

# Sustainable Drive Tourism Routes

Subjects: Management

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Drive tourism (DT) has become an attractive way to visit tourism destinations for an increasing number of visitors along driving routes. This flow of visitors has made sustainability a major issue, that is, the way by which tourism development ensure economic benefits for local communities and preserves local identity, along the route, without compromising the environmental resources. Many studies focused the topic of DT, mainly the analysis of a particular angle, either be economic sustainability, e.g., advantages of the ones related to economic and environment sustainability, such as the impact of tourists along the route environment.

Keywords: drive tourism ; routes ; sustainable

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## 1. Introduction

The environment, social justice, and development have become an important issue worldwide and one of the main topics of analysis. A change in values has been carried out in order to ensure the sustainability of future generations, while triggering change with regard to behaviors and raising consciousness about sustainability issues.

## 2. Economic Dimension

Some authors focus on the economic characteristics of sustainability, pointing out the importance of DT as an added tourism attraction to the destination, with positive impacts on the local economy, creating job opportunities, encouraging investment in new businesses, in particular in rural areas, while maintaining the destination attraction through a collaborative management effort ([Lemky 2017](#)). It is notable the existence of an interplay between real per capita GDP and tourism ([Lemky 2017](#)), as tourism activity leads—in the long term—to economic growth, or, on the other hand, economic development drives tourism growth, being apparent a bidirectional interplay ([Brida et al. 2015](#)). For example, scenic travel routes created to provide opportunities for tourism and recreation and to encourage economic development, in particular in rural areas, while maintaining the destination attraction through a collaborative management effort ([Lemky 2017](#)). Despite the positive economic implications, it will avoid several environmental issues ([Lemky 2017](#)).

A strategic planning is needed with regard to DT routes. Authors argue that, depending on destinations and geographical areas, the public road administration and route planning procedures are different, using Norway as an example that implemented a top-down principle regarding the labeling of routes. On the contrary, in Sweden, the standard is of muddling through, giving street-level planners more opportunities for individual influence on both the route and the surrounding area planning ([Antonson and Jacobsen 2014](#)), to better supply the DT market ([Sivijis 2003](#)).

Some studies about the economic dimension of sustainability are more connected to the management dynamics of the supply side, while analyzing the pertinent characteristics of visitors, to better ascertain the impact of tourism on the local community and ensuring alternative strategies of livelihood. A good example is India's first National Geopark in Varkala cliffs, a well-established tourism destination, for both domestic and international travelers, that constitutes the major source of livelihood for the local communities, despite the issues related to seasonality ([Saluja et al. 2022](#)). In this vein, dinosaur fossils provide a potential resource for remote-region economic development through commoditization as a new tourism attraction and new tourism services ([Laws and Scott 2003](#)). With respect to supply side, network strategies and marketing policies are suitable to promote the attractiveness of these DT routes and thus generate economic benefits in the surrounding areas, as in the case of the economic benefits of an access road to encourage tourism at deserts or at coast ([Rolfe and Flint 2018](#)). However, the introduction of a new product such as *4Wheel Drive market* as a new economic strategy, developed in Australia, does not always have positive net economic benefits for the local community ([Cartan and Carson 2009](#)).

Regarding the factors that influence the attractiveness of DT routes, authors suggest, for example, the proximity to other tourism attractions and tourism segments ([Buffa 2015](#); [Laws and Scott 2003](#); [Ejelstul and Fyall 2015](#)), physical

infrastructures, location, access, attractions, promotion, accommodation, and the history of the place ([Saluja et al. 2022](#); [Butler et al. 2021a](#); [Marschall 2012](#)).

Other authors mentioned that national cooperation and coordination is mandatory, and helps contribute to a territorial image, which is important to point out authenticity and sustainability characteristics and to create common strategies to attract and retain the visitors in the route for more time ([Qiu et al. 2018](#); [Antonson and Jacobsen 2014](#)).

Regarding the transport infrastructures, it is important to evaluate the physical conditions of highway and tolls price, as these can be determinant factors for the tourist to feel more attracted to travel by other modes of transport, for example, high-speed railway. Literature also suggests that factors that influence the attractiveness of DT routes include proximity to other tourism attractions and tourist segments.

For many tourists, the DT routes themselves are not the main motivation for travel, as normally tourists add some other visits and territorial attractions to the main experience. For this reason, it is very important to create common strategies between private and public entities, to promote and develop a solid product that values the main characteristics of the route and the territory, their attractions, services, history, and other elements that may be important for tourist decision. In this framework a route manager could improve the potential of the DT routes and develop tools to gather data concerning the visitor profile, expenditures, economic impacts, and others that bring new information and knowledge ([Prideaux and Carson 2003](#)).

National cooperation and coordination are paramount, as visitor road corridors have shown to be central to visitor dispersion, while relying on cross-sector tourism cooperation, as in the case of themed routes, deemed as 'win-win' tourism outcomes, thus highlighting the need for greater national coordination ([Olsen 2003](#)). In the same vein, one can weigh against the impact of two different transport infrastructures, highway and high-speed railway, on tourist flows, in which tourism via high-speed railway was responsive to the position of trip destination, whilst self-drive tourism was more susceptible to travelling time ([Liu et al. 2022](#)). Noteworthy, this strategy, combined, contributes to the creation of a "territorial image" that emphasizes the importance of authenticity and sustainability ([Olsen 2003](#)).

Some authors state that local cultural traditions and previous experiences underpin diverse types of capital and shape entrepreneurship in decisive times, as was the case for women tourism entrepreneurs during COVID-19 ([Filimonau et al. 2022](#)). For example, Morden, a small city in Manitoba, Canada, has been lately doing well in diversifying its economy, including hospitality, manufacturing, services, and tourism. This was partly due to a south-central Manitoba location and to an innovative local entrepreneurship attitude towards tourism ([Ramsey and Malcolm 2018](#)).

Regarding the demand size of DT routes, studies found different typologies of tourists with 4WD (four-wheel-drive)—for example, the explorer-traveler that feels more attracted to desert areas, or the independent travelers, or multiple-vehicle-trips travelers, or also tag-along-tours travelers ([Taylor and Prideaux 2008](#)). Moreover, it could also include active/adventure tourism and geo-tourism; among other business initiatives, such as motels that can improve the mix of attributes, they are advertising to attract drive tourists along the route ([Shanahan 2003](#)). As a consequence of distinct tourist segmentation, literature suggests that the number of activities in which drive tourists participate depends significantly on the segment they belong to ([Pennington-Gray 2003](#)).

DT routes demonstrate a great tourism potential because of the heterogeneous interest amongst driving tourists. Its strength relies mostly on the aforementioned development of attractions, a profound understanding of the drive tourist, community involvement, effective interpretation, and infrastructure ([Hardy 2003](#)). The output could be substantial economic return, for example, through an increasingly entrepreneurial attitude within communities ([Zheng et al. 2016](#)). Driving tourists can contribute to the improvement of the local economy by staying in accommodations along the road, visiting local villages, and buying local products related to the local heritage, in which senior tourists constitute a central segment ([Prideaux et al. 2001](#)).

The driving forces behind tourists' travel choices, the main motivational influences include the destination attractiveness, the desire to enhance one's relationship and socialization, discover new places, and experiencing feelings of enjoyment ([Buffa 2015](#); [Wu et al. 2018](#); [Patterson et al. 2015](#)). Motorcycle tourists are a good example of customers that value infrastructures, environment, hospitality, and good services ([Frash et al. 2018](#)) in DT routes. They are good customers, who normally return to the same routes and bring others with them. DT routes managers need to look for the different tourist profiles and develop strategies and promotional campaigns accordingly, in order to capture their attention and visit overtime, with direct impacts on the local economy of the area ([Frash et al. 2018](#)). In so, there is a need to develop segmentation strategies that match the types of tourists targeted by destination ([Tkaczynski and Rundle-Thiele 2019](#)), for both international and domestic tourism ([Lin et al. 2020](#); [Leick et al. 2021](#); [Tripathi and Shaheer 2022](#)).

### 3. Environmental Dimension

Environmental issues are also very important to evaluate sustainability. Several authors ([Ooi et al. 2018](#); [Taylor and Carson 2010](#); [Saluja et al. 2022](#); [Dou et al. 2022](#); [Echeverri et al. 2022](#)) argue that the development of sustainable tourism should be based on the suitable usage of natural resources and the cautious improvement of natural processes of the sites. In terms of DT routes, several authors mention the importance of the environmental issues that need to be balanced in order to protect natural resources and assure that new investments can provide both biodiversity conservation and positive economic impacts for the local community.

There are environmental goals that guide the development of tourism, aimed at enhancing and protecting the environment of DT routes. There is a need to balance tourism with the protection of the natural resources. Yet, the degree to which biodiversity goals drive tourism, especially with respect to infrastructure, is poorly understood, while investments in infrastructure must keep up with successful biodiversity conservation for tourism to create attractive economic revenue ([Echeverri et al. 2022](#)).

Regarding the relationship between tourism development and the environment, although the latter is sometimes identified as a restraint, it turns out that it often enhances destinations' competitiveness instead ([Guizzardi et al. 2022](#)). For example, the migration of more than a million wildebeest in the Serengeti-Mara, in Africa ecosystems, generates economic benefits through ecotourism and strengthens the continued conservation of ecosystems that contain wildlife resources ([Larsen et al. 2020](#)).

It is worthwhile to identify and categorize all the elements present in DT routes that can attain an important impact at the environmental level, and are representative of the site, of scientific and recreational interest. It is valuable to acquaint the scenery, road facilities, and available activities that might have a significant impact on drivers' satisfaction. For example, for the Chinese drive tourists, the responses of the local community to their trip, as well as central environmental issues, in particular air quality, are peculiarly key concerns ([Wu et al. 2018](#)).

There are ways that accomplish a balance between tourism enhancement and the protection of natural resources, such as the cooperation between local actors in order to develop a sustainable model of tourism, that protect the main environmental characteristics of the areas along the route and contribute in a positive way for the overall community. The tourism industry can collectively respond and adapt to changes, based on human interactions with sensitive ecosystems through resiliency, innovation, and adaptation, allowing people to combine natural issues of the route and their cultural value. These measures can improve drive tourists' experience, thus allowing for tourism development ([Ooi et al. 2018](#); [Ejelstul and Fyall 2015](#)).

Cooperation amongst the diverse stakeholders (scientists, local authorities, owners—public and private institutions) is needed to distinguish the potential of the natural resources and improve the safety of the environment—for example, for the people who drive through natural environments, often at fast speeds and more destination-oriented, whose interest for the sites along the route is relative and likely not fully exploited ([Ooi et al. 2018](#); [Saluja et al. 2022](#)).

Another way of interest to lead a balanced support of the natural resources in DT routes relies on the tourists' profiles in terms of educational and demographic segmentation that impact on their decision-making processes, motivations, and behaviors. For example, a distinction is made between hard path young tourists and soft path young tourists. Their different profiles should be deemed in destination strategies, as the strong sympathy of the former to sustainability suggests the likelihood of developing offers that optimize some distinctive features of a territory ([Buffa 2015](#)). Thus, planning the DT routes is demanded to open further paths, able to include the needs of several actors, such as decision makers, residents, local firms, and tourists for the management and preservation of DT routes ([Ejelstul and Fyall 2015](#)).

### 4. Social Dimension

The social dimension of sustainability comprehends a social viewpoint to approach the socio-cultural outcome of tourism development. Consumers are deemed as identity seekers, in which the sensory experience of tourism creates a unique link for visitors with the destination, therefore providing memorable and, thus, authentic experiences ([Esau and Senese 2022](#)). In this way, sustainability adds value to the input of people to tourism development and to the development of the DT routes to accomplish the growth of the local economy and ensure the approval of tourists' demand. Sustainability also embraces the impacts of tourism development on ameliorating the quality of life of the local communities in the long range, emphasizing their community identity and authenticity, whilst linking tourists' happiness with the local quality of life at a destination ([Jiang and Lyu 2022](#); [Paniagua et al. 2022](#)).

A literature review allows people to understand that social cultural repercussions in DT routes is connected to the creation of community identity and collective participation in the decision-making process of tourism development. Some authors refer the potential of DT routes to the economic revitalization of less attractive regions ([Wu 2015](#); [Liu et al. 2022](#); [Taylor and Prideaux 2008](#)), mainly because these territories are identified and shared by different visitors, on social media or even on live streams ([Saluja et al. 2022](#)). Visitors play an important role in the informal promotion of a DT route, improving the knowledge of the areas for others that are not so familiar with them.

The potential of the DT routes with respect to the social and economic revitalization of previously tourism, less attractive regions has been mentioned by studies of this topic ([Jiang and Lyu 2022](#); [Paniagua et al. 2022](#); [Li et al. 2022](#)). Some territories were put on the map by tourism live streamers' while sharing their travel experience, in terms of entertainment and self-presentation, in which monetary incentives are identified as a central motivation. ([Li et al. 2022](#)). Additionally, by improving eco-tourism practices throughout the route, mainly in peripheral regions less developed ([Ramsey and Malcolm 2018](#)), allow the development of some adventure tourism activities, being more attractive and allowing the improvement of roads and creating some synergies along the route between destinations (i.e., cities, villages) ([Qiu et al. 2018](#)). Either the escape to an attractive destination, or the appeal of the rally itself, the desire to socialize, was leading motivational influences ([Wu and Pearce 2017](#)).

Authors argue that tourism development can improve the quality of life of hosting communities, suggesting that drive tourism could create a community engagement and garner their support, mainly if they perceive that public entities and route managers to be creating strategies under sustainable principles with correct planning measures that could benefit the overall community ([Fjelstul and Fyall 2015](#); [Carson and Taylor 2008](#); [Dou et al. 2022](#)). Furthermore, scenic travel routes have been developed to offer opportunities for tourism and to promote the economic development of rural areas. However, maintaining the site attraction requires a collaborative destination management effort ([Lemky 2017](#)).

With the involvement of all the main actors and a collaborative destination management effort, a DT route can allow for the improvement of job opportunities and development of rural areas and local and familiar businesses. Some authors believe that local entrepreneurship can allow the development of a more sustainable quality of life of the residents ([Filimonau et al. 2022](#); [Saluja et al. 2022](#); [Sykes and Kelly 2014](#); [Mahadevan 2014](#); [Armbrecht 2014](#)). Tourism development along DT routes impacts substantially the sense of community along the host destinations, while offering visitors core cultural experiences ([Patterson et al. 2015](#)), shaped by a closer interaction with residents and their cultural traditions, enhancing their proud as a community. Also it is important to note that being accessible by car is a motive of proud for many communities, which means that they are connected to other regions and they can be more attractive for visitors and tourists. A good example is Africa, that in the first decade of the twentieth century, through motor touring and by printing road reports became more known ([Pirie 2013](#)). Nevertheless, support to local initiative and infrastructures are sometimes scarce as in the case of parks. In particular, park capacity, to support the drive-tourism experience, in terms of caravanning and accommodation facilities ([Caldicott and Scherrer 2013a](#)). Community identity has a symbolic nature with the function of representing reality, as the constructs have been found to manage sport tourists' safety risk perceptions, in how the interrelationships amongst these constructs can positively influence repeat visitation ([George et al. 2013](#)).

Local communities believe in the significance of including DT in their identity to preserve their history, through memory, as memory is a crucial factor in choosing a destination due to its impact on the tourist experience at the destination and on the sharing of the experience with others after the trip, which contributes to the process of identity formation ([Marschall 2012](#)). Nonetheless, when these sites suggest negative memories, it is therefore realized as negative heritage, becoming crucial to create a new narrative ([Marschall 2012](#)). Moreover, it is important to develop products and experiences that reflect the motivations and experiential aspirations of their target as in the case of 4WD tourism in Australian desert areas ([Taylor and Prideaux 2008](#)), as there appear to be market segments based on motivations, activities, and demographics, which resemble a diversified marketplace ([Taylor and Carson 2010](#)). This process of integrating DT routes into the community's identity is often hampered by the difficulty in assuming DT routes as part of local identity, even though the inclusion of one or more professional rally sports teams, for example, among a community, with limited extent in terms of self-drive sports impacting and representing marketing opportunities for the host communities ([Taylor and Young 2005](#)), in the field of tourism behavior ([Woodside et al. 2004](#)).

Finally, the segment of senior travelers go on holiday, travel by car, and prefer the non-school-holiday periods for travel ([Prideaux et al. 2001](#)); whereas, younger travelers would rather seek fast driving irrespective of the time of year and aim to achieve an 'authentic' driving experience ([Gross 2020](#)). Either way, driving tourists engage in self-drive tourism due to the feelings of safety, adventure, and discovery that it offers compared with other modes of transport, ([Butler et al. 2021a, 2021b](#)), through which, after the pandemic of COVID-19, has become a tourism mode that enable tourists to travel freely ([Gross 2020](#)), by using at its best new vehicles technologies ([Brida et al. 2013](#)), including in caravans ([Caldicott and](#)

Scherrer 2013b), according with each ones' economic conditions (Grechi et al. 2017), driving contexts (Thompson and Sabik 2018), and extant key factors for the successful development of touring routes (Dahl and Dalbakk 2015; Prideaux 2020).

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