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Perceptions and Behaviors Concerning Tourism Degrowth and Sustainable Tourism: Latent Dimensions and Types of Tourists

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Abstract: The current economic model centered on perpetual growth is unsustainable. Without a shift away from this growth-centric approach and rampant consumerism, the environmental and social crises will persist. This article explores tourists' relationship with degrowth and sustainability. Through an empirical investigation, the study explores the relatively uncharted territory of how tourists engage with degrowth. Employing an online survey with a sample of 261 respondents obtained through convenience sampling via online distribution, the research seeks to unearth key facets of tourist behavior and categorize tourists based on their attitudes toward sustainability and degrowth. The findings indicate that degrowth remains a largely unfamiliar concept among tourists. Interestingly, those exhibiting more sustainable travel practices also display a greater alignment with degrowth principles. Conversely, younger tourists appear less inclined towards sustainable behaviors and more resistant to embracing degrowth ideologies. These findings underscore the potential of degrowth in addressing sustainability challenges within the tourism industry while emphasizing the need of including tourists and local communities in fostering a shift toward more sustainable tourism practices.

Keywords: sustainable tourism; tourism degrowth; tourist behavior; tourism impacts; overtourism; responsible travel practices

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1. Introduction

The capitalist system is being frequently questioned as many global tensions are studied and attributed to its influence. A paradigm of growth as the best and only option has been dominant alongside capitalism. This worldview of growth as a unique development "tool" has spread and has been promoted. Jason Moore [1] critiqued this growth imperative by introducing the concept of the Capitalocene, which emphasizes that capitalism, not humanity as a whole, is responsible for environmental degradation. According to Moore, capitalism's relentless drive for profit commodifies nature and labor, exploiting them in unsustainable ways to fuel endless growth. Nancy Fraser [2], in *Cannibal Capitalism*, extended this argument, highlighting how capitalism not only exploits labor and natural resources but also cannibalizes essential social and ecological foundations, such as public goods, care work, and nature itself. Fraser argued that capitalism systematically consumes these resources, depleting the very conditions that make social reproduction and ecological sustainability possible.

In contrast to this prevailing growth-centric paradigm, social movements and academics are now exploring alternative ideas such as the limits to growth, post-growth, or post-capitalism. Over recent decades, the concept of degrowth has emerged and gained traction. Degrowth is a complex concept drawing from diverse intellectual fields. It aims to tackle social and environmental challenges through profound transformations and restructuring [3].

One of the major players in the capitalist system is the tourism sector. Many problems associated with the excessive growth in tourism are documented in the literature. Tourism's unchecked expansion mirrors the broader exploitative patterns described by Moore and Fraser, where the relentless pursuit of growth leads to the overexploitation of natural resources and human labor, often to the detriment of local environments and communities. According to projections by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), international tourism is expected to continue its rapid growth in the coming years, highlighting the urgency of addressing sustainability challenges such as rising inflation, resource depletion, and extreme weather events [4,5]. To mitigate these impacts, a shift toward degrowth principles is essential, prioritizing environmental protection, community well-being, and equitable tourism practices to counteract phenomena like overtourism [6,7]. Nevertheless, the study of degrowth and its connection to tourism remains relatively underexplored.

It is generally accepted that there is a growing number of tourists shifting toward more sustainable options, potentially positioning degrowth as a pathway to a more environmentally friendly future. Individuals have the capacity to drive change, and degrowth presents itself as a promising framework for this transformation [8]. Notably, there is a critical gap in the field—the absence of field studies involving tourists and degrowth.

Given the fundamental role that tourists play in the tourism industry and the evident link between tourism impacts and degrowth principles, several pertinent questions arise: Who are the tourists that take into consideration sustainability aspects when traveling? Are they aware of degrowth? Are they aligned with it? While research on degrowth and tourism is expanding, there remains a scarcity of empirical studies on this topic. Discussions around degrowth have predominantly overlooked tourism, with only limited prior research indicating the potential for degrowth to foster genuinely sustainable tourism [8].

This article aims to address this gap by identifying the specific characteristics of sustainability-oriented tourists, evaluating their awareness and understanding of degrowth, and exploring their views on its potential to minimize the environmental impact of travel and destinations. Tourists are central to sustainable tourism because their behaviors and choices directly impact destinations' environmental, economic, and social well-being.

This research gap is addressed by examining how tourists' behaviors and attitudes align with degrowth principles, rooted in the key theoretical frameworks, such as Moore's Capitalocene and Fraser's analysis of capitalism's ecological and social depletion. Grounded in these perspectives, the study identifies sustainability-oriented tourists, evaluates their awareness of degrowth, and assesses its potential to reduce tourism's environmental and social impacts. By linking critical theory with practical applications, the research provides actionable insights to foster sustainable tourism practices.

The present study identifies specific characteristics of sustainability-oriented tourists, latent dimensions that refer to underlying, often unobserved factors that influence tourists' attitudes and behaviors toward tourism degrowth and sustainability. Identifying these latent dimensions helps reveal how different types of tourists internalize and express values related to sustainable practices and degrowth in tourism.

The article is organized as follows: First, we present a reflexive review of the literature on degrowth and its linkages with the impacts of tourism. Then, the following sections

briefly present the methods. The results of the empirical study are presented and discussed. A final section explores key findings and policy implications.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Degrowth Principles and the Challenges of Tourism Expansion

Degrowth is a social and intellectual movement that originated in the 1960s and 70s in Latin European countries, mainly in France. The concerns about the limits to growth, how the capitalist model would have global impact, and how resources could be enough for unstoppable growth were the main drivers for its origin [9]. Since then, the concept has been imported to different knowledge areas and has been adapted to different dimensions, such as economic, ecological, philosophical, and psychological.

According to Serge Latouche, one of the precursor authors in this debate, degrowth is not a concept or theory; it is just a buzz word invented by radicals to try to provoke thought about alternatives to the growth obsession in economics [3]. Nowadays, it is becoming clearer that the current economic system will collapse if systematic change is not made [10]. So, even if the ideas might still sound radical or utopian today, they are fundamental in discussing disruptive change [11].

Since the emergence of the concept, scientific production has been increasing in a quite multidisciplinary approach. This has the positive characteristic of crossing disciplinary boundaries and creating interactions between different fields [12]. The concept of degrowth has evolved from a critical and normative premise to the creation of alternatives and viable applications to address the urgent problems it criticizes [13]. Degrowth regards different aspects of reality. Fitzpatrick et al. [14] saw at least three meanings of degrowth: (1) degrowth as a reduction of environmental pressures; (2) degrowth as an emancipation from certain ideologies deemed undesirable, such as extractivism, neoliberalism, and consumerism; and (3) degrowth as a utopian goal, with a society based on autonomy, sufficiency, and care. While all meanings are relevant, in this article, the focus is primarily on the economic and environmental aspects of degrowth, and at times, it will converge with other boundaries.

The concept of degrowth, with its call for reduced consumption and structural change, has gained traction across multiple disciplines due to growing awareness of its ecological and social implications [15]. As ecological economists suggest, climate challenges cannot be resolved while growth remains central, given the strong link between GDP expansion, resource use, and pollution [13]. Degrowth, therefore, seeks alternative paths that transcend traditional economic metrics, focusing instead on equitable resource distribution, reduced labor, and sustainable consumption patterns. Against this backdrop, tourism emerges as a particularly relevant area within the degrowth discourse. The sector's rapid expansion and substantial environmental footprint underscore the need for integrating degrowth principles into tourism, as highlighted by Fitzpatrick et al. [14]. Addressing tourism through a degrowth lens could transform it into a sustainable activity, balancing industry needs with social and ecological preservation.

Tourism has long been a driver of global economic growth and social development, but its expansion brings complex challenges. As international tourist arrivals are projected to grow by 43 million annually, reaching 1.8 billion by 2030 [4], the scale of global tourism demands urgent attention. This increase represents significant opportunities for economic advancement but poses equally critical risks to cultural and natural heritage and the quality of life of residents. The UNWTO highlights the dual nature of tourism's potential, noting that while it "brings enormous opportunities", it also imposes "added challenges and responsibilities for our sector to mitigate its potential negative impacts on host communities and the environment" [4] (p. 5). The intense international tourism post-pandemic recovery

has further highlighted the urgency of these challenges. By 2024, global arrivals reached 97% of pre-pandemic levels, with an estimated 285 million international travelers recorded in the first quarter alone [5].

While tourism is a key catalyst of economic growth and social development, its rapid expansion creates pressures on ecosystems and host communities, particularly as destinations face challenges such as rising inflation, energy market volatility, and extreme weather events [5]. These dynamics emphasize the need for a more balanced approach, prioritizing environmental protection and community well-being over unrestrained growth. Future tourism development must focus on fostering sustainable economic practices, promoting social equity, and ensuring the preservation of cultural and natural resources [4]. These concerns are particularly acute in the context of overtourism, where the concentration of visitors in specific destinations creates significant negative impacts on the environment and local quality of life.

Overtourism is characterized as "the impact of tourism on a destination, or specific parts thereof, that significantly affects the perceived quality of life of residents and/or the quality of visitors' experiences in a negative manner" [16] (p. 6). However, this term encapsulates issues that were under investigation long before its popularization [17]. The consequences of overtourism include environmental degradation, strain on resources and infrastructure, diminished quality of life for locals, urban gentrification, and erosion of cultural identity.

The intricacy of this issue has attracted significant scholarly attention, according to Goodwin [18] (p. 10) "The state of overtourism is a consequence of tourism using the destination rather than the destination using tourism", and overtourism is the result of a growing sector that focuses on accumulation and uses the wrong indicators of success instead of measuring the inequalities and conflicts that arise with growth. In a similar perspective, overtourism should not be studied as a tourism problem but as a social problem that is the result of the problems of the urban context [17]. Tourism economic contribution has been prioritized, while social and environmental impacts have been neglected [19].

The consequences of overtourism are not substantially different from the problems that degrowth aims to address; they are perhaps even more aggravated in the most touristic destinations and in the urban context. From the perspective of tourism and degrowth social movements, the excess of tourism arose, as usually happens, as a dissatisfaction of the population where tourism was growing too fast. It began in Barcelona, and later, it spread internationally, mainly in other southern European countries, and the problems caused by the unrestrained tourism growth in the cities, such as the rise in prices, gentrification of urban areas, loss of residents' identity and sense of belonging, exclusivity of tourists related shops, and overuse of public infrastructures, were some of the main dissatisfactions [20]. Thus, considering the similarity of the problems and the importance of tourism for the economy, the studies on degrowth in tourism are necessary [21–23].

Examples of overtourism in destinations like Barcelona, Venice, or Machu Picchu highlight the pressing need for degrowth-focused tourism models. In Barcelona, rapid growth has caused overcrowding, gentrification, and tensions between tourism's economic benefits and social costs [20]. Similarly, Machu Picchu's tourism pressure has resulted in environmental and archaeological damage, prompting daily visitor caps and stricter regulation [24]. These cases underscore limitations of the current tourism paradigm, advocating for approaches that respect sustainable carrying capacities.

Despite the fact that the relationship between tourism and degrowth is still underexplored in studies and policies, there are several academic works that provide a perspective on how degrowth and tourism could be compatible. Fletcher et al. [8] discussed tourism and degrowth as an emerging agenda, bringing together key debates. For tourism to

be more sustainable, it should seek alternatives to the growth paradigm, and tourism development should be qualitative rather than quantitative, ignoring the natural and social capital damaged in the process. Moreover, consumption behaviors should be restructured, encouraging travelers to adopt sustainable practices that reduce resource consumption and other associated impacts, aligning with and advocating for principles of degrowth. The authors emphasize that tourism's role should transcend private sector benefits and capital accumulation, prioritizing contributions to the common good and resisting the commodification of cities and culture [25,26].

Building on these perspectives, Blanco-Romero et al. [27] argued that the pressing need for degrowth in tourism stems from the negative impacts of mass tourism, such as saturation, displacement of residents and local businesses, and commodification of cultural resources. These impacts often lead to social, labor, and environmental abuses, exacerbated by multinational corporations' influence in the tourism sector. However, the concept of degrowth has faced co-option by some industry actors who promote "quality tourism", which focuses on attracting fewer, wealthier tourists. This soft version of degrowth may fail to address the underlying issues of social and environmental justice that original degrowth principles advocates [27].

In contrast, "fair degrowth" is defined as a planned and democratic reduction in the flow of energy and materials per capita, aiming for equitable redistribution of resources and access. This approach emphasizes the importance of social sustainability and the collective enjoyment of public goods rather than exclusive experiences for the elite. For this type of degrowth to be achieved, Blanco-Romero et al. [27] argued that both short-term reforms (e.g., improving working conditions and expanding public services) and long-term radical change (e.g., decommodifying leisure and promoting post-capitalist alternatives in tourism) are necessary. These changes require a shift away from market mechanisms and technological fixes toward regulation and self-restraint, aligning tourism with broader social and environmental justice goals.

For Fletcher et al. [8], tourism degrowth is not a movement against tourism; it is not an end to tourism but rather a transformation of tourism, a reconfiguration of tourism, and a systematic change in the way it is practiced, looking for a way to benefit host communities and ecosystems and solving some of its main problems.

The relationship between tourism and degrowth invites a rethinking of growth's role in a world with finite resources. As overtourism increasingly strains both destination sustainability and residents' quality of life, the prevailing growth model appears less viable. Moving toward a degrowth approach in tourism requires a shift in priorities—from a focus on economic gains to a balanced framework that values social and environmental well-being. This transition implies moving beyond market-driven models that prioritize capital accumulation and advocating for tourism practices that foster inclusivity, equity, and sustainability for all stakeholders. Consequently, the future of tourism may rely not on further expansion but on evolving to practices that align with social equity and environmental stewardship. Within this shift, tourism has the potential to foster a more balanced relationship among visitors, host communities, and the natural environments.

Despite significant scholarly attention to overtourism and the unsustainable growth of the tourism sector, there remains a notable gap in understanding how tourists translate these concepts in their behaviors. Much of the literature has focused on policy or industry-driven approaches to address sustainability, with limited empirical research examining tourists' awareness and support for degrowth principles. The resistance to degrowth, both at an individual and institutional level, represents a significant structural barrier to its broader adoption in tourism. This resistance stems from entrenched consumption patterns, cultural norms, and the dependency of institutions on growth-centric economic frameworks. These

challenges highlight the need for strategies that not only address educational shortcomings but also tackle systemic inertia, fostering a cultural and institutional shift toward degrowth principles [23].

Moreover, while concepts such as "quality tourism" and "fake degrowth" have been critiqued [27], there is still a need to explore what authentic degrowth might look like from a tourist's perspective. This study seeks to address these gaps by analyzing tourists' views on sustainability and degrowth, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of how tourist behavior can support sustainable tourism models.

2.2. Changes in Consumer Behavior Toward Responsible Consumption

Building on the need to understand tourists' perspectives on degrowth, recent research highlights a shift in consumer behavior toward greater environmental responsibility. Studies indicate that individuals are increasingly concerned about their impact on the world and are willing to adjust their habits to minimize harm. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), 69% of tourists now consider sustainability when choosing their destinations, and nearly half prioritize travel companies with robust sustainability policies that support local communities and environmental protection [28]. This emerging trend suggests that tourists are not merely passive participants but can actively shape sustainable tourism practices through their consumption choices. At the beginning of the 2000s, fast changes in consumer trends were already being observed [29]. Tearfund published a campaign in the U.K. in 2000 where they reminded about the issues raised when someone travels and all the impacts it has on society, the economy, and the environment, and they argued that since tourism is a product "consumed" as any other, the consumption of it should also be responsible to control its impact on others. According to this study, from 1999 to 2001 (two years' gap), the percentage of respondents willing to pay more for ethical holidays increased 7 percent, from 45 to 52 percent [30]. Looking into more recent studies, WTTC [31] surveyed consumer attitudes in the U.K. to sustainability and sustainable behaviors, and comparing 2022's results to 2023's, consumers are still shifting toward a more sustainable lifestyle. Even though the survey is not tourism-specific, one of the most positive shifts was in reducing air travel.

The concept of decoupling, central to growth management approaches, is increasingly criticized as a myth, particularly in the context of tourism [32]. While proponents argue that technological innovation can reduce resource use and emissions without compromising economic growth, evidence suggests that absolute decoupling is rarely, if ever, achieved. The tourism industry exemplifies this challenge, with increases in efficiency often outpaced by the growth in demand, leading to a net rise in environmental pressures. This failure to decouple underscores the limitations of growth-centric paradigms and highlights the necessity of transitioning to alternative models such as degrowth, which advocate for a planned reduction in material and energy throughputs to align economic activity with planetary boundaries [32].

Responsible consumption (RC) is one of the main terms used to describe "the use of services and related products which respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life while minimizing the use of natural resources and toxic materials as well as emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle of the service or product so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations" [33]. It goes beyond consuming sustainably; it also considers social and economic impacts and, most importantly, its incentive to consume less. Consuming responsibly is deeply aligned with degrowth principles and sustainable tourism. Consumption is inherent to capitalism and is therefore a large contributor to the pressure on resources, environmental degradation, and waste generation, among others.

The problem is so clear that the United Nations 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development Goals has its SDG 12, which calls for responsible consumption.

Responsible consumption can be divided in two categories: narrow and broad [34]. Narrow RC is the one that necessarily involves purchasing and includes ethical criteria when making consumption choices. Broad RC is more holistic: "any practice of consumption in which the explicit registration of obligation or commitment to distant or absent others is an important dimension of the meaning of the activity for the actors involved" [35] (p. 1110). Broad RC does not necessarily involve a purchase; it could be the act of not consuming for ethical reasons or boycotting a brand. This broader definition is certainly the one most in line with degrowth.

The shift toward responsible consumption among tourists marks a critical alignment with degrowth principles, as travelers increasingly choose sustainable options that minimize environmental and social impacts. This behavioral change underscores the potential of tourists to influence the tourism industry toward more sustainable practices, fostering resource conservation, equity, and environmental stewardship. By aligning consumer choices with the values of degrowth, responsible tourism can play a pivotal role in shaping a balanced tourism model that prioritizes the well-being of both destinations and communities. This alignment between responsible consumption and degrowth principles is further supported by frameworks that emphasize the interconnectedness of individual choices and systemic outcomes. For instance, Fitzpatrick et al. [14] highlighted how degrowth-oriented policies can reshape tourism by prioritizing equitable resource distribution and reducing the environmental pressures associated with unchecked growth. Such policies align with the broader shift in consumer behavior toward sustainable practices, as evidenced by recent studies showing increased demand for eco-conscious travel options. By focusing on the behavioral patterns and latent dimensions of tourists, the present study explores how the alignment of personal values with degrowth principles can drive a shift in industry standards. This perspective not only deepens the understanding of tourist behaviors but also underscores the necessity of bridging theoretical constructs like degrowth with actionable strategies for fostering more sustainable tourism practices.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Survey Data Collection

The main objectives were to understand if tourists consider sustainability and degrowth when traveling and to identify and define types of tourists and their relationship with sustainability and degrowth. The research further aimed to explore how these types of tourists differ in their behaviors, particularly in the context of sustainability-focused travel decisions. By examining their alignment with degrowth principles, the study sought to uncover the specific factors that drive or hinder sustainable practices among distinct tourist profiles.

The research used a survey to understand this directly from tourists' responses. As it was an initial exploratory research, and considering the objectives, no need or reason to restrict the study to any specific region was identified. The option was to apply an online survey through social media targeting all respondents who like to travel, do it frequently, or have done it recently, without geographical or demographic restrictions. The survey was applied in Portuguese and English, and the collected data were all translated to English.

It is important to mention that the majority of the tourists interviewed were from Brazil. This geographical focus bias is acknowledged as a result of the online survey distribution channels, which saw higher engagement from Brazilian respondents. In a study on geographical bias in scientific evaluations, Kowal et al. [36] found that such biases often arise from factors like accessibility and recruitment. In this case, the random online

sampling method may have inadvertently favored Brazilian participants due to the survey timing, recruitment platforms, or the language in which the survey was conducted, leading to higher engagement from this group.

Online surveys can suffer from several limitations [37], such as self-selection bias, where individuals who choose to participate may not be representative of the broader population. In this study, while the online survey approach allowed for a broad reach and convenience, it also introduced potential biases due to the specific platforms used for recruitment and the self-selected nature of respondents. These limitations can affect the generalizability of the findings, emphasizing the need for caution when interpreting results and considering them within the context of the sampling method employed.

Nonetheless, the predominance of Brazilian participants offered a unique opportunity to examine how cultural and national identity influence perceptions of sustainability and degrowth in the Global South. This experience underscores the importance of refining recruitment strategies in future studies to achieve a more balanced representation of diverse nationalities and to explore perceptions across different cultural backgrounds.

It is also relevant to mention that the survey was pre-tested. After the feedback of the five test participants, minor adjustments were made. These answers were not used on the official dataset. The survey was officially conducted from the beginning of December 2023 until the beginning of February 2024. In total, 261 valid responses were obtained.

The survey comprised five main groups of questions:

1. Multiple-choice questions to segment the tourists according to demographic, geographic and psychographic characteristics;
2. Questions in Likert scale to gauge tourists' concerns, attitudes, and behaviors related to sustainability across different aspects of the tourist experience, including transportation, destination and accommodation choices, and overall trip considerations;
3. Questions in Likert scale to determine which of the three pillars of sustainability motivates tourists' sustainable behavior the most;
4. Questions in Likert scale to determine if tourists recognize and support the concept of degrowth;
5. An open-ended question to identify what tourists perceive as the most significant global challenges for sustainable tourism.

In addition to identifying tourists' concerns about sustainability and their alignment with degrowth, this study tried to better understand the types of tourists that are closer to or more distant from these concepts, and for that, it was necessary to segment the respondents. Kotler segmentation groups were used to elaborate the first group of questions: behavioral, demographic, psychographic, and geographical [38]. The behavioral and psychographic questions in this study were the ones that aimed to understand tourists' preferences and their travel choices [39]. The Macao Institute for Tourism Studies has been conducting quarterly surveys for many years to provide details about the profile of visitor [40]. This was used as an inspiration to elaborate questions that would identify the different types of tourists.

Understanding consumer behavior and intentions while considering their concerns, knowledge, and attitudes, can provide valuable insights for empirical studies based on questionnaires. Several relevant empirical studies focusing on environmental behavior [41–44] emphasized the importance of behavioral theories. While these studies primarily concentrate on the environmental aspect, the present research extended this focus to encompass the broader concept of sustainability. So, the second group of questions was adapted to explore tourists' behavior and intentions toward sustainability.

Considering the division of sustainability into the three pillars (economic, social, and environmental) adopted by UNWTO and by the large majority of the literature, the third

set of questions aimed to determine which of the pillars of sustainability motivates tourists' sustainable behavior the most.

The degrowth-related questions were inspired by the degrowth literature that informed the research. The essence of degrowth was distilled into a brief explanation of the concept provided to respondents, making it accessible and understandable to individuals outside the academic community. The goal was to determine whether respondents who identified as "very sustainable" in earlier responses would recognize and support the concept of degrowth. In this study, degrowth refers to a measurable construct in terms of tourists' awareness of, alignment with, and support for degrowth principles. While degrowth as a concept has concrete socio-economic implications, individuals' alignment with its principles—such as reducing consumption, prioritizing community well-being, and supporting environmental sustainability—is not directly observable. Therefore, scale items related to degrowth were designed to capture these attitudes and behaviors, assessing tourists' degree of support for degrowth principles within the context of their travel habits. Table 1 outlines the scale items used to measure tourists' perspectives on degrowth and sustainability, along with their respective sources and descriptions.

Table 1. Scale Items and Their Sources.

Scale Item	Source	Description
Awareness of degrowth	Adapted from [3,14]	Measures familiarity with degrowth terminology and ideas
Belief that sustainable tourism requires limiting growth	Adapted from [8,27]	Assesses the perception that degrowth is essential for achieving sustainable tourism
Prioritization of community well-being over tourism growth	Adapted from [9]	Evaluates whether respondents value local community interests above tourism development
Willingness to reduce consumption in travel	Adapted from [12,13,33]	Measures tourists' willingness to make environmentally responsible choices during travel
Preference for environmentally friendly accommodation	Inspired by [16]	Assesses respondents' preference for accommodation with lower environmental impact

Source: Own elaboration.

Following the degrowth questions, an open-ended question sought to identify what tourists perceive as the most significant global challenges for sustainable tourism, with the goal of exploring whether degrowth offers solutions to any of these challenges.

3.2. Statistical Analyses

The methods used to analyze the data collected were a mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Descriptive statistics and factor and cluster analysis were used for the quantitative part, using the software IBM SPSS Statistics 29.0.2.0 software.

Factor analysis is a statistical method that can be used to simplify and group a set of data with many variables into a few factors, showing the correlation between the main factors and the variables. No initial hypothesis is required to carry it out, as it is a method of exploring the data and then arriving at hypotheses or conclusions. The factor analysis estimates the loadings (the weight of each factor) and variances so that the predicted covariances and correlations are as close as possible to the observed values. The loadings define each of the new variables such that the variables resulting from the application of these methods (principal components) explain maximum variation and are uncorrelated

with each other. In surveys, exploratory factor analysis is usually used to identify the main themes from the responses [45], which is what was done for this study. The analysis was used to identify the main dimensions of tourist behavior in relation to degrowth and sustainability.

Cluster analysis, as the name suggests, is used to identify groups of respondents (in this case groups of tourists) with common characteristics or relevant differences within the data. While the previous method analyzes the relationships between variables and identifies groups of factors according to them, this method is used to identify types of respondents. The chosen method was hierarchical cluster analysis, using Euclidean squared distances with Wards criteria to define groups. It involves measuring the distance between pairs of cases using the variable values, always maintaining the hierarchy within the subsets. The result is the formation of groups with low distance within the group (similar to the group) and with high distance between the groups (different from other groups) [46]. This method was useful to analyze the different types of tourists according to their behavior toward degrowth and sustainability.

The open-ended question asked tourists about their perceptions of the main challenges to achieving a truly sustainable tourism in the current context, and this question was used in the qualitative part of the research. Content analysis was carried out with the results of the open questions to identify the main challenges according to the tourists interviewed. Content analysis is a commonly used method for open-ended questions, as it helps to identify the main themes, patterns, or words in the texts and tries to determine the existence and frequency of concepts [47].

In this case, word cloud was used as a visualization tool for the content analysis, as suggested by Vilela et al. [48]. The texts from the answers were carefully synthetized into short phrases or key words, one by one manually, to summarize the idea of the answer. The guidelines presented by Stemler [47] were considered to codify the data in the most neutral way possible. After simplifying the data and organizing them in one term per line, the ©Jason Davies website was used to build a word cloud based on it [49]. Word cloud creates a visualization with the most frequent words, which are presented bigger, and the least frequent, which are smaller. The chosen scale was "log n", the number of terms to be shown was set to one hundred, and the option "one word per line" was chosen to consider the full term instead of loose words.

4. Results

4.1. Sample Characterization

The survey was answered by 261 tourists, 60.5% female and 38.7% male, and 2 respondents who preferred not to answer or identified as other. Almost 70% of respondents were Brazilian, 16% were Portuguese, and the rest were from various other nationalities. The ANOVA test proved that the significance of nationality was not relevant (significance < 0.05), so all the responses could be kept without significant impact.

In fact, from the demographic, geographic, and psychographic/behavioral variables collected at the beginning of the survey to characterize the sample, only three showed significant difference and influence on the results between clusters (significance < 0.05): age, reason for travel, and sustainability information moment.

A brief characterization of the sample is that the level of formal education of surveyed tourists was high, with almost 90% having higher education (46% bachelor's degree, 22% master's degree, and 20% doctorate). The main travel reason for 70.5% was leisure/holidays, and almost half (47.9%) of travelers said that their main means of transport for traveling was car and 39.8% plane, while the rest used mainly bus, train, or others.

4.2. Main Dimensions of Tourist's Behavior

In order to extract insightful and meaningful results from all the data obtained, further statistical analyses were performed. To perform the factor analysis, the Likert scale responses were transformed into quantitative values from one to six, with six being the response most aligned with sustainability and degrowth and one being the response least aligned and more focused on economic growth.

Barlett's sphericity test with a significance of 0.001 (less than 0.05) showed that there was indeed a correlation between the variables, allowing factor analysis to be used. The partial correlation coefficients must also be checked to perform the factor analysis, and the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) test was used to make this comparison. Ranging from zero to one, high values (close to 1) generally indicate that a factor analysis may be useful with the data. The KMO obtained was 0.863, which indicates a good adequacy of the factor analysis (0.8–0.9).

The common factors are the proportions of the variance of each variable explained by the main components; i.e., the closer to one, the more the variance of that variable is explained by the common factors [45]. Small values indicate variables that do not fit well with the factor solution and should possibly be dropped from the analysis. In Table 1, it is possible to see that most communalities have a high value, and most of them are closer to one than to zero. In other words, the factors explain a large part of the variance of the variables in our sample.

The variables related to "Avoiding the use of air conditioning when traveling" and "Having already rejected a destination due to the lack of sustainable options" are the only ones that showed a communality lower than 0.5, showing that they did not fit as well as the others. It was decided to keep these two variables, but since they were poorly explained by the common factors, they were carefully monitored.

Some of the criteria for determining how many factors to keep included the scree plot and Kaiser's criteria. According to Pestana and Gageiro [46], these criteria are valid for cases when at least one of the following conditions are met: the number of variables is less than 30 (in our case, there are 19 variables used in the factor analysis), the number of cases is higher than 250 (in our case, there are 261), and the communalities are at least 0.6 (this is not the case for all our variables).

Since the first two conditions were met, on the scree plot analysis, the point with higher slope suggested that five factors should be retained. According to the total variance explained, the five retained factors explained 67.41% of the variance in the variables, still leaving room for unexplained variation. Factor 1 explained 35.81% of the total variance, while factor 2 explained 11.5%, and the other factors explained less than 8% each.

The component matrix shows how each variable correlates with each factor, with the highest absolute values (closer to −1 or 1) being the most correlated. In this case, the matrix without rotation did not clearly show how the factors influenced the variables. For several variables, there were high loadings or very close values for more than one factor, making it difficult to interpret the results and making it necessary to rotate the component matrix. The rotation used was orthogonal, using the Varimax method with Kaiser normalization, which is a way of increasing the absolute value of the loadings to make it easier to interpret the variables according to the factors. From the rotated component matrix, it was possible to determine which variables were associated with which factors, according to Table 2.

Table 2. Rotated component matrix and variable communalities.

Variable	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Communalities
F1: Sustainability in travel planning						
Sustainability in travel planning	0.873855925					0.820717504
Sustainability in destination choice	0.889691542					0.862256143
Sustainability in accommodation choice	0.8600936					0.824006103
Sustainability in transportation choice	0.797202804					0.702670483
Give up on destination lacking sustainability options	0.755164958					0.672065838
Have ever given up on destination due to lack of sustainability choices	0.667833615					0.477900829
F2: Tourism impacts						
Separate waste to be recycled when traveling		0.71712297				0.569742543
Worry about not wasting food when traveling		0.74394257				0.576184765
Avoid using A/C when travelling		0.55078268				0.4556176
Concerned with impacts of tourism on the environment		0.528635933				0.671233174
Concerned with impacts of tourism on the economy		0.503379998				0.608243102
F3: Degrowth alignment						
Concerned with impacts of tourism on culture			0.573183283			0.675828498
Truly sustainable tourism only possible if the search for growth is left behind			0.565083521			0.515470356
Tourism should be limited according to destination characteristics			0.752950011			0.608380001
Communities' well-being and environmental preservation should always be the priority			0.642870646			0.580037772
F4: Knowledge about degrowth						
Have heard about the term degrowth				0.891386857		0.883159919
Already knew degrowth ideals				0.877213749		0.886134532
F5: Economic growth alignment						
Sustainable tourism is possible even keeping focus on economic growth					0.838129118	0.713305627
Economic growth should always be the priority					0.793456718	0.704199503

Source: Own elaboration. Extraction method: Principal component analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser normalization. Rotation converged within eight interactions.

As a result of the factor analysis, five main dimensions were identified concerning tourists' behavior toward sustainability and degrowth, which were very similar to the

pillars used to elaborate the survey. By interpreting the variable–factor relationships, a name was given for each factor according to the variables with higher scores.

The selection of each component and variable in Table 1 was grounded in the relevant literature, supporting both the theoretical basis and replicability of our factor analysis model.

Factor 1 (sustainability in travel planning) comprises variables capturing sustainable practices in travel planning, including choices around destination, accommodation, and transportation. The importance of these variables is underscored by frameworks from the UNWTO [16] and studies highlighting the environmental impact of tourism [7]. Sustainable travel planning is integral to behavior that aligns with degrowth principles, making these variables essential for evaluating sustainable tourism behaviors [8].

Factor 2 (tourism impacts) includes variables that reflect tourists' concerns about tourism's environmental, economic, and social impacts. Studies on overtourism [19] and responsible tourism [30] have suggested that awareness of tourism's broader impacts influences sustainable travel behaviors. Tourists' environmental consciousness drives responsible behaviors, aligning with degrowth by acknowledging tourism's environmental costs [19].

Factor 3 (degrowth alignment) evaluates tourists' alignment with degrowth principles, focusing on values such as prioritizing community well-being over economic growth. Tourism's rapid growth makes it an appropriate sector for implementing degrowth policies [14]. Variables within this factor—such as limiting tourism based on destination characteristics and prioritizing community preservation—were influenced by Milano, Novelli, and Cheer [20], who discussed the importance of community-oriented practices in sustainable tourism.

Factor 4 (knowledge about degrowth) assesses tourists' awareness of degrowth concepts, a crucial element in understanding sustainable behavior. Research [4,12] has highlighted the significance of degrowth awareness for adopting related behaviors, reinforcing the relevance of this factor. Including these variables allows us to evaluate whether tourists' actions correspond with their level of knowledge about degrowth.

And finally, factor 5 (economic growth alignment) captures attitudes that align with traditional economic growth principles, providing a counterpoint to degrowth perspectives. There is a tension between economic growth and sustainability, especially within tourism [14]. The variables in this factor help to differentiate tourists who support growth-oriented tourism from those aligned with degrowth principles.

4.3. Types of Tourists

After the identification of the main factors influencing the variance of the variables, the cluster analysis helped to identify many groups of tourists with similar positioning on the factors. Thus, it was possible to identify types of tourists and their positioning toward sustainability and orientation toward degrowth.

To choose the number of clusters, a dendrogram was utilized. Two different solutions were tested: one with two clusters and the other with three clusters, and the option with three clusters seemed to be more appropriate due to the different characterization of each of them.

The ANOVA test was executed to confirm if there were significant differences between the means of factors through the groups, and it confirmed that all five factors were highly significant in the three-cluster context (ANOVA table available in Appendix A). Usually, significance values lower than 0.05 are considered to be at a good level, and in this case, all factors had significant differences between the groups. Factor 5 (economic growth orientation) was the one with less significance, although it was still high (0.018). All the others had values smaller than 0.001.

Cluster 1 was called "growth-oriented tourists" (Figure 1). This cluster contains 32.57% of the surveyed tourists. The cluster showed negative scores on both the degrowth factors and positive scores on "economic growth alignment", indicating a preference in this direction. Regarding "tourism impacts", cluster 1 did not present a significant positioning, with a score close to zero. What is interesting, however, is that it also showed a positive score value for "sustainability in travel planning", in a similar proportion to its alignment with "economic growth".

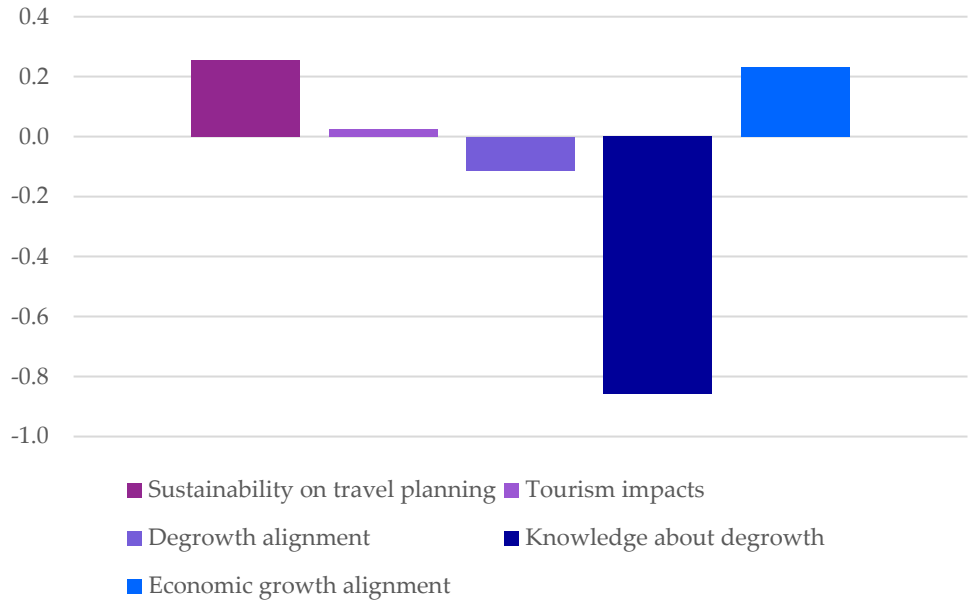

Figure 1. Factor score average of growth-oriented tourists. Source: Own elaboration.

Cluster 2 was called "the degrowthers" (Figure 2). This group represents 41.38% of the surveyed tourists. The scores were positive in all four factors, which indicates alignment with sustainability and degrowth. "Knowledge about degrowth" had the highest score, followed by "sustainability in travel planning" and then "tourism impacts" and "degrowth alignment", with very similar scores. The only factor that scored negatively was "economic growth alignment", which also indicates alignment with degrowth beliefs. This group of tourists showed a strong positioning toward factors that are very much in line with the purpose of this study.

Cluster 3 was called the "unsustainable tourists" (Figure 3). This group represents 26.05% of the surveyed tourists. This cluster had negative scores for all factors, meaning that it is not aligned with sustainability, degrowth, or economic growth. The factor "knowledge of degrowth", although it showed a negative score, was very small, so it could be considered almost neutral. After this factor, "economic growth" was the least negative, followed by "degrowth alignment" and "tourism impacts". This group of tourists is the only one that showed a high negative score for the sustainability factor.

To summarize, two groups had at least some sustainable behavior, while only one of those was considered completely sustainable and degrowth-oriented, and the other was partially sustainable but not degrowth-oriented. Cluster 1 was more economic growth-oriented, even though they were sustainable. Cluster 3 was a type of tourist that does not care about sustainability or degrowth but is not oriented toward economic growth either. Cluster 2 was the one with more degrowth-aligned tourists and also the most sustainable group.

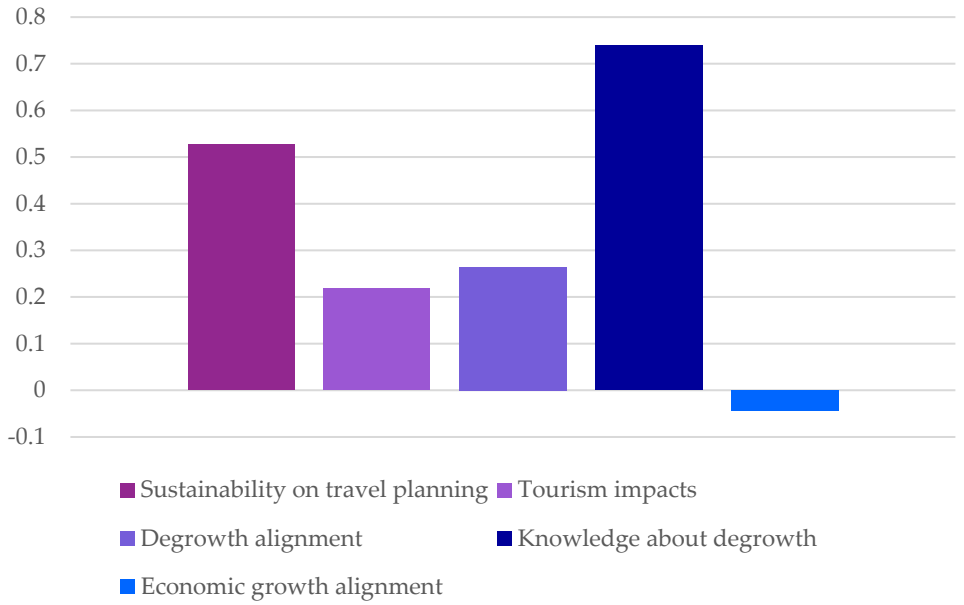

Figure 2. Factor score average of the degrowthers. Source: Own elaboration.

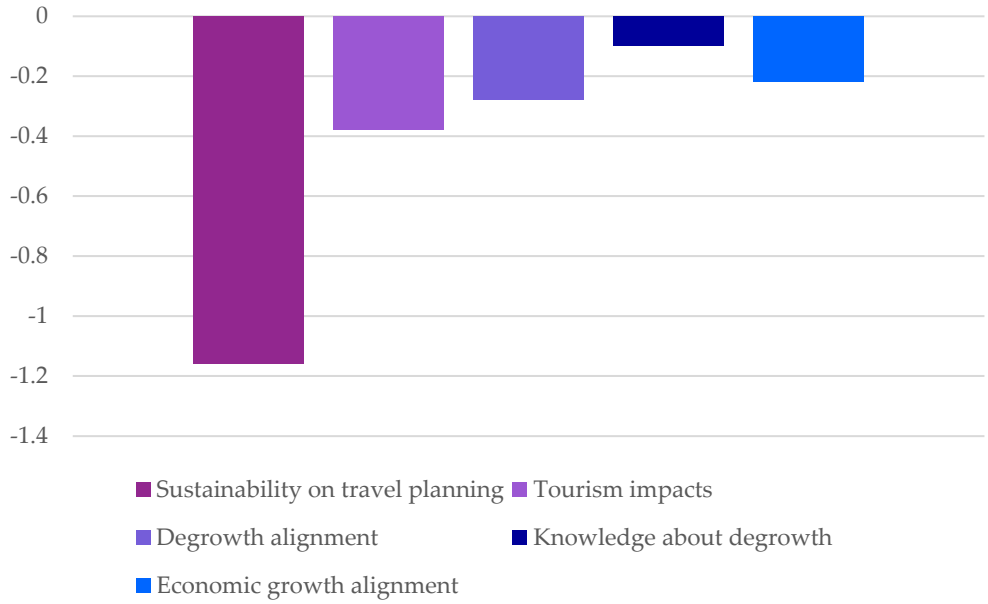

Figure 3. Factor score average of unsustainable tourists. Source: Own elaboration.

Regarding the characterization variables, the ones with significant difference between clusters (significance < 0.05) were age, the moment of obtaining sustainability information, and the reason for traveling. The two tourist groups with more sustainable behavior and alignment with degrowth (clusters 1 and 2) were mostly composed of older people (more than 45 years old) and had a greater number of cases of people who search for sustainability information before booking their trips (cluster 2 more than 1), and these two groups also had more diversification on the motivations/reasons to travel, although in a small percentage. Group 3 comprised more younger tourists, who generally do not look for sustainability information when traveling, with their main reason to travel being leisure/vacation, visiting family, or work.

It was verified that the majority of the interviewed tourists, around 73%, showed a positive attitude toward sustainability in travel-planning features. And part of them, about 42%, also showed care and action regarding the impacts generated by their tourism activity, and they were also aligned with degrowth.

4.4. Challenges for a Truly Sustainable Tourism

In the open-ended question, respondents were asked to identify what they view as the greatest global challenges to achieving truly sustainable tourism. Their answers were coded into keywords and visualized in the word cloud in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Challenges to sustainable tourism according to interviewers in word cloud visualization. Source: Own elaboration on Jason Davies software [49].

The purpose of Figure 4 is to provide an accessible summary of respondents' views on sustainability challenges. The word cloud complements the study's analytical results by highlighting recurring themes in participants' perceptions. According to respondents, the biggest challenge for sustainable tourism is raising awareness among all stakeholders, including tourists, residents, and the general population, and addressing consumption habits. Other significant challenges include mass tourism, greed, public policy limitations, social inequality, the transition to clean energy, and issues related to capitalism, political will, and environmental education.

5. Discussion

The results reveal insights that can serve as inspiration for future research. It became clear that, despite the belief held by many that degrowth offers a path toward truly sustainable tourism, there is a significant lack of awareness about this concept among a large portion of tourists. This underscores the need, as Fitzpatrick et al. [14] also suggested, to disseminate knowledge about degrowth among various actors, including tourists, to foster more grassroots initiatives.

This study observed that tourists who exhibit a strong alignment with sustainable practices and degrowth principles tend to be older, particularly those over 45 years of age. This finding aligns with previous research, such as that of Fletcher et al. [8] and Fitzpatrick et al. [14], which noted that older demographics may demonstrate greater awareness or commitment to sustainability due to life experience or generational values. The present study adds nuance by highlighting that, although younger tourists were generally less

aligned with degrowth ideals, some still consider sustainability to a degree and are primarily influenced by environmental concerns rather than the broader degrowth ideology.

Additionally, the segmentation of tourists into growth-oriented, sustainable-oriented, and degrowth-aligned types aligns with Kotler's framework of behavioral segmentation. However, this research extends this framework by applying it to the emerging concept of degrowth, revealing distinct attitudes within the context of sustainability. This segmentation helps clarify that while sustainability has broad appeal, alignment with degrowth is more polarized.

These results emphasize that a portion of tourists is open to behavior changes aligned with degrowth, suggesting potential for demand-driven shifts in the tourism sector. This demand-driven perspective complements prior research often centered at the industry level, adding depth to the argument for incorporating tourists' preferences in sustainable tourism strategies, as suggested by studies on responsible consumption trends by Goodwin and Francis [30] and Patwary [28].

The present study concludes that efforts to promote degrowth should target multiple actors, including tourists, to encourage bottom-up approaches. If a niche of tourists is already inclined toward sustainable practices that align with degrowth principles, then there is potential to popularize and integrate this concept more effectively into the tourism sector. Tourists should not merely be made aware of degrowth but actively involved in advancing the degrowth movement and exploring sustainable alternatives.

Another relevant result was the fact that tourists who showed themselves to be more concerned about sustainability and more aligned with degrowth principles had a large participation of people over 65 years old and also from 45 to 60 years old. Tourists between the ages of 24 and 35 were almost all in the group of tourists who did not care about sustainability. This finding may be very useful for degrowth policies, such as the one suggested by Fletcher et al. [8], to be applied with focus on the right groups through tourism education for (trans)shaping people's consumption behavior.

These results may help decision- and policymakers to focus on specific groups and to study these groups' behaviors in more detail. The fact that most tourists search for sustainability information before booking their trips could also bring insightful information on an appropriate approach for sustainable information within the planning stage of travel.

A more subjective finding that could be explored further is the fact that anything that goes against growth is apparently too radical and that this paradigm shift is a huge challenge. For example, cluster 1 had a positive attitude toward more sustainable options, showing some indirect alignment with degrowth. But the group also responded in a way that is completely contrary to degrowth ideals and completely in favor of economic growth. They probably believe that it is possible to have both more sustainable tourism and economic growth; they do not see the antagonism explored so far between these two issues.

At least five respondents said that answering the survey raised some interesting points and reflections, namely "Do we live our sustainable values when we travel?" So, if only by answering the survey, reflections like this arose for respondents, and hopefully, this study will create critical reflections on tourism degrowth and sustainability not only within academia but also among ordinary tourists.

Many of the findings of this research could inspire public policy to move tourism in a direction that prioritizes people and the environment over economic gains for a few stakeholders. Individuals influence local policies directly and indirectly, so if there is a significant portion of tourists who are degrowth-oriented and an even larger portion who consider sustainability when choosing a destination and planning a trip, then policymakers should create initiatives to move toward a truly sustainable direction and limitation of

tourism in their regions instead of creating policies that give a false and superficial sense of sustainability but do not change anything systemically.

While explicitly naming and admitting that policies are "degrowth-inspired" may scare many policymakers as well as many tourists and institutions, it is important that the concept is at least known among them and that the antagonism between sustainability and the current growth system is further studied and disseminated among all stakeholders in the tourism sector. It is not possible to be sustainable in a world of finite resources if the position of infinite growth continues to prevail.

In order to develop tourism in a more sustainable way, it should follow a degrowth direction and be developed with a focus on qualitative rather than quantitative growth [50]; if tourism policies were created to incentivize small local businesses, local hosts and longer stays, nature-based activities, and valorization of local culture, then the impact and development of tourism on the region would likely generate a much more equal and equitable development. This would benefit the region more than international foreign companies, while many tourists would be very happy and satisfied to have such a good destination in line with their values and their desire to generate more positive impacts where they visit.

To promote these practices, three concrete strategies could be implemented. First, targeted educational campaigns could raise awareness among tourists about the environmental and social benefits of choosing sustainable travel options, encouraging behavioral changes that align with degrowth principles. Second, there should be incentive systems for businesses that adopt degrowth principles in production, such as subsidies or tax reduction. Third, destination management organizations could prioritize community-led tourism initiatives, fostering partnerships between local stakeholders and tourists to co-create travel experiences that emphasize cultural immersion, environmental stewardship, and equitable economic distribution.

Even if this is not the main goal, it could even be a competitive advantage for a destination to have a very suitable option for "degrowth tourists". Furthermore, if the destination is successful with this degrowth-inspired policy, it could even become a successful degrowth case, with limited visits and nature activities generating more environmental protection, local businesses generating more equitable economic distribution, and culture being valued and generating more local demand.

So, even if policy makers do not see no-growth/degrowth/post-growth as an alternative, studying and applying some of its ideals could bring many positive impacts to a destination. Perhaps, it could even become a future model for all destinations struggling with overtourism and the negative impacts of unbridled development based on economic growth.

6. Conclusions

6.1. Key Contributions and Novel Insights

If the current economic system does not change and if the pursuit for growth and consumerism continues at the level it is today, it is impossible to be sustainable and to avoid the environmental and social damage the world is experiencing. Although tourism and degrowth have been studied, this research uniquely explores the relationship of tourists with the concept of degrowth—a previously under-explored area. Since this relationship of tourists with tourism degrowth as a sustainable tourism path was identified as a very under-explored area and without much prior research, this exploratory study was structured to understand directly from tourists their relationship with degrowth proposals. After all, tourism does not exist without tourists, and since tourists are "consumers", their options

and demands play the crucial role in generating change in public policies and in the private sector.

In this context, the present research identified the specific characteristics of sustainability-oriented tourists, evaluated their awareness and understanding of degrowth, and explored their views on degrowth potential to minimize the impacts of tourism on destinations. It was possible to determine from the obtained responses that a big portion of tourists do take sustainability into consideration when traveling, but a much smaller portion knows about degrowth, and the ones most aligned with degrowth have highly sustainable behavior. It was also identified that even tourists that are indirectly aligned with degrowth ideals, when directly asked, said to be more "growth-oriented". Thus, the findings suggest that tourists, if made more aware, could be essential allies in advancing degrowth ideals within tourism.

In line with sustainable tourism principles, it is essential to emphasize the rational organization of tourism businesses to prevent the negative impacts associated with over-tourism. Often, in pursuit of profit, tourist organizations attract volumes of visitors that exceed the capacity of the destination to sustain them, leading to environmental degradation, resource strain, and diminished quality of life for residents. This study's findings support the conclusion that a more structured, balanced approach to tourism is crucial, prioritizing sustainable limits over unchecked growth. This reinforces the importance of implementing sustainable practices within the tourism industry to align visitor numbers with the capacity of the destination.

6.2. Theoretical Implications

Beyond the specific results, the study broadens theoretical horizons by bridging degrowth with consumer behavior in tourism. While most previous studies and discussions are more focused on the relationship between degrowth and other actors, such as the government, the private sector, tourism regulators, and academics, here, the focus was to elaborate and introduce this lack of involvement of tourists (population) in degrowth movements and discussions. This contribution aligns with prior work by Fletcher et al. [8] and Latouche [3], who argued for a consumer-based focus in sustainability theories, suggesting that tourists, as consumers, hold significant influence over sustainable tourism models. A critical reflection on the findings raises questions about the feasibility of applying degrowth principles to tourism practices. The inherent unsustainability of many aspects of the tourism industry—such as its reliance on long-distance travel, the commodification of destinations, and its heavy use of resources—suggests that aligning tourism with degrowth principles may face significant structural barriers. For instance, the mass scale of tourism infrastructure (airlines, cruise ships, hotels, etc.) is fundamentally at odds with the low-impact, resource-conserving ideals of degrowth. This aligns with critiques in the literature, such as that of Kallis et al. [12], which questioned whether sectors deeply embedded in growth can realistically adopt degrowth principles. Thus, the findings contribute theoretically by highlighting the limits of degrowth application within tourism's current framework and the need for broader systemic change to support it.

This reflection extends to a critical examination of whether changes in individual consumer behavior, while important, are sufficient to foster meaningful transformations. The focus on encouraging sustainable consumption, such as eco-friendly travel choices or carbon offsetting, may offer incremental improvements, but these efforts risk reinforcing the status quo if they do not challenge the deeper systemic drivers of unsustainable growth. In fact, such consumer-oriented strategies could inadvertently "greenwash" the industry, allowing the illusion of progress without addressing the root causes of environmental degradation and social inequity in tourism. The tension between promoting sustainable tourism and the continued push for economic growth raises the following question: Can

true sustainability be achieved in a system that fundamentally values expansion and profit over environmental and social welfare?

Furthermore, the degrowth agenda challenges the core assumptions of modern capitalism, which views growth as inherently positive. Applying this to tourism, it becomes clear that a meaningful shift toward degrowth requires far more than just encouraging individual tourists to make more sustainable choices. It necessitates a profound transformation of the tourism model itself from one driven by profit and expansion to one focused on well-being, equity, and environmental stewardship. This requires not only changes in consumer behavior but also a fundamental restructuring of tourism governance, business models, and policy frameworks. In essence, the pursuit of degrowth in tourism cannot be fully realized without addressing broader societal structures, including the power of multinational corporations, neoliberal economic policies, and the commodification of culture and nature.

6.3. Policy and Managerial Implications

There is no doubt that any movement toward tourism degrowth would depend heavily on public policy. However, it is equally important that tourists and communities are involved in movements toward more sustainable tourism. Thus, tourism operators and policymakers could benefit from understanding the role of tourists as allies in advancing degrowth.

Therefore, to achieve meaningful progress toward degrowth in tourism, it is essential to integrate the concept into public policy frameworks and local tourism strategies. Policymakers and tourism operators can collaborate toward sustainable practices. Additionally, setting clear guidelines and benchmarks for degrowth-aligned tourism practices can provide a structured pathway for tourism actors to follow.

The present study explored tourists' perceptions of degrowth, paving the way for future research. This could focus on creating educational programs and awareness campaigns to promote degrowth principles through digital platforms and partnerships. Policymakers might test degrowth practices in tourist hotspots, such as visitor caps, green certifications, or incentives for low-impact travel, generating data for larger-scale initiatives. Evaluating how awareness initiatives affect tourists' sustainability behaviors and whether they lead to lasting change could refine strategies for sustainable tourism aligned with degrowth.

The findings suggest that although tourists are generally open to sustainable practices, there is limited awareness of degrowth as a concept. This provides an opportunity for tourism managers to incorporate education on degrowth into their sustainable tourism strategies. Managers could align with sustainable demands while gradually introducing degrowth-aligned practices, such as offering lower-impact travel options or promoting local cultural experiences that limit resource consumption. These managerial actions align with UNWTO [18] guidelines and support tourism frameworks that balance economic viability with social and environmental responsibility.

Concrete strategies must address systemic and practical challenges to effectively transition toward a degrowth paradigm in tourism. One key proposal involves leveraging productivity gains to reduce working hours, shifting the focus from economic output expansion to enhancing leisure and quality of life: a new worldview that promotes social well-being and reduces the environmental pressures associated with overproduction and consumption. Complementary policies, such as income redistribution and work sharing, can support this transition, ensuring equitable outcomes across society [32].

Another critical strategy is fostering a shift toward localized tourism models, emphasizing domestic travel over international visitation. This can reduce environmental impacts, such as carbon emissions from air travel, while promoting sustainable livelihoods and

community well-being. However, the economic risks associated with reduced international tourism, particularly for regions dependent on foreign visitors, must be carefully managed through tailored policies that balance environmental and economic goals [35].

Institutional transformation is also essential for embedding degrowth values into tourism governance. This includes reforming policy frameworks to prioritize ecological sustainability and social equity over growth metrics and encouraging participatory governance to ensure diverse stakeholder engagement. Additionally, fostering innovation in tourism business models—such as those based on local collaboration—can create new pathways for sustainable practices while reducing dependence on traditional, resource-intensive operations [35].

Tourism managers can play a pivotal role by embedding degrowth principles into consumer-facing strategies. For instance, they could develop marketing campaigns emphasizing eco-conscious travel choices, such as longer stays, locally owned accommodations, and nature-based activities. These campaigns could also promote educational content on the benefits of degrowth for tourists and destinations alike, fostering a deeper understanding and alignment with sustainable practices. Managers could also diversify their service offerings to cater specifically to tourists who value minimal environmental impact and cultural preservation.

Furthermore, the data on demand-driven sustainability indicate that consumer education on degrowth principles could support gradual behavioral shifts in tourism. This is particularly relevant in popular destinations, where consumer awareness could reinforce policy decisions, such as limiting tourist numbers or prioritizing community-centered tourism models, in line with recommendations by Dodds and Butler [19].

Finally, collaboration among stakeholders is key to reinforcing degrowth practices at both local and global levels. Managers should work closely with policymakers to implement tourist caps in high-impact destinations while investing in infrastructure that supports low-impact, community-driven tourism. Additionally, partnerships with local businesses can help amplify the visibility of degrowth-aligned services and products, ensuring they are accessible and appealing to sustainability-conscious travelers. Such initiatives not only align with degrowth principles but also ensure that tourism development benefits local communities and ecosystems over the long term.

Although this transformation must fundamentally arise from social actors, it requires a multi-level approach, particularly from a macro-scale perspective. Governments, international organizations, and policy frameworks play a crucial role in steering tourism toward sustainability. One such example is Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 12: Responsible Consumption and Production, which provides a strategic framework for aligning tourism practices with environmental and social sustainability. SDG 12 promotes resource efficiency, waste reduction, and sustainable supply chains, emphasizing the need for systemic change in how resources are managed within the tourism industry. By encouraging initiatives such as local procurement, renewable energy adoption, and circular economy principles, SDG 12 exemplifies how macro-scale interventions can create enabling conditions for sustainable practices. Moreover, it highlights the importance of educating both tourists and industry stakeholders about conscious consumption, fostering a cultural shift toward reducing overconsumption and its environmental impacts. This multi-scale alignment underscores the critical role of macro policies in complementing grassroots efforts to transition toward a sustainable tourism model.

Beyond this, several global initiatives actively promote sustainable tourism practices, aligning with the principles of degrowth. The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) establishes universal criteria for sustainable practices in destinations, businesses, and tourism organizations, focusing on sustainable management, social and economic benefits

for local communities, environmental protection, and cultural heritage preservation. Similarly, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) underscores tourism's potential as a catalyst for achieving the SDGs, emphasizing sustainable destination management, community-based tourism, and the transition to low-carbon economies. The International Tourism Partnership (ITP) complements these efforts by working with major hotel chains to reduce carbon emissions, water consumption, and waste while encouraging the adoption of circular economy practices and renewable energy. The One Planet Sustainable Tourism Programme, led by the UNWTO and UN Environment, supports the tourism industry's adoption of sustainable standards, promoting carbon reduction, resource management, and responsible consumption. Addressing aviation, the Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA) seeks to mitigate the significant carbon footprint of air travel, while the Air Transport Action Group (ATAG) drives aviation decarbonization through innovations in sustainable fuels.

This study highlights that sustainable tourism—and degrowth—requires shifts beyond individual behaviors, demanding structural, political, and economic reforms. This involves redefining tourism success metrics, moving from growth indicators like arrivals and GDP to those prioritizing well-being, environmental health, and social justice. Emphasis on local governance is essential, empowering communities to shape tourism in their areas. Integrating these systemic changes is key to aligning tourism with degrowth and achieving a sustainable future.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted according to the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki and followed the University of Algarve Code of Ethics.

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

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available upon request to the email cinturs@ualg.pt. Access to the data is subject to the approval of the corresponding author of the article.

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Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Appendix A

Table A1. ANOVA table.

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	Z	Sig.
Factor 1	Between groups	126.823	2	63.411	122.845	0.000
	Within groups	133.177	258	0.516		
	Total	260.000	260			
Factor 2	Between groups	14.999	2	7.500	7.898	0.000
	Within groups	245.001	258	0.950		
	Total	260.000	260			

Table A1. *Cont.*

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	Z	Sig.
Factor 3	Between groups	13.865	2	6.932	7.267	0.001
	Within groups	246.135	258	0.954		
	Total	260.000	260			
Factor 4	Between groups	122.347	2	61.173	114.656	0.000
	Within groups	137.653	258	0.534		
	Total	260.000	260			
Factor 5	Between groups	7.958	2	3.979	4.073	0.018
	Within groups	252.042	258	0.977		
	Total	260.000	260			

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