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Barriers to Evidence-Based Sustainable Planning for Tourism: Perspectives from Ireland's Local Authorities

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Abstract: Local Authorities have significant tourism planning responsibilities and can benefit from evidence-based approaches. Qualitative interviews with 29 Local Authorities identified impediments to adopting indicators. Key barriers included more knowledge of indicator systems, training in using systems and understanding sustainability value and governance issues. However, transitioning to sustainable tourism through monitoring requires efficient resourcing of Local Authorities. Statutory adoption of indicators may be needed to enable evidence-based planning and policymaking. More informed planning approaches can help destinations respond to tourism issues and sustainability threats. Findings have implications for facilitating indicator implementation and evidence-based planning in other tourism destinations internationally.

Keywords: destination management; tourism planning; indicator systems; local authorities; sustainable tourism; governance

1. Introduction

Tourism has long been recognised for its potential to positively contribute to economic growth, development, and the social fabric of host destinations [1–3]. However, evidence has shown that tourism has not always met destination development expectations [4,5]. Effective planning with a sustainable long-term vision is vital for long-term economic and social development, visitor satisfaction, improved business success, social integration, and the protection of environmental assets [6,7]. McLoughlin and Hanrahan [8] and Mason [9] note how tourism planning is crucial to delivering on a destination's sustainability agenda. Therefore, planning is essential for securing long-term solutions to destinations' challenges while helping control current activities and coordinate sustainable and competitive product development at destination and local levels.

Previous research, however, has shown that approaches to tourism planning tend to be determined by existing planning and management functions [10,11]. Local Government Authorities play a significant role in tourism planning and its management and have a statutory responsibility for regulating land use and environmental and social protection [12,13]. Despite the tools and indicator systems available to guide Local Authorities in the democratic process of planning for and managing tourism, policymakers can face challenges in carrying out their statutory obligations at the local level. Although tourism indicator systems have been identified as management, information, and monitoring tools for the sustainable management of tourism and have long been the topic of much discussion and debate in tourism management and policy-related research, there exists little academic literature specific to the adoption and utilisation of indicator systems by Local Government planners and policymakers. More specifically, there needs to be more academic attention paid to the

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barriers and constraints of the implementation and utilisation of such indicator systems, which warrant further investigation. This paper examines the barriers and constraints to evidence-based sustainable tourism planning and management. It highlights possible solutions to maximise adopting and implementing such tools by relevant authorities, such as Local Government Authorities, moving forward. This is essential given the need for destinations to better prepare for, plan for, and respond to tourism issues and the challenges they may face in the future.

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) defines tourism indicator systems as a 'set of specific measures that can provide the necessary information to better understand the links between tourism and its impacts on the cultural and natural setting' [13] (p.4). Early studies highlighted their importance in tourism planning [14]. Their benefits have long been observed [7,15,16]. For example, Font et al [3] notes their ability to simplify complex data, allowing policymakers to quantify the actual situation in the tourism sector within destinations. The UNWTO [17] discussed the ability of indicator systems to provide in-time information to deal with pressing issues and to help guide the sustainable development of destinations. Similarly, Font, Torres-Delgado, Crabolu, Martinez, Kantenbacher, and Miller [3] identified the value of indicator systems in informing destination governance and policy decisions that inform destination competitiveness. Notably, such systems have been recognised for their flexibility and ability to fit into existing management structures [18], making them a viable tool for sustainable tourism planning [19]. The European Tourism Indicator System (ETIS) aims to help destinations measure and monitor their sustainable tourism performance using a standard, comparable approach [20]. It provides destinations with a thoroughly tested system and a more realistic set of core indicators to improve destination management and sustainability performance [20].

While this tool, together with additional indicator systems, has the potential to quantify, assess, monitor, measure, and communicate relevant information [21–23], the practical barriers and challenges in the implementation of these systems at the destination level continue to encounter difficulties [24], which warrants further attention across various destinations and political environments. Barriers, such as a lack of legislative enforcement and funding, have previously been acknowledged as crucial obstacles affecting the implementation of indicators at the local level [25]. Other authors have identified issues with resourcing regarding human, financial, and time [26]. Torres-Delgado et al. [27] noted constraints related to data calculation and interpretation for accuracy in results as possible impediments. In this paper, senior planners in Ireland's Local Authorities will be interviewed to initially examine the adoption and utilisation of indicator systems for sustainable tourism planning and management and, secondly, to examine what, if any, barriers, and constraints Local Authorities perceive in the implementation and utilisation of indicator systems for sustainable tourism and destination planning and management. This research offers lessons to be learned and solutions to maximise evidence-based approaches to sustainable tourism planning and management for other European destinations and destinations at the international level.

1.1. Sustainable Tourism Management

Discussions concerning the sustainability agenda for destinations still revolve around the challenges of monitoring growth limits and managing capacities [4,18,28]. McLoughlin and Hanrahan [8] argue that such concerns can be addressed by applying reliable tourism indicator systems [7,29,30]. However, applying these systems by Local Authorities remains a relatively under-researched topic.

The European Commission (EC) has introduced several tools and legislation to promote the sustainable development of European tourism, recognising that tourist destinations face increasing social, cultural, economic, and environmental challenges. The ETIS is one tool for sustainable destination management, launched initially in 2013 and revised in 2016, aimed at helping destinations measure and monitor their progress toward greater sustainability in tourism [20]. The core indicators of the ETIS provide information to understand better the links between the impact of tourism on the economic, cultural, and natural environment, making them an essential component of policy formulation processes for destinations [3,18,28,31].

However, there is a need for more knowledge regarding which stakeholders are responsible for implementing sustainable tourism indicator systems. Budeanu et al. [32] insist that sustainability is a function of governmental agendas, while Sharpley [4] discusses the role of Local Government in developing, implementing, and overseeing tourism strategies and plans to drive economic and social development. Implementing tourism indicator systems could make this task more efficient, as noted by McLoughlin and Hanrahan [8]. Therefore, this paper will question Local Authority senior planners on their implementation of indicator systems to understand if there may be any perceived barriers and constraints to indicator adoption and implementation at a local level.

Sustainable tourism planning is shaped by the governance structures and planning regimes at the local destination level [34]. Local authorities operate within a complex governance framework involving multiple stakeholders and policy domains that can influence their capacity to effectively implement sustainability initiatives like tourism indicators [34,35]. As the mandated bodies for local tourism planning, local authorities serve as a bridge between top-down governance efforts to encourage sustainability and bottom-up community needs [36]. The extent to which local authorities can fulfil sustainable planning goals through tools like indicators depends on their authority over planning decisions, funding access, staff capacity, and adaptiveness to complex evolutions in governance [28,32]. Analysing local authorities' use of tourism indicators thus provides insights into the connections between governance, planning, and sustainability objectives.

Dredge and Jenkins [37] noted the role Local Authorities have when it comes to the development and planning for tourism, with Charlton and Essex [38] highlighting their role in developing tourism policies and strategies for implementation in respective destinations. In the context of tourism planning and the role of Local Authorities, Elliot [39] pointed to the importance of political stability, security, and the legal and financial framework associated with Local Authorities. Maxim [40] further alluded to their legal responsibility for providing planning guidelines for tourist services after examining sustainable tourism planning by Local Authorities in London. However, moving towards an evidence-based approach to tourism planning depends on using quality indicators but also on the effectiveness and commitment of policymakers to apply them effectively and accurately [7,41].

While there is a need to expand knowledge on how destinations and policymakers can foster impactful sustainability in tourism through functional and practical planning approaches, the barriers to driving such measures and tools to advance sustainable practices in the industry require attention [42]. By addressing the barriers and challenges to developing an evidence-based approach to planning and, in turn, policymaking at the local level, policymakers can effectively champion sustainable tourism and evidence-based planning for tourism in destinations.

Delivering sustainability in tourism is a challenge for Local Authorities, according to Nunkoo [34]. Effective governance is crucial for sustainable tourism management, implementing sustainable tourism indicators, and achieving the UN sustainable development goals, as Rasoolimanesh et al. [22] noted. However, sustainable tourism involves numerous policy domains and stakeholders, potentially making it difficult for Local Authorities to effectively govern, as Hall and Jenkins [43] pointed out. Therefore, Wan [44] suggests exploring new ways to manage tourism planning to address this issue. Although Hamilton [45] notes that policy issues are now transcending administrative boundaries and the central government is exercising more control, Government Authorities in Ireland are still legally obligated to plan for tourism by developing specific CDPs.

While Ruhanen [36] contends that Local Authorities are mandated to present the local community's interests impartially, the actual ability of Local Authorities to work in the best interests of the local community or to further the objectives of sustainability in tourism has been questioned by both Bramwell [46] and Madrigal [47], who noted that many have been criticised for implementing short-term tourism policies that often lack direction. Moreover, Godfrey [48] pointed to Local Authorities in the UK who tend to engage communities only passively regarding tourism development. However, as McLoughlin and Hanrahan [8] noted, the application of tourism indicator systems still needs improvement among Local Authorities in Ireland. Therefore, this paper aims to identify the key barriers and constraints perceived by Local Authorities in Ireland in implementing sustainable tourism indicator systems.

1.2. Barriers to evidence-based sustainable tourism planning and management

The tourism sector and the ever-changing environment in which it operates pose unique challenges and opportunities for destinations and destination planners regarding evidence-based sustainable tourism planning and management. Maxim [49], in her exploration of sustainable tourism implementation in urban areas, found that obstacles lie in implementing sustainable tourism planning and policy into practice. This supports Janjusevic's [50] view on the necessity of reviewing current practices for sustainable tourism and evaluating their effectiveness. This review was conducted over a decade in Ireland, which found a moderate shift towards a more sustainable approach to tourism planning [8]. However, there is still a need for more evidence-based planning approaches.

Mihalic (2016) discussed how a need for more consistency in terminology could challenge tourism and evidence-based planning for tourism. Midgett, Deale, Bendickson, Weber, and Crawford [51] point to more expertise or education, which could form significant barriers to sustainable tourism development. Likewise, Luo, Chau, Chen, and Fan [26] acknowledged constraints, including perceived costs associated with meeting the sustainability agenda, a lack of awareness of sustainability issues, and training and employee motivation to achieve sustainability as constraints to implementing sustainable practices. Similarly, Dodds [25] and later Dodds and Butler [52] discussed how the policy and regulatory environment and minimal legislative enforcement of sustainability by tourism destinations often create challenges and obstacles to advancing the sustainability agenda. Both authors further noted issues surrounding management, managers' interests, and available human, financial, and time resources as barriers to implementing sustainable practices and evidence-based planning for tourism. What is important is the claim by Wanner [53], who noted there needed to be more consensus among stakeholders regarding who should be responsible for tourism policy implementation processes. This was identified as a barrier to delivering on sustainability agendas and advancing evidence-based planning for sustainable tourism.

Taking the political environment in which tourism operates together with the political will for action, the development of evidence-based tourism planning approaches can be hindered. In line with this, Dodds and Butler [52] argued the need to avoid placing economic development priorities over social and environmental considerations, which is a significant barrier to sustainable tourism management as Dodds [25] noted the need for integrating sustainable tourism and evidence-based planning into the broader policy context. This paper will question the perspectives of senior planners in Ireland's Local Authorities concerning the perceived barriers and constraints to evidence-based planning for sustainable tourism management.

2. Materials and Methods

A qualitative approach to research was adopted and utilised to determine the barriers and constraints to sustainable tourism management regarding the adoption and implementation of indicators by Local Government Authority planners. Qualitative research permits researchers to collect and analyse non-numerical data and is a valuable method for gaining a deeper understanding of the opinions and experiences of participants [54]. Through qualitative research, the authors can delve deeper into the topic and provide a more comprehensive picture of the practical barriers and constraints related to implementing tourism indicator systems from the perspective of Local Government Authorities in Ireland.

The use and acceptance of qualitative research have long been discussed, debated, and advocated in tourism management and tourism policy and planning literature [55–60] as a tool for gathering rich, in-depth data from real-world experiences [61]. Although qualitative research can be time-consuming and relies on the researcher's skills, Bryman [62] notes that qualitative research can provide an in-depth exploration and detail of a subject matter while also serving as a flexible and cost-effective method for data collection that allows for comparing individual perspectives. Given that this research involved gaining the perspectives and opinions of Local Government senior planners with a legal mandate to plan for tourism in Ireland, consideration needed to be given to the

most suitable research instrument for data collection within the qualitative research paradigm. Thus, qualitative semi-structured in-depth interviews were chosen as the most appropriate method for obtaining professional and personal opinions and experiences of tourism planners in Ireland.

2.1. Research Method

Semi-structured interviews have long been acknowledged as one of the most used qualitative methods of inquiry in tourism research [63]. Using qualitative semi-structured in-depth interviews, an examination of the perspectives of Local Authorities in Ireland regarding the barriers and constraints to adopting and implementing indicators for sustainable tourism planning and management was conducted. The semi-structured interview technique allowed the researchers to gather rich data, enabling them to establish connections between what people say they do and what they do, as noted by Fink [64]. This approach enabled the interviewer to explore the barriers that Local Authority tourism planners perceive when implementing tourism indicator systems as management tools to measure and monitor sustainability progress and performance through one-on-one telephone conversations. The interview method unfolded conversationally and fluidly, allowing participants to delve into essential issues [65]. The interviewing style aimed to extract additional insights, elaborations, and perceptions from interviewees on specific points of interest. This methodological choice provided valuable national baseline data.

2.2. Procedure

The primary qualitative fieldwork within this study involved conducting semi-structured interviews with senior planners from Local Authorities in Ireland who are legally responsible for planning and managing tourism at the local level. Informal, strategically open-ended questions were developed to uncover insights into the barriers and constraints that Local Authority planners perceive when adopting or implementing indicators for sustainable tourism planning and management (see Table 1). These questions were consistent and applied to all Local Authorities. They were formulated after reviewing international literature on tourism planning and the adoption and utilisation of indicator systems.

Table 1. Open-ended Questions Employed with Local Authorities.

1.	To what extent do the Local Authorities employ tourism indicator systems?
2.	Do/How do the Local Authority feel they would benefit from an indicator system for tourism policy and planning?
3.	What are the barriers and constraints of indicator implementation within the Local Authority?
4.	What is needed to ensure the implementation of indicator systems within the Local Authority?
5.	What resources would be necessary to help Local Authorities transition towards implementing tourism indicator systems?

After considering various interview methods, the researchers chose telephone interviews due to their convenience for both planners and researchers, which, in turn, facilitated greater accessibility to planners and higher response rates. This technique paid significant attention to how the interviews were conducted and the specific skills required to gather comprehensive insights into the planners' perspectives on indicator adoption constraints. These skills included probing, listening actively, and incorporating deliberate pauses [66]. These skills were crucial in guiding the interview process and obtaining more nuanced information.

Through semi-structured interviews, interviewees were allowed to develop their ideas and speak more extensively on the issues raised by the researcher. This approach allowed for a greater depth of knowledge regarding adopting indicator systems and the barriers and constraints to their implementation.

The questions were effectively explained to participants to ensure a clear understanding of terminology. Initially, phone calls were made to Local Authorities to identify Local Authority tourism planners, enabling the researchers to obtain contact information for tourism planners in Ireland's Local Authorities. Following this initial contact, an email was sent to planners outlining the research's purpose, assuring the confidentiality and anonymity of respondents, establishing credibility, and requesting them to schedule a convenient date and time for an interview.

Several difficulties were encountered during this process. One significant challenge was coordinating a suitable time for the planners, as the interviews typically lasted around 40 minutes. This scheduling issue resulted in delays in the data collection process.

2.3. Sampling and Selection

Local Authorities were chosen for this research based on their legal authority to approve or deny planning permission for tourism development projects and associated infrastructure. Additionally, they are legally required to develop strategic planning documents (CDPs) that include tourism policies for each county. The jurisdiction of each of these Local Authorities corresponds to twenty-six of the traditional counties of the Republic of Ireland (including the three Dublin Administrative counties). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a non-probability purposive sample of senior planners from twenty-nine Local Authorities in Ireland, resulting in a 100% response rate.

2.4. Data Analysis

Data were recorded and transcribed after each interview, facilitating a thematic analysis of key issues and patterns. NVIVO was also used to enhance the rigor and reliability of the data. This, in turn, provided a foundation for theory construction by identifying quotes and expected trends within the data. During this thematic analysis, comparisons were made between Local Authorities. A coding process was applied to each Local Authority's data to ensure complete anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. For instance, Local Authorities were referred to by numbers (e.g., Local Authority 10). Respondents were informed of their right to withdraw from the research process and to decline to answer specific questions. All information provided by the participants was treated with the utmost confidentiality to safeguard their privacy.

3. Results

From interviews with senior planners from Local Authorities, it became evident that they recognise the necessity of utilising Tourism Indicator systems to monitor sustainability performance in tourism. Nevertheless, it remains essential for Local Governments to supply information for evidence-based planning and policymaking [28]. The willingness of Local Authorities to embrace indicator systems still requires assessment. The responses from senior planners unveiled a shared perspective on the utilisation of indicators:

'No, and I doubt there would be any interest among us planners as we have other priorities'
(Planner 15).
'Currently no, I doubt, with the current resources available, that this would change any time soon'
(Planner 24).
'Using such indicator tools would all depend on staffing levels, resources, and funding. The
availably of such at the moment might pose a problem (Planner 7).
'I'm not sure about these indicator tools. The process would become too cumbersome' (Planner 2).

Local Authorities need to include valuable data provided by tourism indicator systems that could influence future policy implementation, as highlighted by [67] and [68]. This observation challenges Rasoolimanesh et al.'s [22] theory that tourism indicator systems often overlook governance issues, despite Hall's [35] and Hawkins and Mann's [69] recognition of the growing influence of governance in tourism and the role of organisations acting on behalf of the tourism industry. Gasparini and Alessia [23] point out that the European Tourism Indicator System (ETIS) is the only common framework for sustainable destination management developed by the European

Commission (EC). However, most senior planners stated they had never heard of it, and less than half expressed interest in such a tool. Nevertheless, most senior planners indicated that implementing tourism indicator systems in the tourism planning process would benefit their Local Authority.

> *'Yes, very much so. We have to base policy on evidence (Planner 25).*
> *'Possibly there is a benefit' (Planner 27).*
> *'Yes, I feel if supported with the necessary resources, then yes I feel they would benefit the development of tourism' (Planner 4).*

Despite the positive enthusiasm demonstrated by Local Authorities in Ireland for tourism indicator systems, it is crucial to emphasise that indicators and other monitoring tools are essential for ensuring sustainability in tourism [28]. Sustainability has become an established responsibility of Government Authorities, with necessary directives and policies aimed at facilitating the transition of destinations toward a low-carbon, climate-resilient, and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050.

However, it is worth noting that, despite the significance of the European Tourism Indicator System (ETIS), several senior planners acknowledged that it is not currently a legal requirement or a part of the mandate of Local Government. This raises the question of whether it might be necessary to establish a legal framework at the local level to ensure its nationwide implementation.

> *'Well, I'd say it would need to be legally required to ensure its compliance' (Planner 1).*
> *'I would be of the opinion that it would need to be made a legal requirement; that way, you would have the will at all levels to utilise these indicators' (Planner 4).*
> *'For the likes of things like indicators and specific tourism planning tools and documents, if they are not included in the national planning framework, then they wouldn't be considered at the local level. There are simply too many other issues that require our attention (Planner 3).*

The responses indicate that achieving sustainability in tourism through evidence-based planning and policymaking requires greater attention at the local level to manage and enhance performance across destinations' economic, socio-cultural, and environmental resource bases. Therefore, addressing this issue warrants increased attention. As recommended by senior planners, an evidence-based approach could provide a clear policy framework for utilising tourism indicator systems at the destination level, thereby helping ensure their widespread adoption.

Blancas et al. [2] suggest a more practical approach where supranational institutions should advocate for the importance of indicators to encourage policymakers to formulate policies based on real-time data. Regardless, Moscardo [70] argues that data is essential for enhancing the sustainable development of tourism destinations. However, Dymond [71] posed the question of how tourism indicator systems could be effectively applied by destinations over twenty years ago, and this question remains pertinent today. In this study, the authors inquired with senior planners about the resources required to facilitate the transition of Local Authorities towards implementing tourism indicator systems. More than half of the planners cited detailed information as one of the necessary resources.

> *'More information would be beneficial, especially for planners like me who are not familiar with tourism indicators' (Planner 18).*
> *'Detailed information would help' (Planner 24).*
> *'More information on their benefit would help' (Planner 14).*

This aligns with Dredge and Jenkins [37] and Elliot [39] who emphasised the importance of knowledge and training in tourism planning and sustainable practices for local authorities. It also supports the findings of McLoughlin and Maguire [31] and Moniche and Gallego [41], who highlighted the significance of effectively utilising indicators and securing commitment from policymakers. Therefore, providing training on the implementation and utilisation of tourism indicator systems becomes crucial for their successful adoption in local tourism planning.

> *'I do believe training would also benefit its use; not many Local Authorities would be familiar with these systems, it would need to be made easy for them' (Planner 21).*
> *'Detailed training on the use of these and maybe mentoring from, let's say, Fáilte Ireland would also be useful' (Planner 12).*

The challenges encountered in the practical application of tourism indicator systems have been discussed by Torres-Delgado et al. [21], who highlighted difficulties in calculating and interpreting results. Accessing destination-specific data sets was also found to be problematic. Additionally, Schianetz et al. [72] and Torres-Delgado and Saarinen [28] both noted issues related to jurisdictional boundaries and data composition.

To enhance capacity, senior planners suggested that additional training would be beneficial. One planner even recommended mentoring by Fáilte Ireland, the National Tourism Development Authority for Ireland (NTDA). The need for support from relevant institutions in implementing sustainability in tourism has been previously recommended by Rasoolimanesh et al. [22]. However, McLoughlin and Hanrahan [8] observed that national organisations have not provided sufficient guidance on applying tourism indicator systems in Ireland. Access to funding was another issue raised by several Local Authorities as a barrier to implementing sustainable tourism indicator systems.

While local authorities are increasingly involved in tourism development, their capacity to fund these services has yet to be largely unexamined [73]. Incorporating sustainability into their operations [3] poses financial challenges, particularly considering the under-resourcing of Irish local bodies [31]. Outsourcing data activities to academic institutions, as suggested by Thomas and Ormerod [74] and Font et al. [3], could provide local authorities with a more sustainable approach, aligning with Wan's [44] call for innovation in tourism planning.

The study's results shed light on the connections between governance, planning, and indicators at the local authority level. Participant responses revealed significant barriers related to limitations in knowledge, training, statutory integration, and resources—factors inherently tied to the broader governance and planning structures in which local authorities operate. As previously discussed, local authorities occupy an intermediary position between top-down governance initiatives and bottom-up community needs [36]. The findings suggest that the current governance and planning regime constrains local authorities' capacity to fully embrace evidence-based sustainability practices like tourism indicators despite recognising their potential value. Overcoming these barriers may require enhancing local authorities' adaptive governance capabilities and increasing their authority over planning decisions and resources (Torres-Delgado & Saarinen, 2014; Budeanu et al., 2016).

Hall [35] warns that sustainable tourism governance faces unique challenges due to its distinct set of institutions and policy actors. While over half of senior planners in Ireland's Local Authorities recognise the value of using tourism indicator systems in tourism planning processes, a fundamental statutory requirement imposed on Local Governments is necessary for their practical implementation. Bramwell and Lane [33] and Moniche and Gallego [41] emphasise that tailored and effective governance is essential for sustainable tourism. The need for more resources in Local Authorities hinders sustainable performance measurement, monitoring, evidence-based planning, and policymaking. More funding, staffing, training, and detailed information must be made available to local authorities to translate the sustainability agenda outlined in the National Planning Framework for Ireland into action. While sustainable tourism indicators should not dictate policymaking, they can help empower future growth in a planned, evidence-based, and sustainable manner. Achieving a robust sustainability vision and strategy for the industry necessitates tourism planning based on evidence and efforts to equip policymakers with the necessary technical knowledge.

Further research and discourse on adopting sustainable indicator systems by government authorities at national and local levels are needed. The findings from this paper represent a step forward in highlighting action areas that must be addressed by international, European, and national governments to better support and facilitate local authorities in implementing more evidence-based approaches to tourism planning. An evidence-based approach to tourism planning grounded in sustainability is essential to address the challenges that hinder effective, sustainable development and change.

4. Conclusions

While there is some recognition of the benefits of tourism indicator systems, Ireland's Local Authorities show only partial willingness to adopt and use them. However, for destinations to make significant strides towards extraordinary sustainability efforts in tourism planning and management, Local Authorities must recognise the importance of planning to safeguard the Irish tourism industry. Sustainability indicators, such as the European Tourism Indicator System, may become a statutory requirement imposed on Local Authority planners and policymakers by higher-level governance structures at European or national levels to foster impactful sustainability through tourism.

Nevertheless, barriers to adoption, such as inadequate resourcing in terms of funding, training, information, and staffing, as noted by Local Authorities in Ireland, have also been identified in the literature and must be addressed. Destinations can transition towards adequate levels of sustainable tourism by measuring and monitoring tourism progress and performance, which requires efficient resourcing levels within the Local Government Authority system. Moreover, it may need to be made a statutory requirement to adopt tourism indicators for Local Government to drive evidence-based tourism planning and policymaking within destinations. This is essential because, with more evidence-based approaches to planning for and managing tourism, destinations can be better prepared to respond to tourism-related issues and maintain the long-term sustainability of destinations.

To overcome these barriers and promote the value of sustainable tourism indicators and evidence-based planning and decision-making, their benefits as tools for quantifying, assessing, monitoring, measuring, and communicating relevant information should be comprehensively reported to senior planners. This may lead to the voluntary adoption such indicators to inform planning, policy, and decision-making. Without the collection and application of data, Local Authorities, particularly senior planners, are ill-equipped to plan for, respond to, or manage the challenges the tourism industry may face at the destination and community levels regarding potential impacts. Local Authorities must place a more pertinent focus on facilitating a transition towards greater levels of sustainability. However, to do this, it is recommended that the government recognise the value of evidence-based planning for sustainable tourism management at all levels and, in turn, provide an efficient level of resourcing to Local Government Authorities in terms of staffing, funding, information, and training to advance sustainability efforts and practices within the tourism sector in Ireland. The findings here may also offer lessons for other European and international destinations.

While this research focuses on implementing indicator systems and the perceived barriers and constraints to evidence-based planning for sustainable tourism management, further research is needed. Future avenues of research would benefit from exploring the barriers and constraints to evidence-based tourism planning and the uptake of indicator systems in other European or international tourism destinations. It would also be helpful to expand this topic to other case study destinations from a policy and Local Government perspective, potentially advancing contributions to knowledge concerning sustainable tourism governance and evidence-based tourism planning. Further research should also propose and present solutions to encourage and maximise the uptake of evidence-based approaches to sustainable tourism planning and management across other European destinations and internationally.

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