

## ENGLISH-SPEAKING TOURISTS' EVALUATION OF SUSTAINABILITY ATTRIBUTES IN CULTURAL TOURISM DESTINATIONS: THE CASE OF CUSCO<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract.** *Although guidelines for sustainable tourism exist, there is a lack of research discussing the sustainability of destinations as perceived by tourists. This study aims to explore sustainability from a demand-based perspective and determine which attributes of a destination are most mentioned by tourists in their reviews. Based on sustainability attributes defined from the literature and in-depth interviews conducted with travel experts, the study analyses comments posted on the TripAdvisor website for Cusco, a mainstream cultural destination. The findings determine that tourists primarily evaluate the destination's sustainability in connection to those aspects that are more likely to affect their own experiences.*

**Keywords:** *sustainability attributes, sustainable tourism destination, tourists' perspective, online reviews*

### Introduction

Tourism as one of the most significant and expanding sectors of the world economy is often presented as an engine for economic growth and development (APEC, 2012). On the other hand, the industry has also been accused of focusing on maximising short-term profits instead of long-term sustainability (Swarbrooke, 1999). As a result of growing knowledge and care about the negative impacts of tourism, the idea of sustainability as a *sine qua non* condition for tourism developments has emerged. Therefore, many theoretical and practical studies that provide a range of principles and guidelines have emerged to help balance economic growth with environmental protection and socio-cultural development.

Cultural tourism destinations are growing in importance in many countries around the world and becoming major tourist attractions. As cultural and heritage assets are generally fragile (Salazar, 2010; Sabec, 2014), it is

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essential that cultural heritage destinations embrace sustainability practices to ensure their continuance over time. In trying to ensure sustainability, the involvement of all stakeholders is vital, including tourists who are able to shape supply at the destination through demand (Swarbrooke, 1999). However, integrating tourists in the sustainability process of destinations is a challenge since they are unable to experience most of the sustainability attributes of tourism destinations directly. Hence, it is essential for destinations to know how to find ways to communicate sustainability to tourists. Despite the importance of this topic and the amount of research conducted on sustainable tourism, the majority of studies are from the supply-side perspective and do not consider the tourist's viewpoint.

Therefore, the purpose of the study is to analyse which aspects of sustainability of a cultural tourism destination are most considered by tourists in their online reviews on the place, and may therefore be considered as most important to them. This information is crucial in order to provide guidance to destinations wishing to better market their sustainability efforts to their current and potential customers. The list of sustainability attributes thus initially obtained from a review of the literature is then refined through interviews conducted with cultural tourism travel experts. Based on the sustainability attributes for a cultural destination thereby identified, the study analyses tourists' comments on these aspects of sustainability in the reviews posted on the TripAdvisor website for Cusco (Peru), a mainstream cultural tourism destination that is currently trying to become more sustainable in reaction to problems of exceeding capacity and environmental degradation, and which has invested in obtaining a sustainability accreditation. The study aims to improve understanding of which sustainability attributes in cultural tourism destinations are more frequently mentioned by tourists, and can therefore be considered more visible and important to them.

## **Background of the Study**

Sustainable tourism as an idea is derived from the more general concept of sustainable development (Garrod and Fyall, 1989). However, there are different approaches in defining sustainable development in tourism. According to the tourism-centric approach, sustainable tourism focuses on keeping up the business viability of tourism over a period of time (Miller and Twining-Ward, 2006). This view points out that tourism can only achieve short-term economic gains while endangering the resources. Therefore, it would be impossible to conceive of tourism as remaining sustainable forever (Sharpley, 2000) and the sustainability paradigm may be seen as a barrier to development (Alvarez, 2014). On the other hand, Lozano et al. (2012: 659) define sustainable tourism as "not a specific form of tourism but

more an approach that can be used to make all types of tourism more environmentally, socially and economically beneficial". This approach regards sustainable tourism in terms of a broader, multi-sectorial context and perceives the impacts of tourism as a component of accomplishing the greater objective of sustainable development (Hunter, 1997).

Tourism as an economic activity needs to be economically feasible. Economic sustainability refers to the prosperity of all levels of society and a growth rate of development that is optimised and kept at a manageable level. Further, the limits of a destination's environment need to be considered (Choi and Sirakaya, 2005). For example, as a result of certain forms of tourism development that create an increase in rents and property taxes, land speculation can occur. Prices for resources may also increase because of competition (Ritchie and Crouch, 2003). However, all stakeholders should benefit from the tourism activity. Local labour needs to be utilised so that residents are more supportive of tourism development. In addition, as tourism demand can be seasonal, the job security of the employees should be maintained (Ritchie and Crouch, 2003). As a result of economic sustainability, the attractiveness of destinations to tourists and residents may increase along with the development of infrastructure (Ozdemir et al., 2014). Nevertheless, in order to maintain a destination's economic viability, the place's development plans need to be compatible with market needs and protect human and environmental integrity (Hassan, 2000). Further, for a sustainable development the "distribution of resources and collaboration between local actors with an aim to attract new investments, corporations, events and tourists" are essential (Kriznik, 2014: 222).

As tourists travel, they seek to experience the socio-cultural fabric of destinations (Ritchie and Crouch, 2003). With the rapid expansion of tourism, changes and developments in the structure of society have started to occur. While tourism may support social development and conserve cultural assets, it can also challenge traditional social standards and commoditise cultural values. The socio-cultural impacts of tourism are felt more strongly in destinations where local communities are entirely dependent on tourism. According to Torabi Farsani et al. (2012: 30), "Cultural sustainability is the concept for the recovery and protection of cultural identities". Social sustainability in tourism destinations is defined as empowerment of the local people in controlling their lives and in decision-making concerning tourism. It also extends to supporting individuals and increasing educational possibilities (Ozdemir et al., 2014). Additionally Katunaric (2014: 123) states that cultural development

*should focus on principles of sustainable development. To that end it is necessary to mobilize cultural heritage resources and new forms of*

*artistic expression; initiate domestic cultural industries; raise the level of art education; step out from a strictly delineated cultural space into everyday cultural life; open up numerous channels of inter-sector cooperation; enhance relations towards other cultures; etc.*

Social and cultural sustainability ensures that development maintains and strengthens the community's identity while increasing people's control over their lives (Ozdemir et al., 2014).

Tourism also relies heavily on the environment which for many destinations may either be the context in which tourism activities take place or a major attraction (Holden, 2000). Tourism and the environment depend on each other. While tourism has the potential to contribute to environmental protection by increasing public awareness through its ability to attract tourists, it also tends to over-consume resources (McKercher, 1993) and can have significantly negative effects, including pollution, traffic congestion and overcrowding. Environmental sustainability is concerned with the protection and management of both renewable and non-renewable resources for present and future generations. It points out the importance of local ownership of the destination's resources and the utilisation of assets in sustaining local people's well-being while reducing the consumption of non-renewable resources (Ozdemir et al., 2014). In order to guarantee long-term sustainability, a suitable balance must be established between economic, socio-cultural and environmental dimensions (Lansing and Vries, 2007).

Tourism destinations are complex phenomena involving a wide range of stakeholders (Swarbrooke, 1999) and acting as a central point for all of them. While tourism destinations are an attracting power for tourists (Ritchie and Crouch, 2003), the impacts of the tourism industry are felt more strongly in tourism destinations. Because of the current and future negative impacts of the industry, it is more important than ever that destinations be managed in a thoughtful way that also considers key success indicators (Fuchs and Weiermair, 2004; Ritchie and Crouch, 2003). A destination can achieve a competitive edge through key attributes that already exist, and sustainability can add to this competitiveness (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2010).

Although attempts have been made to apply sustainable development principles to tourism, theorising and policy formulation are what most of the work on sustainable tourism has entailed. Transforming theory into action and the operationalisation of concepts are challenges faced by tourism professionals due to insufficient practical tools (Butler, 1999). Although many studies on tourism indicators exist, one of the most comprehensive ones was by Choi and Sirakaya (2006). These authors used the Delphi technique to arrive at a set of 125 indicators under six dimensions: political,

social, ecological, economic, technological and cultural. Choi and Sirakaya (2006) increased the number of facets for measuring sustainability in order to enhance the ability of monitoring. Also, this set of indicators can be used as a base and adapted to different communities. Another initiative, this time from a practitioner's perspective, addressed the promotion of sustainability, which is important for encouraging destinations to invest in sustainability at the destination. This scheme is that of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). GSTC Criteria for Destinations include guiding principles to protect and preserve diverse and scarce natural and cultural resources based on sustainability standards recommended by the UNWTO and other leading environmental groups (GSTC, 2011). As these criteria assist the media by providing information for recognising destinations and informing the public with respect to their sustainability, they also provide marketing visibility of sustainability to the destinations that apply them. However, as with many systems of indicators of sustainability, a supply-side perspective is taken. There is a lack of best practices or research on sustainability systems that consider the tourists perspective and analyse how sustainability indicators are viewed by visitors.

Destination marketing is one of the key success drivers of sustainability (Buhalis, 2000). Traditionally, destination marketing has been aligned to growth-oriented strategies that have mainly focused on image creation, advertising and sales promotion. On the other hand, recent studies show that destination marketing should be integrated with sustainable destination management (Cox and Wray, 2011). A 'dual responsibility' which aims to conserve the resources of a tourist destination as well as provide a high quality visitor experience is needed. Marketing can be used as a management tool to ensure that the 'right kind' of tourism is developed within regions, to take into account both tourism capacity and visitor management issues (March, 2004). Therefore, destination managers increasingly use marketing reasons to support expensive investments in sustainability projects. Further, following growing interest in responsible tourism, social media sites are currently working on including information concerning the sustainability of tourism enterprises to help travellers select greener travel choices (for example, see TripAdvisor's GreenLeaders programme for hotels). It is also foreseeable that in the near future customer reviews and ratings will include sustainability characteristics. Accordingly, understanding which aspects of sustainability are most discussed in visitors' reviews of a destination is important, and may be used to build better comprehension of sustainability from the demand point of view.

Destinations generally face major challenges in communicating the sustainability of their products to consumers because many sustainable product characteristics cannot be experienced directly by tourists. Since sustainable

tourism products are different from standard alternatives, they need to be marketed differently to the common 4-P producer-oriented model (Jamroz, 2007). Although it is important to communicate sustainability attributes to tourists, there is little literature on tourists' attitudes and perceptions regarding sustainability attributes in tourism destinations. Therefore, it is important to develop a greater understanding of sustainability from a demand-based perspective. In this regard, this study attempts to fill the gap in the literature and add to understanding of tourists' observations concerning the sustainability attributes of a cultural tourism destination. The investigation focuses on online reviews, trying to generate information concerning visitors' spontaneous mentions of sustainability attributes when reviewing a particular destination. Thus, the research aims to answer the questions: How do tourists evaluate sustainability attributes in their online reviews of cultural tourism destinations? Which sustainability attributes are most mentioned in these online reviews?

Based on the literature (Choi and Sirakaya, 2005; Cottrell et al., 2004; GSTC, 2011; Ngamsomsuke et al., 2011; Nicholas et al., 2010), the current study attempts to theorise which aspects of the sustainability of tourism destinations may be considered by tourists so that an initial list of sustainability attributes for a cultural tourism destination is created. As more understanding is required concerning the research area, interviews are conducted with three cultural tourism travel experts chosen through judgmental sampling due to their extensive knowledge on cultural tourism, sustainability and tourist attitudes. The semi-structured, face-to-face interviews lasting about 30–45 minutes are undertaken with these travel experts in order to refine the list of sustainability attributes for cultural tourism destinations initially derived from the literature. By taking their advice and evaluations into consideration, the resulting attributes of sustainability shown in Table 1 are considered.

Table 1: SUSTAINABILITY ATTRIBUTES FROM A DEMAND-BASED PERSPECTIVE

Economic Attributes	
Capital leakage and linkage	• Availability of local products for purchase by tourists for the benefit of the local people
	• Services at the destination are provided by the local people as opposed to international chain/non-local providers
Capital formation in the community / investment	• The destination charges adequate pricing that allows it to sustain itself in the future
	• Money paid by the tourists to experience/view/interact with cultural attractions is used for the conservation of the destination

Local career opportunities	• Local employment/Local people employed not only in lower-paid jobs, but also in higher-paid jobs in the tourist labour market
	• Women and minorities getting equal opportunities
Ease of access to cultural destinations	• Convenient access to cultural destinations
Nature of demand	• Seasonality of cultural tourism
Infrastructure/ superstructure	• Availability and quality of facilities and services at cultural destinations
<b>Socio-cultural Attributes</b>	
Respect for culture and local values	• Destination is developed with respect to the local community's culture and values
	• Local authorities act with respect for the local community's culture and values
Criminality and other negative behaviours at cultural destinations	• Crime, vandalism, drug usage, alcoholism rates are increased due to tourism
Access of local community to tourism resources at the destination	• Local people are able to benefit from facilities which tourists come to enjoy
	• Local people are able to visit the attractions at the destination together with the tourists
Cultural exchange	• The destination offers cultural exchange between tourists and hosts
Quality of life	• The local community's quality of life at the destination is increased because of tourism
Knowledge	• Interpretation/Knowledge about the history and culture of the destination received through the visit
<b>Environmental Attributes</b>	
Preservation of natural resources	• Protection of green areas, fauna and flora
	• Urbanisation and level of building at the cost of green areas
Preservation of historical and cultural resources	• Protection of historical/cultural resources
	• Cultural/historical site preservation condition
	• Overall architectural character of location surrounding the cultural destination is protected
Pollution of the environment	• Level of pollution of the environment, water and air in cultural tourism destinations
Reuse/recycling	• Renewable resources being used and recycling being applied
Capacity/limit to tourism growth	• Tourist overcrowding and congestion at cultural destinations
	• The site puts emphasis on limiting the growth of tourism

Prepared by the authors based on the following sources: Choi and Sirakaya, 2005, p. 386; Cottrell et al., 2004, p. 414; GSTC, 2011; Ngamsomsuke et al., 2011, p. 519; Nicholas et al., 2010, p. 851.

## Methodology

The study seeks to explore the topic of sustainability from the tourist perspective and therefore employs qualitative methodology based on netnography in order to determine which sustainability attributes in tourism destinations are more frequently mentioned by tourists in their peer-to-peer online reviews. The Internet is becoming ever more embedded in the daily lives of people and is playing an important role as an information source for travellers. Tourists are using forums, chat rooms and blogs to exchange considerable amounts of information, share ideas, look for advice and make contact with other tourists who have had experience with the destination. Therefore, netnography is a popular online marketing research technique which has recently started to be used in tourism research (Wu and Pearce, 2014). It is a novel adaptation of traditional ethnography, with the Internet as a virtual fieldwork site. This study partially follows Kozinets' (2002) guidelines including the five steps he proposed: *entrée*, data collection, data analysis, data interpretation, and member checks.

The first stage, *entrée*, involves identifying the most relevant online communities for the study and learning as much as possible about the selected communities in order to assure their appropriateness (Kozinets, 2002). Accordingly, travellers' comments from TripAdvisor on Cusco (Peru) as a specific destination are assessed. As no destination can be described as wholly sustainable, Cusco is chosen as one of the 14 worldwide destinations that has applied the GSTC criteria and is trying to promote itself as a sustainable tourism destination. Out of the 14 early adopters, most of them are natural destinations. Cusco is seen to be most focused on cultural and historical resources and is therefore thought to be most suitable for this research. TripAdvisor, one of the largest online networks of travel consumers, is recognised as the most 'popular' social-media website containing travel-related content (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). The website was chosen following the key criteria suggested by Kozinets to select a site which consists of: (1) a more focused and research question-relevant segment, topic or group; (2) higher 'traffic' of postings; (3) more detailed or descriptively rich data; and (4) more between-member interactions of the type required by the research question. Thus, TripAdvisor offers an unbiased evaluation of comments on destinations from the demand side since the posts are experience based.

The second step in Kozinets' framework involves data collection. In netnography, this phase is about observing the chosen pages closely and downloading information. In this research, TripAdvisor's posts on the "Centro Histórico de Cusco" of the past year concerning Cusco as a tourism destination are downloaded. This follows the focus of the research on cultural tourism, thus selecting one of the most visited cultural sites in the region.

Comments made in July 2014, October 2014, January 2015 and April 2015 are taken into account in order to keep the number of comments at a manageable level while at the same time avoiding a seasonality bias. Only those remarks made in English are used to avoid the need for translation, thereby limiting the conclusions derived from this research to the evaluations of English-speaking tourists.

Content analysis, the process of identifying, coding and categorising the primary patterns in the data (Patton, 1990), is used to analyse the collected data through QSR International's NVivo 10 qualitative data analysis software program. The list of sustainability attributes derived from the literature and the subsequent interviews with travel experts (Table 1) guided the coding and identification of categories. The reviews are classified under three main categories: economic, socio-cultural and environmental sustainability. As the member checks are criticised by some researchers (Lee, 1993; Langer and Beckman, 2005; Sandlin, 2007) and the TripAdvisor website only allows limited interaction with reviewers, even excluding contact information for some of them, this step is eliminated.

The demographic profile of the users based on the information available in TripAdvisor shows that, out of the total of 127 reviews examined in this study, 64 reviewers did not specify their gender. Almost half the reviewers with gender information available are male. On the other hand, out of 114 reviewers who shared information on their country of origin, more than half are from North America, including 51 reviewers from the USA and 10 from Canada.

The comments are classified based on the list of sustainability attributes identified, as discussed above. Therefore, the discussion of the results follows the three main headings of sustainability: economic, socio-cultural and environmental.

## **Results**

The analysis of the 127 TripAdvisor reviews established that only 110 of these include any reference to sustainability attributes that may be related to the demand-based perspective. However, they are not evenly distributed among the different dimensions. While there is an equal number of references (n=41) concerning economic and socio-cultural attributes, the environmental dimension is only discussed in 28 comments. There is some overlap between categories, i.e. a single post may be assigned to more than one category.

The distribution of the reviews among the three pillars of sustainability contrasts with existing analyses in the literature that consider visitor perceptions of sustainability since in most studies environmental sustainability is

mainly addressed. It is, however, true that the current research investigates tourists' perceptions concerning sustainability attributes from a broader perspective so that certain aspects of the customer experience that are not traditionally related to sustainability are seen in this investigation as being part of the overall sustainability of the destination. Further, the research focuses on a cultural heritage destination, while in a nature-based destination environmental issues may take higher precedence in visitors' comments.

### *Economic Attributes*

Out of the total of 127 reviews examined in this study, comments referring to economic sustainability include 12 references regarding capital leakage and linkage, 10 comments on infrastructure/superstructure, 8 mentions concerning ease of access to the destination, 7 allusions to the nature of the demand, and 4 references regarding capital formation in the community and investment. However, there was no comment on local career opportunities, in line with what the interviewees also mentioned. According to the travel experts, tourists would be happy to see local employment but they would not check whether it is there or not. Likewise, women and minorities receiving equal employment opportunities in tourism is not considered by tourists in their reviews.

Regarding local products, tourists are interested in buying *well-crafted souvenirs of local artisans*. A reviewer from the USA writes that he prefers buying *“not a spoon or a shot glass with Cusco stamped on it”*. Tourists are also aware of fakery and deception surrounding the indigenous culture and find it disheartening. A reviewer living in Mexico stated that the majority of the 'handmade' items for sale are actually machine woven (or knitted) which is *“a theatrical attempt to make you think you are buying from an artisan, when you're not”*. Another TripAdvisor member asked the question *“Are we selling India cheap?”*. While being interested in local products, none of the reviewers mentioned the benefit for the local people to be derived from tourism.

The availability of facilities and services are important for the tourists but, out of 10 comments, 9 of them are on *“shopping”* and *“restaurants”*. While four reviewers wrote recommendations on local services, demeaning non-local fast-food restaurants like KFC and Starbucks, only one reviewer had a positive comment on *taking a drink in odd Irish and English pubs*. Out of all the economic attributes stated in the conceptual model, capital leakage and linkage is the one most mentioned.

Another important attribute for the tourists is ease of access since it affects their comfort in seeing the places around. A US tourist posts a negative comment on an unexpected construction that was blocking the easiest access. Other than this remark, all of the reviews are positive and state that

the destination has convenient access to nearby places. On the other hand, ease of access also increases the number of tourists and may lead to the destination becoming too crowded and its sustainability endangered. Tourists also comment on the best time to travel to the destination, which is *festival time* and *religious holidays*. Avoiding *crowds* and the *rainy season* are considerations that are also often mentioned.

There are few comments on pricing, which is important to allow the destination to sustain itself in the future. Certain reviewers mentioned that visiting some of the churches is too expensive. In addition, there were three remarks concerning the money paid by tourists to experience, view and interact with the cultural attractions. All of them were about the price being *expensive* or not. As one of the experts stated in the interview, tourists want to be given the best service at the lowest price without thinking about the sustainability of the destination.

### *Socio-cultural Attributes*

According to the comments made about socio-cultural attributes, 15 references out of the 127 reviews relate to respecting the culture and local values, followed by 13 references to criminality and other negative behaviours at cultural destinations, 8 comments on knowledge and 5 comments on cultural exchange. The destination is described as being *touristy* with negative comments such as “*a lot of people approaching you every five minutes or less trying to sell you something*”. Tourists are looking for authentic things like folk dancing, which one of the reviewers finds a “*picturesque and engaging perspective of the marvelous culture*”. Positive comments like “*See people relatively unchanged for 35,000 years*” and “*An accident of natural barriers and malaria have kept this continent pristine*” also appear.

Concerning the cultural exchange between tourists and hosts, tourists state that it is an “*amazing experience to see the way the locals live*”. Another reviewer mentions that “*it was amazing to see all their traditions and people dancing on the streets with colorful clothes*”. Further, “*friendly*” is an adjective used in describing the local community. However, there are no comments on the local community’s access to tourism resources and on the locals’ quality of life at the destination.

One of the most mentioned sustainability attributes is safety; however, out of 13 comments, none of them were about tourism’s effect on the community. All of them concerned tourists’ *personal safety* and *pick-pocketing* problems. The destination is described as a “*secure city*”, “*well policed*” and “*very safe for solo women travelers*”. Nevertheless, there is no information on whether crime, vandalism, drug usage, alcoholism rates are increased due to tourism or not.

Another of the most mentioned socio-cultural attributes is interpretation and knowledge about the history and culture of the destination received through the visit. Interpretive information available to tourists at cultural sites is part of cultural education and tour guides are important, as mentioned in the comments. All eight references regarding knowledge concern the importance of tour guides. For instance, tourists mention: *“the guide helped us understand the history”*, *“impressed by the wealth of knowledge displayed by our guide”* and *“guides were superb in narrating these tours”*. As one tourist writes, the *“city pass for museums, churches and historic places can get confusing if you don’t know what you are doing”*. Therefore, guidance is significant for cultural tourism destinations.

### ***Environmental Attributes***

Although tourism relies heavily on the environment, environmental attributes is the least mentioned main dimension of sustainability in the reviews. As Cusco is a cultural tourism destination, comments made on the preservation of historical and cultural resources, rather than natural resources, could be expected. Seeking to analyse the environmental attributes, 28 comments are identified out of the total of 127 reviews examined in this study, including 19 that refer to the preservation of historical and cultural resources, 5 to the pollution of the environment, 2 to the capacity/limit to tourism and 2 to the preservation of natural resources. Comments on the preservation of historical and cultural resources are equally distributed between protection of historical/cultural resources, cultural/historical site preservation condition and protection of the overall architectural character of the cultural destination’s surroundings. A female tourist points out that there are *“no neon signs, billboards”*. Another male tourist indicates that *“despite the obvious tourism has a nice vibe of its own which adds to its character”*. Although the preservation of historical and cultural resources is found to be important for the tourists, there are only two comments on the preservation of natural resources. A TripAdvisor member states that *“the city while preserving the old monuments is turning in to a big Brick and concrete urban center”*. According to the interviews with the experts, this is one of the sustainability attributes that tourists pay most attention to. However, having such a small number of comments in this category might be due to the fact that the destination is mainly a cultural destination and not a natural one.

Cusco is described as *“very noisy with a lot of traffic”* and *“the constant never ended car horns”*, which annoy the tourists. In addition, pollution of the environment is mentioned as a negative perception. Likewise, tourists’ overcrowding and congestion at the cultural destination is also mentioned.

However, there is no information as to whether the site puts emphasis on limiting the growth of tourism or not. Another attribute without any comment concerns renewable resources being used and recycling being applied. According to the expert interviewees, it is a concept the tourists are not conscious about.

The research reveals that tourists in Cusco perceive only those sustainability attributes that affect their experience, like convenient access to the destination, crime rates, interpretation/knowledge about the history and culture of the destination, preservation of historical and cultural resources and the quality of the environment. No comments were made concerning local career opportunities, the local community's access to tourism resources at the destination, the local community's quality of life, or reuse and recycling. Remarks regarding local people were only about those issues that could affect the tourist's travel experience.

## Conclusions

The study results of the TripAdvisor comments following the list of sustainability attributes identified from the literature, which was then refined through interviews with experts, provides a better understanding of which sustainability dimensions – economic, socio-cultural and environmental – are considered by the tourists in their reviews of Cusco.

In order to promote sustainability initiatives to tourists, destinations need to focus on how these measures influence the experience and increase the enjoyment of visitors. Parallel to the trends in tourism marketing concerning the growing importance of experiences and experiencescapes (O'Dell, 2005), this study proposes that sustainability should be introduced to tourists from the perspective of the creation of unique and memorable experiences. Thus, as attempts are made to justify sustainability initiatives for tourism businesses in terms of cost savings and marketing visibility, the same efforts should be made to communicate sustainability practices to tourists, focusing on how these would benefit them and enhance their experience at the destination. Therefore, an experience-based sustainability model should be created to be used as an attraction point for the destination. The sustainability attributes that are more visible to tourists can be used as a marketing tool to promote sustainability practices that increase tourists' enjoyment of the destination.

The findings are important since they may provide guidance for destinations on how to communicate their sustainability practices to tourists. In addition, user-based travel review sites, such as TripAdvisor, do not currently include user ratings on the sustainability attributes of destinations. In the near future, online review sites might consider including sustainability

as an aspect to be rated by tourists since individuals are becoming more conscious about responsible tourism options. The current research may be of practical use when designing these evaluation systems.

Tourists could also be educated about those items that do not seem so visible or important to them. Raising awareness on sustainability can assist the progress of tourists' sustainable attitudes and practices (Mazilu, 2012), and may also be eventually beneficial for the destination. The research determines that environmental aspects are the least mentioned attributes of sustainability in the reviews of a cultural destination. Education on these aspects given by travel agencies that focus on cultural tourism may increase the level of tourists' awareness of sustainability. The study proposes a list of sustainability attributes that takes a demand-based perspective, focusing on the views of tourists and those attributes of concern to them. The current research examines to what extent visitors include the sustainability features of the destination in their online reviews. However, this is merely a starting point and the research is limited to providing an understanding of which attributes of sustainability are mentioned in tourists' online reviews. In particular, those attributes not found in TripAdvisor comments should not be labelled as insignificant to tourists. It is possible that certain attributes considered important are not shared with others or commented on in TripAdvisor.

Future research may use the knowledge gathered in this study to go a step further and determine through both qualitative and quantitative methodology which sustainability attributes of destinations are most visible and important to tourists. Further, other investigations could consider different types of destinations since attributes important in cultural destinations may not be so crucial in other destinations. In this study, environmental attributes are the least mentioned by the reviewers, but they might have been considered more important in a nature-based tourism destination. Further, additional research could examine other variables influencing tourists' attitudes to sustainability, such as tourist types, which were not considered in the current study.

In addition, this research is limited in that it analyses only those comments made in English, and more than half the sample originates from North America. This means that the findings are very specific to a given cultural context and may not be generalisable to other populations. Accordingly, studies in different destinations and from varied cultural contexts are recommended.

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