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REVIEW



## A review on destination social responsibility: towards a research agenda

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### ABSTRACT

Destination social responsibility (DSR) is a contemporary construct related to social responsibility efforts at the level of destinations rather than corporations. While DSR has become a salient topic for destinations, research approaches are still fragmented. This work discusses existing conceptualisations, followed by a systematic review. Studies have supported positive outcomes of DSR, which can be favourable towards destinations at large. Although stakeholder theory is deemed foundational in conceptualizing DSR, findings reveal the construct has been studied from the perspective of tourists or residents, whereas other stakeholders are still absent from studies. The topic is biased towards quantitative methods and settings, and a comprehensive measurement instrument and definition of DSR are called for. This review aims to outline the contribution and progress of DSR in the context of responsible tourism, propose a unifying definition of DSR, and offer avenues for future research.

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### KEYWORDS


Destination social responsibility; DSR; sustainable tourism; responsible tourism; stakeholder; systematic literature review

## Introduction

Debates around concerns about tourism impacts on natural and social environments gained relevance in the 1970s, and alternatives to mass tourism started being discussed in the 1980s (Krippendorf, 1987). These alternatives to mainstream tourism, which are deemed more responsible, have been named 'alternative', 'soft', 'eco', 'green', 'ethical', and 'responsible' tourism (Goodwin, 2016; Mihalič, 2016). Recent documents from the European Travel Commission (ETC, 2021) provide definitions for some of these concepts. While they are interrelated and share similar principles (e.g. sustainable and responsible tourism), different nomenclatures have a specific focus (e.g. green tourism focuses on environmentally-friendly tourism). Although the idea of 'better' tourism has been primarily addressed in literature as sustainable tourism, the sustainable development paradigm has changed in time and pace against practical and political debates surrounding the complex notions of sustainability and responsibility in tourism (Mihalič et al., 2021).

Embedded in academic thinking and practical strategies, the practical application of sustainability in tourism contexts remains a challenge (Mihalič et al., 2021). This difficulty has resulted in the expansion of the concept of sustainability to include the responsibility of all stakeholders to act in a sustainable way. For example, Mihalič (2016) offers a comprehensive discussion on different nomenclatures of sustainability that are addressed as 'theory' and the notion of responsibility as an adequate 'practice'. The author shows how the sustainable tourism development (STD) paradigm evolved and proposes the term 'responsustainable tourism' (sustainable and responsible tourism),

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supporting that the current understanding of responsible tourism (action-based) is related to the concept of sustainable tourism (values-based).

Initially, UNWTO (2004) focused on the three pillars of sustainability. More recent communications from UNWTO (<https://www.unwto.org/tourism4sdgs>) and European Commission (e.g. EC, 2012) accompanied the expansion of sustainability rationale to incorporate the notion of responsibility (taking action). The increased use of the term responsible tourism (RT), as a response to sustainability aims in the second decade of the twenty-first century (Font & Lynes, 2018; Goodwin, 2016), called for the need to connect better the responsible approach with the notion of sustainability (Mihalič, 2016). Empirical research supports that RT plays a vital role in the perception of destination sustainability, impacting outcomes such as the perception of quality of life (e.g. Mathew & Sreejesh, 2017). Therefore, while interconnected, responsibility and sustainability in tourism are different concepts (Goodwin, 2016).

Parallel to the academic discussion surrounding sustainability at a destination level, the tourism industry traditionally preferred using Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to address responsibility in the context of companies (Dwyer, 2005). CSR is a 'concept whereby firms decide voluntarily to contribute to a better society and a cleaner environment' by integrating economic, social, and environmental aspects (Commission of the European Communities, 2001, p. 5). In the last decade, the construct of Destination Social Responsibility (DSR) has transferred the rationale of CSR to the level of the entire tourism destination (e.g. C. Lee et al., 2021; Hassan & Soliman, 2021; He et al., 2022; Ma et al., 2013; S. Lee et al., 2021; Su, Huang, & Huang, 2018; Su, Lian, & Huang, 2020). DSR is distinctive to CSR as the latter, coined in the area of organizational behaviour, is 'not completely suitable to the destination context' (Su, Huang, & Huang, 2018, p. 1041). In the context of RT, DSR includes 'stakeholder activities that protect and improve the social and environmental interests of an entire destination, in addition to the economic interests of the individual organisations' (Su & Swanson, 2017, p. 309) to achieve STD.

While CSR has mainly been studied within the level of individual tourism organizations and sectors, such as tour operations, ground transportation, airlines, accommodations, restaurants, travel agencies, and cruise ships (Font & Lynes, 2018; Su, Huang, & Pearce, 2018), the focus on destinations through the nomenclature DSR is still emergent and adopts a broader stakeholder orientation (C. Lee et al., 2021; Hassan & Soliman, 2021; S. Lee et al., 2021; Su, Swanson, & He, 2020). By following the discourse of contributing to implementing 'better tourism', i.e. more sustainable, the DSR approach relates to the tourism paradigm of sustainable and responsible tourism (Mihalič, 2016), which is aligned with contemporary real-world and socio-political challenges. This rationale is likely to gain relevance in destination management and governance as tourism destinations are expected to develop efforts to meet the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>). Therefore, DSR is relevant to academic tourism thinking and practical policy and can be approached as a tool to mitigate the risk of unsustainable tourism (Mihalič et al., 2021). Considering that behaviours (responsible and irresponsible) of all involved in tourism have potential impacts on destinations (Mihalič, 2020; Volgger & Huang, 2019) and that the stakeholders' perception of DSR can result in positive outcomes for destinations, DSR literature calls for further research to better assess and understand its benefits to the entire destination (e.g. Hassan & Soliman, 2021; Khan et al., 2021; S. Lee et al., 2021; Su, Lian, & Huang, 2020; Su & Swanson, 2017; Su, Swanson, & He, 2020). Also, a comprehensive and unifying definition of DSR that considers the complex nature of the construct and its diverse perspectives of analysis is still required to advance knowledge.

So far, diverse approaches have been used to examine DSR, and its effects and the growing interest in the construct are apparent (Su, Swanson, & He, 2020). Since previous reviews on RT have not yet considered DSR in their search protocols (e.g. Mondal & Samaddar, 2021), there is no structured research mapping existing studies on DSR in a critical manner, examining their theoretical foundations and methodological approaches, identifying outcomes, and depicting knowledge gaps to be addressed in future research. As such, this research intends to offer a systematic overview of

studies focusing on DSR that can contribute to advancing knowledge by proposing a comprehensive and unifying definition of DSR and a research agenda.

## Theoretical background

### *DSR: conceptualisations and dimensions in literature*

Formally reflected in the 2002 Cape Town Declaration (RTP, 2002), RT is one of the responses to meeting three parts of the triple bottom line of sustainability (economic, social, and environmental) goals (Elkington, 1998). Specifically, it can be defined as all forms of tourism that take ‘responsibility for making the consumption and production of tourism more sustainable’ (Goodwin, 2016, p.1), i.e. that contribute to maintaining the viability of tourism in an area considering the needs of future generations. It regards taking action and making change, enhancing the positive and reducing the negative impacts of tourism activities.

Although the notion of RT is not reducible to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), it entails some of its aspects (Goodwin, 2016). The discussions around corporate social responsibility (CSR) date back several decades (Carroll, 1999). The difficulty in setting a unifying definition relates to adapting the concept to particular contexts and industries where CSR is practised and considering multiple stakeholders (Fatma et al., 2016; Latif & Sajjad, 2018). A review of definitions of CSR found that the most addressed components of CSR have been: economic, environmental, social, stakeholder, and voluntariness, i.e. actions not prescribed by law (Dahlsrud, 2008).

Literature shows that a social responsibility approach in tourism means that firms and individuals have an ‘obligation to act for the benefit of society at large’ (Su & Swanson, 2017, p. 308). This has been the rationale applied to organizations in the form of CSR. Over 70% of the articles on CSR in tourism and hospitality have been published from 2013 onwards, revealing the increasing interest in this approach in recent years (Font & Lynes, 2018). Attempts to develop scales gauging CSR have been conducted in hospitality contexts (e.g. Fatma et al., 2016; Gursoy et al., 2019; Martínez et al., 2013). Su, Swanson, and He (2020) stress that since research conducting scale development has considered consumers’ perceptions of CSR of hotels only, these measurement instruments have been deemed more suitable for service firms such as hotels and not to assess the social responsibility of entire destinations.

Su and Huang (2012) proposed the term DSR in a non-English work for the first time, based on the idea that destinations are expected to have social responsibilities, go beyond their profit-oriented activities and boost community well-being. Ma et al. (2013) formally defined the construct in English as the ‘status and activities’ applied to stakeholders with respect to its social obligations (p. 5948). According to this definition, Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) should commit to safeguarding and enhancing the whole destination’s social and organizational interests. The nomenclature started being more popular when Su and Swanson (2017) stressed the importance of practices related to DSR to enhance the quality of life of the community and society at large. DSR has been associated with expressions such as ‘obligations and activities’ (Su et al., 2017), ‘collective ideology and efforts’ (Su, Huang, & Huang, 2018; Yu & Hwang, 2019), or ‘initiatives’ (Hu et al., 2019). In general, studies adopt definitions that highlight the perspective of tourists or residents only, even though there is consensus that DSR is related to all the stakeholders’ activities and their continuing commitment to enhancing the environmental, social, and economic interest of the entire destination (Su & Swanson, 2017).

Although the components covered in the conceptualisations of DSR vary, most of the definitions contemplate the destination’s sustainable efforts using the three lenses of economic, social, and environmental dimensions. Current literature acknowledges DSR as a multi-dimensional construct conceptually, despite some studies gauging it as a one-dimensional construct and using measurements specific to CSR (Su, Swanson, & He, 2020). To tackle these issues, Su, Swanson, and He (2020) validated the first DSR measurement scale, centring on the residents’ perspective, which

includes economic, environmental, social, voluntariness and stakeholder dimensions, and provided a comprehensive conceptualization for each dimension. The proposed five components have been the most highlighted within the definitions proposed for DSR (Appendix A). Curiously, none of the conceptualisations considers the cultural dimension independently, as proposed by others in the RT approach. This component is related to the 'preservation of local art, culture and traditions' (e.g. Mathew & Sreejesh, 2017, p. 85). Against this background, it is visible that a comprehensive and unifying definition of DSR adapted to diverse contexts and perspectives is still absent.

### ***Stakeholders' roles and perceptions of DSR***

Since DSR details the degree to which groups of individuals consider destinations to behave in terms of social responsibility, it is crucial to identify relevant stakeholders and their perceptions of DSR. Stakeholders are the members of society who are most crucial to specific businesses and to whom the latter must be responsive (Carroll, 1999). Different groups with diverse interests can impact and be impacted by tourism activities at destinations (Freeman, 1984).

In the case of destinations, the literature highlights the role of tourists, business owners, employees, government officials, non-governmental institutions, and residents (Goodwin, 2016; Mihalič, 2016; Su, Swanson, & He, 2020). Mihalič (2020) advocates that responsibility enablers are related to socio-psychological tourism supply capacity (e.g. residents' quality of life), socio-psychological demand capacity (visitors' experience), and socio-political capacity (e.g. actions, agendas). Among other factors, these aspects aid destinations monitoring and managing unsustainable tourism risks, such as overtourism. The latter is related to exceeding the capacity thresholds of destinations and congestion increase, resulting in communities' opposition to tourism and a decrease in visitors' interest. The theory of DSR stresses that destination sustainability can be attained if stakeholders act with a common goal to benefit society. As a result, this concept captures the outcome of collaboration in socially responsible conduct, which is supported by the RT approach (Goodwin, 2016; Su, Huang, & Huang, 2018). In the context of destination management and governance, the broad capabilities of DMOs in intermediation and networking are vital to boosting stakeholder collaboration and encouraging self-responsibility (Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014).

Whereas DSR definitions highlight the role of all stakeholders, empirical studies on DSR have primarily centred on tourists and residents. Studies on DSR show that when residents gain benefits from DSR activities (such as good natural environments or improved quality of life), they exhibit feedback behaviour such as pro-tourism behaviour and environmentally responsible behaviour (e.g. Ma et al., 2013; Su, Huang, & Pearce, 2018; Su, Swanson, & He, 2020). Similar to the literature supporting that consumers engage in favourable attitudes and behaviours based on the perceived effectiveness of CSR practices (Hofenk et al., 2019), tourists' outcomes are shaped by their perceptions of DSR efforts (Su & Swanson, 2017). Specifically, tourists' perceptions of DSR play a part in determining their intentions and actions related to environmentally responsible behaviours and revisitation decisions (e.g. C. Lee et al., 2021; S. Lee et al., 2021; Su, Lian, & Huang, 2020). Therefore, the stakeholders' cognition of DSR is relevant since it can enhance positive tourism impacts and lessen negative ones (Su, Huang, & Pearce, 2018), such as overtourism (Mihalič, 2020).

### **Methods**

This subsection discloses the systematic literature review (SLR) process used to offer an overview of studies on DSR in a critical manner. SLR minimizes the potential for reviewer biases in the literature selection process (Yang et al., 2017), makes it possible to identify what is already known more objectively, and allows to establish what is yet to be known (Prayag et al., 2019). Therefore, this oriented-process can be used to reveal existing research gaps that demand future research (Bichler, 2021). In this light, this review aimed to answer four specific questions helping to depict future research avenues and propose a comprehensive definition for DSR: (a) How has the publication of journal

articles on DSR evolved?; (b) What have been the theoretical foundations used?; (c) What have been the methodological approaches and measurements utilized? (d) What outcomes of DSR have been supported, and what research gaps remain? These questions are the basis for critically reflecting on DSR against literature and proposing a research agenda.

Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) scientific databases were selected to identify published studies because of their comprehensiveness and inclusion of high-impact and peer-reviewed journal articles (Kuhzady et al., 2020). The use of peer-reviewed journal articles in systematic reviews reduces flaws and enhances the quality of results (Bichler, 2021; Liu et al., 2021; Scott et al., 2019). Following the recommendation that reviews should not focus only on leading journals in the field (Koseoglu et al., 2016), we did not filter specific journals indexed in the selected databases. The inclusion criteria utilized to determine which publications would be included in the present SLR were based on being a peer-reviewed journal article, written in English, mentioning DSR directly in either the title, authors' keywords, or abstract, and approaching the construct DSR as playing a significant role in the study, cumulatively. The articles were selected first by one researcher and validated by two other researchers independently (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). The process ended when a consensus was reached. This process was concluded on 16th May 2022.

The advanced search was conducted directly in WoS and Scopus online databases in titles, abstracts and keywords with the search string 'destination social responsibility'. Search filters included: type of document (journal article) and language (English). No filters were used for publication date, field category or journal. The search resulted in 28 and 21 records in WoS and Scopus, respectively. Of these 49 results, 17 duplicate records were excluded using Endnote software.

In the first phase of the screening process, it was observed that nine articles mentioned 'destination social responsibility' only in the indexed keywords automatically allocated by the system (WoS and Scopus) and not in the authors' keywords, i.e. not self-identified. Also, the focus of the studies was not on DSR. Therefore, nine of the 32 remaining articles were excluded, and 23 publications were assessed for eligibility through reading the full texts. One article cumulatively was not centred on DSR but rather a critical literature review on social responsibility in tourism and hospitality (Volgger & Huang, 2019), and the full text for another one was not available in English. For these reasons, these documents were excluded, which resulted in 21 journal articles for the systematic review. Reference lists were checked to ensure no relevant article matching the selection criteria was absent from the research. Following systematic review procedures used in previous research (Liu et al., 2021; Prayag et al., 2019; Yang et al., 2017), the selection process of publications to review can be observed in Figure 1 by adapting the PRISMA flowchart (Page et al., 2021).

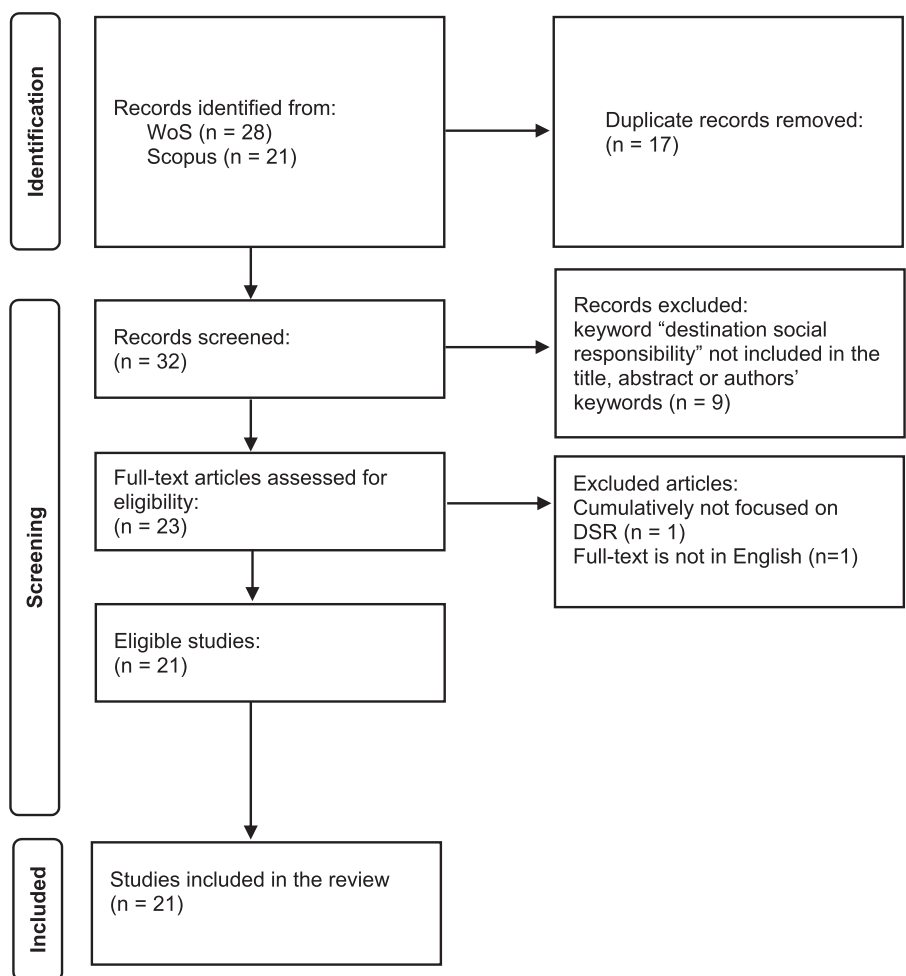
Bibliometrix (Biblioshiny) software from 'R package' was used to import metadata generated from the databases and analyse evaluative bibliometric information (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). A spreadsheet was created in Excel to summarize the relevant categories for analysis and synthesis (Liu et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2017).

## Results

### *Evolution of publications on DSR*

The analysis of the dataset shows that the number of publications on DSR has increased in recent years. The first journal article mentioning the construct is from 2013. From 2017 onwards, publications about DSR accelerated, indicating a growing interest in publishing about DSR (Figure 2).

The authors with more production on the construct over time are L. Su, with thirteen journal articles published in English, followed by S.R. Swanson with four articles, Y. Huang with three articles, and C. Lee, C. Yu, K. Kim, M. Hsu, S. Huang, X. He, and Y. Hwang, with two articles, respectively. Thirty-five other authors have participated in the development of at least one journal article. All papers are co-authored. The three journals more active in publishing on DSR in the dataset are *Sustainability* ( $n = 6$ ), *Tourism Management* ( $n = 3$ ), and *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management* ( $n = 2$ ) (Table 1).



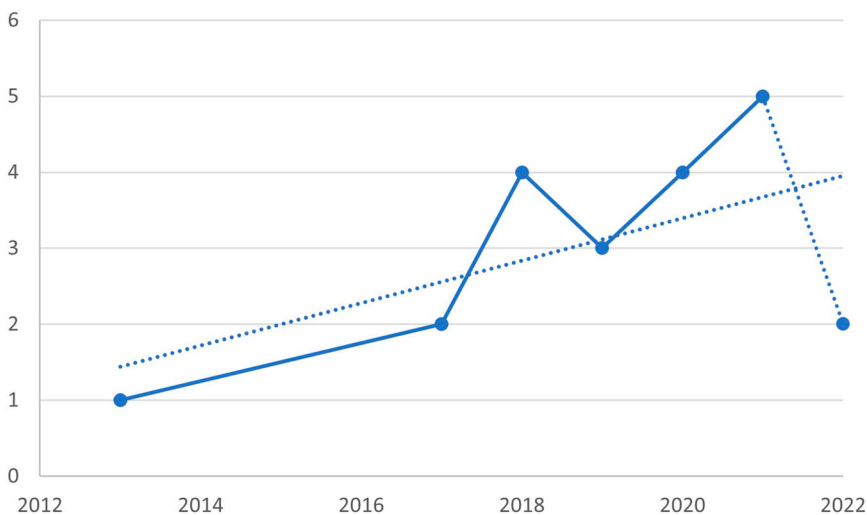
**Figure 1.** PRISMA flowchart 2020 process of article selection (adapted from Page et al., 2021).

Figure 3 depicts the authors' country of affiliation and country collaboration, where research collaboration between China and the USA is visible. When considering only the corresponding authors' country of affiliation, the distribution is the USA (7), China (6), South Korea (4), Australia (1), Oman (1), Malaysia (1), and the UK (1). On average, each article is co-authored by three authors. Most destinations selected as settings to collect data were Asian: 12 studies used samples from Chinese destinations, three in South Korea, two in Vietnam, one in Egypt, and one in Malaysia (Table 1).

**Methodological approaches and measurements in DSR studies**

Table 1 depicts that only five studies measure DSR as a multi-dimensional construct (C. Lee et al., 2021; S. Lee et al., 2021; Su, Swanson, & He, 2020; Tran et al., 2018; Yu & Hwang, 2019). Tran et al. (2018) adapted CSR and DSR research scales, utilizing 28 items and five dimensions. Although the scales transferred from CSR research show high internal consistency, ethical and philanthropic responsibility dimensions were merged into one dimension, and six items were eliminated due to low factor loadings. Yu and Hwang (2019) used the same multi-dimensional scale in which the ethical and philanthropic dimensions were eliminated due to low reliability. Su, Swanson, and He (2020) used a scale development process for measuring DSR as a five-dimensional construct



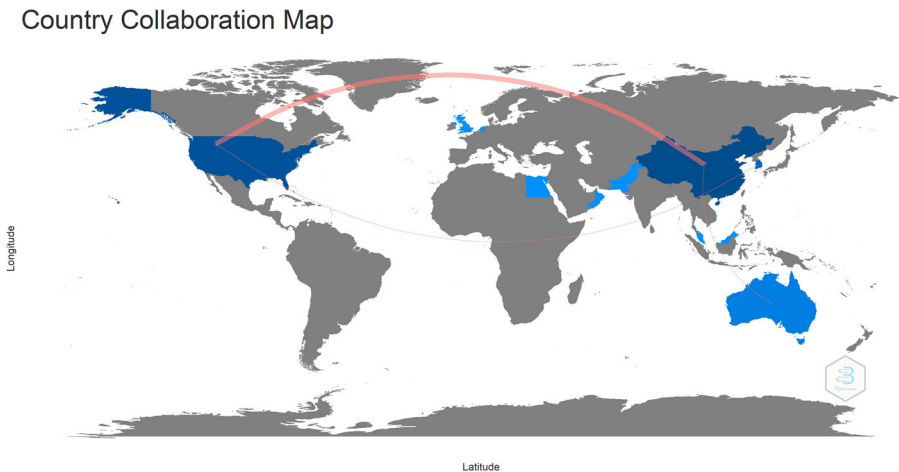


**Figure 2.** No. of journal articles on DSR per year.

(environmental, economic, social, stakeholder and voluntariness). The internal consistency is good for all dimensions, which total 20 items. The limitation of the scale is related to the fact that it was validated from the residents’ perspective only. C. Lee et al. (2021) and S. Lee et al. (2021) used the scale validated by Fatma et al. (2016) for measuring CSR in a hospitality context. Although the internal consistency is good for all the dimensions, the scale was validated in a hotel context and is composed of the three dimensions associated with the three-bottom line of sustainable development (economic, environmental and social) only. Despite stressing the multi-dimensional nature of the construct conceptually, the remaining studies assess DSR as uni-dimensional.

Apart from the study by Su, Swanson, and He (2020), which used both quantitative and qualitative methods, all the articles followed a quantitative approach (questionnaire). The analysed 21 articles stress the difficulty in measuring DSR given the complex nature of the construct.

Table 1 reveals that regarding data analysis, structural equation modelling is the most utilized method to test relationships between constructs (76). Samples used in the final questionnaires



**Figure 3.** Authors’ country of affiliation and country collaboration.



**Table 1.** Measurements and analysis instruments of DSR (by year).

Authors	Setting	Sample	Scale	DSR dimensions/ items	DSR internal consistency (Cronbach Alpha)	Data analysis
Ma et al. (2013)	China	272 residents	5-point Likert scale	Four-items	0.798	SEM*
Su and Swanson (2017)	China	539 domestic tourists	7-point Likert scale	Five-items	0.914	CFA** SEM
Su et al. (2017)	China	272 residents	5-point Likert scale	Five-items	0.798	CFA SEM
Su, Huang, and Huang (2018)	China	272 residents	5-point Likert scale	Four-items	0.798	CFA SEM
Su, Huang, and Pearce (2018)	China	453 residents	7-point Likert scale	Five-items	0.921	CFA SEM
Su et al. (2018)	China	541 domestic tourists	5-point Likert scale	Four items	0.802	CFA SEM
Tran et al. (2018)	Vietnam	359 tourists	5-point Likert scale	Five-dimensions and 28-items adapted from CSR: Dimensions: economic (7- items), environmental (7-items), legal (4-items), ethical (6-items) and philanthropic (4- items).	Economic (6): 0.948; Environmental (6): 0.888; Legal- ethical (6): 0.922; Philanthropic (4): 0.919 Six items were eliminated	EFA*** CFA SEM
Hu et al. (2019)	China	381 residents	7-point Likert scale	Five-items	0.792	CFA SEM
Su and Huang (2019)	China	522 domestic tourists	7-point Likert scale	Five-items	0.881	CFA SEM
Yu and Hwang (2019)	Vietnam	359 tourists	5-point Likert scale	Five-dimensions and 28-items adapted from CSR Dimensions: economic (7- items), environmental (7-items), legal (4-items), ethical (6-items) and philanthropic (4- items).	Economic (7): 0.896; Environmental (7): 0.836; legal (4): 0.294 (removed from analysis); Ethical (6): 0.697 (removed from analysis); Philanthropic (4): 0.919	SEM
Kim and Yoon (2020)	South Korea	250 tourists	7-point Likert scale	Four-items	0.894	CFA SEM LRA <sup>+</sup>
Su et al. (2020)	China	Study 1: 127 undergraduate students Study 2: 167 tourists	7-point Likert scale	Experimental research	N/A	Two-way ANOVA One- way ANOVA LRA

(Continued)

**Table 1.** Continued.

Authors	Setting	Sample	Scale	DSR dimensions/ items	DSR internal consistency (Cronbach Alpha)	Data analysis
Su, Lian, and Huang (2020)	China	Study 1: 80 undergraduate students Study 2: 200 undergraduate and graduate students Study 3: 167 tourists	7-point Likert scale	Experimental research	N/A	t-tests Two-way ANOVA One-way ANOVA LRA
Su, Swanson, and He (2020)	China	Study 1: 80 residents; 6 professors Study 2: 429 residents Study 3: 467 residents	Study 1: N/A Study 2: 7-point Likert scale Study 3: 7-point Likert scale	Scale development for DSR. 5-dimensions: environmental (5-items), economic (4-items), voluntariness (4-items), social (4-items) and stakeholder (3-items).	Environmental (5): 0.945; Economic (4): 0.875; Voluntariness (4): 0.846; Social (4): 0.818; Stakeholder (3): 0.924	Content analysis, EFA, CFA SEM
Hassan and Soliman (2021)	Egypt	543 domestic tourists	5-point Likert scale	Six items	0.899	SEM
C. Lee et al. (2021)	South Korea	415 visitors	5-point Likert	Three-dimensions adapted from CSR: economic (4-items), environmental (4-items), and social (4-items)	Economic (4): 0.871; Environmental (4): 0.868; Social (4): 0.839	CFA Cluster analysis ANCOVA General linear model
Khan et al. (2021)	Malaysia	163 managers	5-point Likert	Five-items	N/A	SEM
S. Lee et al. (2021)	South Korea	433 visitors	5-point Likert	Three-dimensions adapted from CSR: economic (4-items), environmental (4-items), and social (4-items)	Economic (4): 0.87; Environmental (4): 0.85; Social (4): 0.87	SEM LMSA <sup>++</sup>
Su et al. (2021)	Online sample	79 participants (Study 1) 170 participants (Study 2) 169 participants (Study 3)	—	Experimental research	N/A	t-tests PROCES: Mediation/ Moderation ANOVA
He et al. (2022)	China	203 tourists (Study 3) 216 tourists (Study 4)	7-point Likert	Five-items	N/A	Hierarchical regression 2*2 Factor between-subjects experimental design ANOVA Moderated/mediation
Su et al. (2022)	China	539 tourists	7-point Likert	Five-items	0.914	CFA SEM

\*SEM: Structural Equation Modelling; \*\*CFA: Confirmatory Factor Analysis; \*\*\* EFA: Exploratory Factor Analysis; <sup>+</sup>LRA: Linear Regression Analysis; <sup>++</sup>Latent Moderating Structural Analysis.

varied from 163 to 541 respondents. Even though the initial studies on DSR focused on residents' perceptions, 62% of the articles are based on tourists' perceptions. Only one study is based on managers' viewpoints (Khan et al., 2021), and no study is longitudinal.

### ***Theoretical foundations of DSR studies***

The most frequently used theories as foundations of DSR research are the stimulus-organism-response (SOR) framework and the social exchange theory (SET). SOR has been adopted in five articles (Kim & Yoon, 2020; Su & Swanson, 2017; Su, Swanson, & Hsu, 2018; Tran et al., 2018; Yu & Hwang, 2019). The SOR framework was introduced by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), who suggested that emotions and feelings guide people's behaviour. The rationale of this framework is that when individuals encounter a particular stimulus, internal states corresponding to the organism are generated (cognitive and emotional). These internal states influence individuals' responses, which can be related to approach or avoidance reactions (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). The articles consider DSR strategies as the stimuli, perceptions and emotions as the organism, and behavioural outcomes (e.g. satisfaction) as responses.

SET was used in Ma et al. (2013), Su, Huang, and Huang (2018), Su, Huang, and Pearce (2018), Su, Lian, and Huang (2020) and Khan et al. (2021), which contemplate the perspective of residents, tourists and managers. The theory developed by Homans (1958) is useful for studying behaviour, including behavioural change or predicting behaviour in the context of social relationships. By outweighing the 'costs' with the 'rewards', it can be determined if a situation has a benefit and how much. In the context of DSR, when gaining more benefits from DSR strategies, individuals may adopt more environmentally responsible behaviours to protect the environment at the destination. This behavioural change, which involves a personal effort, contributes to sustainable destination development and, therefore, benefits residents (Su, Huang, & Pearce, 2018), tourists (Su, Lian, & Huang, 2020), and the destination itself (Khan et al., 2021). Indeed, the relevance of SET has been highlighted in debates concerning the prevention of unsustainable tourism (Mihalič, 2020).

The stakeholder theory has also been used in framing DSR studies (Khan et al., 2021; Ma et al., 2013; Su, Huang, & Pearce, 2018; Su, Swanson, & He, 2020). As defined by Freeman (1984), a stakeholder can be described as a group or an individual who can impact or be impacted by the achievement of the organisation's objectives. In the context of DSR, the rationale is that DSR actions will benefit all stakeholders. In the analysed articles, the most frequently studied stakeholders are tourists, followed by residents. Similar to SET, stakeholder theory has been deemed crucial in debates around the prevention of unsustainable tourism (Mihalič, 2020).

Attribution theory was used in two studies (Su, Gong, & Huang, 2020; Su, Lian, & Huang, 2020). This theory was introduced by Heider (1958) and is informed by social psychology, aiming to explain how individuals perceive the causes of an event or behaviour and the consequence of such attribution on their subsequent behaviour.

Signalling theory (Connelly et al., 2011), which is related to signals sent to receivers that are focused on mitigating information asymmetry between groups, has been used in Su, Lian, and Huang (2020) and Su et al. (2021). Theories on values have also been employed as the theoretical background of recent studies on DSR through the lens of values belief norm theory (C. Lee et al., 2021) and values-identity-personal (VIP) model (S. Lee et al., 2021) in explaining pro-environmental behaviours. Relationship quality theories have been found useful in examining the role of DSR in strengthening the relationship between individuals and destinations by focusing on trust, identification and satisfaction (Su et al., 2017; Su & Huang, 2019). Place attachment theory was adopted to frame the study by Hu et al. (2019). Originating from environmental psychology, place attachment is related to the bond between individuals and places. In this light, Hu et al. (2019) advocate that place attachment mediates the link between DSR and pro-tourism behaviours. Other theories such as nudge theory (C. Lee et al., 2021), bottom-up spillover theory (Su, Huang, & Huang, 2018),

emotional solidarity theory (Su et al., 2021), services quality, and reciprocity theory (He et al., 2022) have also been found useful to further the knowledge on DSR and its effects.

### ***DSR outcomes and research gaps***

Appendix B depicts the effects that have been supported in the dataset. From residents' perspective, the support for tourism and pro-tourism behaviours are the most studied outcomes of DSR (Hu et al., 2019; Ma et al., 2013; Su, Huang, & Huang, 2018; Su, Swanson, & He, 2020). The effects between DSR and constructs such as resident-destination identification (Su et al., 2017; Su, Swanson, & He, 2020), trust (Ma et al., 2013; Su et al., 2017), environmentally responsible behaviour (Su, Huang, & Pearce, 2018), quality of life (Su, Huang, & Huang, 2018; Su et al., 2021), place attachment in the form of place dependence and place identity (Hu et al., 2019), and emotional solidarity (Su et al., 2021) have also been supported.

From tourists' perspectives, revisit intention has been the outcome of DSR most tackled and supported by empirical studies (Hassan & Soliman, 2021; Su & Huang, 2019; Su, Swanson, & Hsu, 2018; Su, Gong, & Huang, 2020; Su, Lian, & Huang, 2020; Yu & Hwang, 2019). The latter is followed by the impact of DSR on environmentally responsible behaviour/pro-environmental behaviours (C. Lee et al., 2021; S. Lee et al., 2021; Su & Swanson, 2017), where the presence of DSR mitigates the negative effect of low service quality on tourist environmental responsible behaviour (He et al., 2022). The effect of DSR on tourists' emotions is also supported (Su & Swanson, 2017; Su, Swanson, & Hsu 2018; Tran et al., 2018). Only one study is conducted from the perspective of tourism managers. The latter supports the effect of DSR on sustainable tourism management, as well as the role of DSR in mediating sustainable tourism policy, destination management, and STD (Khan et al., 2021).

Figure 4 portrays the co-occurrence network considering the articles' abstracts, using Bibliometrix (Biblioshiny) software. Three groups linking terms related to the three main foci of the articles can be observed: (a) tourists' perceptions of DSR and its impacts on their behaviour, such as intentions of revisit and trust (blue cluster); (b) residents' perceptions and DSR effects on their satisfaction and support for tourism development (red cluster); and (c) discussions around the impacts of DSR on sustainable behaviours, such as pro-environmental behaviours (green cluster). These three main discussion areas can also be identified in Figure 5, which shows trend topics. While residents were the focus of early DSR articles, this concern has also been transferred to tourists' perspectives. The interest in the effect (positive and negative) of DSR information on sustainable behaviours, such as pro-environmentally behaviour, became a more recent research goal.

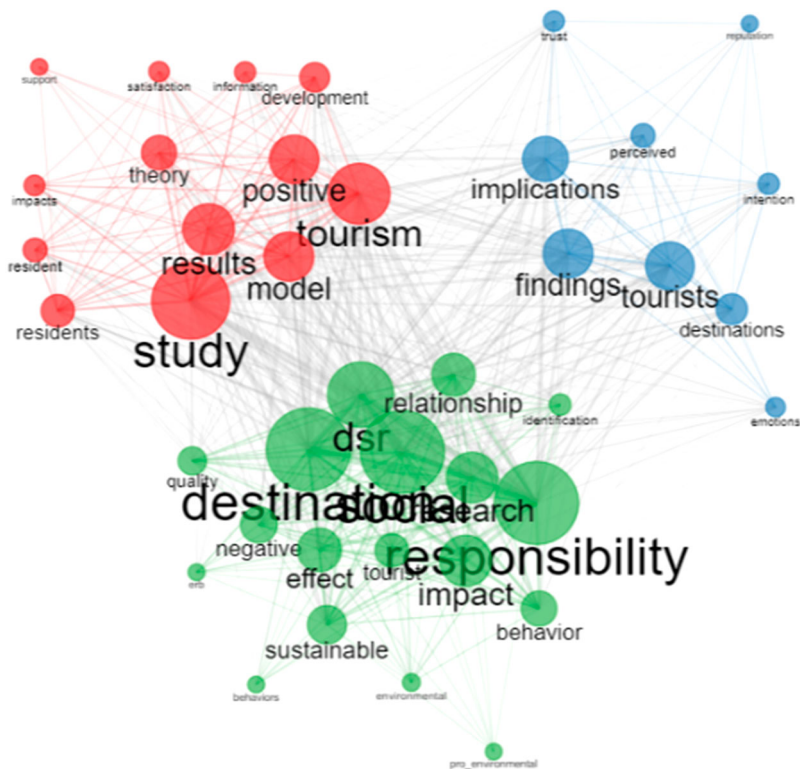
Appendix B also offers a summary of the studies' limitations. The gaps reported in the analysed studies are mostly related to the samples utilized with limited sociodemographic diversity, such as cultural and geographical profiles. Also, findings show that tested models still do not represent the complexity of DSR and the diversity of variables that can impact DSR outcomes (e.g. Hassan & Soliman, 2021; Su, Lian, & Huang, 2020; Tran et al., 2018).

Most studies adapt measurements from CSR research and assess DSR as a one-dimension construct. This aspect has been deemed a research gap, resulting in a call for measures specific to DSR contexts (Su, Lian, & Huang, 2020). Table 1 also shows an underrepresentation of stakeholders in the studies, which either focus on tourists or residents. Furthermore, since most of the studies are cross-sectional, they do not allow examining effects over time, focusing more on intentions rather than actual behaviours and effective STD.

## **Discussions and conclusions**

### ***Towards a research agenda on DSR***

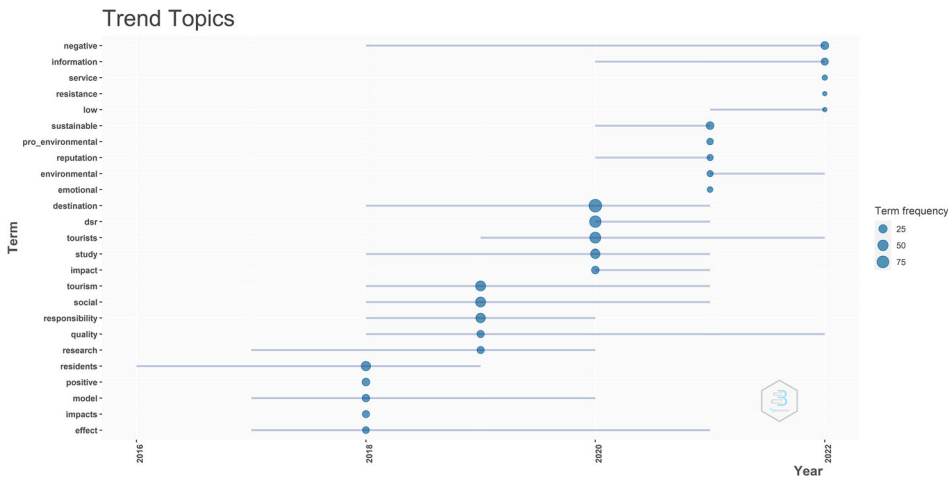
Regarding publication progress on DSR, the review revealed that this is still an emergent research topic; around 67% of journal articles have been published from 2019 onwards. This aspect



**Figure 4.** Co-occurrence network based on abstracts about DSR.

confirms the interest in using this construct and the increasing relevance of addressing responsibility at the destination level rather than in the context of specific sectors or companies only. [Figure 6](#) summarizes the primary outcomes of DSR (residents' and tourists' perspectives) along with ten directions for further research based on knowledge gaps, discussion of findings and literature.

Individuals' attitudes, intentions and behaviours have been posed as being affected by the perception of DSR strategies. Foundational theories in sociology and psychology (e.g. SOR model and

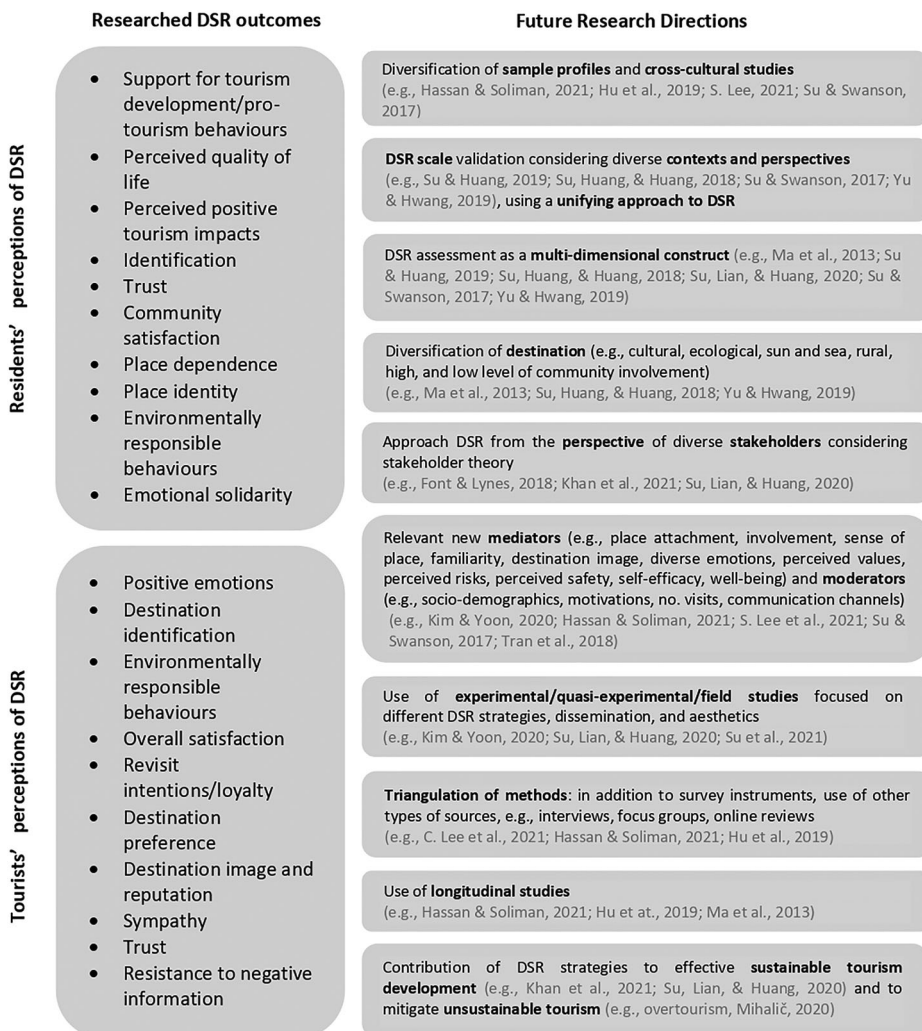


**Figure 5.** Trend topics on DSR.

SET) have been preferred to study these impacts based on the rationale of stakeholder theory. SOR is mostly used to study tourists, and SET is mostly employed to examine residents' perspectives. Other theories related to values, place attachment, signalling theory, and emotions, for example, were helpful in tackling DSR outcomes but are still visibly unexplored.

Notably, cultural theoretical foundations are almost absent in DSR studies, despite most empirical studies highlighting the need for conducting cross-cultural studies and examining whether cultural differences affect the outcomes of DSR strategies (e.g. Lee et al., 2021). Most studies on DSR were conducted in an Asian context. While this result is in line with the advancement of research on RT in the Asia-Pacific region (e.g. Mondal & Samaddar, 2021), this finding contrasts with many tourism studies stressing the need to conduct more studies from an Asian perspective to complement research focused on Western samples. Considering the sample profile may cause different views on DSR and its effects, studying DSR from a wider variety of perspectives and locations can contribute to a better understanding of DSR (Yu & Hwang, 2019).

Most empirical studies still rely on measurements developed to assess CSR practices in general or hospitality firms, focusing on a hotel context. Despite conceptualisations of the construct



**Figure 6.** Outcomes of DSR and research agenda.



highlighting the complex and multi-dimensional scope of DSR (Table 1), most studies still assess DSR as a one-dimensional construct (ranging from four to six items). Su, Swanson, and He (2020) conducted a scale development procedure and proposed a specific scale composed of five dimensions (environmental, economic, social, stakeholder and voluntariness) and 20 items. However, the scale was only validated from a resident's perspective.

Although existing conceptualisations of the construct (Appendix A) emphasise the role of all stakeholders in the operationalization of DSR and the impact of their perceptions on behavioural outcomes, residents' and tourists' perceptions have been the focus of research. Despite tourism managers having a deeper understanding of a given destination's tourism policy, DSR, and STD, only one study addressed their perspective (Khan et al., 2021). Thus, future studies should tackle this knowledge gap by addressing businesses (owners and employees), investors, competitors, governments, and organizations/institutions relevant from destination management and governance perspective. Indeed, this is a recommendation for research on responsible and sustainable approaches to tourism (Mondal & Samaddar, 2021; Mihalič, 2020).

This review indicates that implementing DSR strategies at a destination will likely positively affect the destination and its community and tourists (e.g. support for tourism development, quality of life, intentions to visit the destination, intentions to engage in environmentally responsible behaviour). However, future research is called to explore complex models by tackling antecedents/outcomes of DSR related to perceived safety and risks, familiarity, socio-demographics, and situational variables (Figure 6). Furthering the knowledge of psychological mechanisms influenced by DSR perception is a fundamental goal for future studies (e.g. Su, Lian, & Huang, 2020). Specifically, the impact of DSR on well-being is relevant for research due to the importance that positive tourism has gained in society at large and the need to safeguard it (Hartwell et al., 2018; Mihalič, 2020; Vada et al., 2020).

Quantitative instruments are the most popular in DSR research, resulting in an underrepresentation of qualitative methods and mixed methods, as questionnaires are prevalent in studies performing structural equation modelling analyses. This result aligns with CSR research, where questionnaires have been deemed adequate to collect data to assess CSR outcomes (Latif & Sajjad, 2018), as well as with RT, where quantitative approaches have been dominant (Mondal & Samaddar, 2021). However, adopting qualitative methods can also bring more in-depth knowledge about DSR and its effects on the field (e.g. S. Lee et al., 2021). In fact, similar to previous research revealing some challenges in drawing individuals' attention to corporate social responsibility initiatives (Babakhani et al., 2020; Fatma et al., 2016), some individuals may have a low level of awareness of DSR actions in place. Therefore, triangulation of methods could mitigate this issue. In this context, DSR literature (Figure 6) suggests that experimental research design can also aid further insights into DSR, as previously advocated in RT research (Mondal & Samaddar, 2021).

Following the RT direction (Mondal & Samaddar, 2021), DSR can be regarded as a pathway for meeting the United Nations 2030 SDGs. Since there is only one attempt (Khan et al., 2021) to gauge the impact of DSR on STD at a destination level (the cornerstone of the DSR), this is a crucial subject for future studies. Furthermore, although longitudinal studies are recommended in DSR literature (e.g. Hassan & Soliman, 2021; Hu et al., 2019) and the relevance of evaluating action-based responsibility approaches in diagnosing, influencing, and monitoring the risks of unsustainable tourism, such as overtourism, is highlighted (Mihalič, 2020), no study in the database has undertaken a longitudinal approach.

### ***DSR: proposing a unifying definition***

The complex nature of DSR resides in five aspects manifested in literature, which have not been captured together in previous definitions (Appendix A): (1) it is a second-order construct composed of multiple dimensions; (2) it focuses on perceived efforts at the level of an entire destination rather than at an organizational level; (3) it goes beyond legal obligations; (4) it involves collective and



continuous efforts of relevant stakeholders in the destination; (5) the managerial approach entailed by the construct relates to the intermediating role of DMOs (public and private) in networking, planning, encouraging, monitoring, and disseminating responsible collective strategies that are beneficial to the destination in the long-term (sustainable) and contributes to mitigating unsustainable tourism.

Based on the reviewed literature and conceptualisations ([Appendix A](#)), together with results from the systematic review, the following definition of DSR is synthesized: DSR is a multi-dimensional construct referring to the socially responsible efforts of an entire destination as perceived by its stakeholders. DSR presupposes a continuous and collective commitment to safeguard and enhance the whole destination's community and organizations interests by adopting practices encompassing economic, environmental, social, cultural, voluntary, and stakeholder-based responsibilities aiming to enhance long-term positive tourism impacts (sustainable tourism) and lessen negative ones (unsustainable tourism). While shared by relevant stakeholders, the implementation, monitoring and dissemination of DSR initiatives are commonly led by DMOs, both public and private, which have a vital role in intermediating and networking within destination management and governance.

### ***Contributions and limitations***

This research contributed to knowledge by addressing a contemporary academic call to reflect on practical approaches to sustainability in tourism contexts. Specifically, this study focuses on recent growing interest in DSR within the scope of RT at a destination level. Previous reviews on RT (e.g. Mondal & Samaddar, [2021](#)) have not considered the DSR as a search keyword. Our study offers a systematic overview of what has been done and what is yet unknown about DSR to guide future research. First, a comprehensive and unifying definition of DSR that can be adopted in diverse contexts is proposed. While the rationale in the literature is not new, DSR offers a specific approach to RT, considering the entire destination and not only firms, such as in the case of CSR. The increasing interest in operationalizing and using the construct DSR in top tourism journals is apparent. Second, several research avenues are pointed out. This synthesis and reflection can bestow future researchers to seek further insights into this domain in a meaningful way.

Existing studies support that DSR positively affects destinations, tourists, and communities. Theoretical foundations used in these studies, especially stakeholder theory, also stress that other stakeholders in the destination, such as firms' employers and employees, NGOs, and governments, can be favourably impacted by DSR strategies (Font & Lynes, [2018](#); Su, Swanson, & He, [2020](#)). In light of challenging times in the tourism sector, tourists may hold more positive attitudes and behaviours toward destinations that act socially responsibly. DSR can thus be addressed as a good practice that helps protect the destination against negative information (Su et al., [2022](#)). Since DSR positively affects destination trust and reputation, which encourages favourable behaviours towards destinations, managerial efforts on DSR seem to be beneficial for strategies aiming at a sustainable recovery of tourism post-COVID pandemic (Hassan & Soliman, [2021](#)). As advocated in the systematic literature review of Mihalić et al. ([2021](#)) concerning the sustainable and responsible tourism paradigm, issues within this research area are of utmost importance for the foreseeable future. The current study findings show the potential of the DSR in the context of RT to aid tourism destinations in reaching (SDGs) (e.g. responsible consumption and production and sustainable cities and communities).

Therefore, similar to CSR strategies that have evolved from a philanthropic approach to a strategic perspective (Latif & Sajjad, [2018](#)), DSR strategies are suggested as key for STD (Khan et al., [2021](#)). Nevertheless, research empirically supporting this rationale is scarce, and future research should further explore the relationship between DSR and STD. The mapping of outcomes of DSR ([Figure 6](#); [Appendix B](#)) shows that the most effective DSR strategies are proactive instead of

reactive (Khan et al., 2021; Su, Gong, & Huang, 2020). Therefore, DSR can be a meaningful approach to consider in the dialogue between destinations and their stakeholders (Su, Huang, & Pearce, 2018; Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014) within destination communication strategies (d'Angella & De Carlo, 2016). Also, it can be part of a prevention approach to unsustainable tourism and safeguarding communities' welfare (Mihalič, 2020). Against this background, a critical approach to literature and findings proposes the use of a unifying definition of DSR that goes beyond the triple bottom line of sustainability. It considers the assessment, monitoring, and dissemination of DSR activities/outcomes by tackling multiple dimensions at a destination level, such as environmental, economic, social, cultural, stakeholder-related, and voluntariness.

This review is not free from limitations. Book chapters and other publication formats were not included, which often do not follow a blind review process and are more difficult to access. In addition, journal articles published in other languages than English were not considered. Due to the recent interest in DSR, the number of articles did not allow for performing other meaningful network analyses, which the authors recommend being conducted in the future. Last, this research is focused on the nomenclature DSR only (used on titles, abstracts, or authors' keywords), as the objective was to map the increasing interest in this construct. Therefore, the specific research did not include other studies centred on a broader approach to RT or CSR.

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