



Article

# Yurt Invited: Combining Tourists and Stakeholders Perceptions of Sustainable Community-Based Tourism in Central Asia

Gulnoza Usmonova <sup>1,\*</sup> , Deniza Alieva <sup>2</sup>  and Carmelo J. León <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tourism, Economics and Management Program, University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 35001 Las Palmas, Spain; carmel.leon@ulpgc.es

<sup>2</sup> Management Development Institute of Singapore in Tashkent, Business and Management School, Tashkent 100185, Uzbekistan; dalieva@mdis.uz

\* Correspondence: gulnoza.usmonova@gmail.com or gulnoza.usmonova101@alu.ulpgc.es

**Abstract:** Community-based tourism represents an opportunity for sustainable socioeconomic development, helping local populations to emerge out of lower living conditions. This paper investigates the perceptions of tourists and stakeholders engaged in Community-Based Tourism (CBT) in Central Asian countries (including Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan) as an opportunity for sustainable development. This study's purpose is to point out the usefulness of a combination approach of stakeholders' and tourists' perceptions to address the opportunities of CBT that can improve the quality of life of the tourism community in Central Asia by identifying the pitfalls of practices and determining challenges for tourism policy. Using a mixed-method approach, two complementary methodologies are simultaneously conducted. (1) An in-depth interview approach with sixteen selected experts in the region was processed with semantic network analysis for the definition of the main challenges and opportunities facing CBT as an enabler of sustainable development, considering the perceptions of sustainability from the point of view of stakeholders. (2) An online survey involving one hundred twenty-five tourists to the region was carried out to focus on tourists' perceptions of sustainability. A structural equation modelling technique was used to identify the influence of tourists' sustainability preferences and their involvement with local communities on sustainability perceptions. The results highlight the benefits the community receives, as well as future opportunities to obtain more advantages from tourism practices within the scope of sustainable tourism planning.

**Keywords:** sustainable tourism planning; community-based tourism; sustainable tourism perception; structural equation modelling; semantic network analysis; mixed methods; central Asian countries



**Citation:** Usmonova, G.; Alieva, D.; León, C.J. Yurt Invited: Combining Tourists and Stakeholders Perceptions of Sustainable Community-Based Tourism in Central Asia. *Sustainability* **2022**, *14*, 7540. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14137540>

Academic Editor: J. Andres Coca-Stefaniak

Received: 20 May 2022

Accepted: 17 June 2022

Published: 21 June 2022

**Publisher's Note:** MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



**Copyright:** © 2022 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

## 1. Introduction

Sustainable tourism has become a common subject for debates and discussions about its useful applicability in developed and emerging economies. Simultaneously, although some assertions centred on the ideas of "sustainable tourism" have become widely considered, conflicting evidence casts some doubts about the practice [1–4], demonstrating that the wide appliance of the terms and concepts is fairly arguable [5–7]. There is a discussion on how tourism brings more opportunities to the poor in the short term, but it cannot sufficiently contribute solemnly to reducing poverty in the long run [8–12], which leads to raising questions on the concept and notion of sustainability used to facilitate poverty alleviation but also causing invisible harm while aiming for good.

One of the ideas raised to promote sustainable tourism for alleviating the poor is the promotion of community-based projects that integrates communities involving small businesses and companies, with all revenue resources going directly to the community and the community providing all services [13]. Community-based tourism (CBT) and other sub-branches of sustainable tourism focused on villages have often been used as tools for

rural growth in outlying areas. Their origins date back to the 1970s when CBT was seen as a viable option for rural communities as well as a viable instrument for poverty reduction, restoration [10], and rural economic growth [14]. As a result of these incentives, many CBT programs in developed countries evolved into community development of ventures.

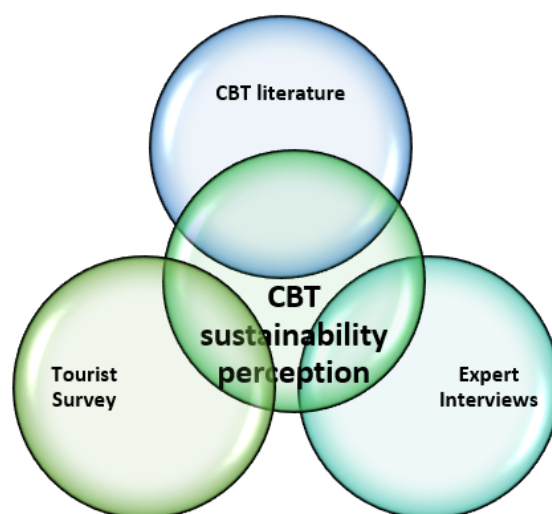
CBT has been advocated as a critical component of sustainability in local communities, as group interest in implementation and decision-making processes provide conditions for community development and empowerment [15–17]. Thus, studies have shown CBT to be rather successful in the creation of additional earnings in remote areas where resources to support the community are scarce, and the flow of direct investment can bring a significant positive impact on living conditions [18–21]. On the other hand, CBT has been offered as an alternative to mass tourism, and as a way to avoid the crowding effect in destinations by invoking a more meaningful purpose as a part of “responsible travel” [13,22–24].

The role of CBT for achieving sustainability in less developed countries has been under-researched, with a lack of understanding of both the facilitators and the barriers facing emerging markets [25]. Regardless of all debates and recognised contributions to sustainable tourism and CBT concepts, there is a need for research on the sustainability perceptions or assessments of visitors who would like to—or did—experience CBT [26]. Thus, it is critical to research the factors enabling tourism growth and sustainability in new-coming destinations to find the defining characteristic of their establishment and promotion. Along with that, there is very little available research on understanding how tourists evoke CBT destination perceptions and which factors play a key role in tourists’ decision-making [27]. To exceed tourists’ expectations from CBT, destination managers must understand how tourists perceive sustainability in their destinations. It can be assumed that sustainability and interactions with local people are significant when local communities can offer the experiences that tourists are looking for in CBT [13].

The purpose of this paper is to assess the CBT sustainability perceptions of both a group of key stakeholders and a sample of tourists that have visited Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan).

The results provide critical evidence on how both tourists’ and tourism businesses’ perceptions of the sustainability of CBT can influence the destination’s main characteristics by analysing factors that influence tourists’ perceptions of their experience and determining critical barriers to success. The conclusions raise some lessons to be learned that can be applied to the design for future CBT development and sustainable tourism planning in the emerging destinations of Central Asia.

The paper is structured as a presentation of a critical review of the relevant literature relating to CBT that discusses stakeholders’ sustainability perception, preferences, and community involvement. Explanatory evidence was gathered through a combination of methods using qualitative data obtained during two field trips to Central Asian countries and quantitative evidence through visitor surveys; discussion of the findings and the implications are provided. The following procedures, recommended by Dimitrovski [28] in a multistakeholder approach study (Scheme 1), were used to investigate tourists’ perceptions of the destination’s CBT sustainability: (1) a literature analysis (a portion of which was supplied above), (2) interviews with tourism industry experts, and (3) interviews with visitors who have recently visited Central Asia.



**Scheme 1.** Data analysis process.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Community-Based Tourism

CBT is conceived as a form of relatively low-scale tourism that is managed by a group of locally owned businesses to benefit the community and, in some cases, contribute to conservation (when taking place in or near protected areas) [29]. It is marketed as a means of enhancing livelihoods and creating opportunities for community development [16] and is defined as being in, owned, and managed by the community, which receives a sizable portion of the benefits [29–31].

CBT is founded on the notion of sustainable development since it encourages community engagement in order to achieve more equitable and comprehensive development [32]. By focusing on local (rural, native, etc.) cultures, CBT assures that communities do not diminish and perish and that communities may be seen strategically as a means of enhancing the resilience of social and ecological systems, thereby contributing to sustainable development [33]. Residents of traditional villages have resurrected local customs and culture and showcased them to visitors [34,35]. As a result, CBT is observed to be critical for poverty reduction since it fosters community development, therefore working toward community sustainability.

However, tourism may have negative consequences, including an increase in the cost of living [36], unequal distribution of tourism revenue [37], low-skilled and low-paying employment [38], degradation of natural and cultural resources [39], crime and crowded living areas [37,40], and a low level of empowerment [41]. These adverse effects may have a detrimental effect on local inhabitants, as well as the economy, culture, and environment, impeding further sustainable CBT. Despite this, many emerging destinations have seen an opportunity in CBT development as an efficient way to reduce poverty and raise the awareness of the destination, heritage, culture, and traditions. This trend is causing economic pressure on some villages, which in turn is forcing young people to move to urban areas. Nevertheless, there is still a strong segment of the urban population that is interested in visiting rural areas and understanding the way of life [42].

Regardless of all the debates on applications of CBT concepts and sustainable tourism practices, there is very little evidence of an understanding of perceptions of current and pre-CBT development destinations and the effects of tourism development on tourists' perceptions and decisions [43]. Additional analysis of community-based tourism sustainability perception is needed that provides insight on how to manage and monitor changes caused by tourism development in emerging regions and evaluate the perceived value that CBT activities actually carry for tourists.

## 2.2. Tourists' Perceptions of CBT

Central to the understanding of tourism as a phenomenon has always been the question of the reasons that determine why people travel to certain destinations [44]. The answer to this question becomes vital for tourist destinations since, in the struggle for attracting tourists, they have to make a significant promotional effort to be noticed and chosen. Regional or national cultural distinctions are significant tourist drivers [45].

People desire to learn about different native cultures and to introduce their own to the locals. Tourists' views of tourism products and places are critical for destination development, management, and promotion, as several destination image studies have demonstrated [46]. The significance of knowing how tourists receive and generate destination image perceptions is that these features play a significant influence in visitors' destination decision-making processes. In other words, because visitors do not experience a location prior to deciding to visit and making reservations, their consuming decisions are influenced by what they believe in and the thoughts and feelings they identify with it [47]. This is especially true when other process variables—for example, prices, proximity across areas, views, expertise, technology, and trust—are comparable amongst accessible options [48].

Given the critical role of perceptions on destination image formation and tourist consumption dynamics, the concept of destination competitiveness emphasizes that a destination's success is contingent on its capacity to deliver experiences that surpass visitors' expectations [49]. However, expectations are influenced by travellers' views of places [50]. Therefore, destination management must know how tourists perceive their locations in order to surpass their expectations. Sustainable tourism behaviour is the focus of many researchers. The studies conducted by Grilli et al. [51], Nok et al. [52], Mathew and Sreejesh [53] claim that the understanding of sustainability, shown by the tourists, is connected with their preferences in sustainable travelling practices. The perceptions of sustainability become crucial in the moment of destination selection and evaluation of tourism activity impact on the local community. In addition, such factors as the quality of existing sustainable initiatives and encouragement of sustainable practices are considered to be important in the evaluation of the sustainable component of CBT practices [54].

Similarly, understanding tourists' expectations and impressions of a location are critical for tourism planning, as they influence tourists' choices and consumption decisions [48]. Given the significance of these two important ideas (perceptions and sustainability), this study aims to add to the progress of knowledge about sustainable tourism by assessing the perceptions of stakeholders and tourists about the sustainability of CBT and its implication trends in Central Asia.

## 2.3. Tourists' Sustainability Preferences and Community Involvement

It is known that to produce economic and social advantages for local communities, tourism firms' value proposition should be able to attract tourists that have preferences for sustainable practices and do become involved respectfully with the communities' activities and social environments [55]. That is, consumer preferences for the external environment and infrastructural facilities within a tourism location can have an impact on the success of sustainable tourism.

Following CBT as a sustainable tourism derivative, it needs numerous stakeholders to collaborate and develop partnerships, pooling their talent, resources, and knowledge [56]. It enables tourists to connect with indigenous communities in a quiet and natural setting, learn about traditional ways of life, and enhances the dynamic and intriguing relationship between customers and the community [57].

CBT places a premium on human engagement and helps visitors through the process of interaction to gain a better understanding of their communities' culture and history [58]. As a result, researchers should examine the total reaction of tourists in a continuous process using CBT as a starting point. Nevertheless, little research has explored how the level of

perceived community engagement in CBT, and the advantages created for them, affects the choices made by tourists when visiting developing destinations [29].

Only a few studies that have examined customers' preferences for attributes related to local communities have found some evidence, demonstrating impartial or even critical attitudes toward community involvement [59], while others exemplify stronger preferences for local community involvement or benefits [60–62].

Rihova et al. [63] claim that tourism is a collaborative and shared experience and that outcomes are achieved via interaction. Therefore, additional insight is needed to comprehend both tourists' preferences and the ability of locals to provide services, and engage and share their communities with visitors. This is especially true in locations with a history of civil strife and in areas where tourists and inhabitants come from diverse social and cultural backgrounds [64,65].

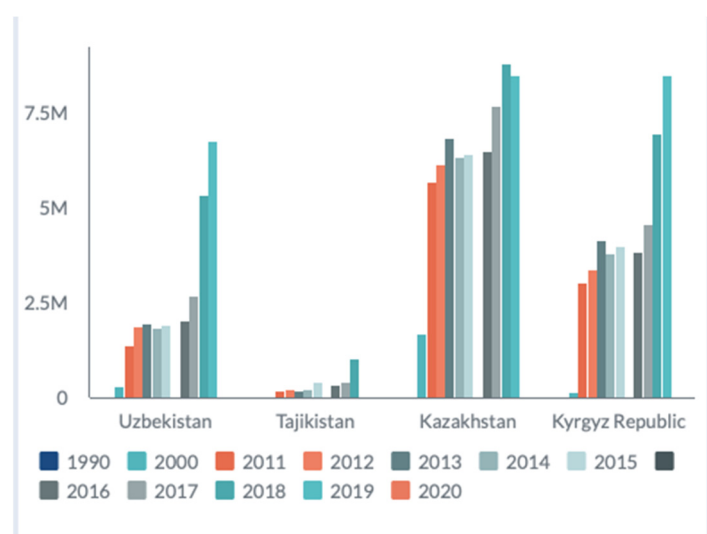
Individual behaviour, which within a group gives rise to collective behaviour that identifies and characterizes the culture in question, is governed by the conviction or belief of each individual regarding the correct form of behaviour in each situation. This echoes the approach to the definition of values tourists and organizations in the sector have and share [66]. The values play an important regulatory role in human activity and therefore in attitudes toward the surrounding world, which establishes a correspondence between what is thought, what is said, and what is done, at the individual level [67]. The values play a key role in the model of sustainability empathy [68] that tries to unite all the influencing matters together and adds the psychological dimension. It uses the tourists' values as a key factor that can determine their attitude toward the local community and sustainable practices. The conclusions of that research created the baseline for future studies in the field and a foundation for the current study.

#### *2.4. Community-Based Tourism in Central Asia*

Central Asian countries have been included in the "bucket list" of the tourists [69] that experience tensions from time to time and pose some "roadblocks" that cause concerns to travel. However, the introduction of e-visa types in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan has significantly increased the flow of visitors and made them more attractive for inclusion in the Lonely Planet's pick list of destinations in 2018–2019. Nevertheless, the key issues are not just border-crossing difficulties and neighbourhood drama, but also the need for adequate sustainability policies and practices, and legislation mechanisms that preserve natural resources and reduce the negative impact of the industry and boost the local economy.

As shown in Figure 1, Central Asian countries were visited by over 15.5 million tourists in 2018 [70], led by Kazakhstan (over 8.7 million) and Uzbekistan (over 5.3 million). The first CBT group opened its doors during May 2000 in Kochkor village in Kyrgyzstan offering tourists cultural and authentic experiences and providing direct incomes for rural families. CBT enterprises in the region offer independent tourists and tour operators accommodation services for homestays, stays at authentic traditional yurts/jailoo, trekking on horses, local guide tours of heritage sites, demonstrations of handicraft skills, etc. Individual service providers directly benefit from sales, and CBT suppliers charge a rate for each service sold (up to 15%).





**Figure 1.** International tourist arrivals in Central Asia (The World Bank, 2020).

*Uzbekistan* is showing intensive development of tourism and tourist services in recent years, with growing niches involving ecotourism, agrotourism, archaeological and ethnographic tourism, and extreme tourism, all related to CBT. In the Jizzakh region, such as the Forish area and Zaamin National Park, special attention is being given to creating infrastructure for CBT activities. Family guesthouses and homestays are gaining popularity among families as their first choice of entry to the tourism business in regions such as Bukhara, Samarkand, Surkhandarya, Khorezm, Fergana Valley, and Tashkent.

*Kazakhstan's* sustainable and competent activities of CBT have contributed to improving the living standards of the rural population, reducing unemployment, and increasing the welfare of the society in the regions.

*Kyrgyzstan* launched its first CBT project in partnership with the Swiss Association for International Cooperation *Helvetas*, which since 2003 has been under the umbrella of the Kyrgyz Community-Based Tourism Association (KCBTA). More than 1400 units are currently involved in CBT in the country. CBT is operating in several villages in Kochkor, Naryn, and Tamchi, where CBT aims at the progress of tourism under the supervision of residents. Participants in CBT projects can be rural residents, local nongovernmental organisations, and the local administration, and the selection criterion is based only on the ambition and opportunity to engage in tourist activities.

The Canadian Adventure Travel Company (social enterprise) “G Adventures” has been involved in the promotion of CBT tourism in Central Asia since 2016 starting in Kyrgyzstan. In addition, the nonprofit organisation “Planetera Foundation” established its first Central Asian project (more than 100 projects worldwide) in Kyrgyzstan—Barskoon village. Project “Ak Orgo” (White Yurt) supports local craftsmen workshop of yurt making that helps to sustain the technique of authentic yurt building skills, passing the knowledge to the younger generations by directly hiring and involving youth at the workshop, with ten people directly hired and over 1000 community members benefited [71].

*Tajikistan* received 1.3 million international tourists between January and December 2019 [70]. Various organizations such as META (Murgab Ecotourism Association), PECTA (Pamir Eco-Cultural Tourism Association), ZTDA (Zerafshan Tourism Development Association), MSDSP (Mountain Societies Development and Support Project), and the Ecotourism Resource Information Centres, have led the promotion of responsible travelling by implementing community development projects, training programs in business management, language learning programs, support homestays, and assistance with necessary infrastructure.

*Turkmenistan* is a highly isolated country with hard travelling restrictions only comparable with North Korea. There are complicated visa processes and regulations that make access to the country only possible by invitation from an individual or agency. The

latest available data on the number of tourists visiting Turkmenistan refers to 2007 [71], counting 8200 visitors. However, the country's authorities have announced a new policy intended to raise the number of tourists and develop tourism infrastructure. The attraction of the *Darvaza* gas crater (or Gates of Hell) has become very popular among adventure and dark tourists. Despite the difficulty of establishing CBT practices and venture activities, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in partnership with the Kyrgyz CBT Association is providing community training for guest houses or homestays in Turkmenistan [69].

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study is to assess tourists' and stakeholders' perceptions of the sustainability of CBT in Central Asian countries. To this aim, specific objectives involve the assessment of the challenges and opportunities of CBT by stakeholders in the industry that are related to sustainability perceptions and may lead to the formulation of actions needed to work toward higher levels of sustainability across the region. In addition, the study evaluates the structural relationships between tourists' sustainability perceptions, their intentions to become involved with CBT in Central Asia, and their preferences for sustainable tourism products.

The validity of the causal relationships indicated by hypotheses H<sub>1</sub>, H<sub>2</sub>, and H<sub>3</sub> were investigated with the estimation of a structural equation model (SEM) [72], which is a technique commonly utilized for appraising complex relationships between variables in a model. The model was statistically assessed by utilizing the SPSS and AMOS 27 statistical packages. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was applied to each of the scales for measuring the constructs of sustainability perceptions and local involvement. This was followed by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess the convergent validity of the scales [73].

#### 3.2. Theoretical Modelling

The theoretical model investigates the formation of the sustainability perceptions of CBT based on tourists' preferences for sustainability and the involvement with the local community. The tourism sustainability preferences of CBT visitors to Central Asian countries were measured utilizing a five-item scale [74]. This scale measures the intention to purchase green certificate tourist products by being willing to pay a higher amount for environmentally friendly products, along with caring about the environment in the choice of holiday destinations. The interest of tourists in the involvement with the local community was assessed utilizing a four-item scale containing the willingness to spend on local goods and services and sustaining local features and culture [75]. Tourists were also asked to assess the sustainability perceptions of Central Asian countries by using a Likert scale, with a score of 1 indicating not sustainable to 5 indicating very sustainable.

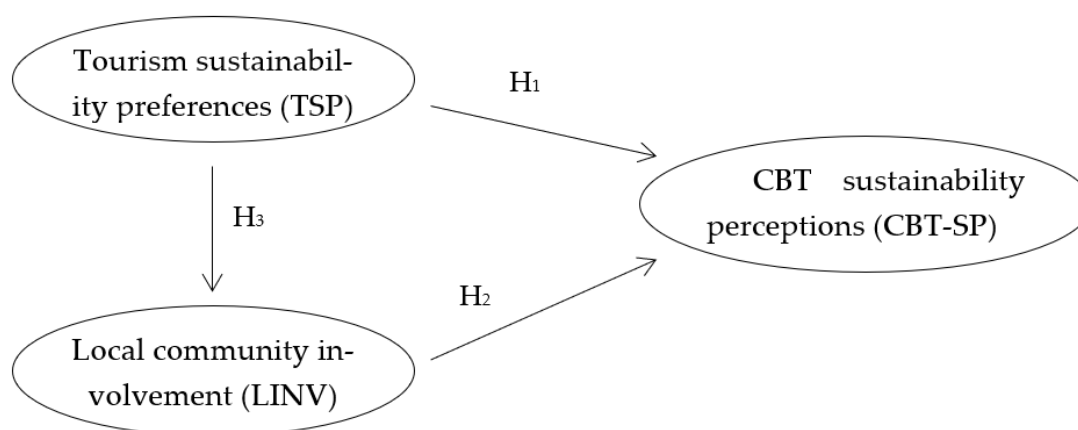
Thus, the following hypotheses were investigated:

**Hypothesis H<sub>1</sub>:** *Tourists' preferences for sustainable tourism (TSP) have a significant impact on the sustainability perceptions of CBT in Central Asian countries (CBT-SP).*

**Hypothesis H<sub>2</sub>:** *Tourists' preferences for getting involved with the local community (LINV) have a positive significant impact on the sustainability perceptions of CBT in Central Asian countries (CBT-SP).*

**Hypothesis H<sub>3</sub>:** *Tourists' preferences for sustainable tourism (TSP) have a positive significant impact on their preferences for getting involved with the local community (LINV).*

Figure 2 illustrates the hypotheses of the model.



**Figure 2.** Theoretical model.

### 3.3. Data Collection and Instruments

The data for achieving the objectives and studying the hypotheses of this study were collected with two complementary fieldworks during 2018 and 2019, one involving a group of stakeholders and experts, and another directed toward tourists who had travelled to Central Asian countries. The fieldwork with experts and stakeholders was intended to be qualitative and involved in-depth interviewing of a group of 16 expert stakeholders in CBT in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. The primary criterion for selection was to include company entrepreneurs that work directly with CBT families and organizations on a national and international basis. The researchers contacted the first participants directly, and they later facilitated more potential persons through horizontal networking [76]. The experts throughout Central Asia to be considered in the study were recommended by local CBT agencies or through the recommendations of local authorities. Experts were six CBT ventures in Kyrgyzstan, two in Kazakhstan, two in Tajikistan, and three in Uzbekistan. Additionally, three executive managers of tourism companies that offer services of CBT throughout the Central Asian region. Interviewed experts had an average of 15 years of experience in CBT and directly worked with the CBT community, taking a leading part in the development initiatives in the regions.

In addition to the in-depth interviews with experts at their own business locations, researchers collected observation field notes on the CBT sites in the specific countries investigated. The interviews with stakeholders were undertaken in person and in their native language to avoid misinterpretation and language bias. Participants were inquired about the most important components of CBT tourism. In addition, opinions were asked to identify the viability of CBT business activities and the community perception of sustainable tourism development and business environment. Interviews with experts were transcribed and the information retrieved was analysed through the application of semantic network analysis techniques (AutoMap and ORA software for processing and Gephi 0.9.2 for visualisation).

On the other hand, tourists were addressed through an online structured questionnaire that was answered by 125 tourists, taken as a purposive sample from those respondents who had earlier travelled to the region. That is, participants had travelled to the region in the period of March 2018 to November 2019, visiting one or more countries of study (Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan, Tajikistan, or Turkmenistan) and had used CBT services during their stay. Tourists had taken the surveys post-trip.

There were 4 sections with 35 questions in the visitor's questionnaire. The question components addressed the tourist profile, including the type of visitor and period of visit in each country, on a multi-item scale the familiarity with sustainability concepts, factors that influence their destination choice, accommodation, preference of availability of leisure choices at CBT, evaluation of experience at CBT area, and rating perceived sustainability concepts applied at destination [77,78].



The questionnaire for tourists collected information on the demographic characteristics of the traveller, the features of the trip, the perception of CBT sustainability, and the preferences for sustainable CBT products and services. The data obtained from questionnaires were quantitatively analysed by using IBM SPSS 23.

Regarding the gender of tourists in the survey, 45.6% were males (57 people) and 54.4% were females (68 people). The percentage of those who visited each of the countries was Uzbekistan (84.0%), Kazakhstan (73.6%), Kyrgyzstan (73.6%), Tajikistan (66.4%), and Turkmenistan (15.2%). The average number of times that this set of countries was visited was 3.5. In 30.4% of the cases, participants had travelled alone, 11.2% with their families, and 23.2% with friends, while for 7.2% of individuals the primary purpose of the visit was business-related; in 39.2%, the trip was organised with colleagues.

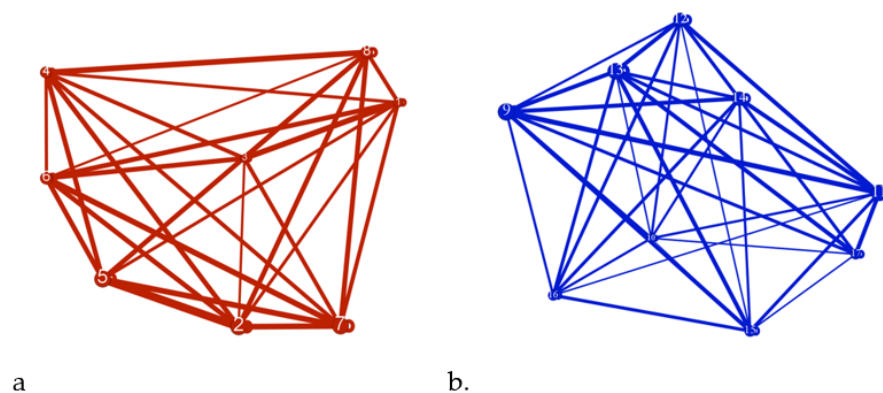
#### 4. Results

##### 4.1. Experts' and Stakeholders' Perceptions

The interviews with experts and stakeholders were transcribed and analysed with AutoMap and ORA software. The issues discussed are presented in Table 1, mapped in two groups according to their inclusion as a challenge or as an opportunity for CBT. In general, most items refer to different aspects that are present in most countries. However, some items are only present in some countries as in the case of high and low levels of bureaucracy. Such tendency confirms a variety of levels of development in CBT in different countries, as some of them, according to the experts, managed to decrease bureaucracy levels, while others maintain a big number of complex procedures. The connections within each group are analysed with two alternative semantic networks (Figure 3), where the size of the node indicates the frequency of the term's appearance, and the width of the edge is the number of the appearance of the pair of terms in the same interview transcript.

**Table 1.** Topics discussed by CBT experts.

Challenges	Opportunities
1. CBT practices damage the environment	9. Big proportion of CBT component
2. Shortage of talents	10. Plenty of benefits for CBT organizations
3. Need for educational programs in CBT services	11. Guarantee of opportunities for the CBT sector
4. Tourism safety literacy	12. Low level of bureaucracy
5. Destination exploration	13. Positive influence on the economy
6. High level of bureaucracy	14. Positive influence on the social sector
7. Lack of information about financial opportunities	15. Possibility to work independently
8. Low foreign language proficiency	16. Funds from NGOs
	17. Openness for self-investment



**Figure 3.** Semantic networks extracted from experts' opinions: (a) challenges and (b) opportunities.

Figure 3 shows that the distribution of opinions is relatively similar among all the challenges and opportunities mentioned by the experts. Although the number of experts is reduced and the results obtained after the analysis are relatively similar for all the countries, several differences can be identified.

In the case of challenges, less attention is given to the problems CBT practices might cause to the environment (50% of experts mentioned it, *Degree centrality* = 35,000). Shortage in talents and problems with their attraction, lack of knowledge about the destination, and financial opportunities that exist for CBT workers are pointed out as the most problematic areas (62.5%). However, high levels of bureaucracy continue to concern a major part of the participants (68.8%). In the case of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, 100% of respondents mentioned it, while the same indicator scored lower in other countries (Kyrgyzstan—33.33%, Kazakhstan—50%).

Further, a low level of bureaucracy is perceived by 25.0% of total respondents, with Kyrgyzstan having a somewhat larger positive evaluation of this factor. On the other hand, 62.5% of experts noted the positive influence CBT has on the countries and region's economies, having an additional 43.75% mention the positive role of social sphere support from CBT. It is noteworthy that 31.25% of participants observed a sufficient number of positive inputs provided by the government to the development of CBT businesses. However, the experts active in the whole region and the Uzbekistan representatives did not mention this aspect in their interviews.

In all the interviews, experts confirmed that they were working with both international and domestic tourists, but the interest in CBT prevailed among the first group (18.75%). The majority of experts (81.25%) concluded that domestic tourists and the local community as a whole lacked an in-depth understanding of the sustainability concept, which may also impact their interest in CBT activities.

According to experts, Kyrgyzstan presented the largest share of CBT in the tourist offer (90%) with CBT services and routes becoming very popular. In addition, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were found to be most active in promoting CBT through facilitating benefits and opportunities. Experts mentioned the easiness and less time-consuming processes required for obtaining activity entrepreneurial licences.

Experts were mostly positive about the influence of tourism on economic and social development, thereby contributing to sustainable development. However, some concerns were raised concerning the preservation of the environment and in relation to the effects of tourism on the adjacent areas, questioning the sustainability of the tourist offer. The public sector is mostly driven to boost economic growth while hardly considering the negative effects on the social-cultural and ecological environments. On the other hand, private operators of CBT in the case of Kyrgyzstan are mostly motivated to work independently in order to reduce the dependency on mediator agencies.

In general, there is a need for human resources training, educational programs, and tourism service literacy. Further, experts pointed out a high level of need for community tourism services training, environmental conservation practices, foreign language and financial literacy, and safety procedures across Central Asia. Thus, according to the perception of stakeholders, there are some key destination issues (environmental and cultural conservation, socioeconomic impacts, governance, education, and human capital) that require urgency from the point of view of planning for sustainability.

Experts showed a high level of dissatisfaction with the information distribution on available development funds between public and private sectors. Despite the government's support for tourism development programs, it is noticed that CBT entrepreneurial families rely mostly on self-investment or start-up funds granted by NGOs [79]. The main challenges are related to the high state bureaucracy for developing entrepreneurial activities in tourism and the very low awareness of the community on opportunities for CBT. There is also a lack of awareness or actual understanding of sustainability concepts among locals and businesses.

According to experts, the main challenges or objectives of Central Asian's CBT can be posed as follows: (i) generate sustainable income for a better quality of life in remote areas; (ii) sustain traditional forms of authentic culture and raise awareness of the cultural content; (iii) find a less harmful alternative to agriculture which damages the natural areas; (iv) involve the local population in preserving the nature and culture, and (v) manage a mutual spiritual exchange with tourists.

#### 4.2. Tourists' Perceptions

Table 2 shows the mean values of the tourists' perceptions of sustainability in the Central Asian countries, valued by utilizing a Likert scale from 1 to 5. Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan are the countries with the highest level of sustainability perceptions, while Turkmenistan has the lowest level. Overall, the perceptions of sustainability of CBT are around the average of the scale in these countries, with the case of Turkmenistan at the bottom of the scale, suggesting that there is a large scope for higher enhancement of the sustainability profiles of the tourism industry.

**Table 2.** Mean and standard deviations of the sustainability perceptions (1–5 scale).

Country	Mean	Standard Deviation
Kazakhstan	2.59	1.320
Kyrgyzstan	2.91	1.465
Tajikistan	2.38	1.528
Uzbekistan	2.91	1.257
Turkmenistan	0.87	1.362

The sustainability perceptions of CBT can be influenced by the preferences of tourists for tourism sustainability and community involvement. Table 3 presents the mean values of the items in the scales utilized for appraising the constructs of sustainability perceptions and community involvement. The values of the items in the scale of community involvement are larger (average value 4.19) than those on the scale of sustainability preferences (average value 3.42).

**Table 3.** Means and standard deviations of the item constructs. (1–5 scale).

Item Scale	Mean	Standard Deviation
Sustainability preferences		
TSP1: I care about the environment and expect the services provided on my holiday to be run in an environmentally responsible way	3.81	1.148
TSP2: I prioritize comfort and value for money over environmentally friendly “green” practices	2.50	1.140
TSP3: I would be willing to pay more for tourism products and services that have an explicit component that is environmentally friendly (e.g., reduction of waste, water and energy use)	3.61	1.092
TSP4: I would choose a product/service ahead of others if it had a green award or certification (e.g., green globe certification)	3.65	1.018
TSP5: I would like to have information about sustainable management policies of hotels and guesthouses when booking a trip	3.57	1.080
Community involvement		
LINV1: I choose to spend money where it stays in the local community and contributes towards a thriving locality	4.10	1.142
LINV2: When I travel I want to understand the destination and “live like a local” through informed decisions	4.10	1.106
LINV3: I would like to be offered locally sourced food and drink where possible	4.31	1.187
LINV4: Sustaining the local culture and community is as important as sustaining the environment to me	4.25	1.203

Regarding the scale of sustainability preferences, the item with the highest value is referred to the care of the environment while on holidays and the expectations of the responsible management of the tourist services (TSP1), followed by the items concerned with the propensity to choose products with a green certificate (TSP3) and the willingness

to pay for environmentally friendly products (TSP4). The lowest value given to item TSP2 indicates that tourists equally balance comfort or value for money and the sound management of the environmental aspects of the destination, since its value is 2.50, i.e., in the middle of the scale.

With respect to the items on the community involvement scale, tourists place the highest value on giving the same interest to sustaining the local community as well as to the environment (LINV4), followed by the desire to be offered local food and drink while travelling (LINV3). Tourists also show high interest in choosing to spend money that helps local communities (LINV1) and in embedding in the destinations' local culture and traditions (LINV2). Thus, although there are strong preferences for local involvement with communities, as expressed by the tourists visiting Central Asian countries, their area also marked preferences for sound sustainability management that show concern for the environmental impacts that tourism activity may generate at the destinations.

#### 4.3. SEM Results

Table 4 shows the mean values of each of the items of the scales utilized for the measurement of the constructs in the model. EFA applied to the scales of sustainability preferences and local involvement raised one single factor for each construct. Table 5 presents the results of the convergent validity as evaluated with CFA for both scales.

**Table 4.** Results of CFA reliability and validity.

Item Scale	Standardized Factor Loading	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Cronbach $\alpha$
Sustainability preferences		0.741	0.630	0.711
TSP1: I care about the environment and expect the services provided on my holiday to be run in an environmentally responsible way	0.835			
TSP2: I prioritize comfort and value for money over environmentally friendly “green” practices	−0.834			
TSP3: I would be willing to pay more for tourism products and services that have an explicit component that is environmentally friendly (e.g., reduction of waste, water and energy use)	0.728			
TSP4: I would choose a product/service ahead of others if it had a green award or certification (e.g., green globe certification)	0.644			
TSP5: I would like to have information about sustainable management policies of hotels and guesthouses when booking a trip	0.672			
Community involvement		0.812	0.695	0.810
LINV1: I choose to spend money where it stays in the local community and contributes towards a thriving locality	0.833			
LINV2: When I travel I want to understand the destination and “live like a local” through informed decisions	0.855			
LINV3: I would like to be offered locally sourced food and drink where possible	0.754			
LINV4: Sustaining the local culture and community is as important as sustaining the environment to me	0.721			

**Table 5.** Correlation matrix of latent variables.

Constructs	1	2	3
1. Sustainability preferences	0.770		
2. Community involvement	0.219	0.830	
3. CBT sustainability perceptions	0.350	0.366	0.775

The composite reliability (CR) ranged from 0.74 to 0.81, therefore above the threshold of 0.7 for a satisfactory level [80]. The average variance extracted (AVE) also exceeded the criterion value of 0.5 for satisfying the internal consistency of the scales [81]. This is also proved by the high values of the  $\alpha$ -Cronbach, which are above 0.7 for both scales [80,82].

In addition, the fitness indexes (NFI = 0.925; CFI = 0.932; TLI = 0.915; IFI = 0.933) are all above the threshold value of 0.9, thus representing a good fit to the model, while the quality indicators of the measurement model are  $\chi^2/df = 2.9$  and RMSEA = 0.031, which are below the threshold levels of 5 and 0.08, respectively, necessary for a level of good fit [83,84].

Discriminant validity refers to the extent to which a construct is actually different from the other constructs in the model. This was evaluated by considering the correlation matrix of the latent variables that allows for assessing whether the square root of the mean value extracted (AVE) is greater than the correlations with the other variables. As shown in Table 5, all correlations indicated in the diagonal values or correlations between factors are greater than those on the off-diagonal, referring to square roots of the variance shared between the factors and their measures (AVE).

Figure 4 presents the parameter results of the structural model (SEM). The model fit is satisfactory based on  $\chi^2/df = 1.7$  and other indicator statistics (CFI = 0.933; TLI = 0.922; IFI = 0.940; NFI = 0.912). The structural model is appropriate according to the RMSEA index, which takes a value of 0.028. The parameters of the structural paths were also significant at the 0.001 level (1%).

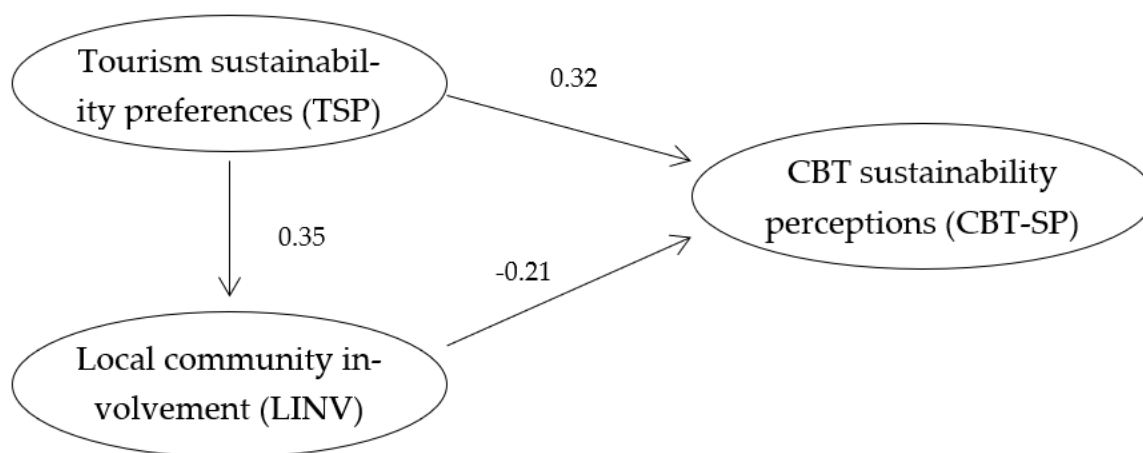


Figure 4. Results of the structural model.

Table 6 presents the summary results of the hypotheses testing and standardised coefficient estimates. The empirical results support two of the theoretical hypotheses of the structural relationships leading to the formation of the perceptions of CBT sustainability (Figure 4). First, the preferences for tourism sustainability have a significant and positive impact on the sustainability perceptions of CBT ( $\beta = 0.32$ ;  $p < 0.00$ ) (supporting hypothesis  $H_1$ ) That is, those tourists with higher preferences for tourism sustainability have higher perceptions of how sustainability is managed in Central Asian countries. However, the relationship between the local community involvement and the perceptions of CBT sustainability is negative but not significant ( $\beta = -0.21$ ;  $p < 0.00$ ) thereby rejecting  $H_2$ . The negative sign would indicate that those tourists who wish to involve more with the local communities have a lower perception of the sustainability of CBT. However, this hypothesis is not supported by the structural model. Finally, the relationship between tourists' sustainability preferences and the local involvement with the community is confirmed with a positive sign ( $\beta = 0.35$ ;  $p < 0.00$ ) supporting  $H_3$ . Thus, tourists' preferences for sustainable tourism practices leading to a positive perception of CBT do also impact on tourists' higher preferences for involvement with the local community.



**Table 6.** Hypotheses testing results.

Path	Par-Estimate	p-Value	Hypothesis
TSP → CBT-SP	0.32	0.000	H <sub>1</sub> supported
LINV → CBT-SP	−0.21	0.141	H <sub>2</sub> rejected
TSP → LINV	0.35	0.000	H <sub>3</sub> supported

## 5. Discussion

As with other emerging destinations, Central Asian countries face critical challenges for successfully working toward sustainability through the expansion of CBT [85]. These challenges are mostly related with the prioritization of the sustainable development goals in the management of the destinations, which are lagging behind the interests of local decision-makers and tourist organizations for the promotion of CBT as a successful socioeconomic activity [86]. In this paper, the perceptions of both business stakeholders and tourists about the sustainability performance of CBT in Central Asian countries have been jointly evaluated, showing that this combined approach may enhance the diversity of perspectives that can be useful for moving forward in a concerted approach.

The results show that tourists are very much interested in the sustainability of CBT since they pose strong preferences for a sound sustainable management of the destinations and for a responsible involvement with the affected communities, similar to the findings of other studies [15,87–89]. Further, structural equation modelling shows that the preferences for sustainable development significantly and positively influence the perceptions of sustainability in the Central Asian destinations. Thus, those tourists with higher preferences for sound management of environmental issues at the Central Asian destinations and who are willing to pay for environmentally certified products do have higher perceptions of the sustainability of CBT.

However, the overall ratings given by tourists to the sustainability perceptions are rather moderate, indicating that there is significant scope for improving the sustainability profiles of the destinations [90]. In this regard, the opinions of tourists coincide with that of stakeholders and experts in CBT in Central Asian countries. That is, the stakeholders have pointed out that there are critical challenges and opportunities for CBT that should be explored in order to transit toward a more sustainable path, given the current conditions in which the tourism industry is being developed [91]. Specifically, there is a need to focus on the aspects of human capital development, socioeconomic impacts of tourism, involvement of local communities, financial facilities, and prevention of the environmental impacts [92]. Overall, most of the aspects raised by stakeholders coincide with the sustainable development goals that are needed in order to increase the performance of sustainability of tourist destinations, thereby leading to higher perceptions by stakeholders and tourists [93].

On the other hand, results show that tourists support sustainable tourism development through participating in tourism with local communities [94,95]. This is related to the fact that they are also willing to buy green-certified tourist products and to pay a premium price for ecologically friendly products, as well as sharing a high environmental concern when choosing vacation places [96]. Along this line, Karlsson [97] found evidence of the willingness of tourists to spend on local goods and services and on the preservation of local features and culture, although Dikgang [61] found evidence of neutral or even critical attitudes toward community engagement.

The perceptions of CBT sustainability are related to the interests of tourists with participating in CBT activities, local life, integration, and participation in local events, since it is clear that tourists are attracted to the region in search of something special [98]. These preferences are manifested in a higher willingness to pay for those experiences that guarantee sound sustainability features [99,100]. This puts into question the common perception of CBT as being scheduled “only for budgeted tourists”, or “provided services are pretty basic, for those who sacrifice comfort” [101]

Thus, based on the perceptions of tourists and stakeholders there are opportunities for tourism businesses to tie their activities with CBT families with the aim to help them to upscale their services and conditions, by increasing the level of tourist participation in traditional daily activities (as herding sheep, cooking traditional meals, engage in seasonal harvesting, horseback riding sports and games, carpet weaving, cultural events and celebrations, etc.) [102]. There is evidence showing that tourists that participate in local activities and become involved with local communities are more satisfied with the tourist experience and become more loyal to the company offering it [2]. Along this line, this paper has shown that tourists' stronger inclinations for interaction with the local community are influenced by their preferences for sustainable tourism practices that contribute to a positive perception of CBT.

The planning and development of sustainable tourism in developing countries are frequently criticized for failing to satisfy the demands of local stakeholders [103]. As a result, stakeholders sometimes resist tourism-related efforts, jeopardizing their implementation and long-term viability [87]. The present study has shown that CBT actors show the need for instrumenting long-term viable sustainable development strategy; providing equal access to resources and funding; obtaining government support in lowering the risks of social, cultural, and environmental damage; and urging financial independence provided by less bureaucratized entrepreneurial activities. Some studies suggest that sustainable tourism development cannot be achieved without early stakeholder input and participation in the tourism planning process [104]. Assessing and incorporating the diverse preferences of all important stakeholder groups in sustainable tourism planning is challenging, and may necessitate a combination of stakeholder involvement strategies [105].

The stakeholders in this study point out that both the domestic tourists and the local populations are not very much aware of the sustainability practice, and that this may affect their lack of enthusiasm for CBT planning and activities. Thus, there is a need for intervention to make it easier for the local communities to access and comprehend tourists' and the tourism sector's concerns [106]. This might be accomplished by conducting awareness-raising efforts in host communities about tourist preferences and interactions between different stakeholder groups (i.e., visitors and local people) before the creation and delivery of any tourism activities [17].

## 6. Conclusions

The perceptions of tourists and stakeholders about the specific features of destinations are one of the main drivers of tourism products and the formation of tourist experiences [107]. Sustainability planning requires working through the perceptions of tourists and stakeholders for putting in place those activities and products that contribute to successful destinations [108]. This paper proposed a combination of methods and approaches to study both stakeholders' and tourists' perceptions of CBT sustainability in Central Asian countries. These destinations face important sustainability challenges to become truly competitive on the international scene and must balance their wealth of endowed tourist resources with the pressures from the urgencies of growth and rising living standards.

These results show that both tourists' and stakeholders' perceptions of CBT coincide in that there is scope for more compelling actions toward sustainability. That is, the sustainability performance of CBT in Central Asian countries can be improved beyond the current practices in managing environmental, social, and financial issues [109]. On the one hand, stakeholders pointed out that there is need to work on improving environmental preservation, reducing socioeconomic impacts on the local populations, building human capital, enabling local entrepreneurship, and providing local financial facilities. On the other hand, the perceptions of tourists are significantly influenced by their preferences for sustainable tourism development, which are also affect their desire to become involved with the culture and traditions of local communities. Thus, it is clear that tourists care about contributing to long-term tourism development, and therefore CBT businesses and

destinations should actively work toward satisfying visitors' needs regarding sustainability management [110].

Tourists' preferences for sustainable CBT products influence their willingness to become involved with the local communities and contribute to the local development. That is, tourists wish to engage and experience the "difference" that successfully contributes to community development [111]. Thus, in some ways, this may shift responsibility away from tourism organizations and toward travellers to combat unsustainable growth and poverty in destination areas [112]. However, it is found that tourism organizations in Central Asia support CBT socioeconomic development, but this support is not fully grounded on sustainability principles and does not always align with local communities' interests. There is a need to meet travellers' desires to contribute to the well-being of local communities by enjoying an authentic tourism experience. In this regard, the strengthening of collaboration between the different stakeholders of destinations may help push forward successful practices for achieving sustainable goals.

Tourists' and stakeholders' perceptions of sustainability across Central Asian countries are not homogenous, with Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan receiving the highest levels of sustainability perceptions, while Turkmenistan having the lowest. This may be due to low destination awareness of Central Asian countries, raising the importance of building competitive promotion strategies and destination branding [113].

In addition, tourists' preferences for sustainable CBT in Central Asian countries are reflected in their willingness to pay more for green-certified products [114]. That is, if tourists concord with the sustainable aim of the payments and have also a meaningful experience, they are more likely to accept a price increase [115]. Further, results reveal that engaging in CBT services is not necessarily associated with backpacking or low-cost tours; i.e., travellers who value comfort also express interest in—and choose—environmentally sound CBT facilities, making authenticity or sustainability no longer the "cheap" option. This suggests that there is scope for tour operators to redesign their products to approach tourists' preferences for sustainability, and for destination management organizations to implement promotional initiatives aimed at incentivizing sustainable tourist behaviour.

The desire of tourists to become involved with the local community as significantly influenced by their sustainability preferences, is also in line with the recommendation raised by stakeholder experts that the community must establish a sense of ownership in order for CBT to yield tangible results [116]. That is, supply should meet demand for CBT to work out according to the sustainable preferences of tourists. Locals must be involved in the resolution of all major concerns, and they must be enabled to solve them on their own [117]. In this sense, empowerment and collaboration of local communities and stakeholders becomes a crucial issue for sustainability, i.e., providing them with the means and capacities (human capital, financial resources, and entrepreneurship) to become active suppliers of CBT at the destination.

In sum, this paper has shown that a combined methods approach provides more grounded insights into the perceptions of CBT in Central Asian countries, since the qualitative information generated by stakeholders' experts, which was analysed by content analysis methods, allows researchers to explain and support the quantitative assessments and hypotheses that are evaluated based on tourists' survey responses. This approach leads to useful implications for destination management that match the desires of tourists according to their demands and perceptions. The organization of the local resources should be put in place to meet those demands, thereby raising the level of perceptions of sustainability, and contributing toward more sustainable CBT in Central Asian countries.

## 7. Limitations and Ideas for Future Research

The present research is centred on the analysis of CBT perceptions from the perspective of travellers, who visited the region recently, and the stakeholders that operate in the area. The main limitation of the work is related to the rather small number of participants, owing to the small scale of CBT in the area and the difficulties for approaching large numbers

of subjects. The results of the research can provide useful information to carry on further inquiries along a larger time span that increase the sizes of the samples. A larger sample size could also enable an in-depth analysis for each specific country in the region. On the other hand, from a methodological standpoint, there would be a need to assess the feedback loops between the CBT perceptions of tourists and stakeholders. This could be carried out by applying methods that assess how the value and social propositions that are designed as sustainable solutions at the destinations are perceived by potential tourists.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, G.U.; methodology, software, validation, D.A. and C.J.L.; formal analysis, C.J.L.; investigation, G.U. and D.A.; resources, G.U.; data curation, G.U.; writing—original draft preparation, G.U.; writing—review and editing, G.U.; visualization, G.U.; supervision, C.J.L. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** ProID2021010048, Agencia ACIISI FEDER Funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

**Data Availability Statement:** The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available.

**Acknowledgments:** We would like to express our gratitude to participants in our study for sharing their valuable experiences and opinion with us.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## References

1. Bramwell, B.; Lane, B. Priorities in sustainable tourism research. *J. Sustain. Tour.* **2008**, *16*, 1–4. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
2. Buckley, R. Sustainable tourism: Research and reality. *Ann. Tour. Res.* **2012**, *39*, 528–546. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
3. Reimer, J.K.; Walter, P. How do you know it when you see it? Community-based ecotourism in the Cardamom Mountains of southwestern Cambodia. *Tour. Manag.* **2013**, *34*, 122–132. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
4. Weaver, D.B.; Lawton, L.J. Twenty years on: The state of contemporary ecotourism research. *Tour. Manag.* **2007**, *28*, 1168–1179. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
5. Butler, R.W. Sustainable tourism: A state-of-the-art review. *Tour. Geogr.* **1999**, *1*, 7–25. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
6. Hardy, A.; Beeton, R.J.; Pearson, L. Sustainable tourism: An overview of the concept and its position in relation to conceptualizations of tourism. *J. Sustain. Tour.* **2002**, *10*, 475–496. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
7. Sharpley, R. Tourism and sustainable development: Exploring the theoretical divide. *J. Sustain. Tour.* **2000**, *8*, 1–19. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
8. Dwyer, L.; Thomas, F. Tourism yield measures for Cambodia. *Curr. Issues Tour.* **2012**, *15*, 303–328. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
9. Harrison, D.; Schipani, S. Lao tourism and poverty alleviation: Community-based tourism and the private sector. *Curr. Issues Tour.* **2007**, *10*, 194–230. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
10. Mitchell, J. Value chain approaches to assessing the impact of tourism on low-income households in developing countries. *J. Sustain. Tour.* **2012**, *20*, 457–475. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
11. Scheyvens, R.; Momsen, J.H. Tourism and poverty reduction: Issues for small island states. *Tour. Geogr.* **2008**, *10*, 22–41. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
12. Sharpley, R.; Naidoo, P. Tourism and poverty reduction: The case of Mauritius. *Tour. Hosp. Plan. Dev.* **2010**, *7*, 145–162. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
13. Dodds, R.; Ali, A.; Galaski, K. Mobilizing knowledge: Determining key elements for success and pitfalls in developing community-based tourism. *Curr. Issues Tour.* **2018**, *21*, 1547–1568. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
14. López-Guzmán, T.; Sánchez-Cañizares, S.; Pavón, V. Community-based tourism in developing countries: A case study. *Tourismos* **2011**, *6*, 69–84.
15. Goodwin, H.; Santilli, R. Community-based tourism: A success. *ICRT Occas. Pap.* **2009**, *11*, 37.
16. Mtapuri, O.; Giampiccoli, A. Towards a comprehensive model of community-based tourism development. *S. Afr. Geogr. J.* **2016**, *98*, 154–168. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
17. Kontogeorgopoulos, N.; Churyen, A.; Duangsaeng, V. Success factors in community-based tourism in Thailand: The role of luck, external support, and local leadership. *Tour. Plan. Dev.* **2014**, *11*, 106–124. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
18. Campbell, L.M. Conservation narratives in Costa Rica: Conflict and co-existence. *Dev. Change* **2002**, *33*, 29–56. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
19. Forstner, K. Community ventures and access to markets: The role of intermediaries in marketing rural tourism products. *Dev. Policy Rev.* **2004**, *22*, 497–514. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
20. Markandya, A.; Taylor, T.; Pedroso, S. Tourism and sustainable development: Lessons from recent World Bank experience. In *The Economic of Tourism and Sustainable Development, FEEM Series on Economics and the Environment*; Edward Elgar: Northampton, MA, USA, 2005; pp. 225–251.
21. Vaughan, D. Tourism and biodiversity: A convergence of interests? *Int. Aff.* **2000**, *76*, 283–297. [\[CrossRef\]](#)



22. Giampiccoli, A.; Mtapuri, O.; Nauright, J. Tourism development in the Seychelles: A proposal for a unique community-based tourism alternative. *J. Tour. Cult. Change* **2021**, *19*, 444–457. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
23. Dangi, T.B.; Tazim, J. An integrated approach to sustainable community-based tourism. *Sustainability* **2016**, *8*, 475. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
24. Isaac, R.K. Alternative tourism: New forms of tourism in Bethlehem for the Palestinian tourism industry. *Curr. Issues Tour.* **2010**, *13*, 21–36. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
25. Durkin, J.; Perić, M.; Šebrek, J.K. Addressing organisational challenges of cultural tourism in rural areas through community-based tourism model. *Tour. S. Eur.* **2017**, *4*, 145–157.
26. Ernawati, N.M.; Sanders, D.; Dowling, R. Host–guest orientations of community-based tourism products: A case study in Bali, Indonesia. *International J. Tour. Res.* **2017**, *19*, 367–382. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
27. Ernawati, N.M.; Dowling, R.; Sanders, D. Tourists' perceptions of community-based tourism products for sustainable tourism in Bali, Indonesia. In *The Practice of Sustainable Tourism*; Routledge: Abingdon-on-Thames, UK, 2015; pp. 117–134.
28. Dimitrovski, D.; Lemmetyinen, A.; Nieminen, L.; Pohjola, T. Understanding coastal and marine tourism sustainability-A multi-stakeholder analysis. *J. Destin. Mark. Manag.* **2021**, *19*, 100554. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
29. Tolkach, D.; King, B. Strengthening community-based tourism in a new resource-based island nation: Why and how? *Tour. Manag.* **2015**, *48*, 386–398. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
30. Trejos, B.; Chiang, L.H.N. Local economic linkages to community-based tourism in rural Costa Rica. *Singap. J. Trop. Geogr.* **2009**, *30*, 373–387. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
31. Sebele, L.S. Community-based tourism ventures, benefits and challenges: Khama rhino sanctuary trust, central district, Botswana. *Tour. Manag.* **2010**, *31*, 136–146. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
32. Stone, M.T.; Stone, L.S. Challenges of community-based tourism in Botswana: A review of literature. *Trans. R. Soc. S. Afr.* **2020**, *75*, 181–193. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
33. Ruiz-Ballesteros, E. Social-ecological resilience and community-based tourism: An approach from Agua Blanca, Ecuador. *Tour. Manag.* **2011**, *32*, 655–666. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
34. Lee, T.H.; Jan, F.H.; Yang, C.C. Conceptualizing and measuring environmentally responsible behaviors from the perspective of community-based tourists. *Tour. Manag.* **2013**, *36*, 454–468. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
35. Wearing, S.L.; Wearing, M.; McDonald, M. Understanding local power and interactional processes in sustainable tourism: Exploring village–tour operator relations on the Kokoda Track, Papua New Guinea. *J. Sustain. Tour.* **2010**, *18*, 61–76. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
36. Lee, C.K.; Back, K.J. Examining structural relationships among perceived impact, benefit, and support for casino development based on 4 year longitudinal data. *Tour. Manag.* **2006**, *27*, 466–480. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
37. Alam, M.S.; Paramati, S.R. The impact of tourism on income inequality in developing economies: Does Kuznets curve hypothesis exist? *Ann. Tour. Res.* **2016**, *61*, 111–126. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
38. Davidson, L.; Sahli, M. Foreign direct investment in tourism, poverty alleviation, and sustainable development: A review of the Gambian hotel sector. *J. Sustain. Tour.* **2015**, *23*, 167–187. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
39. Bowers, J. Developing sustainable tourism through Eco museology: A case study in the Rupununi region of Guyana. *J. Sustain. Tour.* **2016**, *24*, 758–782. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
40. Ap, J. Residents' perceptions on tourism impacts. *Ann. Tour. Res.* **1992**, *19*, 665–690. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
41. Hatipoglu, B.; Alvarez, M.D.; Ertuna, B. Barriers to stakeholder involvement in the planning of sustainable tourism: The case of the Thrace region in Turkey. *J. Clean. Prod.* **2016**, *111*, 306–317. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
42. Zapata, M.J.; Hall, C.M.; Lindo, P.; Vanderschaeghe, M. Can community-based tourism contribute to development and poverty alleviation? Lessons from Nicaragua. *Curr. Issues Tour.* **2011**, *14*, 725–749. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
43. Lee, T.H. A structural model for examining how destination image and interpretation services affect future visitation behavior: A case study of Taiwan's Taomi eco-village. *J. Sustain. Tour.* **2009**, *17*, 727–745. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
44. Agapito, D.; Pinto, P.; Mendes, J. Tourists' memories, sensory impressions and loyalty: In loco and post-visit study in Southwest Portugal. *Tour. Manag.* **2017**, *58*, 108–118. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
45. Sosa, M.; Aulet, S.; Mundet, L. Community-based tourism through food: A proposal of sustainable tourism indicators for isolated and rural destinations in Mexico. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 6693. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
46. Tavares, J.; Tran, X.; Pennington-Grey, L. Destination images of the ten most visited countries for potential Brazilian tourists. *Tour. Manag.* **2020**, *16*, 43–50. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
47. Paunovic, I.; Jovanovic, V. Sustainable mountain tourism in word and deed: A comparative analysis in the macro regions of the Alps and the Dinarides. *Acta Geogr. Slov.* **2019**, *59*. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
48. Buhalis, D. The tourism phenomenon: The new tourist and consumer. In *Tourism in the Age of Globalisation*; Routledge: Abingdon-on-Thames, UK, 2005; pp. 83–110.
49. Papatheodorou, A. Why people travel to different places. *Ann. Tour. Res.* **2001**, *28*, 164–179. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
50. Lima Santos, L.; Cardoso, L.; Araújo-Vila, N.; Fraiz-Brea, J. Sustainability perceptions in tourism and hospitality: A mixed-method bibliometric approach. *Sustainability* **2020**, *12*, 8852. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
51. Grilli, G.; Tyllianakis, E.; Luisetti, T.; Ferrini, S.; Turner, R.K. Prospective tourist preferences for sustainable tourism development in Small Island Developing States. *Tour. Manag.* **2021**, *82*, 104178. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
52. Nok, L.C.; Suntikul, W.; Agyeiwaah, E.; Tolkach, D. Backpackers in Hong Kong–motivations, preferences and contribution to sustainable tourism. *J. Travel Tour. Mark.* **2017**, *34*, 1058–1070.



53. Mathew, P.V.; Sreejesh, S. Impact of responsible tourism on destination sustainability and quality of life of community in tourism destinations. *J. Hosp. Tour. Manag.* **2017**, *31*, 83–89. [CrossRef]
54. Budeanu, A. Sustainable tourist behaviour—a discussion of opportunities for change. *Int. J. Consum. Stud.* **2007**, *31*, 499–508. [CrossRef]
55. Jetter, L.; Chen, R. Destination branding and images: Perceptions and practices from tourism industry professionals. *Int. J. Hosp. Tour. Adm.* **2011**, *12*, 174–187. [CrossRef]
56. Ozturk, A.B.; Qu, H. The impact of destination images on tourists' perceived value, expectations, and loyalty. *J. Qual. Assur. Hosp. Tour.* **2008**, *9*, 275–297. [CrossRef]
57. Liu, C.H.; Jiang, J.F.; Gan, B. The antecedent and consequence behaviour of sustainable tourism: Integrating the concepts of marketing strategy and destination image. *Asia Pac. J. Tour. Res.* **2021**, *26*, 829–848. [CrossRef]
58. Jarvis, N.; Weeden, C.; Simcock, N. The benefits and challenges of sustainable tourism certification: A case study of the Green Tourism Business Scheme in the West of England. *J. Hosp. Tour. Manag.* **2010**, *17*, 83–93. [CrossRef]
59. Capriello, A.; Altinay, L.; Monti, A. Exploring resource procurement for community-based event organization in social enterprises: Evidence from Piedmont, Italy. *Curr. Issues Tour.* **2019**, *22*, 2319–2322. [CrossRef]
60. Okazaki, E. A community-based tourism model: Its conception and use. *J. Sustain. Tour.* **2008**, *16*, 511–529. [CrossRef]
61. Dikgang, J.; Muchapondwa, E. The economic valuation of nature-based tourism in the South African Kgalagadi area and implications for the Khomani San 'bushmen' community. *J. Environ. Econ. Policy* **2017**, *3*, 306–322. [CrossRef]
62. Carballo, M.M.; Araña, J.E.; León, C.J.; Moreno-Gil, S. Economic valuation of tourism destination image. *Tour. Econ.* **2015**, *21*, 741–759. [CrossRef]
63. Rihova, I.; Buhalis, D.; Moital, M.; Gouthro, M.B. Conceptualizing customer-to-customer value co-creation in tourism. *Int. J. Tour. Res.* **2015**, *17*, 356–363. [CrossRef]
64. Tosun, C. Limits to community participation in the tourism development process in developing countries. *Tour. Manag.* **2000**, *21*, 613–633. [CrossRef]
65. NatGeo. 2018. Available online: <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/projects/out-of-edén-walk/media/2018-02-on-foot-in-the-path-of-the-silk-road/> (accessed on 1 May 2022).
66. Kruczek, Z.; Szromek, A.R. The identification of values in business models of tourism enterprises in the context of the phenomenon of overtourism. *Sustainability* **2020**, *12*, 1457. [CrossRef]
67. Kim, M. A systematic literature review of the personal value orientation construct in hospitality and tourism literature. *Int. J. Hosp. Manag.* **2020**, *89*, 102572. [CrossRef]
68. Adongo, C.A.; Taale, F.; Adam, I. Tourists' values and empathic attitude toward sustainable development in tourism. *Ecol. Econ.* **2018**, *150*, 251–263. [CrossRef]
69. OSCE. 2009. Available online: <https://www.osce.org/bishkek/63428> (accessed on 5 January 2021).
70. The World Bank. 2020. Available online: [https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/ST.INT.ARVL?locations=KZ-UZ-KG-TJ&most\\_recent\\_year\\_desc=false](https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/ST.INT.ARVL?locations=KZ-UZ-KG-TJ&most_recent_year_desc=false) (accessed on 5 January 2021).
71. World Bank. Central Asia; Tourism a Driver or Development. 2017. Available online: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2017/10/31/central-asia-tourism-a-driver-for-development> (accessed on 5 January 2021).
72. Yoon, Y.; Gursoy, D.; Chen, J.S. Validating a tourism development theory with structural equation modeling. *Tour. Manag.* **2001**, *22*, 363–372. [CrossRef]
73. Byrne, B.M. Factor analytic models: Viewing the structure of an assessment instrument from three perspectives. *J. Personal. Assess.* **2005**, *85*, 17–32. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
74. Kibicho, W. Community-based tourism: A factor-cluster segmentation approach. *J. Sustain. Tour.* **2008**, *16*, 211–231. [CrossRef]
75. Naidoo, R.B. Heterogeneous consumer preferences for local community involvement in nature-based tourism drive triple-bottom-line gains. *Conserv. Sci. Pract.* **2021**, *3*, e425. [CrossRef]
76. Geddes, A.; Parker, C.; Scott, S. When the snowball fails to roll and the use of 'horizontal' networking in qualitative social research. *Int. J. Soc. Res. Methodol.* **2018**, *21*, 347–358. [CrossRef]
77. Cohen, E. Toward a sociology of international tourism. *Soc. Res.* **1972**, *39*, 164–182.
78. Kozak, M.; Crotts, J.C.; Law, R. The impact of the perception of risk on international travellers. *Int. J. Tour. Res.* **2007**, *9*, 233–242. [CrossRef]
79. USAID. Building a Stronger Central Asian Travel Brand. 2021. Available online: <https://www.usaid.gov/central-asia-regional/success-stories/may-2021-building-stronger-central-asian-travel-brand> (accessed on 20 May 2022).
80. Hair, J.F., Jr.; Sarstedt, M.; Matthews, L.M.; Ringle, C.M. Identifying and treating unobserved heterogeneity with FIMIX-PLS: Part I—method. *Eur. Bus. Rev.* **2016**, *31*, 2–24. [CrossRef]
81. Sohn, H.K.; Lee, T.J.; Yoon, Y.S. Relationship between perceived risk, evaluation, satisfaction, and behavioral intention: A case of local-festival visitors. *J. Travel Tour. Mark.* **2016**, *33*, 28–45. [CrossRef]
82. Nunnally, J.C. An overview of psychological measurement. In *Clinical Diagnosis of Mental Disorders*; Springer: Cham, Switzerland, 1978; pp. 97–146.
83. Chen, C.F.; Tsai, D. How destination image and evaluative factors affect behavioral intentions? *Tour. Manag.* **2007**, *28*, 1115–1122. [CrossRef]

84. Byrne, B.M. Testing for multigroup equivalence of a measuring instrument: A walk through the process. *Psicothema* **2008**, *20*, 872–882. [PubMed]
85. Alieva, D.; Usmonova, G. Sustainability perceptions of Community Based tourism by stakeholders in Central Asia. *Local Dev. Soc.* **2021**, *2*, 244–254. [CrossRef]
86. Kantarci, K.; Uysal, M.; Magnini, V.P. (Eds.) *Tourism in Central Asia: Cultural Potential and Challenges*; CRC Press: Boca Raton, FL, USA, 2014.
87. Halstead, L. *Making Community-Based Tourism Work: An Assessment of Factors Contributing to Successful Community-owned Tourism Development in Caprivi, Namibia*; Directorate of Environmental Affairs: Windhoek, Namibia, 2003.
88. Jamal, T.; Getz, D. Collaboration Theory and Community Tourism Planning. *Ann. Tour. Res.* **1995**, *22*, 186–204. [CrossRef]
89. Salazar, N.B. Community-based cultural tourism: Issues, threats and opportunities. *J. Sustain. Tour.* **2012**, *20*, 9–22. [CrossRef]
90. Buffa, F. Young tourists and sustainability. Profiles, attitudes, and implications for destination strategies. *Sustainability* **2015**, *7*, 14042–14062. [CrossRef]
91. Planeterra Foundation. Ak Orgo Project. 2020. Available online: <https://planeterra.org/ak-orgo/> (accessed on 5 January 2021).
92. USAID. USAID/Central Asia's Future Growth Initiative. 2020. Available online: <https://www.usaid.gov/central-asia-regional/fact-sheets/usaid-central-asia-future-growth-initiative> (accessed on 1 May 2022).
93. Rocharungsat, P. Community-based tourism: The perspectives of three stakeholder groups. In Proceedings of the New Zealand Tourism and Hospitality Research Conference, Wellington, New Zealand, 8–10 December 2004; pp. 335–347.
94. Goodwin, H.; Francis, J. Ethical and responsible tourism: Consumer trends in the UK. *J. Vacat. Mark.* **2003**, *9*, 271–284. [CrossRef]
95. Caruana, R.; Glozer, S.; Crane, A.; McCabe, S. Tourists' accounts for responsible tourism. *Ann. Tour. Res.* **2014**, *46*, 115–129. [CrossRef]
96. Penz, E.; Hofmann, E.; Hartl, B. Fostering sustainable travel behavior: Role of sustainability labels and goal-directed behavior regarding touristic services. *Sustainability* **2017**, *9*, 1056. [CrossRef]
97. Karlsson, L.; Dolnicar, S. Does eco certification sell tourism services? Evidence from a quasi-experimental observation study in Iceland. *J. Sustain. Tour.* **2016**, *24*, 694–714. [CrossRef]
98. Han, H.; Eom, T.; Al-Ansi, A.; Ryu, H.B.; Kim, W. Community-based tourism as a sustainable direction in destination development: An empirical examination of visitor behaviors. *Sustainability* **2019**, *11*, 2864. [CrossRef]
99. Martínez García de Leaniz, P.; Herrero Crespo, Á.; Gómez López, R. Customer responses to environmentally certified hotels: The moderating effect of environmental consciousness on the formation of behavioural intentions. *J. Sustain. Tour.* **2018**, *26*, 1160–1177. [CrossRef]
100. Bendapudi, N.; Leone, R.P. Psychological implications of customer participation in co-production. *J. Mark.* **2003**, *67*, 14–28. [CrossRef]
101. ODI. Tourism in Poor Places-Who Gets What? 2021. Available online: <https://odi.org/en/insights/tourism-in-poor-places-who-gets-what/> (accessed on 10 June 2022).
102. Satke, R. In Kyrgyzstan, community Based Tourism Shows Way Forward. 2020. Available online: <https://earthjournalism.net/stories/in-kyrgyzstan-community-based-tourism-shows-a-way-forward> (accessed on 10 June 2022).
103. Ioannides, D. Planning for international tourism in less developed countries: Toward sustainability? *J. Plan. Lit.* **1995**, *9*, 235–254. [CrossRef]
104. Grafakos, S.; Flamos, A.; Enseñado, E. Preferences Matter: A Constructive Approach to Incorporating Local Stakeholders' Preferences in the Sustainability Evaluation of Energy Technologies. *Sustainability* **2015**, *7*, 10922–10960. [CrossRef]
105. Nugroho, P.; Numata, S. Resident support of community-based tourism development: Evidence from Gunung Ciremai National Park, Indonesia. *J. Sustain. Tour.* **2020**, *1*–16. [CrossRef]
106. Xu, J.B. Perceptions of tourism products. *Tour. Manag.* **2010**, *31*, 607–610. [CrossRef]
107. Ahn, B.L.; Lee, B.; Shafer, C.S. Operationalizing sustainability in regional tourism planning: An application of the limits of acceptable change framework. *Tour. Manag.* **2002**, *23*, 1–15. [CrossRef]
108. Harris-Smith, K.; Palmer, C. Donor funded community-based tourism development projects: The experience of rural mountain communities in Tajikistan's zerafshan valley. *Tour. Plan. Dev.* **2021**, *1*–24. [CrossRef]
109. Ditta-Apichai, M.K.; Kattiyapornpong, U.; Gretzel, U. Platform-mediated tourism micro-entrepreneurship: Implications for community-based tourism in Thailand. *J. Hosp. Tour. Technol.* **2020**, *11*, 223–240. [CrossRef]
110. He, M.; Liu, B.; Li, Y. Tourist inspiration: How the wellness tourism experience inspires tourist engagement. *J. Hosp. Tour. Res.* **2021**, 10963480211026376. [CrossRef]
111. Graci, S.; Van Vliet, L. Examining stakeholder perceptions towards sustainable tourism in an island destination. The Case of Savusavu, Fiji. *Tour. Plan. Dev.* **2020**, *17*, 62–81. [CrossRef]
112. Woodside, A.G.; Lysonski, S. A general model of traveler destination choice. *J. Travel Res.* **1989**, *27*, 8–14. [CrossRef]
113. Doran, R.; Hanss, D.; Larsen, S. Attitudes, efficacy beliefs, and willingness to pay for environmental protection when travelling. *Tour. Hosp. Res.* **2015**, *15*, 281–292. [CrossRef]
114. Durán-Román, J.L.; Cárdenas-García, P.J.; Pulido-Fernández, J.I. Tourists' willingness to pay to improve sustainability and experience at destination. *J. Destin. Mark. Manag.* **2021**, *19*, 100540. [CrossRef]
115. Zielinski, S.; Jeong, Y.; Milanés, C.B. Factors that influence community-based tourism (CBT) in developing and developed countries. *Tour. Geogr.* **2021**, *23*, 1040–1072. [CrossRef]

- 
116. Kim, S.; Park, E.; Phandanouvong, T. Barriers to local residents' participation in community-based tourism: Lessons from Houay Kaeng Village in Laos. In Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Tourism Research, Kota, Kinabalu, Malaysia, 9–11 December 2014.
  117. Gannon, M.; Rasoolimanesh, S.M.; Taheri, B. Assessing the mediating role of residents' perceptions toward tourism development. *J. Travel Res.* **2021**, *60*, 149–171. [[CrossRef](#)]