



## Ecological Sustainability Activities in Travel Agencies: A Research on Encourages and Barriers

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### Abstract

In the research, it is aimed to determine the factors that encourage and barriers the ecological sustainability practices of travel agencies. In this regard, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 travel agency managers operating in Istanbul. The data analyzed by the use of MAXQDA 2020 analysis software. Results of the analysis revealed that travel agencies don't have enough knowledge in regards to sustainable tourism and ecological sustainability concepts and applications. In addition, it is seen that very few of the travel agencies have written policies, principles, and rules, in regards to ecological sustainability applications, which may lay a path firms and managers during managerial processes. Along with these, it is also determined that travel agencies have a low rate of participation to voluntary environment programs and certification applications for preserving ecological environment. First of all, this study is important in terms of contributing the literature since there are very limited number of studies which inspect the subject of ecological sustainability from the perspective of travel agencies. Secondly, it is also important to create a scale in regards to ecological sustainability applications and to provide managerial insight to travel agencies which are critical actors in terms of managing ecological sustainability due to their role of mediation between supply and demand.

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## 1. Introduction

The main purpose of the businesses in the tourism sector is to increase their economic outputs, thus improving their competitiveness and ensuring its continuity. Although economic indicators are taken into focus, it is clear that tourism practices that will be carried out without considering the socio-cultural and natural environment will cause serious losses in the future. The importance of businesses working to build their own future in the tourism sector in terms of saving the socio-cultural and natural environment, which are the main supply sources of tourism, and carrying it to the future and ensuring sustainability cannot be ignored (Amoako et al., 2022).

Travel agencies have the ability to manage and influence sustainability initiatives at the sectoral level, due to their intermediary role between supply and demand components in the tourism sector (Sigala, 2008: 1590). The power of managing the preferences of tourists and influencing the practices of suppliers and destinations, increases the importance of travel agencies in the process of managing the effects of touristic activities. At this point, travel agencies should tend to sustainability activities and integrate sustainable management practices into their business processes, in order to reduce the negative effects on the economic, socio-cultural and natural environment caused by touristic activities and to increase the positive effects. This situation has led to the questioning and discussion of the function and role of travel agencies in the sustainability process (Kıvılcım, 2020 ; Russell et al., 2008: 126).

The importance of the implementation of the sustainability process of travel agencies at the sectoral level, enabled the evaluation of sustainability initiatives in this businesses. In this context, sustainability areas in travel agencies

(Arica, 2020; Budeanu, 2005; Hamid & Isa, 2020; Kivilcim, 2020; Marin-Pantelescu et al., 2017), eco-labeling (Tepelus, 2005; UNEP, 2005), factors which barriers sustainability initiatives (Arica & Çorbacı, 2017; Budeanu, 2007; Khairat & Maher, 2012; Tepelus, 2005) and the opportunities that sustainability will create (Arica, 2020; Khairat & Maher, 2012) have been evaluated in the literature.

Turkey is among the countries that attract the most tourists in the world, it is a country where sustainable use of touristic resources is important. Thus it is inevitable for the negative effects of tourism to emerge and spread more rapidly in countries that are heavily flooded by tourists. This situation necessitates the implementation of sustainability initiatives by all stakeholders in the tourism sector. The aim of the research is to examine the sustainability situation in travel agencies. In addition, the research aim to determine the factors that encourage and barriers the ecological sustainability practices of travel agencies from the perspective of managers. With the research, the sustainability practices in travel agencies in Turkey will be revealed from the manager's point of view, and the framework for improving the activities at the sectoral level will be presented by determining the point of sustainability in tourism. In addition, it will be possible to determine the opportunities that sustainability will provide in travel agencies. At this point, in the research, the path will be presented in terms of determining the factors which barriers the sustainability initiatives in the agencies, determining the steps to be taken to eliminate these factors and thus accessing the opportunities.

## 2. Literature Review

Sustainability and sustainable development, which has its origins in the 1970s and is accepted as a universal agreement, is defined as meeting the needs of the present and saving the resources that will meet the needs of the next generation (Brundtland, 1987: 8). Middleton and Hawkins (1998: 247) explain sustainability as a state of balance between the activities of the human population and their natural and socio-cultural environment. Çakar (2013) and Dönmez (2016) associate sustainability with the balanced consumption of natural and socio-cultural resources. Tourism is one of the sectors where natural and socio-cultural resources can be consumed quickly and unconsciously. This situation causes the idea of sustainability, which is at the forefront of the economic development policies of countries, correspondence to the concept of sustainable tourism in the tourism sector.

World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines sustainable tourism as the management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs are met while creating cultural integrity, necessary ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems (UNEP, 2005: 7). Leung et al. (2001: 23) describe sustainable tourism as a development that aims to reduce possible threats while preserving opportunities for the future, while meeting the requirements that will ensure the development of destinations that accept tourists.

According to Arica (2020), there are some prerequisites for the sustainability idea in the tourism sector to be met in practice. The most important of these is the active participation of all stakeholders in the sustainability process within the sector. Accordingly, public and private sector, businesses, local folk, tourists, civil society actors should establish cooperation mechanisms with the focus on managing the sustainability process effectively and efficiently and all stakeholders should support the process. Budeanu (2007) emphasizes that travel agencies have an important position in ensuring sustainability in the tourism sector with their relations with both tourists and service providers, touristic region management and local people. Amoako et al. (2021) points out that travel agencies have an important function in mobilizing and enabling sustainable development at the sectoral level with the power to affect tourism supply and demand components. Travel agencies have a critical role in determining the direction of the tourist flow, contributing to the development in the tourist region, and ensuring that stakeholders in the sector can contribute to sustainability by directing their behaviors, intentions, attitudes and practices (Fennell, 2003: 116). While travel agencies may cause an increase in tourism-related destruction with wrong practices (Kivilcim, 2020), they will be able to minimize the destruction and deterioration caused by touristic activities by supporting the development of sustainable tourism forms (Wijk & Persoon, 2006: 383).

Travel agencies' attempts on sustainability has come into agenda with the American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA). ASTA has created a green travel program guide consisting of five pages and nine sections for environmentally friendly travel. The most comprehensive framework for sustainability activities in agencies was presented by Tour Operators Initiatives (TOI) (2003) and Travellife (2007). These organizations have set criteria in five areas for effective

and efficient sustainability initiatives in travel agencies. These areas are described as: internal management, supply chain, product production and management, relations with destinations and relations with customers. TOI (2003) and Travellife (2007) point out that the implementation of sustainability initiatives in these areas is important for travel agencies to promote sustainability at sectoral level.

Despite the role and function of travel agencies in ensuring sustainability at the sectoral level, there are some obstacles to their orientation towards sustainability activities. In the researches, these obstacles are explained as obstacles arising from state, public and local governments (Budeanu, 2000; Schwartz et al., 2008; Polat, 2022), organizational obstacles (Arıca & Çorbacı, 2017; Curtin & Busby, 1997), financial obstacles (Dinica, 2006; Kivilcim, 2020; Marin-Pantelescu et al., 2017; Tepelus, 2005; Türkoğlu, 2022), employee-based obstacles (Arıca & Çorbacı, 2017; Budeanu, 2007; Khairat & Maher, 2012), customer-based obstacles (Arıca, 2020; Budeanu, 2007; Khairat & Maher, 2012; Tepelus, 2005), supplier-based obstacles (Budeanu, 2007; Hamid & Isa, 2020; Kivilcim, 2020), market-based obstacles (Arıca, 2020; Khairat & Maher, 2012), touristic region-based obstacles (Budeanu, 2007; Khairat & Maher, 2012; Kivilcim, 2020;) and international barriers (Arıca, 2020; Polat, 2022). Arıca (2020) argues that agencies that support sustainable development at the sectoral level can gain some opportunities with the elements that lead travel agencies to be passive and defensive in participating in sustainable tourism activities. Accordingly, travel agencies can provide efficiency and efficiency in organizational structure and functioning with sustainability initiatives (Arıca, 2020; Tepelus, 2005; UNEP, 2005), develop employees (Arıca, 2020; Budeanu, 2005; Budeanu, 2007;), achieve financial outputs (Khairat & Maher, 2012; Kivilcim, 2020; Kilipiris & Zardava, 2012; Marin-Pantelescu et al., 2017), improve service outputs (Arıca, 2020; Marin-Pantelescu et al., 2017), increase competitive power (Arıca, 2020; Budeanu, 2007; UNEP, 2005), improve the brand and its image (Arıca, 2020), and improve relations with stakeholders in the sector (Arıca, 2020; Budeanu, 2000).

### 3. Methodology

This study, which aims to examine the sustainability situation in travel agencies towards ecological sustainability applications, adopts phenomenology, one of the qualitative research designs, as its research design. In qualitative research, phenomenology is defined as discovering participants' past experiences related to a phenomenon or a concept (Cresswell, 2013). According to Baş and Akturan (2017), in phenomenology research, studies focus on individuals' subjective experiences and try to determine their perceptions or the meaning they assigned to the phenomenon in question. Moreover, phenomenology design helps researchers to discover the facts individuals experience during their daily lives but can't explain in detail (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). In this regard, since this study aims to reveal the subjective experiences and perceptions of personnel working in travel agencies towards ecological sustainability applications in detail, the researchers chose to adopt the phenomenology design. The phenomenon in question in the research is "*ecological sustainability applications*". Additionally, phenomenology studies are varied in two subcategories as interpretive (Van Manen, 1990) and experimental (Moustakas, 1994). In this study, the experimental phenomenology approach which is presented by Moustakas (1994) is adopted. In experimental phenomenology studies, a detailed description of the participants' experiences takes a larger part while the researchers' interpretations take a lesser part (Moustakas, 1994). In this regard, this study mainly focuses on determining the facts through direct quotations inferred from the interviews while it has little focus on researchers' interpretations.

#### 3.1. Sample Group

Sampling strategy of phenomenology studies is purposeful sampling strategy which is commonly used in qualitative research (Baş & Akturan, 2017). Purposeful sampling helps to obtain detailed information from individuals who are considered to be knowledgeable about the subject (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). In this regard, in the name of obtaining detailed information from travel agency managers on ecological sustainability applications, the sample had been determined through purposeful sampling method. Purposeful samples vary as several types (Patton, 2014) and in this study the sample had been determined through maximum variation sample method. In maximum variation sampling, the aim is to ensure maximum reflection of the variety of individuals in small sample groups (Patton, 2014). In accordance with that, 18 people who work at various group A travel agencies which operate in Istanbul with various educational levels, genders, positions, and years of expertise had been identified through maximum variation sample method as the sample group of this study. Demographic information of the participants is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Demographics of the participants

Participant No	Gender	Position
P1	Male	Manager
P2	Male	Manager
P3	Male	Manager
P4	Male	Manager
P5	Male	Manager
P6	Male	Manager
P7	Male	Manager
P8	Male	Manager
P9	Male	Sales Director
P10	Male	Sales Director
P11	Male	Sales Director
P12	Male	Sales Director
P13	Male	Manager
P14	Male	Manager
P15	Male	Manager
P16	Male	Manager
P17	Famale	Manager
P18	Famale	Manager

There isn't a precise limit of number of participants required for the sample group in qualitative studies. Common method is to stop adding participants when the new participants aren't able to provide new information, in other words when the data reached a saturation point (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Shenton (2004), identified the repetition of the information as the main criterion for determining the sample size. In this study, repetition of the information started with the 16th interview. Researchers carried out two more interviews to check if there are any more new information that can be acquired. Finally, they decided to end the interviews since the repetition continued in the last two interviews and no new information acquired.

### 3.2. Data Gathering Method and Tools

In phenomenology research, it is important to carry out concentrated and profound interviews during data gathering stage to reveal the experiences of participants with the phenomenon. In addition, it is also advised for researchers to take notes and record the interviews (Sanders, 1982). In this regard, semi-structured interviews were carried out with 18 people who works at group A travel agencies which operate in Istanbul. In qualitative research interviews, participants don't just answer the research questions but also researchers get insight in regards to participants' subjective perspectives towards facts and happenings (Weiss, 1995). In accordance with that, in this study researchers adopted interview method to discover the perspectives of managers of travel agencies towards the concept of "ecological sustainability applications" in detail. The interviews took place in the participants' offices and took 30-45 minutes. Before the interviews, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and they were ensured about their confidentiality. In addition, participants were asked for their permission for the recording of the interviews and with the consent of participants all interviews have been recorded with a voice recorder. The interview questions were formed after a detailed examination of related literature with the help of expert academicians on the field of tourism. During the interviews, following questions were asked to the participants:

- What is the concept of sustainable tourism? Could you explain briefly?
- Do you practice sustainable tourism activities in your workplace? If you do, are there any policies, rules, or principles in regards to sustainable tourism activities that you resort as a pathway? If your answer is yes, were those policies, rules, or principles constituted by yourself or you are taking benefit of already existing policies, rules, or principles?

- Do you consider to take part in voluntary environment programs and certifications systems for a more preserved ecological system.
- In your agency, is it preferred to have small tours with long continuity or high profits with short term sectoral continuity?
- Are there any social responsibility projects that your firm takes place in? If there are any, could you give information about those projects?
- Could you share your opinions on the applications of sustainable tourism activities in Turkey?
- What are the factors which barriers or restrict your firm to have tendency for ecological sustainability?
- What are the factors that encourage ecological sustainability initiatives? Do sustainable tourism activities provide economic benefits to firms?
- Do sustainable tourism activities provide benefits in terms of image?

Answers of the participants to those questions were transcribed without any changes got prepared for the analysis.

### 3.3. Analysis of the Data

In the study, the data analyzed through content analysis method. During the content analysis, researchers aimed to determine the data which is obtained from the participants and categorize the information derived from the data under themes to present it in a way that readers can have a better understanding (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Before starting the content analysis, the researchers read all the data carefully. After a thoroughly inspection of the data researchers started the process of coding. During the coding similar codes have been gathered in related groups and categories have been formed. While naming the categories researchers made use of the related literature. During the content analysis, researchers used qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA 2020. MAXQDA 2020 is a qualitative analysis software that helps researchers to analyze “interviews, reports, tables, online surveys, focus groups, videos, voice files, literature, visuals, and pdfs” (MAXQDA, 2020). Cresswell (2017), emphasizes that he uses MAXQDA 2020 because of its ability to do a better documenting, easiness of coding and mapping function. During the study, to ensure trustworthiness and reliability, researchers applied strategies Yıldırım and Şimşek (2013) emphasized which are peer review, detailed description, and purposeful sampling. In this regard, by having prolonged interactions with the participants, researchers prioritized to gain the trust of the participants and by doing so aimed to obtain more trustworthy information from them. During the preparation of the interview questions researchers referred to opinions of experts and related literature. In the name of transferability, detailed descriptions have been presented with direct quotations from the participants’ answers and purposeful sampling was preferred.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Sustainable Tourism

Participants identified sustainable tourism as a tourism type which prioritizes quality service during travels, considers the customers satisfaction, provides important benefits in terms of continuity of the firms, doesn’t constitute a problem, doesn’t prevent anti-growth policies in destinations. In Figure 1, sustainable tourism theory model, consists of the participants perspectives, is presented. Statements of P2 and P3 support the statements above.

*“An important feature of sustainable tourism is that the products it offers is more quality than the products of mass tourism. In addition, since this tourism type has more considerate approach towards both nature and people, the services are provided without issues. Customer satisfaction is prioritized” (P2).*

*“Sustainability leads to a controllable development and it isn’t against growth. It also plays an important role for the continuity of the firms” (P3).*

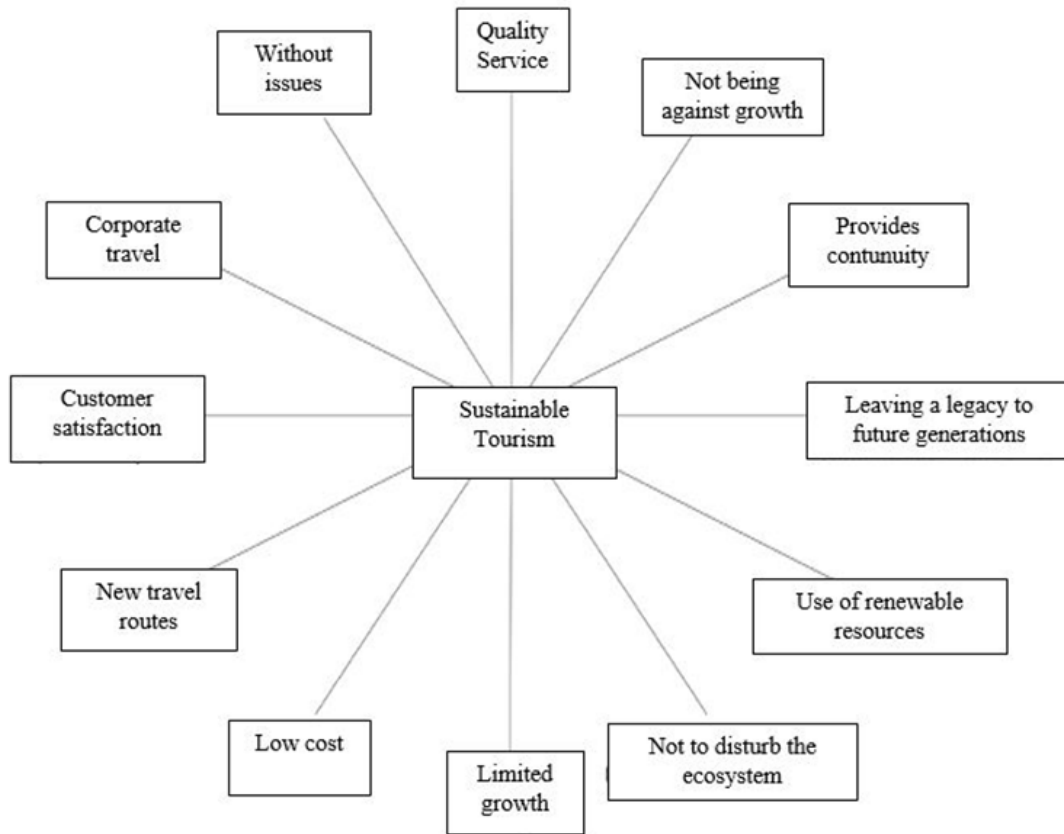


Figure 1. Sustainable tourism Code-Theory Model

Some participants identified sustainable tourism as a tourism type which creates new travel routes for destinations, decreases the costs of agencies, emphasizes the use of renewable resources such as solar power, safeguards our legacy to future generations by protecting the nature, and gives a more corporate characteristic to the travels of customers. Along with that, participant 5 expresses that contrary to being anti-growth sustainable tourism actually supports a controllable growth in his following statement.

*“In my opinion, sustainable tourism offers controllable and limited growth opportunities rather than an uncontrolled growth” (P5).*

#### 4.2. Sustainable Tourism Activities Applications

As the prominent sustainable tourism application in travel agencies, it is revealed that participants try to use social media tools such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter instead of traditional media materials such as banners and hand brochures. P8 emphasizes the role of social media among sustainable tourism applications by saying *“Previously promotion activities were being carried out with brochures and that were causing more paper consumption but now social media is the primary material for promotion and marketing activities”*. Sustainable tourism activities in travel agencies is presented in Figure 2 with code-subcodes divisions model.

Along with social media, there are several other sustainable tourism applications takes place in travel agencies such as preventing high power consumption by less electricity usage, using recycle bins for recyclable waste, and choosing materials which are made of recyclable materials. P15 shares his opinion on this subject with following statement:

*“In our agency, we are using waste bins with different colors to ensure the recycle of plastic, paper, battery, and glass wastes and we prefer materials that can be recycled” (P15).*

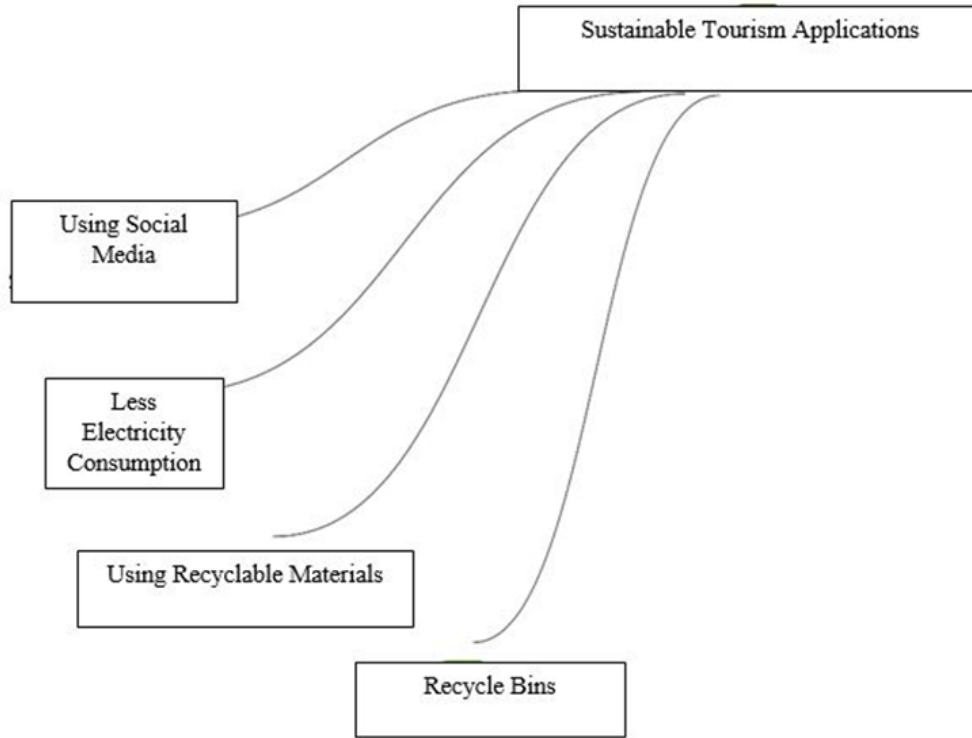


Figure 2. Sustainable tourism activities applications Code-Subcodes Divisions Model

### 4.3. Short Tours

Participants from the travel agencies emphasized that they mostly prefer short tours since they have long term profitability, they provide momentum, they are appropriate for every type of customers and they have minimal risks for the agencies. Especially P15 states the importance of short tours with the following: *“I prefer long continuity with short tours. They provide more development for both the firm and employees. It is also more impressive to make a name for the firm”.*

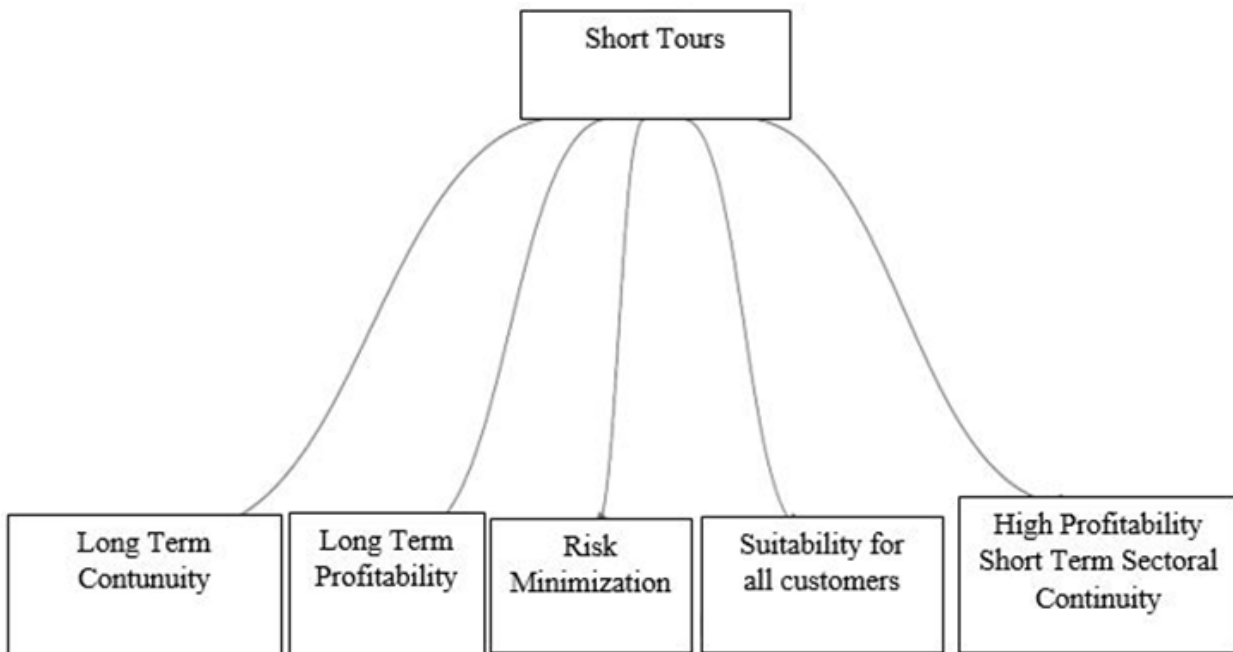


Figure 3. Short tours Hierarchical Code- Subcodes Model

On the contrary, some participants state that they prefer short term continuity with high profit instead of long-term continuity. Participant 17 expresses her opinion on the subject with the following statement: *“I prefer short term sectoral continuity with high profit. Because in my opinion high profits have more productivity”.*

#### 4.4. Suggestions to Improve Sustainable Tourism in Turkey

In the name of improving sustainable tourism activities in Turkey, participants offered several suggestions such as recruiting highly educated personnel who are sensitive to natural environment, prioritizing the protection of the country’s ecological balance, providing governmental incentive to the agencies that suffered financial losses during COVID 19 pandemic, approaching the ecological tours not only with commercial purposes, working towards Turkey’s promotion at the international fairs by the participants from travel agencies, and using touristic attractions affectively for promotions.

Opinions of P9 and P13 are as follows:

*“Nature isn’t something we inherited from previous generations. It is something we borrowed from future generations. In this regard, it is highly important to preserve ecological balance with sustainability activities. Preservation must be ensured not by penalties but by the activities carried out voluntarily” (P9).*

*“Agencies shouldn’t view ecological tours, organized as a part of sustainable tourism activities, with only the motivation of making income. Making only money in ecological tours must be excluded from being the main focus” (P13).*

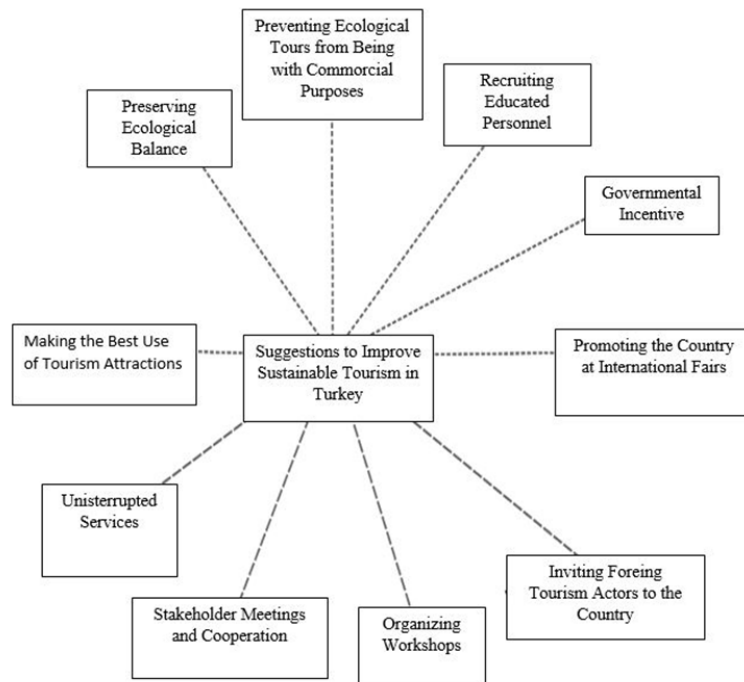


Figure 4. Suggestions to improve sustainable tourism in Turkey Code- Subcodes Divisions Model

Some other suggestions from the participants to improve the sustainable tourism applications in Turkey are; uninterrupted services offered in ecological or some other tours organized by the agencies, getting the support of stakeholders with cooperation, inviting foreign stakeholders from abroad who works at public or private sectors and organizing workshops to promote our country.

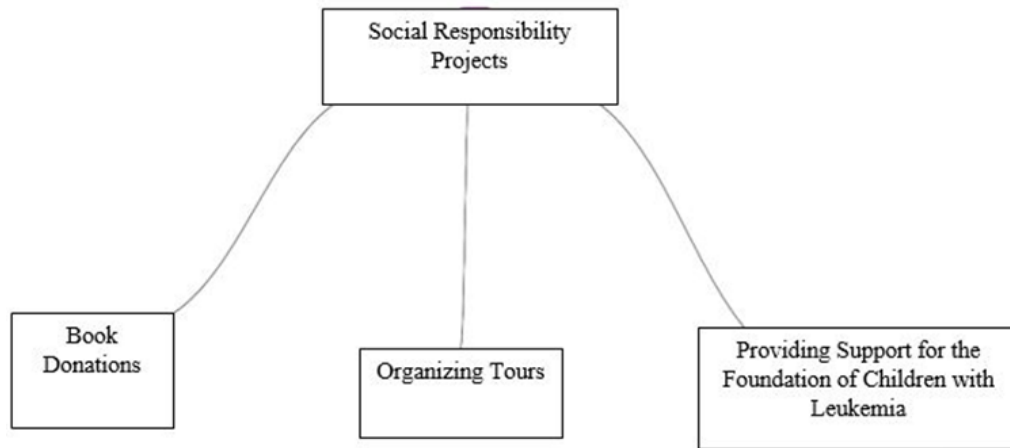
#### 4.5. Social Responsibility Projects

Participants state that agencies are providing support for several social responsibility projects. Especially in this regard, it is seen that the projects supported by the agencies are quite diversified. Examples of primary projects are presented with hierarchical code-subcodes model in Figure 5. According to Figure 5, agencies provide book donations, organize special tours for sick or poor kids, and providing support for The Foundation for Children with Leukemia within the concept of social responsibility projects. Opinions of P8 and P14 about this subject are as follows:



*“Our agency place emphasis on social responsibility projects. This year we provided financial support for the foundation works for the children with leukemia” (P8).*

*“Our agency provides support for the needs of children with cancer and down syndrome, we even organize tours we donate all the income to the association” (P14).*



**Figure 5.** Social responsibility projects Hierarchical Code- Subcodes Model

#### 4.6. Factors Barriers Ecological Sustainability

According to the participants there are several factors barriers the sustainability of ecological tours. Not having any compulsory policies for ecological tours on a governmental degree, the ease of mass founding agencies without having proper means and tools, agencies being more profit oriented than being service oriented, TURSAB’s lack of written policies on sustainability, lack of demand from customers towards sustainable tourism product and services and high demand for mass tourism products, lack of awareness in society in terms of protecting the nature, existence of commercial barriers, illegally established agencies are some of those factors. Following statements of P7 and P12 supports those claims.

*“According to me, TURSAB’s lack of policies is a big restriction. A policy is needed which may guide agencies in terms of organizing nature tour packages and applying the sustainability principles in their work places. TURSAB must create a procedure such as Green agency and provide green flags to agencies” (P7).*

*“Registered agencies are struggling with taxes and many legal procedures, and trying to survive. But the next thing you see is illegal agencies managing their deals through their connections and organizing tours for 80-90 people. This needs to be prevented. If this can be barriers, registered agencies can get stronger and develop themselves. The agencies that develop themselves approach those kinds of international concepts with more honesty and seriousness” (P12).*

In Figure 6, factors barriers ecological sustainability is presented with hierarchical code-subcodes model.

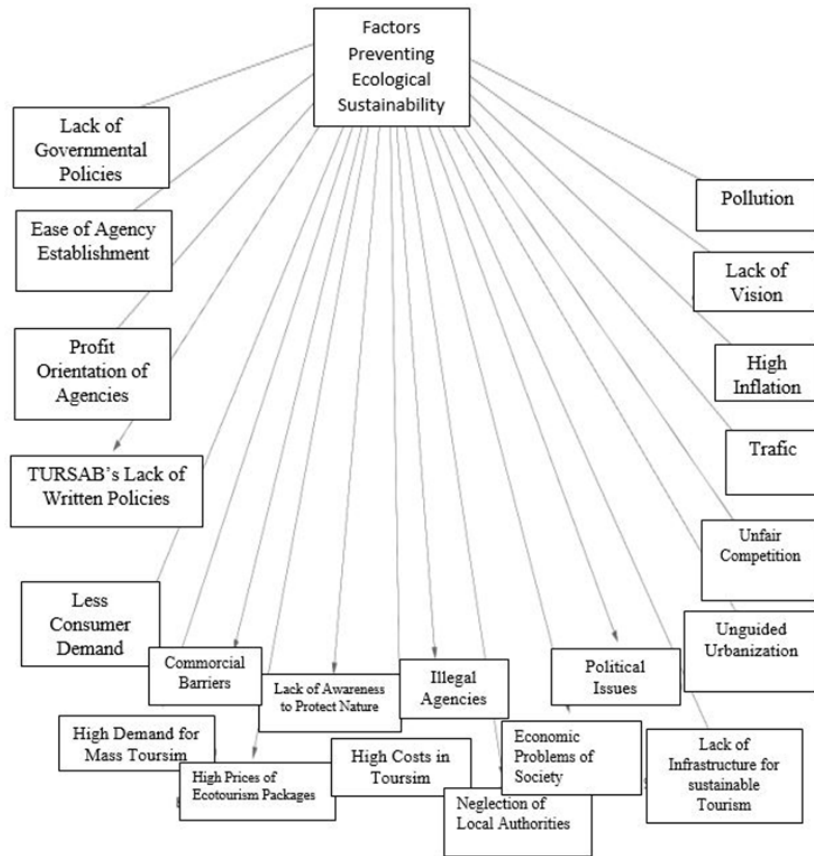


Figure 6. Factors barriers ecological sustainability Hierarchical Code-Subcodes Model

P12 states that high pollution in Turkey and unguided urbanization on important natural sites is a grand restriction for ecological sustainability and continues as follows; *“Important sites we can have ecotourism tours are being threatened by pollution. In addition, rate unguided urbanization in rural areas is rapidly increasing. Those kinds of negativities barriers ecological sustainability”* (P12). In addition to that, participants mentioned some other restrictions such as increasing cost in tourism sector, neglection of local authorities towards sustainability policies, Turkish peoples’ struggle against high inflation and economic problems, political issues, infrastructure issues, unfair competition between agencies, increasing traffic within tourism sites due to increased number of cars, and agency personnel’s lack of vision.

#### 4.7. Factors That Encourage Ecological Sustainability Initiatives

Ecological activities in travel agencies provides opportunities for both the agencies and society. In Figure7, factors that encourage ecological sustainability initiatives code-subcodes theoretical model is presented. Participants claim that ecological sustainability activities create a stronger image for the agency and especially makes the firm quite sympathetic in the eyes of customers who are sensitive towards nature. This situation plays an important role in terms of customer satisfaction, increased demand for agencies’ products and continuity of the agencies. P5 supports these claims with the following statements:

*“Some customers who are sensitive towards nature pays attention to agencies’ sustainability applications and activities during their tours. They feel sympathy for those agencies which offer nature sensitive products and services. Image of those agencies get stronger. Customers gets satisfied and they buy more tours from those agencies”* (P5).

In travel agencies, especially some participants state that by the use of social media, recyclable products and power saving bulbs they manage to decrease their consumption on resources. P10 states the following about that subject:

*“We used to have banners printed for our promotion. It was more costly. Now we are making our promotion without any costs thanks to social media. In addition, it prevents paper usage and provides sustainability”* (P10).

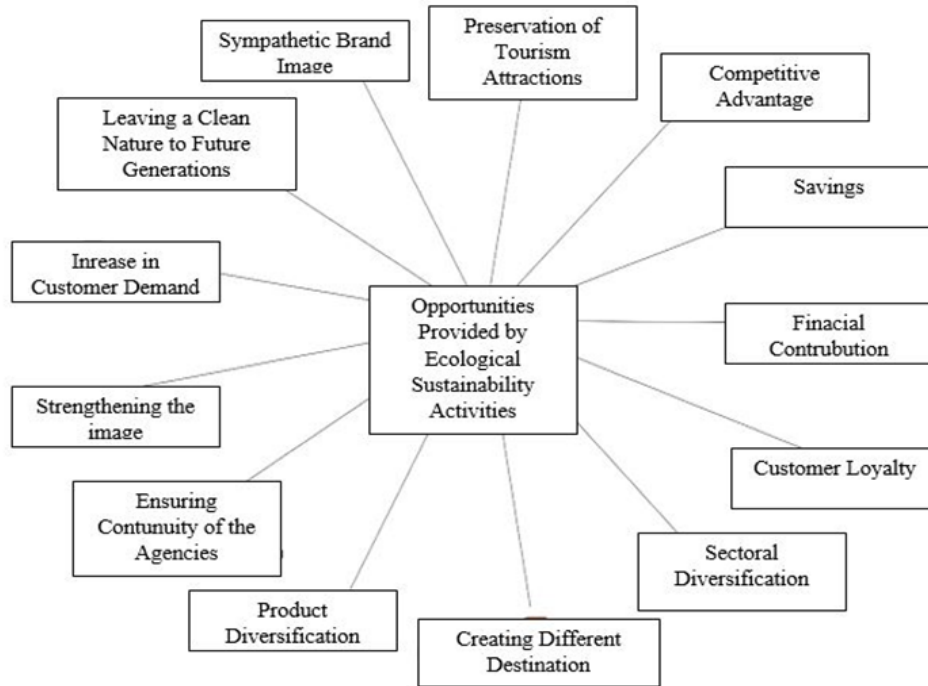


Figure 7. Factors that encourage ecological sustainability initiatives Code-Subcodes Theory Model

P8 emphasized that ecological sustainability activities barriers the destruction of tourism attractions in tourism destinations and help us to leave those attractions to the future generations as our legacy. In addition, some participants state that agencies that apply ecological sustainability activities cause product diversification, have increased incomes, cause a sectoral diversification, and may lead to creation of different destinations that host ecological tours.

## 5. Result

### 5.1. Theoretical Implications

The aim of the research is to examine the sustainability situation in travel agencies. In addition, the research aim to determine the factors that encourage and barriers the ecological sustainability practices of travel agencies from the perspective of managers. Different results were obtained from this research. Firstly, the travel agency managers' opinion on the concept of sustainable tourism was assessed. According to this; managers' sustainable tourism, quality service, customer satisfaction are important strategies for the continuity of their businesses, and it is seen as a type of tourism which does not possess obstacles against the expansion policies at destinations. Sustainable tourism is seen as an instrument, and a type of tourism, that enhances the quality of services (Budeanu, 2007) and increases the customer satisfaction (Arica, 2013), a strategy that helps the businesses continuity (Amoako et al., 2021; UNEP, 2005) and contributes to the development of destinations (Arica, 2020; Budeanu, 2000; Khairat & Maher, 2012). So, we can say that the result of research is corresponds with the studies.

Secondly, the sustainability practices implemented by travel agencies were examined. Results show that, in agencies; practices that support saving energy, water, paper and recycling applications are exercised within the scope of sustainability. This result is composed of performed activities within internal management under one of the dimensions of sustainability by the agencies by TOI and Travellife. According to most of the research that handle sustainability, there are certain proofs that support that sustainability is done in an efficient way within internal management of agencies (Arica, 2020; Budeanu, 2007; Khairat & Maher, 2012; Türkoğlu, 2022). And in addition, it has been shown that agencies prefer boutique tours rather than mass tours regarding the endeavours for reduction of destruction of socio-cultural environment. These endeavours have clearly shown us, that agencies consider sustainability when it comes to product, production and management. We can observe many studies that agencies consider sustainability when it comes to courses of product, production and management (Arica, 2013; Budeanu, 2007; Hamid & Isa, 2020; Tepelus, 2005). These results are in accordance with the known literature.

However, when the five dimensions of the sustainability areas are considered (internal management, supply chain, product production and management, relations with destination and customers), three of these dimensions have no equivalence when it comes to implementation in Turkey. This result creates the part of differentiation from the known literature. Budeanu (2007) It shows that, the sustainability applications may vary depending on country or business.

Thirdly, factors that barriers the sustainability orientation were examined. According to results of this research, the reasons are; the lack of policies of government that enforce ecological tours, the ease when it comes to creating agencies that lack the requirements, agencies focus on profit rather than service, TÜRSAB having no written sustainability policy, low demand for sustainable tourism, products and services and high demand for mass tourism products, lack of awareness towards environmental conservation of society, existence of commercial obstacles and unofficial agencies. These results are supported by many of the research. Budeanu (2007) Claims that demand for sustainable tourism practices are low because of travel agencies' policy insufficiency, whereas Arica and Çorbacı (2017) mentions, insufficiency of policies, lack of regulations and unlicensed agency activities possess obstacles against sustainability. Whereas Khairat and Maher (2012) claim; reasons of restriction to sustainability practices comes through the agencies' profit orientation and domination of demand for mass tourism products. Hamid and Isa (2020) mention that the lack of demand and market structure is what blocks the practices for sustainability actions. Moving on from here, we can state that these results are in accordance with the literature.

Fourthly, the opportunities that may appear considering travel agencies' orientation towards sustainability ventures are evaluated. Regarding this; results state that, with sustainability applications, agencies can improve service outputs (profit, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty), increase savings, improve the image and competitiveness power in market, diversify the products, differentiate within industry, conserving the touristic attraction and leaving a clean nature for future generations. Budeanu (2005) and Arica (2013) advocates that travel agencies can enhance their service outputs and power in market with usage of sustainability applications. Carbone (2004) emphasizes that sustainability is a method of saving for travel agencies whereas Hamid and Isa (2020) states that sustainability can be a strategy for agencies to differentiate them. If we evaluate these results as a whole, then we can say that it is in accordance with the literature.

Lastly, requirements for improvement of sustainability applications in agencies were examined. Regarding the research results; In order to improve sustainable tourism activities in Turkey emphasizing the importance of highly educated and responsive employees, caring about conserving the ecological balance of the country, state substitution for businesses that were affected by the recent Covid 19 pandemic by means of economy, approaching ecological tours not only as commercial purposes, promotion of Turkey in international conferences that are attended by agency executives and using tourism attraction efficiently when it comes to advertising and promoting. These results are supported by the literature. Türkoğlu (2022) states that agencies' success in sustainability applications are in the same class with the quality of employees, whereas Cavlek (2002) and Arica (2020) mentions that state substitution would encourage sustainability applications in agencies. According to Kilipiris and Zardava (2012), sustainability is possible when agencies can balance their economic interests with the sensitivity of conserving the natural and socio-cultural environment. Lozano et al. (2016) claims that sustainability in agencies are possible with the awareness on business level and tourist's demands. Regarding these claims, results are supported by the literature.

## 5.2. Managerial Implications

Travel agencies play a critical role when it comes to their position between supply and demand components within tourism sector and proactive realization of sustainable tourism policies. At this point, it is clear that sustainability practices in agencies would mobilize the sectoral stakeholders and have an impact in sectoral scale. So, perception towards sustainability tourism and obstacles against sustainability within agencies should be detected in order to come up with more efficient implementation in sectoral scale.

Results of the research shows us, the travel agencies' managers have information regarding sustainable tourism and its requirements. In addition, managers are aware of the opportunities that may appear with the sustainability applications. Yet, although the awareness, research results shows that sustainability when it comes to application in agencies are insufficient. This situation is closely tied with the existence of factors that block sustainability. So, for a

general agreement on sustainability applications and their development on sectoral scale, obstacles that block the sustainability ventures should be mitigated or removed.

Research results show that the biggest obstacles against sustainability in travel agencies are bureaucratic inabilities and financial worries. At this point, it is important that state should have an active attendance to process as a regulator, law maker and incentive. Encouragement towards sustainability applications, ratification of inclusive laws and putting them into use and their regulation would contribute to process. It is known that most of the market is dominated by agencies that promote mass tourism, and sustainability applications are mostly practiced by smaller travel agencies. And smaller travel agencies' power when it comes to competitiveness is weaker compared to bigger enterprises. On this matter, state should subsidize agencies that contribute to sustainability implementations in order to encourage more and more. Awareness and education are other points when it comes to implementation of sustainability. In tourism sector, sustainability is possible with participation of public and private sectors, local people, tourists, civil society organizations. At this point, in order to achieve sustainability at a sectoral level, increase in the number of applications that would raise the awareness of stakeholder, giving weight to attempts for raising the awareness both in written and visual media, educating employees should be emphasized.

To sum up, in a structure that is; being binded by canon, activated by regulation, optimised by infra and superstructure, actively participated by stakeholders, in agencies that inform both employees and customers in order to raise their awareness and achieve sustainability would led us to a point of reduced environmental damage and mitigated commodification.

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