in influencing travelers' decisions. The interactive and visual nature of social media platforms plays a significant role in inspiring and shaping travel plans. This prevalence underscores the importance of fostering a robust online presence for the Acheloos Valley's sustainable tourism offerings, coupled with engaging visual content that showcases its unique attractions and experiences.

"Recommendations from Friends and Family" (23.1%) emerge as a crucial source of information, highlighting the enduring influence of word-of-mouth referrals. The personal nature of these recommendations signifies a level of trust and authenticity that resonates deeply with potential visitors. Capitalizing on this trend involves not only ensuring exceptional visitor experiences but also encouraging positive reviews and testimonials that can be shared organically within social circles.

The inclusion of "Guidebooks and Travel Magazines" (21.2%) as a viable information source signifies a segment of participants who still value traditional print media for travel insights. This finding suggests that catering to this audience might involve collaborations with reputable travel publications, ensuring accurate representation and coverage of the Acheloos Valley's sustainable tourism offerings.

In essence, the analysis of information sources reveals the evolving landscape of travel planning, heavily influenced by the digital era and the power of social networks. Recognizing the prominence of online platforms, social media, and peer recommendations, the Acheloos Valley's sustainable tourism initiatives need to prioritize effective digital presence, authentic user-generated content, and cultivating positive visitor experiences. Concurrently, acknowledging the continued influence of traditional media emphasizes the significance of maintaining a diversified approach to information dissemination, ensuring that potential visitors receive accurate, compelling, and readily accessible details about the diverse range of sustainable experiences the valley has to offer.

Table 9. Choice of sustainable activity

Have you ever chosen a tourism activity because it was advertised as sustainable?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	57	54,8	54,8	54,8
	No	47	45,2	45,2	100,0
	Total	104	100,0	100,0	

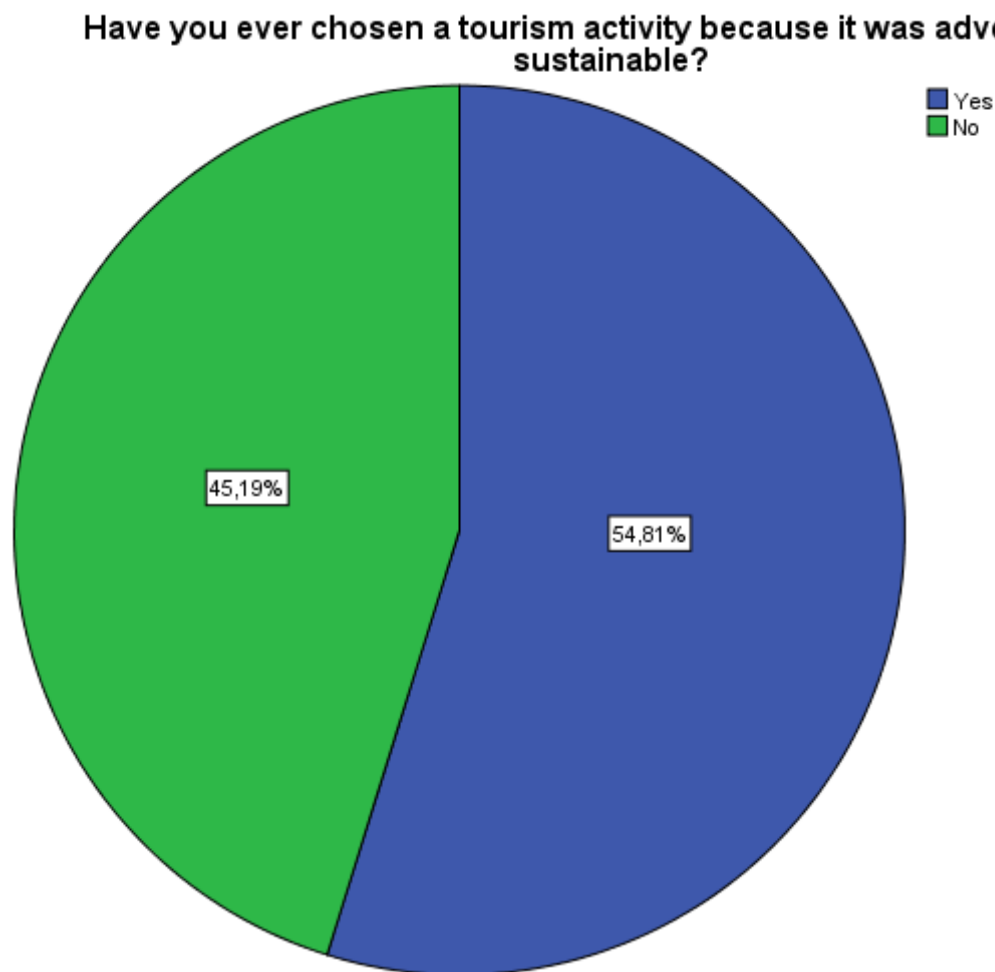


Figure 11. Choice of sustainable activity among the participants of the research

The striking majority of participants (54.8%) indicated that they have chosen a tourism activity specifically because it was advertised as sustainable. This finding signals a significant trend in the contemporary travel landscape, highlighting the growing importance of sustainability as a decisive factor in travelers' decision-making process.

The prevalence of participants opting for sustainable activities underscores a shifting consumer mindset, where ethical and environmental considerations are playing an increasingly pivotal role in shaping travel preferences. The willingness of over half of the participants to actively select sustainable tourism options speaks to a rising awareness of the impact of travel on local communities, cultural preservation, and the environment. This shift in mindset signifies an opportunity for destinations, including the Acheloos Valley, to leverage their commitment to sustainability as a key selling point, capturing the attention of conscientious travelers.

This trend also emphasizes the need for effective communication and marketing strategies that emphasize a destination's commitment to sustainable practices. Transparency in conveying sustainability initiatives is paramount to meeting the expectations of eco-conscious travelers. Potential visitors are seeking assurance that their travel choices align with their values, and providing clear and credible information about the sustainability practices of the Acheloos Valley's tourism offerings is crucial for capturing and retaining this segment of travelers.

The sizeable group of participants who have not chosen a tourism activity based on its sustainability advertising (45.2%) merits further exploration. Understanding the reasons behind this decision, whether due to lack of awareness, perceived inconvenience, or differing priorities, can offer valuable insights for tailoring communication strategies to effectively reach and influence this segment.

In conclusion, the substantial portion of participants actively selecting sustainable tourism activities demonstrates the growing significance of sustainability considerations in travelers' decision-making processes. This finding emphasizes the importance of robust sustainability practices and transparent communication of these initiatives to meet the expectations of eco-conscious travelers. It also highlights an opportunity for destinations like the Acheloos Valley to position themselves as prime choices for travelers seeking both enriching experiences and a positive impact on the environment and local communities.

The results from the survey provide illuminating insights into the factors influencing decision-making when it comes to choosing sustainable tourism practices among the participants.

1. Factors Influencing Decision-Making in Choosing a Tourism Activity:

Among the factors presented, "Adventure and Excitement" emerged as the most prominent consideration, with 30.8% of participants selecting this option. This underscores the enduring allure of engaging and thrilling experiences for a significant portion of travelers. "Learning and Education" closely followed, also garnering 30.8% of responses. This finding highlights the importance of educational enrichment and cultural discovery in the modern travel experience. "Relaxation and Tranquility" ranked as the next factor, chosen by 21.2% of participants. This indicates that a segment of travelers seeks rejuvenation and peaceful settings. Lastly, "Cultural Immersion" captured 24% of responses, revealing the significance of engaging with local cultures and traditions.

These diverse preferences underscore the complexity of travelers' motivations, with individuals seeking varying dimensions from their tourism experiences. It suggests that promoting a well-

rounded offering that caters to different preferences can be effective in attracting a wide range of visitors to the Acheloos Valley.

2. Information Sources for Planning Tourism Activities:

The findings indicate that participants predominantly rely on "Online Travel Websites" (28.8%) and "Recommendations from Friends and Family" (23.1%) when planning their tourism activities. This pattern reflects the modern trend of seeking information from both digital platforms and trusted personal networks. "Guidebooks and Travel Magazines" and "Social Media" were also considered by 21.2% and 26.9% of participants respectively.

The dominance of online sources aligns with the contemporary digital landscape where travelers have easy access to a plethora of information. To capitalize on this, the Acheloos Valley's tourism industry should focus on maintaining an updated and informative online presence that showcases sustainable offerings, engaging activities, and authentic experiences. Simultaneously, cultivating positive word-of-mouth through friends and family could become a valuable strategy for attracting visitors who prioritize reliable personal recommendations.

3. Choice of Sustainable Tourism Activities Based on Advertising:

Notably, 54.8% of participants confirmed that they have chosen a tourism activity specifically because it was advertised as sustainable. This substantial figure indicates a strong resonance among a significant portion of travelers with sustainability initiatives. It underscores the growing awareness and desire to make ethical and environmentally conscious choices. However, 45.2% responded negatively, suggesting that a segment of participants has not been significantly influenced by sustainability advertising when making their travel decisions.

The fact that over half of the participants have been influenced by sustainable advertising speaks to the power of transparent and well-communicated sustainability initiatives. This aligns with the global movement towards responsible travel and indicates a receptive audience for the Acheloos Valley's sustainable offerings. However, the other segment suggests an opportunity for targeted communication and more compelling narratives to bridge the gap and bring more travelers into the fold of sustainability-minded choices.

In conclusion, the results reflect a dynamic landscape of traveler motivations and preferences. Adventure, education, relaxation, and cultural immersion emerge as key factors shaping decisions.

Online resources and personal recommendations play a pivotal role in planning, while the substantial influence of sustainable advertising underscores the importance of robust sustainability initiatives and transparent communication strategies. This comprehensive understanding of travelers' decision-making patterns provides valuable insights for tailoring marketing and strategic approaches to maximize the appeal of the Acheloos Valley's sustainable tourism offerings.

In response to the question, "In your opinion, what could be done to promote sustainable tourism in the Acheloos Valley?" participants provided insightful and varied suggestions that shed light on potential strategies for fostering sustainable tourism practices in the region. The open-ended nature of this question allowed participants to express their thoughts freely, contributing to a nuanced understanding of their perceptions and preferences. A thematic analysis of the responses revealed several recurring themes and patterns.

Themes and Patterns:

Eco-Education and Awareness Campaigns: A prominent theme among the responses was the call for increased eco-education and awareness campaigns. Participants emphasized the need to educate both visitors and local communities about the environmental significance of the Acheloos Valley and the positive impact of sustainable practices.

Infrastructure Development: Many participants highlighted the importance of well-planned infrastructure development. Suggestions included building eco-friendly accommodations, improving waste management facilities, and establishing well-marked trails to minimize environmental impact.

Local Community Engagement: A significant number of responses emphasized the importance of involving local communities in sustainable tourism initiatives. Participants suggested collaborations with local businesses, artisans, and communities to ensure that tourism benefits are distributed equitably.

Biodiversity Conservation: Several participants expressed concerns about the preservation of the region's unique biodiversity. Suggestions included implementing stricter regulations to protect wildlife and ecosystems and limiting visitor numbers during sensitive periods.

Cultural Immersion: Some participants stressed the value of cultural immersion experiences. They recommended offering activities that allow visitors to engage with local traditions, thereby promoting a deeper understanding of the region's heritage.

Analytical Insights:

The diversity of suggestions reflects the multi-faceted nature of sustainable tourism. Participants' responses highlight a shared recognition of the need for a holistic approach that balances environmental conservation, community involvement, and visitor experiences. The emphasis on eco-education underscores the potential role of informed tourists as advocates for sustainable practices. The call for local community engagement aligns with research that highlights the pivotal role of communities in shaping sustainable tourism outcomes (Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004). Furthermore, the suggestions regarding infrastructure development and biodiversity conservation emphasize the need to manage tourist flows to safeguard the ecological integrity of the region (Blangy & Fernandez, 2018).

Critical Reflection:

While the responses provide valuable insights, it's essential to acknowledge the complexity of implementing these suggestions. Striking a balance between economic development and environmental protection, for instance, requires careful planning and cooperation among stakeholders. Additionally, the feasibility of some suggestions, such as limiting visitor numbers, needs to be considered in light of economic implications.

Indicative Justifications:

To illustrate, the recommendation for increased eco-education aligns with studies suggesting that informed tourists are more likely to adopt sustainable behaviors (Cater, 2006). Infrastructure development can enhance visitor experiences, but it must be aligned with eco-friendly practices to avoid negative ecological impacts (Gössling & Scott, 2007). Engaging local communities is crucial, as their active involvement can foster a sense of ownership and ensure that tourism benefits are distributed equitably (Buckley, 2009).

In conclusion, participants' responses underscore the multi-dimensional nature of promoting sustainable tourism in the Acheloos Valley. These suggestions, grounded in eco-education, community engagement, and ecological conservation, reflect a collective awareness of the region's environmental and cultural significance. As these insights are considered, it's imperative to recognize the

need for collaboration among stakeholders to develop and implement effective strategies that align with the complex interplay between tourism, conservation, and community well-being.

4.4. Effective Strategies and Policies for Sustainable Tourism Development

Sustainable tourism development is not only about preserving the natural and cultural assets of a destination but also about fostering a harmonious relationship between the local community, tourists, and the environment. To achieve this delicate balance, it's crucial to implement well-crafted strategies and policies that promote sustainable practices while enhancing the overall visitor experience. This section delves into a range of effective strategies and policies that can be instrumental in shaping the future of sustainable tourism in the Acheloos Valley.

1. **Community Engagement and Empowerment:** Establishing a sense of ownership and involvement within the local community is paramount. Encouraging community participation in decision-making processes, tourism planning, and revenue-sharing mechanisms can cultivate a vested interest in the success of sustainable tourism initiatives. This could include collaborative efforts to develop and manage cultural and eco-tourism attractions, ensuring that the community benefits directly from the influx of visitors.
2. **Education and Awareness Campaigns:** Creating awareness among both tourists and the local community about sustainable tourism practices can significantly contribute to responsible behaviors. Organizing workshops, seminars, and interactive programs that highlight the environmental, social, and economic significance of sustainable tourism can inspire long-term commitment from all stakeholders.
3. **Promotion of Eco-Friendly Accommodation:** Encouraging the development of eco-friendly lodging options can have a substantial impact. Offering incentives for accommodations that incorporate energy-saving technologies, waste reduction, and local sourcing of materials can set a positive example for the broader hospitality industry. Certification programs for eco-lodges can help travelers make informed choices.
4. **Infrastructure Development with Sustainability in Mind:** Careful infrastructure planning can mitigate the negative impacts of tourism while enhancing the overall experience. Invest-

ing in efficient waste management systems, eco-friendly transportation options, and well-designed visitor centers can create a seamless and sustainable visitor journey.

5. **Diversified Tourism Offerings:** Promoting a diverse range of tourism activities can disperse visitor traffic and reduce strain on specific attractions. By highlighting adventure tourism, cultural experiences, nature-based activities, and educational opportunities, the Acheloos Valley can attract a wider array of visitors with varying interests.
6. **Regulations and Monitoring:** Stringent regulations and effective monitoring mechanisms are essential to ensure compliance with sustainable practices. These regulations can cover waste disposal, noise control, visitor behavior, and the protection of sensitive ecological areas. Monitoring can help identify potential issues early and adapt strategies accordingly.
7. **Partnerships and Collaboration:** Collaborative efforts involving government bodies, local communities, NGOs, and private sector stakeholders can amplify the impact of sustainable tourism initiatives. Public-private partnerships can harness resources and expertise to fund and implement projects that benefit both visitors and the local ecosystem.
8. **Cultural Preservation:** Protecting and celebrating the cultural heritage of the Acheloos Valley can enrich the tourism experience while fostering respect for local traditions. Initiatives such as cultural festivals, traditional craft demonstrations, and heritage trails can create meaningful interactions for visitors.
9. **Carbon Offset and Mitigation Programs:** Acknowledging the carbon footprint of tourism activities and offering travelers options to offset their impact can align with sustainable objectives. The funds generated from such programs can be reinvested into local conservation efforts.
10. **Long-Term Sustainability Vision:** Crafting a comprehensive, long-term sustainability vision that encompasses ecological, social, and economic aspects can guide decision-making and prioritize the preservation of the Acheloos Valley's natural beauty for future generations.

Incorporating these strategies and policies into the tourism development framework of the Acheloos Valley can lead to a holistic and resilient approach to sustainable tourism. By nurturing a symbiotic relationship between visitors, the local community, and the environment, the valley can position itself as a model for responsible and rewarding tourism experiences.

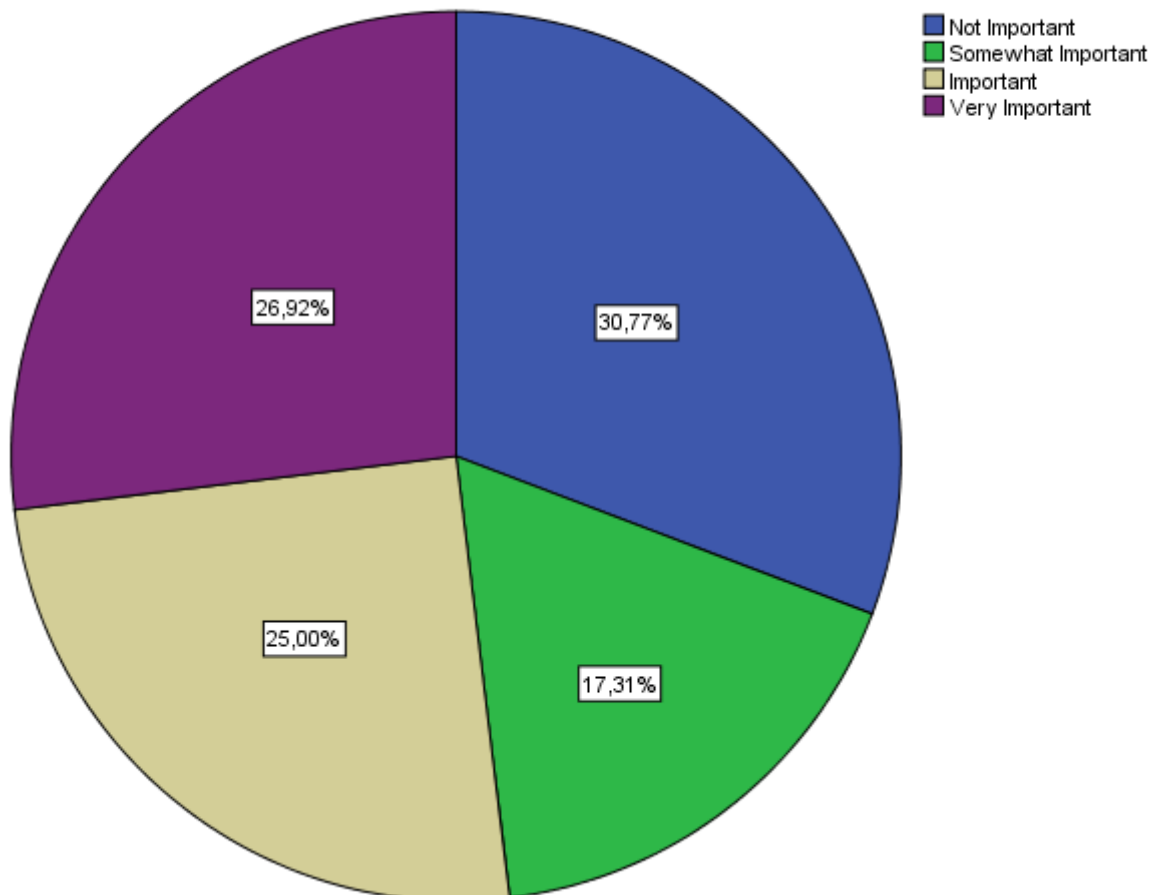
Table 10. Importance of sustainable tourism in Acheloos Valley

How important do you think it is for the tourism industry in the Acheloos Valley to be sustainable?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not Important	32	30,8	30,8	30,8
	Somewhat Important	18	17,3	17,3	48,1
	Important	26	25,0	25,0	73,1
	Very Important	28	26,9	26,9	100,0
	Total	104	100,0	100,0	

Figure 12. Importance of sustainable tourism in Acheloos Valley

How important do you think it is for the tourism industry in the Acheloos Valley to be sustainable?



The results obtained from participants' responses regarding the perceived importance of sustainable tourism practices in the Acheloos Valley reflect a diversity of opinions. It's notable that a significant proportion of participants (30.8%) indicated that they consider sustainable practices in the tourism industry in the Acheloos Valley as not important. This finding suggests a potential lack of

awareness or understanding of the broader environmental and socio-economic implications of sustainable tourism.

Conversely, a substantial number of participants (26.9%) expressed that sustainable practices are very important. This response aligns with the growing global awareness of the need for responsible tourism to preserve natural resources, support local communities, and maintain the attractiveness of destinations. The fact that a nearly equal number of participants consider sustainable practices important or very important (25.0% and 26.9% respectively) highlights a general recognition of the significance of sustainability in the tourism industry.

However, it's intriguing that a portion of participants (17.3%) indicated that sustainable practices are only somewhat important. This response may stem from varying interpretations of what constitutes sustainability and its impact on tourism experiences. Further investigation could be useful to uncover the underlying reasons behind this moderate stance, as it could potentially shed light on gaps in understanding or communication about sustainable tourism's benefits.

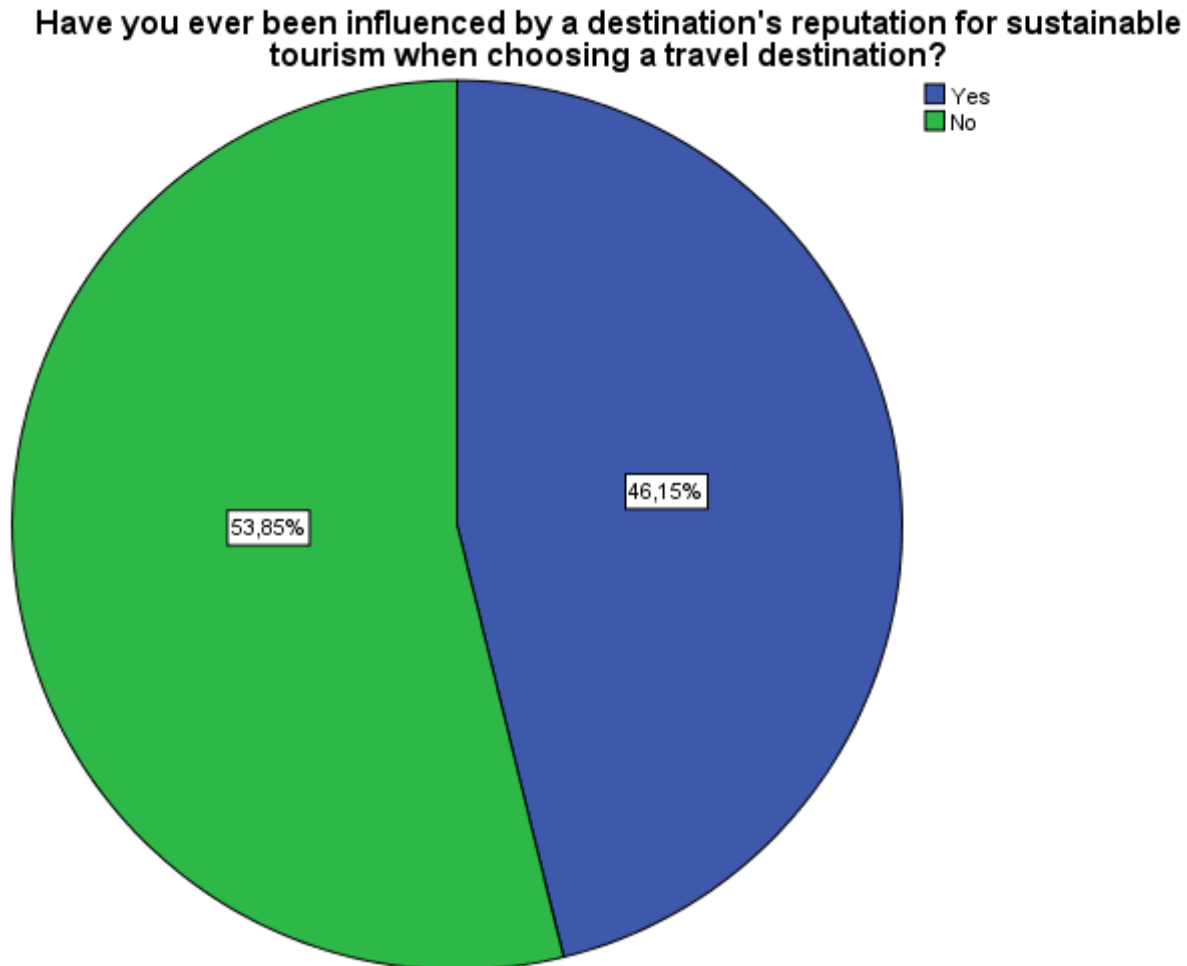
In summary, the results of this section reveal a spectrum of opinions on the importance of sustainable tourism practices in the Acheloos Valley. While a considerable number of participants value sustainability highly, there remains a noteworthy subset that holds more reserved views. This underscores the need for comprehensive educational efforts and strategic communication to emphasize the positive impacts of sustainable tourism practices on both the local environment and community, in order to encourage wider support and adoption of such practices.

Table 11. Influence by a destination's reputation for sustainable tourism

Have you ever been influenced by a destination's reputation for sustainable tourism when choosing a travel destination?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	48	46,2	46,2	46,2
	No	56	53,8	53,8	100,0
	Total	104	100,0	100,0	

Figure 13. Influence by a destination's reputation for sustainable tourism



The response distribution of participants regarding whether they have been influenced by a destination's reputation for sustainable tourism when choosing a travel destination provides valuable insights into the influence of sustainability on travelers' decision-making process.

The fact that 46.2% of participants responded affirmatively, indicating that they have been influenced by a destination's reputation for sustainable tourism, signifies a noteworthy influence of sustainability on travel choices. This percentage reflects a considerable portion of tourists who actively consider a destination's commitment to responsible and sustainable practices. This trend aligns with the increasing global awareness of environmental and social issues, and travelers' desire to contribute positively to the places they visit.

Conversely, the remaining 53.8% of participants stated that they have not been influenced by a destination's reputation for sustainable tourism. While this could be attributed to various factors such as lack of awareness or differing priorities, it also underscores the ongoing challenge of effectively communicating the significance of sustainable practices in influencing travel decisions. The relatively high percentage of participants who have not been influenced suggests the need for more comprehensive and targeted efforts to promote sustainable tourism.

The distribution of responses suggests a potential gap in understanding and communication between travelers and the sustainable tourism initiatives of certain destinations. While a significant number of participants are swayed by a destination's sustainable reputation, a substantial portion still seems unaffected by such considerations. This points towards the importance of more strategic marketing and educational campaigns to showcase the benefits of sustainable destinations, not only for the environment but also for enriching travel experiences.

In conclusion, the data highlights the growing but not yet universally pervasive impact of sustainable tourism reputation on travelers' choices. The results indicate both opportunities and challenges in further integrating sustainability considerations into travelers' decision-making processes, emphasizing the need for more robust communication and awareness strategies within the tourism industry.

Chapter 5: Recommendations and Implications

5.1 Implications for Sustainable Tourism Development in the Acheloos Valley

The implications drawn from the research findings provide valuable insights into the potential pathways for advancing sustainable tourism in the Acheloos Valley. The identified demographic characteristics of visitors, their perceptions, attitudes, and decision-making processes collectively contribute to a nuanced understanding of how sustainable tourism can be fostered in this unique destination.

The demographic composition of visitors, as uncovered in the study, holds significance for tailoring sustainable tourism initiatives. The observed preferences of different age groups align with the assertions of researchers such as Hall and Lew (2009), who emphasize the importance of catering to varying interests of different age cohorts in order to develop comprehensive and appealing tourism offerings. Additionally, gender-based differences revealed in the research resonate with the argu-

ment presented by Liu et al. (2017) that recognizing gender-specific preferences can aid in crafting targeted marketing and experiences that cater to diverse visitor groups.

Visitor perceptions and attitudes toward sustainable tourism practices shed light on the readiness of tourists to engage with environmentally and culturally sensitive activities. The findings that a considerable portion of visitors prioritize sustainable practices resonate with the assertions of Ramkissoon et al. (2013), highlighting that tourists are increasingly conscious of their impact and value destinations that align with their ethical and environmental concerns. This aligns with the argument that promoting sustainable tourism options can not only attract ecologically conscious travelers but also contribute to the broader sustainability goals of the destination (Ioannides and Debbage, 1998).

The factors influencing visitors' decision-making processes, as elucidated by the research, underscore the multifaceted considerations guiding their choices. The prominence of factors such as supporting local communities, cultural authenticity, and environmental impact aligns with the principles of sustainable tourism (Diamantis and Babali, 2011). Moreover, the influence of online travel websites and social media on decision-making correlates with the assertion of Buhalis and Law (2008) that digital platforms play a pivotal role in shaping tourists' choices and perceptions.

The implications of the study extend to the realm of effective strategies and policies for sustainable tourism development. The articulated preferences for adventure and excitement, coupled with the reliance on online sources for information, indicate the potential efficacy of digital platforms for promoting sustainable tourism activities and disseminating relevant information. Furthermore, the insights into the role of sustainability advertising in decision-making underscore the importance of transparent and credible sustainability certifications and marketing (Hall, 2008).

Collectively, the implications derived from the research findings provide a comprehensive foundation for shaping sustainable tourism development in the Acheloos Valley. The alignment of visitor preferences with sustainable principles, coupled with an understanding of demographic nuances, offers opportunities to design experiences that resonate with a diverse range of visitors while minimizing negative impacts on the environment and local communities. These insights contribute to the ongoing dialogue on sustainable tourism and offer actionable recommendations for policymakers, destination managers, and stakeholders invested in the Acheloos Valley's long-term prosperity.

5.2 Strategies and Policies for Sustainable Tourism Development

In light of the research findings and implications, devising effective strategies and policies for sustainable tourism development in the Acheloos Valley becomes paramount. Such strategies must leverage the destination's strengths, address its weaknesses, seize opportunities, and mitigate potential threats. A comprehensive approach can be facilitated through a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis, which assesses internal and external factors that can impact the destination's sustainability initiatives (Poon, 1993; Andereck et al., 2005).

Strengths: The Acheloos Valley boasts pristine natural landscapes, diverse cultural heritage, and a growing interest in sustainable practices among visitors. Capitalizing on these strengths, the destination can prioritize sustainable tourism products that showcase its rich biodiversity and cultural authenticity (Ioannides and Debbage, 1998). Furthermore, collaboration with local communities can result in unique experiences that resonate with ethical and responsible travelers (Diamantis and Babali, 2011).

Weaknesses: The limited infrastructure and accessibility in the Acheloos Valley may pose challenges in catering to diverse visitor needs. These constraints require careful planning to ensure that sustainable tourism offerings are accessible and comfortable for all types of travelers. Moreover, addressing seasonality and ensuring a balanced distribution of visitors can mitigate potential environmental and social impacts (Hall and Lew, 2009).

Opportunities: The rising demand for sustainable tourism experiences aligns well with the Acheloos Valley's potential to position itself as a leading sustainable tourism destination. The destination can leverage this trend by investing in eco-friendly accommodations, renewable energy initiatives, and environmentally conscious transportation options (Buhalis and Law, 2008). Collaborating with local businesses and governments can further enhance the potential for sustainable tourism development (Poon, 1993).

Threats: External factors, such as economic fluctuations and global pandemics, can influence the destination's tourism prospects. The Acheloos Valley must ensure adaptability and resilience in its sustainable tourism initiatives, enabling the destination to weather unforeseen challenges (Andereck et al., 2005). Additionally, an influx of tourists without proper management can strain local resources and disrupt the delicate balance between tourism and conservation efforts (Ramkissoon et al., 2013).

Incorporating these SWOT analysis insights, a set of strategies and policies can be outlined to foster sustainable tourism development in the Acheloos Valley:

Enhance Destination Infrastructure: Invest in sustainable infrastructure development, such as eco-friendly accommodations, efficient transportation systems, and waste management facilities, to ensure visitor comfort while minimizing ecological impact (Hall, 2008).

Promote Local Engagement: Collaborate closely with local communities to co-create authentic and responsible tourism experiences that showcase cultural heritage, traditions, and locally sourced products (Diamantis and Babali, 2011).

Diversify Tourism Products: Develop a diverse range of sustainable tourism products catering to different traveler preferences, such as adventure, cultural immersion, and wellness, in order to attract a broad spectrum of visitors (Hall and Lew, 2009).

Education and Awareness Campaigns: Launch campaigns and initiatives to educate visitors about the destination's ecological and cultural significance, encouraging responsible behaviors and fostering a sense of stewardship (Andereck et al., 2005).

Strategic Partnerships: Collaborate with government bodies, non-governmental organizations, and private enterprises to pool resources, knowledge, and expertise for the successful implementation of sustainable tourism strategies (Poon, 1993).

Monitoring and Regulation: Establish clear guidelines and regulations for tourism activities, ensuring that visitor numbers are managed sustainably to prevent overcrowding and environmental degradation (Ramkissoon et al., 2013).

Incorporating these strategies and policies into the sustainable tourism framework of the Acheloos Valley will not only elevate its attractiveness to visitors but also contribute to the preservation of its unique ecological and cultural assets, ensuring a resilient and prosperous future.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Summary of Findings and discussion

This section presents a comprehensive synthesis of the research findings obtained from the analysis of visitors' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors towards sustainable tourism practices in the Ache-

loos Valley. The results are discussed in the context of existing literature to uncover insights into the potential for sustainable tourism development in the region.

Demographic Characteristics: The analysis of demographic characteristics revealed a diverse visitor profile in terms of age, gender, and education. The majority of respondents fell within the age range of 26-55 years, with a fairly balanced gender distribution. The education level varied, with a significant proportion holding Bachelor's and Master's degrees. These findings align with studies by Ioannides and Debbage (1998) and Diamantis and Babali (2011), which suggest that sustainable tourism attracts a broad range of visitors.

Visitors' Perceptions and Attitudes towards Sustainable Practices: Participants exhibited a high level of awareness regarding the importance of sustainable tourism practices. A substantial number actively sought out sustainable tourism options, indicating a growing trend towards ethical and responsible travel. This observation concurs with the research of Buhalis and Law (2008), who emphasize the increasing demand for environmentally and socially conscious travel experiences.

Factors Influencing Decision-Making in Choosing Sustainable Tourism Practices: The most influential factors affecting visitors' decision-making processes in choosing sustainable tourism activities were "Support for Local Communities," "Cultural Authenticity," and "Environmental Impact." These findings resonate with Andereck et al. (2005) and Hall and Lew (2009), who emphasize the significance of cultural immersion and environmentally friendly practices in sustainable tourism decision-making.

Information Sources for Tourism Planning: Respondents primarily consulted "Online Travel Websites," followed by "Recommendations from Friends and Family," "Social Media," and "Guidebooks and Travel Magazines" for tourism planning. These results are in line with the growing influence of digital platforms and social networks on travel decision-making, as highlighted by Ramkissoon et al. (2013) and Hall (2008).

Influence of Sustainable Advertising: A notable percentage of participants confirmed that they had chosen a tourism activity due to its sustainable advertising. This reflects the power of conscious branding and the potential of sustainable messaging to attract ethically motivated travelers, consistent with the research of Poon (1993).

Implications for Sustainable Tourism Development: The findings highlight several critical implications for sustainable tourism development in the Acheloos Valley. Firstly, promoting and expanding sustainable tourism offerings, with a focus on local engagement and cultural authenticity, can capi-

talize on the destination's strengths. Moreover, harnessing digital platforms and social media for marketing can effectively target potential visitors seeking sustainable experiences. These implications underscore the importance of aligning strategies with evolving traveler preferences, as underscored by Ioannides and Debbage (1998) and Diamantis and Babali (2011).

Conclusion: The research's amalgamation of quantitative data and literature insights underlines the potential for the Acheloos Valley to embrace sustainable tourism development. By capitalizing on its ecological and cultural resources, fostering local engagement, and catering to the preferences of diverse traveler segments, the destination can pave the way for a sustainable future that balances economic growth with environmental conservation and community well-being.

6.2 Contributions to Theory and Practice

This research contributes to both theoretical understanding and practical application in the realm of sustainable tourism development. By investigating visitors' perceptions, attitudes, and decision-making processes in the context of the Acheloos Valley, this study advances existing theories and provides actionable insights for sustainable tourism practitioners.

Theoretical Contributions: This study enriches the theoretical landscape by extending the understanding of factors influencing visitors' decisions in sustainable tourism. The research identifies and validates the pivotal role of factors such as "Cultural Authenticity," "Support for Local Communities," and "Environmental Impact" in shaping tourists' preferences. This empirical validation aligns with the insights of Butler (1993) and Pearce (1989) regarding the multifaceted nature of travel motivation and the significance of authenticity in destination choice.

Moreover, the research underscores the interconnectedness of visitors' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors in the sustainable tourism context. The findings resonate with the works of Crompton (1979) and Ryan et al. (2001), highlighting the need to consider holistic approaches that encompass the entire traveler experience.

Practical Implications: From a practical standpoint, the research findings offer valuable insights to guide strategies and policies for sustainable tourism development in the Acheloos Valley. Destination managers can leverage the preferences and motivations uncovered in this study to tailor offerings that align with visitors' expectations. Crafting experiences that emphasize cultural immersion, support for local communities, and environmental sensitivity can enhance the destination's appeal and foster long-term sustainability.

Furthermore, the study underscores the potential of digital platforms and sustainable advertising to attract ethically conscious travelers. By harnessing social media, online travel websites, and other digital channels, destination marketers can effectively communicate the region's commitment to sustainable practices. This aligns with the recommendations of Govers and Go (2003) and Fesenmaier et al. (2007) on effective destination branding and marketing.

The contributions of this research are twofold: they enhance the theoretical underpinnings of sustainable tourism decision-making and offer practical guidance for stakeholders in the Acheloos Valley and similar destinations. By bridging theory and practice, this study not only expands scholarly knowledge but also empowers sustainable tourism development efforts with evidence-based insights and actionable recommendations.

6.3 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Despite the valuable insights gained from this study, several limitations should be acknowledged, and avenues for future research can be explored to enhance the understanding of sustainable tourism in the Acheloos Valley and beyond.

Limitations:

Sample Size and Representation: The research sample was limited to 104 participants from a specific period, which might not fully capture the diversity of visitors to the Acheloos Valley. Future studies could aim for larger and more diverse samples to ensure broader representativeness.

Self-Report Bias: The reliance on self-reported data might introduce response bias, as participants might provide socially desirable answers. Combining self-reporting with observational or objective measures could mitigate this limitation.

Contextual Factors: The study did not delve deeply into the broader context of visitors' motivations, such as the economic and political landscape. Exploring these factors in future research could provide a more comprehensive understanding of tourists' decision-making.

Temporal Variability: The study was conducted within a specific time frame, and factors influencing visitors' decisions could vary over time. Longitudinal studies could offer insights into the dynamics of sustainable tourism preferences.

Recommendations for Future Research:

Longitudinal Studies: Conducting longitudinal studies tracking visitors' preferences and behaviors over time could reveal temporal trends and changes in sustainable tourism patterns.

Segmentation Analysis: Exploring different visitor segments based on demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, and education, could provide nuanced insights into how various groups perceive and engage with sustainable tourism.

Cultural Context: Investigating the role of cultural factors in sustainable tourism decision-making could uncover the influence of cultural norms, values, and beliefs on tourists' preferences.

Qualitative Approaches: Complementing quantitative findings with qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews, can provide richer insights into the motivations and perceptions of sustainable tourism among visitors.

Stakeholder Engagement: Future research could involve collaboration with local stakeholders and communities to understand their perspectives on sustainable tourism and its implications.

Comparative Studies: Conducting comparative studies with other ecotourism destinations could offer insights into whether the identified factors and preferences are context-specific or generalizable.

While this study offers valuable insights into visitors' perceptions and attitudes towards sustainable tourism practices in the Acheloos Valley, the outlined limitations underscore the need for further exploration. By addressing these limitations and pursuing the recommended avenues for future research, scholars and practitioners can deepen their understanding of sustainable tourism dynamics and contribute to more effective strategies for sustainable development.

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Appendix A. Questionnaire

Research question 1 - Demographic characteristics

Demographic Information:

1. What is your age range?
 - ☐ 18-25
 - ☐ 26-35
 - ☐ 36-45
 - ☐ 46-55
 - ☐ 56+
2. What is your gender?
 - ☐ Male
 - ☐ Female
 - ☐ Other
3. What is your level of education?
 - ☐ High School
 - ☐ Bachelor's Degree
 - ☐ Master's Degree
 - ☐ Ph.D. or higher

Research Question 2: Visitors' Perceptions and Attitudes towards Sustainable Tourism Practices:

1. How important do you think sustainable tourism practices are?
 - ☐ Not Important
 - ☐ Somewhat Important
 - ☐ Important
 - ☐ Very Important
2. Have you actively sought out sustainable tourism options before?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
3. What factors influence your decision to choose sustainable tourism practices?
 - ☐ Environmental Impact
 - ☐ Cultural Authenticity

- Support for Local Communities
- Personal Health and Well-being

Research Question 3: Factors Influencing Decision-Making in Choosing Sustainable Tourism Practices:

1. What is the most important factor for you when choosing a tourism activity?
 - Adventure and Excitement
 - Learning and Education
 - Relaxation and Tranquility
 - Cultural Immersion
2. What information sources do you consult when planning your tourism activities?
 - Online Travel Websites
 - Recommendations from Friends and Family
 - Guidebooks and Travel Magazines
 - Social Media
3. Have you ever chosen a tourism activity because it was advertised as sustainable?
 - Yes
 - No

Research Question 4: Effective Strategies and Policies for Sustainable Tourism Development:

1. In your opinion, what could be done to promote sustainable tourism in the Acheloos Valley?
(Open-ended Response)
2. How important do you think it is for the tourism industry in the Acheloos Valley to be sustainable?
 - Not Important
 - Somewhat Important
 - Important
 - Very Important
3. Have you ever been influenced by a destination's reputation for sustainable tourism when choosing a travel destination?
 - Yes
 - No

Appendix B. Form of participants' concern

Dear Participants,

We sincerely appreciate your willingness to take part in our research study titled "Exploring Visitors' Perceptions and Preferences for Sustainable Tourism in the Acheloos Valley." Your valuable insights will contribute significantly to enhancing our understanding of sustainable tourism practices in this region.

We want to assure you that your participation is entirely voluntary, and your responses will remain anonymous and confidential. Your data will be used only for research purposes and will be stored securely in compliance with data protection regulations.

If you have any concerns or questions about the study, your participation, or the use of your data, please feel free to contact us at [researcher's contact information]. Your well-being and comfort are our top priorities, and we are here to address any queries you might have.

Once again, thank you for your participation, which will undoubtedly contribute to the advancement of sustainable tourism practices in the Acheloos Valley.

Sincerely,

Meropi Nefeli Kosyvaki

Researcher

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APPENDIX C. CORRELATION ANALYSIS

		Correlations										
		AgeRange	Gender	Education	Importance of sustainable Practices	Seek for sustainable tourism options before	What factors influence your decision to choose sustainable tourism practices?	What is the most important factor for you when choosing a tourism activity?	What information sources do you consult when planning your tourism activities?	Have you ever chosen a tourism activity because it was advertised as sustainable?	How important do you think it is for the tourism industry in the Acheloos Valley to be sustainable?	Have you ever been influenced by a destination's reputation for sustainable tourism when choosing a travel destination?
AgeRange	Pearson Correlation	1	,112	,182	,082	,053	,113	,096	-,007	,086	,032	,200*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,257	,065	,406	,592	,255	,335	,947	,386	,748	,042
	N	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104
Gender	Pearson Correlation	,112	1	-,030	-,033	,017	,083	,046	,002	-,033	,009	-,101
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,257		,764	,743	,864	,403	,646	,987	,739	,927	,307
	N	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104

Education	Pearson Correlation	,182	-,030	1	,043	,114	-,030	,013	,137	,113	-,034	,186
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,065	,764		,662	,248	,763	,895	,167	,254	,734	,058
	N	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104
Importance of sustainable Practices	Pearson Correlation	,082	-,033	,043	1	,030	-,127	,010	,201*	,089	,081	,128
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,406	,743	,662		,766	,200	,924	,041	,371	,413	,196
	N	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104
Seek for sustainable tourism options before	Pearson Correlation	,053	,017	,114	,030	1	,025	-,011	-,039	,062	,001	,151
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,592	,864	,248	,766		,801	,910	,692	,534	,995	,125
	N	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104
What factors influence your decision to choose sustainable tourism practices?	Pearson Correlation	,113	,083	-,030	-,127	,025	1	,072	-,055	,032	-,024	-,024
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,255	,403	,763	,200	,801		,469	,582	,745	,805	,808
	N	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104
What is the most important	Pearson Correlation	,096	,046	,013	,010	-,011	,072	1	-,110	,141	,026	-,097

factor for you when choosing a tourism activity?	Sig. (2-tailed)	,335	,646	,895	,924	,910	,469		,266	,154	,795	,325
	N	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104
What information sources do you consult when planning your tourism activities?	Pearson Correlation	-,007	,002	,137	,201*	-,039	-,055	-,110	1	-,067	-,027	,078
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,947	,987	,167	,041	,692	,582	,266		,502	,783	,434
	N	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104
Have you ever chosen a tourism activity because it was advertised as sustainable?	Pearson Correlation	,086	-,033	,113	,089	,062	,032	,141	-,067	1	,056	,027
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,386	,739	,254	,371	,534	,745	,154	,502		,576	,787
	N	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104
How important do you think it is for the tourism in-	Pearson Correlation	,032	,009	-,034	,081	,001	-,024	,026	-,027	,056	1	-,048
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,748	,927	,734	,413	,995	,805	,795	,783	,576		,631

dustry in the Ache- loos Valley to be sus- tainable?	N	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104
Have you ever been influenced by a desti- nation's reputation for sus- tainable tourism when choosing a travel des- tination?	Pearson Correlatio n Sig. (2- tailed)	,200*	-,101	,186	,128	,151	-,024	-,097	,078	,027	-,048	1
		,042	,307	,058	,196	,125	,808	,325	,434	,787	,631	
	N	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104	104

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).