

An assessment of the viewpoints of local stakeholders on tourism sustainability and local economic development (LED)

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Abstract

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Reducing inequality and promoting sustainable economic development have become two of the most pressing concerns for global economies. Since economic and tourism development cannot occur without involving issues surrounding natural resources, perceptions and opinions regarding sustainability cannot be excluded from deliberations when it comes to economic development. However, coordination between local governments, business stakeholders, and other community members of a local economy is imperative in order to effectively promote the development of sustainable tourism. Therefore, this paper aims to further explore the idea of developing sustainable tourism and local economic development (LED) by determining whether there are any differences between the local government, business stakeholders, and the community regarding their perceptions of the importance of tourism sustainability in a local economy. This study follows a quantitative approach using primary data collected via a questionnaire distributed to the three groups. SPSS was used to conduct data analysis, with the results indicating a statistically significant difference concerning the natural and cultural sustainability of the Vaal Triangle region, South Africa. For example, business stakeholders believed that natural and cultural sustainability presented a major challenge to regional development. However, the local government did not recognise these factors as significant or challenging to regional development. This study contributes to the research gap on tourism sustainability and its critical role in influencing the local economies.

Key words:

sustainable tourism development, economic development, local economic development, Vaal Triangle region, South Africa.

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Introduction

In recent years, there has been a significant focus on the process of inequitable economic growth, development, and distribution, which involves environmental and sustainable practices as the primary focal point of such activities (Cole and Morgan, 2010; Pereira-Moliner et al., 2021). Moreover, the term ‘sustainability’ certainly garnered increased popularity in the 1990s when its association with economic development began (Creaco and Querini, 2003). Sustainability is defined as “*improving the quality of human life while living within the carrying capacity of supporting ecosystems*” (IUCN, 1991, 8). This definition appeared in a book entitled “*Caring for the Earth*”, which was published in 1991 through the shared endeavours of the following entities: the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural resources (IUCN); and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). According to Klarin (2018), sustainability is the capacity to implement activities in a particular manner that does not consume resources through unrecoverable means. “The Sustainable Sonoma County” (Coetzee, 2004, 12) refers to sustainability as:

“[a manner of] securing the quality of life of people within the means of nature to be equitable and fair to all of humanity, future generations and other species. Sustainability is aware of the interconnections of the environment, society and economy. Therefore, it requires that resources are not consumed faster than what they can be replenished or produce wastage faster than what can be absorbed.”

Furthermore, Todaro and Smith (2015) posited that sustainability involves the idea that environmental preservation and eco-

nomic growth should be balanced both adequately and symbiotically. Therefore, the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987, 39) defines sustainable development as “*the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the needs of future generations.*” Hence, for the purpose of this research, sustainable tourism development is viewed as a justified development, which is intended to enhance the lives of present and future generations within the parameters of the natural environment, thus protecting the ecosystems and natural resources of a particular region. According to the United Nations (2019), economic activity should not be considered an end in and of itself; instead, it ought to be perceived as a means of sustainable activity related to evolving human capacities for future development. Additionally, variations and anomalies in producer and consumer behaviour are associated with natural resources, and these vacillations certainly impact economic development. Since economic or tourism development cannot occur without natural resources, the concept of sustainability cannot be excluded from economic development negotiations. Research also underscores the vital significance of coordination between the local government, business stakeholders, and the community in a local economy to effectively promote sustainable development and tourism development (Peters et al., 2010). Therefore, if sustainable tourism development and sustainable development policy agendas are not appropriately aligned among these groups, sustainable development is less likely to occur. For this reason, the purpose of this study is to explore the notion of sustainability in tourism and local economic development (LED) by determining whether there are any variations between business stakeholders, the local government, and the community concerning their views on the importance of sustainability in a local economy.

1. Literature review

Reducing inequality and promoting the sustainability of economic development have become two of the most pressing concerns for global economies. Stricker (2010) professed that sustainable development generally focuses on how various resources are dispersed internationally, as well as their distribution throughout society and the impact on people's standard of living. Firstly, the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) introduced five central theoretical models regarding the implementation of sustainable development. Their initial model targeted economics; the second was concerned with stress-response models; while the third involved a variety of capital models. The fourth also comprised the links associated with various social, economic and environmental aspects; lastly, the fifth introduced the human-ecosystem well-being model (Hardi and Zdan, 1997). However, these specific models proved to be somewhat complex in relation to more pragmatic principles. Throughout the past several years, numerous international organisations, governments, and stakeholders have published more pragmatic principles regarding sustainability, along with extensive sustainable development indicators, which could be utilised to measure, monitor, and evaluate sustainable development advancements. Arguably, the watershed moment of the Rio de Janeiro Conference of 1992 cast a spotlight on recognising the significance of sustainability. This conference attracted global leaders from the international community and intended to raise awareness and a commitment to safeguarding the ideal that future development should be completed by equitably meeting environmental and social needs (Creaco and Querini, 2003). Thus, as a result of this conference, Agenda 21 was formally created. Agenda 21 includes collective policy initiatives and strategies that all nations can utilise as a map to achieving an equitable

balance between the earth's carrying capacity, growth potential, and population consumption (Moeletsi, 2004). Pedrana (2013) defines the term 'carrying capacity' as optimising a particular area's potential prior to achieving the point where damage to the environment may occur. An element that distinguished Agenda 21 from other agendas was that local regions worldwide could apply its principles, thereby instituting a starting point for implementing sustainable development. These Agenda 21 principles, as mentioned earlier, are as follows:

- Partnerships – sharing joint responsibility and mutual aims should be a top priority;
- A systematic approach – symptoms as well as the entire scheme should be investigated when addressing social, economic, and ecological problems;
- Transparency and participation—the local community should be updated on sustainable development;
- Ecological limits – developmental projects should be implemented within the limitations of the Earth's carrying capacity;
- Accountability – all stakeholders should be answerable for their actions related to such development;
- Concern for the future – long-term planning is crucial to community discussions and support involving both immediate and future trends and needs;
- Equity and justice – encouraging equal human rights and opportunities (ICLEI, 1999).

Even though the Rio de Janeiro Conference of 1992, in cooperation with the resulting Agenda 21, was perceived as a catalyst for sustainability, it was not completely successful in achieving its ultimate goal. Drexhage and Murphy (2010) posited that the meeting attracted significant political attention. However, some of the proposed goals in Agenda 21, specifically those outlining support for underdeveloped countries, were not

considered successful in the years immediately following the conference. Several similar conferences were convened after 1992. Some seemed rather successful; however, implementing such goals to achieve an equilibrium between the earth's 'carrying capacity' and sustainable development on the national and international fronts remains challenging. Among the more successful conferences was the Rio+20 conference held in 2012, which, according to Klarin (2018, 84), established a more pragmatic map for achieving a sustainable future. These enhancements were perceived as attainable and, thus, the resolution *"the future we want"* was adopted.

Another significant milestone related to the global pledge towards an environmentally sustainable future occurred in 2015, marking the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This agenda also comprised 17 Millennium Development Goals that governments and other heads of state adopted at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development held in New York in 2015. Moreover, the first UN Summit after adopting the 2030 Agenda was convened in New York in September 2019. The conference's objective was to appraise and follow up on advances in implementing the 2030 Agenda and the 17 SDGs and provide advice concerning areas of leadership and how to move forward to reach their goals, as previously mentioned (Muhammad-Bande, 2019). More specifically, these summits proved to be essential benchmarks in achieving sustainable economic development. This success is due to the fact that such conferences establish an international platform for all governments, local authorities, and organisations as well as private sector actors to discuss their progress, share experiences, specify challenges, and raise awareness of the vital importance of environmental sustainability within the global economy.

Moreover, it has been proposed that sustainable development tends to integrate two central themes. According to Creaco

and Querini (2003), the first surrounds the idea that three dimensions (i.e. economic, social and environmental) construct the core elements of development. These three dimensions or supports should be concurrently balanced to help ensure the appropriate functioning of the natural environment, which are paramount for sustaining life. Additionally, the overall implications of equilibrium between these three dimensions of sustainable development are supported by the results of a variety of researchers such as Elkington (1994), Klarin (2018) and Rogers et al. (2008). The second theme specified by Creaco and Querini (2003) is the ideology that future generations should be allowed to achieve the same stages of gratification as the present generation, which result from taking advantage of various social, economic and environmental resources. Therefore, the present generation has an ethical responsibility to provide such benefits to future generations.

The most significant role of sustainability is to achieve efficient development via national and local leaders on a local and global scale (Zamfir and Corbos, 2015; Halaskova et al., 2021). In short, sustainability involves preserving natural resources and limiting negative impacts on the environment, which allow for equilibrium with the cultures and traditions of the local community (Pedrana, 2013). Pedrana (2013) highlighted the fact that many local communities worldwide frequently discover that they consistently measure and compare themselves with other communities due to globalisation. As a result, this practice can lead to the possible exploitation of resources; however, this may also limit or obfuscate the cultural and social exclusivity of the communities. According to Todaro and Smith (2015), developmental economists' policy initiatives should integrate environmental, social, and cultural anxieties, since they form an important segment of developmental policies. Holden et al., (2014) further stipulated that policymakers should

be aware of human development and its impact on the Earth's 'carrying capacity'. This is important because when the 'carrying capacity' is achieved, the natural resources are depleted; thus, human development is simultaneously mitigated due to degraded resources that cannot be reclaimed through regenerated natural resources or man-made products.

It is usually acknowledged that sustainable development comprises three primary objectives related to the local level. These intentions, as posited by ICLEI (1999), are: 1) to increase local social welfare; 2) to enhance the reliability of local ecosystems; and 3) to guarantee the equitable disbursement of economic wealth. However, at the local level, the overall significance of sustainability cannot be overshadowed due to the fact that the natural environment sustains life, maintains health, and supports all human activities. Therefore, a region's sustainability and ecological characteristics cannot be perceived as being separate entities (Jenkins, 2009; Sachs, 2010; Shiva, 2010). Shiva (2010) specified risk in terms of policymakers' general comprehension of sustainability that leads to an inadequate understanding of the need for human activities to be adapted to the carrying capacity of the natural environment and the general disregard for environmental limits. There are several ways in which sustainable development can be achieved. For example, Minciu et al., (2012) broadly identified four means that involve transitioning towards a sustainable economy: 1) establishing the primary reasons for the degradation of the environment; 2) assessing the extent of such degradation; 3) pragmatically evaluating ways in which to correct the issues related to degradation; and 4) highlighting techniques for abating the damaging effects on the community's social and economic life (Minciu et al., 2012). Hence, one of the top priorities for the local government and other involved agencies should be to preserve local areas. This process certainly demands an effective management system. Therefore,

possible future and existing effects should be checked continuously to provide for suitable preventative measures and the implementation of corrective measures (Lozano-Oyola et al., 2012). These requirements certainly emphasise the fact that achieving sustainable development is a highly complicated process, and thus necessitates a substantial commitment by the local participants and supervisors. Moreover, in addition to the complexity of this practice is the fact that, in accordance with guaranteeing the sustainability of the local region, both the socio-cultural and natural environment has to be understood and discussed during the planning and decision-making process related to local developmental policies (Pedrana, 2013).

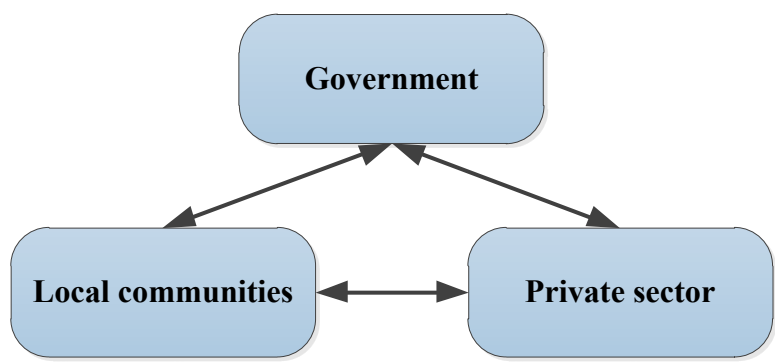
Since no city or town is unique, local environmental policymakers must ensure their policies and strategies are custom-tailored for a specific region. However, administration or management should be decided based on the area's unique features (Bačlija, 2013). Accordingly, when developing strategies focused on encouraging sustainable development within the community, it should be developed in such a way as to enhance the community's competitive advantages. For example, Henry Ford's great-grandson, Bill Ford, inspired companies to observe how preserving the natural environment provides both a business opportunity and a competitive advantage (CNN, 2001). Moreover, Holliday et al. (2002) proposed that companies should visualise sustainable development as an opportunity, which could prove to be a highly significant resource for gaining a competitive advantage over the competition. In other words, these authors imply that companies should alter the way they think about sustainability and not only see it as a challenge and expense, but instead regard this as a new paradigm by which to create opportunities and savings (Holliday et al., 2002). Also, to ensure the feasibility of the proposed strategy, specific elements, such as a region's brand and image, should be in-

corporated into their promotional activities (Zamfir and Corbos, 2015). Therefore, companies and governments should focus more on developing and sustaining a host of effective and innovative mechanisms that are capable of continuously reacting and altering their activities at the most opportune moment that is based on various external changes directly or indirectly linked with the environment in which they operate (Zamfir and Corbos, 2015).

Based on the information offered in this section, it is clear that sustainable development can no longer be ignored, nor can it be achieved by only a single nation acting alone. In conformity with Holliday et al., (2002), sustainable development is certainly not applicable or achievable by any lone

sector. Instead, sustainable development requires a partnership between all spheres on a comprehensive scale that sets it apart from all prior discussions or collaborations. Thus, the primary importance and significance of public-private sector cooperation are emphasised. Researchers such as Alińska et al., (2018) and van Niekerk (2020) stressed that sustainable development could only be promoted successfully when cohesion between the local government, business stakeholders and the community of a local economy is present. The local government, business stakeholders (private sector) and community are regarded as the three pillars of LED where one sector cannot succeed without the other three (Meyer, 2014). Figure 1 depicts the three primary pillars associated with LED.

Figure 1. The three pillars of LED



Source: Meyer, 2014.

When promoting sustainability and economic development within a local economic region, the local government, business owners, and the local community must collaborate to formulate effective partnerships and cooperation to develop local policies and strategies for implementation.

Looking at the tourism industry within the LED sphere, the industry is multidimensional as it encompasses various natural, cultural and economic aspects and, subsequently, the significance of sustainabil-

ity. Challenges such as climate change and pandemics can have devastating impacts on the industry. However, if the industry is not sustainably managed, it can contribute to climate change. Moreover, as Assaker et al., (2014) point out, the infrastructure and environment of a region have a direct and positive influence on the income resulting from tourism activities. According to Lozano-Oyola et al., (2012), sustainable tourism should not be considered a specific type of tourism, but should rather ensure that all tourism-related

activities are beneficial to all environmental, social, and economic spheres. Thus, sustainable tourism allows for the maximisation of the positive economic benefits resulting from tourism while simultaneously minimising the potential negative effects of the industry (Kallmuenzer et al., 2019). It is stressed in the literature that it is extremely important for policymakers to take the available methodologies into consideration, as well as gaining more knowledge through these new efforts and insights aimed at promoting sustainable tourism, which will ensure that the most effective and applicable policies can be developed and implemented (Kallmuenzer et al., 2021).

In light of this, sustainable tourism development brings new challenges to local economies. It requires new approaches and methods regarding what has traditionally been employed through developmental plans and strategies coordinated by only one or two local sectors, including role of businesswomen (e.g. Garcia Machado et al., 2020). This new way of promoting development necessitates researchers, governments, policymakers, and key stakeholders to facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of sustainable tourism and its role in local economies. For this reason, the main aim of this study is to establish whether there are any differences in the viewpoints of the local government, business stakeholders, and local community members regarding the role of sustainability in a local economy. This will determine whether sustainable tourism development policies and strategies are closely aligned, contributing to the feasibility of sustainable development.

2. Methodology

The study is focused on the Vaal Triangle region in South Africa. This region comprises two local municipalities: the Emfuleni Local Municipality (Gauteng Province) and the Metsimaholo Local Municipality (Free State Province). The Vaal Triangle is located ap-

proximately 120km from Pretoria and 80km from Johannesburg (Local Government Handbook, 2016), with both municipalities being situated along the banks of the Vaal River. The reason for selecting this area as the research object was its geographical location and various prospects for economic growth and development.

The target population of the study included individuals from the local government, the community, and the private sector within the Vaal Triangle region. The major towns in this area are Vanderbijlpark, Vereeniging, and Sasolburg. This study followed a quantitative approach by utilising primary data collected via the distribution of a questionnaire. The measurement scale used in the questionnaire was developed by using questions that were amended from research explored in the literature review, in conjunction with similar prior studies, such as those put forward by Dupeyras and MacCallum (2013), du Plessis et al., (2017), and Thitthongkam and Walsh (2010). A Likert scale was employed to collect the participants' feedback, on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The questionnaires were disseminated to the three preselected groups (local government stakeholders, business stakeholders, and community members) in the Vaal Triangle region. The returned questionnaires were scanned for any incomplete information. Questionnaires with missing values exceeding 10% were excluded from the study. This practice ensures that only high-quality data were used. A total of 309 questionnaires were returned, of which 231 questionnaires were regarded as acceptable based on the criteria mentioned above. A Microsoft Excel spreadsheet was utilised to capture the data. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), a commonly-used statistical software programme, was employed for the purposes of data analysis. This analysis included reliability and validity tests, descriptive statistics, and ANOVA. Generally, researchers use ANOVA to determine if statistically

significant differences can be identified in the means of the different groups; however, it does not allow the researcher to pinpoint precisely where these variances are located (Sekaran, 2003). Therefore, the Tukey HSD test was used to identify where the differences between groups are present (Cohen et al., 2018). A total of 231 questionnaires were collected concerning the sustainability of the region to determine whether practical and comprehensive policies are in place to safeguard and sustain the natural, cultural and social environment.

3. Research results

The results acquired from the quantitative analysis are discussed in this section. As previously mentioned, 231 usable questionnaires were recorded following a process of disregarding any faulty or inadequately completed questionnaires. From the 231 questionnaires, the community members made up 55% of the sample, business stakeholders

constituted 29% of the sample, while the local government made up the remaining 16% of the sample. This segmentation accurately represents the local economy since the community comprises the largest group in the Vaal Triangle region, followed by businesses and the local government.

The elements forming part of the questionnaire were grouped into a factor. This method is generally utilised to generate a summary of the data to simplify data interpretation and facilitate more clarity (Yong and Pearce, 2013). The factor was named Natural and Cultural Sustainability. As mentioned previously, it included elements related to the region’s sustainability and whether or not practical and comprehensive policies were available to safeguard and sustain the natural, cultural and social environment. The elements used to measure the participants’ responses that were subsequently grouped into the factor Natural and Cultural Sustainability are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The elements pertaining to the factor Natural and Cultural Tourism Sustainability

Natural and Cultural Tourism Sustainability (10 elements)	
B1	Pollution is a significant problem in the region
B2	The environment is being protected
B3	There are policies in place to protect the natural environment
B4	There are policies in place to preserve cultural integrity and authenticity
B5	Environmental and social impact assessments are used as the basis for local development
B6	Stakeholders and the community are adhering to the principles of sustainable development
B7	People in the region value the cultural and natural assets of the region
B8	I feel a sense of pride in protecting the natural, cultural and social assets of the region
B9	The local government is doing enough to promote the importance of sustainable development
B10	The natural and cultural environments are being developed in harmony with one another

Source: own elaboration

After grouping the elements into a single factor, the first step was to test the reliability and validity of the data. The results of reliability testing are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Reliability and Validity results

Factor Name	Number of elements	Cronbach's alpha	Average inter-item correlation
Natural and Cultural Sustainability	10	0.879	0.419

Source: own elaboration

The reliability of the results was tested by using Cronbach's alpha. According to Heale and Twycross (2015), the Cronbach's alpha test determines the internal uniformity of a measuring instrument by ascertaining the mean of all the correlations in every combination of split-halves of the variable. As shown in Table 2, the Cronbach alpha of 0.879 exceeds the recommended cut-off value of 0.3, not requiring any further action (Hajjar, 2018). As regards construct validity,

the average inter-item correlation value of the factor falls within Clark and Watson's (1995) recommended parameter levels of 0.15 to 0.50; thus, it was deemed acceptable for further analysis.

Descriptive statistics were used to identify whether the data were distributed normally, which, in due course, contributes to the quality of the results. Skewness and kurtosis were used as the two measures of normality in this study. The results can be viewed in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics summary for the Natural and Cultural Sustainability factor

Factor name	Number of items	Mean statistic	Standard deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Natural and Cultural Sustainability	10	3.15	0.903	0.676	0.299

Source: own elaboration

Gujarati and Porter (2010) mention that skewness determines asymmetry while kurtosis measures the flatness or tallness of a data set. Meyer's (2018) guideline proposed that skewness values between -2 and 2 can be viewed as appropriate. That said, marginally higher skewness levels are also still deemed acceptable. However, Kline (2011) reiterated that variables with skewness exceeding 3 are highly skewed and require further analysis. As depicted in Table 3, the skewness value for the factor is well within the recommended parameters of more than 3, and thus deemed acceptable. Regarding kurtosis, researchers such as Aminu and Shariff (2014) and Kline (2011) insisted that kurtosis numbers up until 10 should be viewed as acceptable. It should be

noted, however, that kurtosis values exceeding 10 indicate a problem, while kurtosis numbers exceeding 20 signify a more severe problem. From Table 3, it is evident that the kurtosis of the data was within the parameters and required no further action.

The possible differences in the responses provided by the local government, business stakeholders and community members to Natural and Cultural Sustainability within the Vaal Triangle region are presented in Table 4. It should be noted that a Likert scale was utilised to gauge the responses where participants were able to select a response between 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). As a result, a higher average would infer a stronger, more positive attitude or outlook pertaining to the subject matter.

Table 4. Group statistics

Factor	Group*	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Natural and Cultural Sustainability	1	3.51	0.945	0.158
	2	2.95	0.832	0.102
	3	3.15	0.901	0.080

*Group 1 – Government stakeholders; Group 2 – Business stakeholders; Group 3 – Community

Source: own elaboration

The elements included in the factor Natural and Cultural Sustainability revolved around determining if the environment is protected, whether policies are in place to preserve and safeguard the natural and cultural environment, and whether people and businesses are abiding by sustainability principles and feel proud to protect the region's assets. It also explored whether the local government successfully encourages sustainable development and whether impact evaluations involving the environment and society are considered part of the basis for local expansion. Looking at Table 4, it could be seen that this factor scored very low mean values. Business stakeholders ($\bar{x} = 2.95$) strongly disagreed that adequate attempts were being made to guarantee natural and cultural sustainable development in the area. The community ($\bar{x} = 3.15$) substantiated the assessment of the business stakeholders, which infers that sustainability constitutes an additional and significant difficulty for developing the Vaal Triangle region. The local government ($\bar{x} = 3.51$), however, had a higher average which means they do not exhibit the same kind of perception that natural and cultural sustainability pose a challenge for the

Vaal Triangle region; instead, the local government proffered that both nature and culture are valued and safeguarded. Extant studies, such as Alińska et al. (2018), determined that local governments function as initiators for sustainable development policies. Thus, the result mentioned above depicts a potential challenge whereby the local government appears to be less conscious about sustainability concerns within the Vaal Triangle region, which are issues that the business stakeholders and community have pointed out.

Although the group statistics reflect possible differences regarding the importance of sustainability in the local economy among the local government, business stakeholders, and community members, it is necessary to ascertain if any statistically significant mean differences occurred between these groups. Hence, ANOVA was utilised in order to evaluate the data. Before commencing ANOVA, Levene's test for homogeneity of variance was done to ensure that the homogeneity of variances' assumptions had not been violated. Levene's test for homogeneity of variance exceeded 0.05; therefore, no further action was taken, after which ANOVA could be conducted.

Table 5. ANOVA results for differences between the local government, business stakeholders and the community

Factor	Local Government	Business Stakeholders	Community	P	η^2
Natural and cultural sustainability	3.51	2.95	3.15	0.011*	0.04

*The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Source: own elaboration

As ANOVA shows the possibility of differences amongst groups, the statistically significant differences were determined by means

of the Tukey HSD (the results are presented in Table 6).

Table 6. Tukey HSD results for differences between the three focus groups

Factor	Group	Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Natural and cultural sustainability	Government	Business	0.563*	0.184	0.007
		Community	0.359	0.168	0.084
	Business	Government	-0.563*	0.184	0.007
		Community	-0.205	0.134	0.280
	Community	Government	-0.359	0.168	0.084
		Business	0.205	0.134	0.280

*The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Source: own elaboration

Table 6 presents the Tukey HSD results to display the differences between the three groups. Table 6 suggests that a statistically significant difference exists between the local government and business stakeholders concerning the importance of sustainability in the Vaal Triangle region. However, no statistically significant difference could be determined between the community and business stakeholders and the community and the local government. According to the business stakeholders ($\bar{x} = 2.95$), the Natural and Cultural Sustainability factor was seen as a significant developmental challenge for the Vaal Triangle region. In contrast, the local government ($\bar{x} = 3.51$) did not acknowledge this factor as presenting a challenge to tourism in the area.

4. Discussion

The most significant themes emanating from the results suggest that business stakeholders believe that the local government is not making sufficient contributions to encourage the development of sustainable tourism in the Vaal Triangle region. The natural and cultural environment is not being developed in congruence. The higher mean record-

ed by the local government suggests that, in contrast to the business stakeholders, the local government believes that the challenges, as mentioned earlier, are not as severe as illustrated by the business stakeholders and even the community members. Although the community's responses were not statistically significant, they could still form a comprehensive understanding of the status quo of sustainability in the Vaal Triangle region.

Furthermore, this result infers that the business stakeholders within the Vaal Triangle region display a more significant concern when evaluating issues involving natural and cultural sustainability than the local government. This result, however, contradicts the general conclusions of researchers such as Andrades and Dimanche (2017). Their study concluded that business stakeholders (private sector) regularly attempt to circumvent their responsibility involving sustainability and feel that the public sector should shoulder this responsibility. Kostić and Jovanović-Tončev (2014) reiterated that even though sustainability is often promoted, it is unlikely that strategic development proposals and policies will be incorporated effectively by either the public or the private sectors. Other researchers, including Alińska

et al. (2018) and Gudmundsson et al. (2016), proffered that poverty has an incapacitating cycle that results in the degradation of the environment. This snowballing cycle produces a further surge in poverty that can only be turned around by sustainable development. Thus, local regions such as the Vaal Triangle could be strengthened by sustainable development (Kostić and Jovanović-Tončev, 2014).

Conclusions

This study investigated the role of tourism sustainability in local economic development (LED) by determining whether there are any differences amongst the local government, business stakeholders, and the community involving their views concerning the importance of sustainability in a local economy. Research on tourism sustainability, especially in local economies of South Africa, has proven to be rather limited when contrasted to various other fields or disciplines. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, sustainable development is less likely to be successful when policies and strategies aimed at promoting sustainability in local regions are not appropriately aligned and coordinated. The results indicate a statistically significant disparity regarding the natural and cultural sustainability of the Vaal Triangle region due to the perception held by business stakeholders ($\bar{x} = 2.95$) that environmental and cultural sustainability presents a significant obstacle to the successful development of the area. This is in contrast to the local government ($\bar{x} = 3.51$), which does not view this issue as a problem for the area. However, no statistically significant variations were discovered between the community and local government or business stakeholders. It should be noted that the responses from the community were similar to that of the business stakeholders.

Stutz and Warf (2014) suggested that policy decision-makers should agree to inter-

nalise environmental expenses with market systems by promoting an organised modification relating to economic development designs. Furthermore, Todaro and Smith (2015) posited that policymakers should integrate the diversity of human capital resources (experience, skills and education), environmental capital (soil quality and forests), and manufactured capital (machinery, industry and roads) as an integral part of decision-making processes. By doing so, they could reduce the probability of diminishing such assets while ensuring a more reasonable and sustainable level of net national income (NNI). In order to evaluate the quantity of environmental capital which may be consumed without any reduction, Michniewicz-Ankiersztajn et al., (2018) mention that it is necessary to promote the coordination and cooperation for sustainable operations between the local government, businesses, and the community. This specific dynamic should, in turn, help confirm that all entities are cognisant of their role in safeguarding the sustainability of the region and promoting effective communicative action (Rist et al., 2007).

Moreover, it is essential to encourage widespread educational awareness of the significance and value of sustainability to the Vaal Triangle region. Therefore, a tourism sustainability committee should host consistent information meetings at primary and secondary schools to promote a better understanding among children about the importance of sustainability and how they can also contribute to their own sustainable future. Additionally, this committee should be comprised of well-informed local and business leaders who may help teach the local communities regarding their specific ability to help implement sustainable activities, not just within the tourism industry. These informed community members would ultimately help ensure a cleaner environment and provide advice on how the private sector can work with the local government to en-

hance and beautify the region. The committee may also provide the local government with vital information on ensuring the consistent cleaning and maintenance of the regional environment, especially concerning the Vaal River and its immediate surroundings. By encouraging sustainable activities among all LED spheres and tourism operators, the committee could also implement special activities to aid local tourism businesses within the Vaal Triangle region. Such assistance might include educating business stakeholders on why they should add sustainable measures for the future and seek various means to systematically organise more sustainable activities for their own business. Basically, there should be more organised activities informing tourism business stakeholders to perceive sustainability as an opportunity for more innovative ideas to enhance their business models.

Since sustainability has become a key concern in economies worldwide, it can no longer be ignored when developing strategies and policies. Moreover, economic development cannot be viewed separately from sustainability, as sustainability provides protection for natural and cultural resources and serves as an opportunity for innovation and the reduction of poverty as well as the enhancement of a community's standard of living. As previously mentioned, sustainable tourism development necessitates a partnership between all domains on a scale that differentiates from previous collaborations. This study contributes to the current limitation of research on tourism sustainability and its critical role in influencing the local economies of South Africa. It should also be mentioned that this study is not without its limitations. Further studies might also include the study of more regions and a comparison between various regions, and the differences between local governments, business stakeholders, and community members relating to the importance of sustainability and economic development.

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