

## **A BALANCED DEVELOPMENT OF ECONOMIC PROCESSES, ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION, AND HUMAN WELLBEING**

Arjana Kadiu<sup>1</sup>, Albana Demi<sup>1</sup>, Szabó Zoltán<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University Aleksander Moisiu, Spitalle 2009 Durres, Albania

<sup>2</sup>University of Sopron, 9400 Sopron, Bajcsy-Zsilinszky u. 4 Hungary

### **Abstract**

*All extraordinary innovations of the last decades have impacted the marketplace, the world's economy, and as a consequence our lives. This dynamism is pushing us to our limits of adaptation and our limits of creativity as well. In light of these events, a very delicate occurrence needs special attention. Our natural, global environment has been forced to change significantly. Therefore, green initiatives are not a question anymore, but an urgent global engagement. In developing countries like Albania, growing green may be a lot more difficult, because this path is closely related to economic factors. However, small steps taken now, are crucial to approaching the global goal. The purpose of this research is to highlight the importance of establishing the key elements of green growth processes in Albania. Although green approaches may take more time in terms of economic growth, they will lead to sustainable development. This primary research will be based on a questionnaire and interviews with management teams of private enterprises and main public administrators in the city of Durres. The analysis is aimed to find out the level of engagement in the process of green development. Descriptive and explanatory research will help us understand the phenomenon of neglect and its whys, related to green growth processes in Albania. Innovative views, concerning marketing planning will be proposed through the study, highlighting their importance in the interconnected process. At the end of the study, based on our primary analysis and existing theoretical research, it is aimed to propose a sustainability scheme that will contribute to tourism development in Albania. Every step to protect local destinations, adds up to the common goal of protecting our planet, our global heritage, and our lives.*

**Keywords:** *economic processes, environment protection, human wellbeing, economic growth, administrators*

### **INTRODUCTION**

All extraordinary innovations of the last decades have impacted the marketplace, the economy of the world and as a consequence our lives. Extraordinary innovations and industrial growth have just occurred in front of us and from many aspects, we may consider ourselves lucky testimonials. However, a lot of good things come at a cost. Unfortunately, industrial activities play a role in environmental degradation as well. A lot of pressure is being put on natural resources, especially in developing countries, where a double environmental effect is occurring. Deforestation and soil degradation. (ISO 2019). According to a study from the UAE about the global future outlook, threats from pollution, habitat destruction, deforestation, over-exploitation, changes in biodiversity, seabed mining, and ocean acidification are all interfering with the natural functioning of the earth's ecosystems. (UAE Ministry of Cabinet Affairs and the Future, 2017). The World Economic Forum, (2021) identifies human overexploitation and/or mismanagement as key drivers of the scarcity of natural resources. Despite the bad side, this statement has a good side too. Human management and overexploitation are things that are still in human hands and may be improved more easily than other things outside human power. This new reality stimulates us to focus this study, analysis, and reflections on the importance of a balanced development of economic processes, environment protection, and human wellbeing. Although the conditions for green growth are not favorable in developing countries, there are surely opportunities to follow a path toward sustainable development. The incentives for green growth have been the focus of this study, highlighting their importance in the interaction between environmental issues and economic development. All stakeholders involved may play a crucial role in this interconnected process and all of them should collaborate to achieve the sustainability goal. Through the whole process of adopting a new

strategy, marketing planning adaptations may be an added contribution to the study and future strategies. This initiative is a topic for future researchers to explore and develop. A suggested marketing planning design, which contains adapted elements along with marketing planning, may be relevant for strategic marketing planning for Albanian tourism and future research and improvement.

## **1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### *1.1 Global climate change and sustainability transitions*

Especially after the industrial period, the global climate has changed a lot. The impact on ecosystems and human wellbeing is evident. During 2006 – 2015, the global mean surface temperature increased by 0.77 Grade Celsius. This occurrence has also increased the frequency and magnitude of impacts and a further increase in GMTS (global mean surface temperature) of 1.5 grade Celsius or more may have a devastating impact on nature as well as human systems. (IPCC Report 2018). With global warming up to 1.5°C, increases in intensity and amount of heavy precipitation are expected, frequency of droughts in different regions, loss of local species, and even the irreversible loss of ecosystems. (IPCC Report 2018) Regarding food availability, a reduction is predicted to be larger at 2°C of global warming than at 1.5°C or lower, especially in southern Africa, Amazon, central Europe, and the Mediterranean, where Albania is located. Ecosystems worldwide are at increased risk of long-term changes and damage. Changes to plant life cycles and animal behavior are observed in both land and marine ecosystems. (CW Scientific and Industrial Research Organization, 2019). Tourism is no doubt, one of the most affected industries, and even greater risks are projected with temperature-related degradation, which is associated with extreme heat and storms. Especially coastal tourism will be affected and loss of beaches or coral reef assets may occur. (IPCC Report, 2018). In this global situation, communities around the world are willing and ready of implementing, consistent with 1.5° pathways, but only a few have a final affirmation. To achieve a stronger and more decisive global response, every country should engage and raise its ambition level. This will be possible only through enhanced institutional capabilities at in-country levels, especially focusing on utilizing local knowledge. (IPCC Report 2018). Carbon emission reduction is a critical response to these threats and, if ambitious emissions reduction targets are achieved, offers some hope for the world's ecosystems. (UK Ministry of Defense Report, 2018). Signs of hope about air pollution may appear in the form of increased public awareness, cleaner transport options, retrofitted buildings, and improved urban design (UAE Ministry of Cabinet Affairs and the Future, 2017).

### *1.2 Establishing key elements of green growth processes in Albania.*

Especially for touristic countries like Albania, growing green must be a priority. Because tourism is the main pillar of economic development it should be managed very carefully and should be protected to grow stably. This initiative will help small touristic countries follow the same path as developed countries and it represents a new, substantial way to appeal to the “responsible” tourist, who is very interested in nature protection and human wellbeing. A small region around the Vjosa river, in the country of Albania, is an example of collaboration and at the same time inspiration for the future of our global environment. The region has attracted the attention of many people who are sensitive and engage in nature protection and building a better environment. Scientists and activists, but also common people gathered in a very short time, for a big cause. Understanding the importance of protecting nature treasures stimulated and increased people's collaboration and inspiration to fight for a cause of global importance. This is one of the best examples to follow, to spread awareness of the importance of sustainable development in Albania. “Inspire each other and together we can change the world.” Everyone certainly has to contribute, whenever possible, to protect the environment where future generations will live. The promotion of Ecotourism in Albania means at the same time responsible development of tourism. Engagement in promoting ecotourism requires collaboration and dynamism in various marketing planning steps, especially in marketing planning campaigns. Step-by-step adaptations, which follow the same path to the intensive environmental changes may contribute to a better performance of the tourism industry.

### *1.3 Green growth and the central elements of the concept. The importance of interdependencies*

Green growth means fostering economic growth and development while ensuring that natural assets continue to provide the resources and environmental services on which our wellbeing relies. To do this it must catalyze investment and innovation which will underpin sustained growth and give rise to new economic opportunities. (OECD GG Studies, 2011) In a developing country, it is very important to raise awareness as much as possible about the importance of growing green. All stakeholders, from government or businesses to individuals should engage in the process. A lot of economic barriers may hinder the process but it is important to have a common approach and place the environment protection process among future development changes. It should be considered of the same importance as other important developmental processes. Some main elements that will incite green growth in Albania and on a global scale are elements like; technology, physical resources, markets, institutions, and policies. (Elsevier, 2019). While the advanced market economies tend to adopt new technologies, to decrease carbon emissions, another concerning movement takes place. Industrial activities, with high carbon emissions, are relocated to low-income or so-called developing countries. (Elliott and Clement, 2015), This represents a major problem, considering that our world is a mutual space and belongs to all of us. By diverting industrial activities from some place to another, the environment on a global scale is not improved. They show that trade while being a driver locally, may be a barrier to green growth on a global scale. Today more than ever, our world is connected, and activities are Global interrelations. Therefore, it is very important to think globally. Albania should be ready to embrace global regulations and become part of agreements and invest more in new technologies related to green growth. Although the country has many economic challenges, environmental protection and human wellbeing are of main importance. Technological progress should be directed towards greener technologies. (Green Growth- A synthesis of scientific findings, Elsevier, 2019). Policies are another crucial element that may incite or hinder green growth. Green policies can create opportunities for employment in sectors such as renewable energy, green agriculture, or sustainable forestry. (Employment Implications of Green Growth: OECD Report, 2017). When large hydropower was intended to be built, near the last wild European river in Albania, many national and international activists gathered and managed to stop this. It seems obvious that in Albania there is an emergent need for a new green growth policy framework. This framework should focus on efficiency of production and consumption and Environmental quality of life. To ensure sustainability and equity elements like intergenerational equity, net savings, employment, and poverty eradication should be on focus. (Safonov, 2020).

Although Albania is a small country, its biodiversity is incredibly impressive. Ecosystems and habitats diversity include 3,200 vascular plants, 2,350 non-vascular plants, and 15,600 vertebrate and non-vertebrate species, most of which are endangered on a global level. Albania has lately expanded the protected areas net from 5.2% of the country's territory in 2005 to 16% of the territory in 2014. Today, 799 protected areas make up about 18% (5,263 km<sup>2</sup>) of the territory. Most of them, although size-small, are considered natural monuments. (Albanian Ministry of Tourism, 2018). This is a good step toward green development and the number of visitors may increase fast. However, nature enjoyment is in jeopardy because of an uncertain future. It is a time to think and care about the future of Albanian tourism. Development strategies should be carefully designed. The necessary possible solutions may come from us but not only. Finding ways to contribute, encouraging donations and a volunteer presence may be helpful too. Established legislation, providing funding for maintenance and protection of these areas, and preservation of public areas, forests, and parks must be a priority to develop green. Innovation and investment must gain main attention in new policies and economic incentives. The central drivers and barriers of green growth are less well understood, especially in the aspect of innovation. New marketing strategies, should aim to highlight the importance of all elements contributing to green growth. Physical resources are another important part of the whole frame and non-routine analytical skills and technical skills are crucial for industries to become sustainable. Albania would need more training opportunities and professional schools rather than classical higher education. Depending on the industrial structure of the country, the need for special skills should be well defined and an intensified engagement to attract youth should be incited. On the other hand, the public needs to be well-informed and offered all necessary knowledge to prepare for the transition to green development. This is where marketing and its strategies play a crucial role. For example (Sustainability Journal, 2011) calls for the

education of human choice and human consciousness about issues of sustainability. They show that the lack of skills for making sustainable and responsible choices is a barrier to societal green growth pathways.

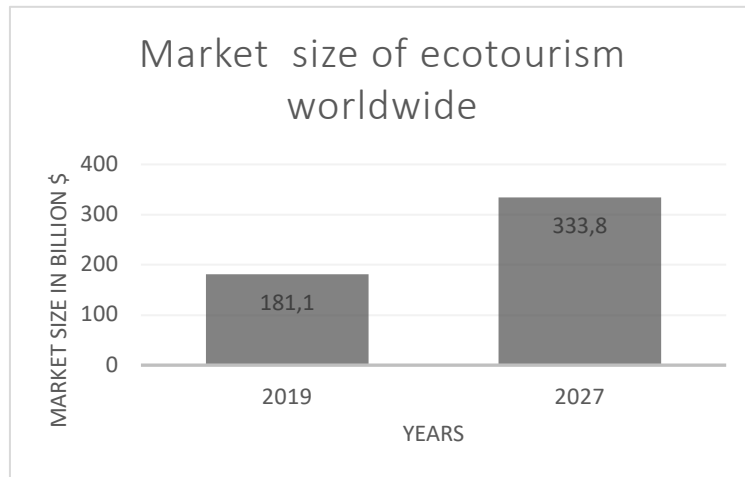
## **2. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### *2.1 Primary research*

In addition to secondary research, explaining the global situation of climate change and environmental degradation, its effects, and predictions for the future, primary research is part of this study as well. To analyze the situation in Albania and to give answers to the question if there is a possibility to develop economically and sustainably in a balanced way, a questionnaire was distributed and interviews with important stakeholders from the private and public sectors were conducted. The study aims to analyze the level of stakeholders' engagement while trying to embrace a global concept of sustainable development. To make sustainable development possible, administrators must first reevaluate their systems and plan for possible and necessary actions. The questionnaire is aimed to understand the level of knowledge and acceptance regarding the importance of environmental protection compared to other economic challenges in the country. At what level is the will of most important actors to engage in innovative initiatives and reimagination.

### *2.2 Steps of a Marketing Plan*

As Marketing will be the main tool to raise people's awareness regarding the importance of developing sustainably, the study focuses its analysis on the steps of a marketing plan. Thinking of these steps as an outline of flexible activities has brought this study to a further level. The purpose of a successful strategy is closely related to customer satisfaction therefore product and service offers should aim for continuous improvement. Albanian touristic offers should focus on marketing environment protection and care and human wellbeing. This will attract normal travelers, but responsible travelers even more. Additionally, this will improve the economy. Both statements of mission and vision outline the values of an industry. "Vjosa no dams" was the appeal of activists engaged in the protection of river Vjosa, the last wild river in Europe, flowing in Albanian territory. Thoughts about the tourism industry's mission should be not only to generate income for major socio-economic industries and increase employment but also to protect nature and the environment. This must become part of its tourism mission if a country would aspire to a long and stable, continuous economic development. The more we care for an object, the longer its life. As an analogy, the longer and better we care for nature, the longer it will remain beautiful and still desired by tourists. Let's not let natural treasures and customs that make us unique, become common. Let's stop for a moment and reflect: Enough with globalization? These lands and the ecologies they support remind us of the life we need to nurture if we are to have a future as species. (ATTA, 2022) Among its mission tourism should present its vision for the future and it should certainly highlight a stable growth that is strongly related to environmental protection and is responsible for human wellbeing. Albania is a treasure and treasures go protected." In the tourism industry, eco-tourism is a very new concept, born in the 1980s. It has developed quickly, especially during these last 20 years. Referring to Figure 01, the market size of Ecotourism was 181.1 billion dollars in 2019 and it is expected to almost double to 333.8 billion dollars in 2027. On a global scale, 83 % of travelers believe in sustainable travel. Gen Z and millennial travelers believe in the importance of an environmentally friendly destination. While generation X seems to be more neutral regarding this, young people, representing this generation are very conscious of the importance of sustainable tourism development. They are concerned about climate change and willing to engage in nature protection and green development. They like places that are environmentally friendly and show a tendency to return to these places. Experiences are very important in marketing communication. The psychological researches show that positive feelings and a structured system can help to save the information in the long-term memory. (Szabo, Pacsi, 2018). This is a great market to target if we would aim for balanced development.



**Fig. 1.** The market size of Ecotourism in the world

Source: Statista 2021

Everyone can be a tourist, however, there is a main important thing to decide about the target market an industry wants to attract and that is income. Eco-tourism may be the right tourism type for middle-class families and individuals. Representing the main layer of the society they may have a high influence on green economy development, as the main potential consumer of eco-tourism. The above-described traveler represents the target market Albanian tourism should attract to develop sustainably. This market, which keeps growing, knows the importance of nature protection and climate change. Furthermore, it keeps growing year after year. Viosa region is a true example of inspiration and collaboration. The number of activists participating in the petition against hydropower development increased from 150 activists in 2016 to more than 4000 in 2017. (ATTA, 2021) From a few scientists in the first biodiversity assessment, the number increased to 776 scientists from 46 countries, signing one of the largest science petitions in freshwater ecology globally. Only within a few years has so much engagement been achieved. At the stage of organizing the budget for the strategy, is worthwhile to involve many stakeholders and get accurate information about a product launch. This phase should not be a secret. The engagement should happen parallelly in product development, finance, and marketing. Many travelers still are not fully aware of sustainable development or how they may contribute or be involved in this. Recent technology developments have made it possible to spread information fast and easily. This phase of promotion may allow more flexibility than the other steps in terms of a "Make -Undo-Redo -Improve" process. There is room for the stimulation of new ideas. Interaction with travelers is a powerful tool and an important indication. Therefore, a strong communication bridge, providing all necessary information to them is a must to be successful. Options like crowdfunding platforms, branding, networking events, social media, blogging, and websites may be very helpful. It is crucial to design events around diversity and involvement. Events offer the possibility to the visitors to become loyal to a company, brand, and the community of consumers. (Szabo, 2018). The world we live in is made up of diverse individuals. Every one of them is hoping for an experience that will meet their desires. In this diversified environment, it is a marketer's skill to create and deliver events that acknowledge and praise diversity. Innovation, creativity, and continuous development maintain the interest of the visitors. (Szabo, Z, 2018) This should be a strategical approach and reflect the vibrancy of diversity. Integrating Agile into the marketing plan may help marketers to measure the effects of their sprint and have the possibility to constantly improve over time. This approach may help the tourism industry to adapt quickly and change in a better and smarter way. In all steps of a customer's journey, a test and improve methodology may be a successful practice. This would help increase the value of investments made and keep engagement alive during the whole process that aims optimization of customer experience. (AMA, 2021) The famous SWOT analysis is designed to help an organization focus on facts and data related to strengths and weaknesses and at the same time stay aware of threats or opportunities presented. What happens if the main focus lies on strengths and less attention lies on



weaknesses? Emphasizing strengths increases motivation and all energy is concentrated to move forward. Albania has many weaknesses, but we do not stop and overthink weaknesses. Instead, we work hard to market our strengths and work hard to reach the objectives. While focusing on strengths increases motivation, this may generate new ideas and more energy, providing more engagement to work toward new or improved products and services. A growing kid does not like to hear about his weaknesses, on the contrary, the more we appreciate his abilities or gifts the better he behaves, and the better he engages. Similarly, a small country that has many insecurities and things to improve should not forget them but not overthink them. Albania is aware of its weaknesses, but if more attention is given to its strengths this may enhance motivation and engagement. Looking at a SWOT analysis as an SSO analysis, as presented in Figure 02, may enhance a sense of positivity only.

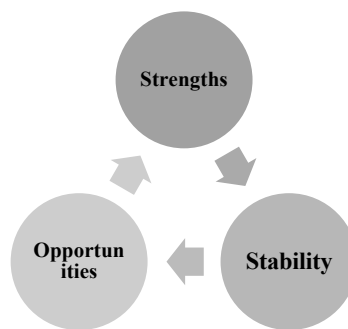


Fig. 2. The elements of a positive SSO analysis

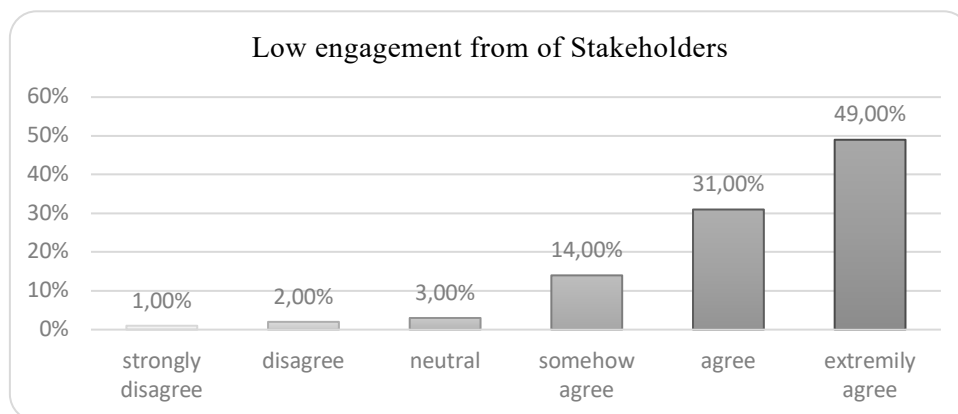
Source: Authors

Strengths, Sustainability, and Opportunities are words with positive connotations and positivity increases confidence. This behavior may also enhance or bring to light innovative ideas and solutions. On the other hand, besides being smart, it is time to be resilient. We are overcoming a pandemic period, which has changed our lives significantly. SMART Objectives are crucial, but to successfully overcome the Covid-19 period, resilience and recovery are fundamental steps. *Resourceful* objectives are necessary to find fast and clever ways to overcome difficulties. *Ecological* is substantial in today's environment. Industries should provide environmental indicators that lead toward desired environmental quality. *Sustainable* has already become a synonym for tourism. *Involving* objectives motivate and engage people. This is a necessity to succeed. *Local acting* and global thinking have dual benefits. *Innovative* means going forward. *Evolving* is perpetual. *Nature caring* means a better future for our children. *Timewise* is last but not least referring to its importance. React and responding to changes on time is a move that increases the possibility for great achievements. Acting with these objectives in mind will help toward sustainable economic and social development. It will be easier to adapt to current developments and have a better performance within the organization. In addition to the above, a well-organized marketing budget is fundamental. The budget must calculate the main following elements but also additional elements: a qualified staff to initiate marketing activities, unique design, website design and maintenance, SEO strategy, and Advertising. Other options like sponsorship or donations may be included in the budget. Attracting responsible travelers is not an easy task but keeping them is even more difficult. Advising about the importance of nature preservation and its protection or climate change solutions will keep people informed. If this is done well, it will probably increase engagement. That is what we hope for. The next step after collaboration, especially in the touristic industry, will satisfy people. Last, but not least, gathering data about customers is a helpful tool to make analysis and better adapt the strategies according to travelers' desires. Many analytical programs may be found online and represent a great tool for this step. If interest in sustainable destinations keeps increasing, this is an evident indicator that natural areas and national parks must be given a higher priority.

### 3. RESULTS

The questionnaire was distributed three months ago and 191 responses were gathered. The participants are mainly people with higher education levels and they live in the main cities of Albania, Tirana, and Durrës. The questionnaire was designed to help analyze tendencies and the future of Albanian tourism, as well as stakeholders' and citizens' engagement in this direction. Different questions were answered, but among the most important, those related to environmental protection and the willingness of citizens to engage in the future green development, are the most relevant.

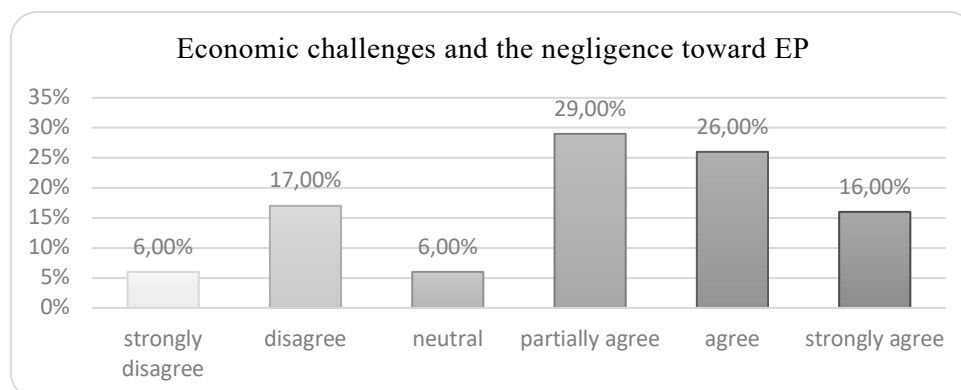
Regarding the question about government and business engagement during the last 30 years, to protect natural treasures in Albania, the following results have been gathered.



**Fig. 3.** The level of engagement in the last 30 years was very low

Source: Authors

When asked about this; if economic challenges hinder the engagement toward nature protection, participants answer as follows;



**Fig. 4.** Economic challenges are the main reason for negligence toward environmental protection

Source: Authors

People who agree with this statement are less than the half of participants. This may suggest other reasons have influenced stakeholders' reactions. Regarding the level of knowledge and understanding of the importance of environmental protection and its relation to human wellbeing, 83 % of respondents agree that environmental issues and protection are of the same importance as other challenges the

country has to face. The future of Albanian tourism is strongly related to this and as a consequence the future of the Albanian economy.

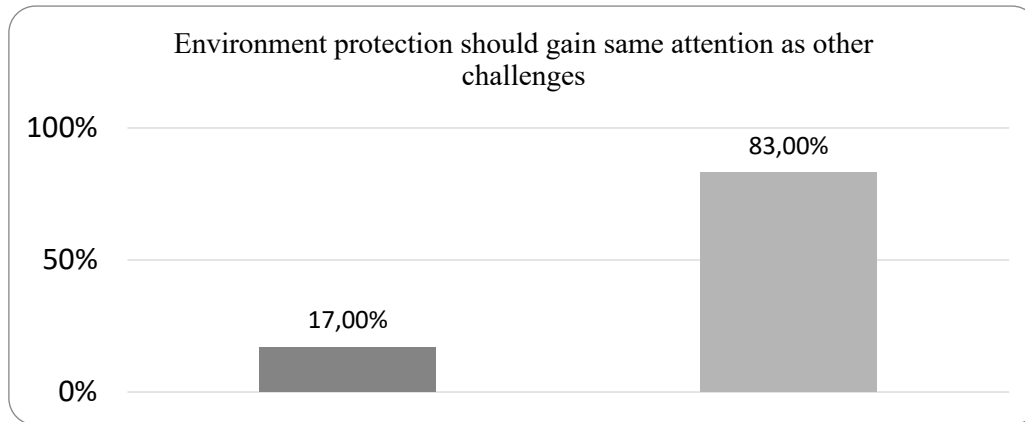


Fig. 5. Environmental quality is of the same importance as other challenges

Source: Authors

In our research paper, we mentioned in continuity that Albania is a developing country, which has to engage in both economic challenges and adapt to global environmental protection regulations and agreements. This is not an easy task but some alternatives will help in this path. For instance, the collaboration with neighboring touristic countries may be a good solution for Albania and countries of the Western Balkans as well. Referring to the European Union, we agree that the future has a synonym and that synonym is collaboration. Therefore, in our questionnaire, we have included a section of questions related to a common space of the Western Balkans, which would increase the chances for a better, sustainable overall development. To the question related to the integration of Western Balkans countries and if this initiative would incite engagement toward sustainable tourism and economic development, respondents gave the following opinions.

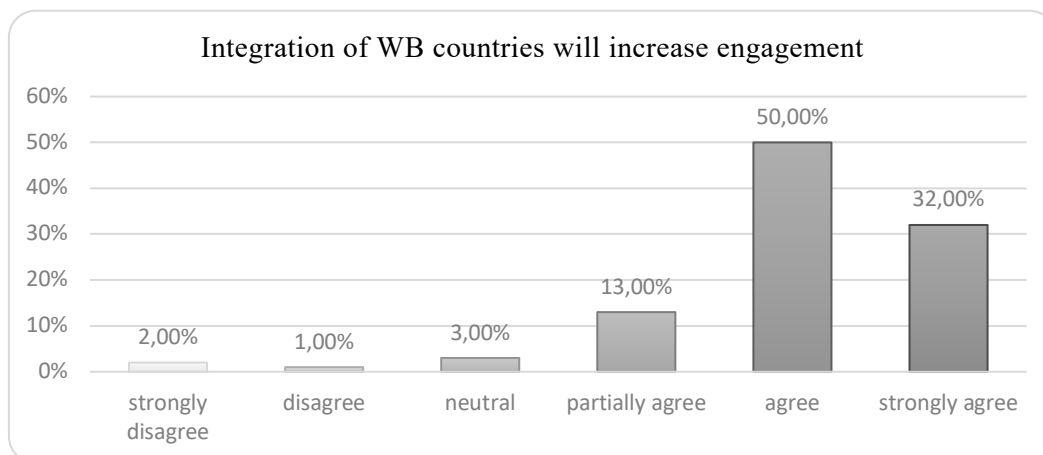


Fig. 6. Integration of WB countries will increase engagement toward sustainable tourism and economic development.

Source: Authors



83 % of respondents believe and strongly believe in this initiative and its influence on a sustainable future. The same opinion was gathered from interviews with public and private stakeholders in the city of Durres. Furthermore, citizens believe that with Albania being part of an integrated destination of WB, they would feel more motivated and engaged to initiate green growth in the country, and balanced development between economic growth and environmental protection.

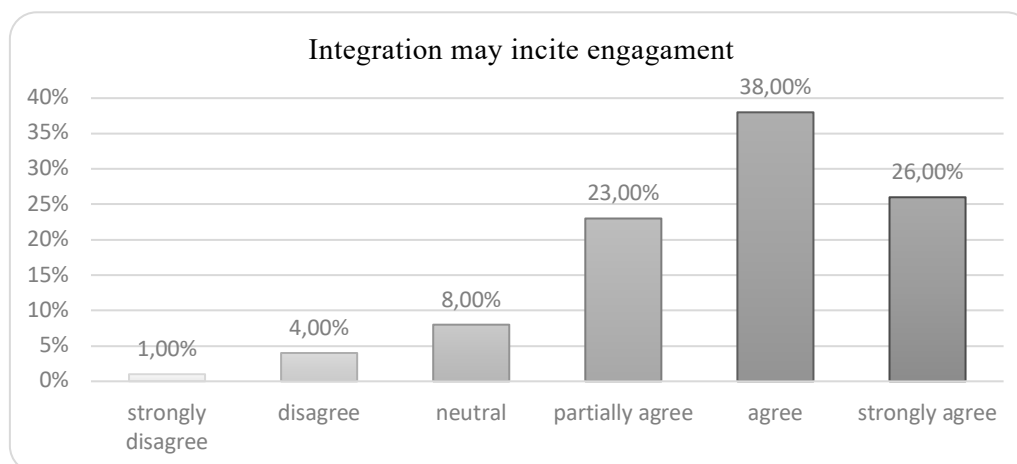


Fig. 7. Citizens increased engagement in green growth with Albania as part of WB

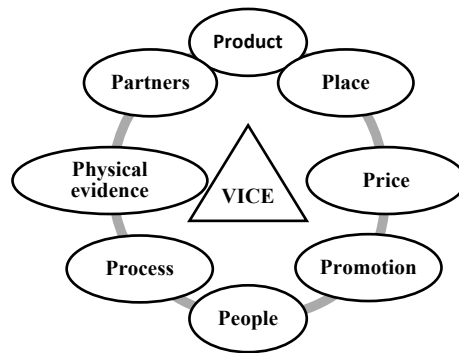
Source: Authors

#### 4. DISCUSSIONS

The respondents of the questionnaire are mainly citizens that have a higher education or students following a Master's program. Although these opinions are very valuable, as these people may represent the future of the government or private sector, there remains uncertainty about the knowledge of other groups and their approach to sustainable development.

*Integrating VICE for sustainable tourism with the 8P-s model.*

During this research, one new idea came up. We would like to explore it further and aim to create a new model, which may be useful for future strategies for Albanian tourism. The idea comprises the integration of the VICE model with the 8P-s model. The presentation in Figure 06 is an initial step to a model to be developed. As both models contain very important elements and factors, necessary for development, an integrated model may be created. The good interaction between visitors, industry, community, and environment is somehow a synopsis to highlight that natural treasures all around the world, wildlife, and wild areas should be protected as our lives and the lives of next generations depend on that.



**Fig. 8.** Integrated 8Ps model and VICE model

Source: VICE Marketing Model, 8 P-s Marketing Model

New, contemporary marketing strategies are necessary for Albanian tourism, and integrating classical theories with new models and elements may be helpful for future developments. Main actors should all be involved and collaborate. We believe that a green economy is a future approach for touristic countries. If sustainability is embraced and if people care about environmental protection, we will have a better life. We are encouraged from a small region, but we are full of hope that an entire common space may develop sustainably. It is time to look carefully at every step of a marketing plan and make necessary adaptations with a spirit of nature -love, and collaboration.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Albania is still a less known and unexplored destination, therefore there is still time to save its uniqueness and avoid transforming the country into a globalized destination. An environmentally friendly destination would be another added value to the world's inheritance.

Green development is a philosophy of inspiration and collaboration. A good representative of the Albanian tourism market is a traveler, who is determined to visit environmentally friendly places and who is very conscious about protecting biodiversity and local development. Regional green growth processes may support or hinder green growth processes at other locations.

Although the category of travelers that understand and value sustainable tourism increases, there is still a considerable percentage of travelers, who were not sure what makes travel sustainable.

Not only the presence or absence of the five central elements of green growth including technology, physical resources, markets, institutions, and policies is necessary, but more importantly, their quality and appropriateness, translate into drivers for green growth.

Focusing on the bright side will increase motivation toward final goals. We lean on our strengths, grow stably, and embrace opportunities during our path. Resilient Objectives are indispensable, especially in a time when we are still fighting a global pandemic.

Flexible moves should be common sense. A good thing the pandemic period has learned to us is that we can't predict for a long time, but we have to be prepared and flexible to face uncertainties. The steps of a plan, should by all means be reviewed often and adapted when necessary This will make sure that activities are being completed and are in line with the overall strategy.

There is no one-size model that fits all regarding green development but collaboration and adaptation are necessary to move forward. Referring to environmental protection, all countries are globally interrelated. Therefore, the initiative should not only be evident in developed countries but a further, global initiative should be incited. Societies should engage more, embrace innovation and incite collaboration. A strategy that leans on three main pillars is necessary to develop sustainably. The pillars of economic growth, good environmental quality, and improved people's welfare should stand tall and

grow balanced. International institutions and organizations are willing to support countries that try hard for green development. Collaboration with international organizations will help protect agrobiodiversity and rural tourism. It brings huge benefits protecting the uniqueness of a country. The modern traveler aims for untamed places, authenticity, local products, and organic food. Better cope with climate change will result in a benefit for the country and the whole global environment as well.

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