

SACRED SUSTAINABILITY: THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S REFLECTIONS ON TOURISM AND ITS FUTURE

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Abstract

Purpose – As global tourism is often considered less sustainable than ever, studies rethinking the concept of sustainable tourism development are on the rise. One of the improvement strategies is advocating for participative approach and involvement of greater variety of stakeholders reflecting multitude of perspectives. This study aims to show how the religious perspective expressed by the Holy See relates to the concept of sustainable tourism in terms of raising awareness and potentially influencing behaviour change of its followers towards sustainability. *Methodology* – Qualitative content analysis was used to examine the 26 publicly available messages published by the Holy See between 2000 and 2024 on the occasion of World Tourism Day.

Findings – Despite the negative aspects that also characterise it, the Holy See experiences tourism primarily as a phenomenon that humanises. The messages can be grouped into three categories that broadly reflect the concept of sustainability: social and economic issues (i.e. the fight against poverty and the establishment of social and economic balance, importance of work, equal rights for women, the development of local communities, the accessibility of tourism for all, peace), environmental (i.e. climate change, biodiversity, water) and technological issues (relationship between technology and nature, sustainable energy, digital transformation).

Contribution – This study contributes to the growing body of research on the future paths of tourism and hospitality. Its novelty lies in the fact that it brings to light a surprisingly “up-to-date”, holistic and comprehensive view of the Catholic Church on sustainable tourism, both in terms of theoretical considerations and practical implications.

Keywords The Holy See, the Catholic Church, sustainable tourism, behaviour change

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INTRODUCTION

The balance and/or trade-offs between the positive and negative impacts of tourism as one of the largest global industries is becoming an urgent issue for its future development (Hunter, 1997; Saarinen, 2006; Buckley, 2012; Hall, 2019; de Bruyn et al., 2023; Niewiadomski and Brouder, 2024). As the symptoms of overtourism and the reactions seems to be omnipresent and global tourism is less sustainable than ever (Hall, 2019), studies rethinking the concept of sustainable (tourism) development are on the rise (de Bruyn et al., 2023). Among others, one of the improvement strategies is advocating for participative approach and involvement of greater variety of stakeholders reflecting multitude of perspectives on sustainability (Choi and Sirakaya, 2006; Liburd et al., 2020; Saarinen, 2006; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2023; Xu et al., 2019). Although Catholic Church is usually associated primarily with supporting various forms of religious tourism and is not usually perceived as stakeholder in global tourism, the Holy See has been actively involved in communicating messages on tourism development for decades (Dziubiński, 2009). Since 1980, the World Tourism Organisation (nowadays UN Tourism) has celebrated World Tourism Day (27 September), which is dedicated each year to a specific theme that is actively discussed both in professional circles and among the general public. St John Paul II joined this tradition in 1982 by publishing a message on World Tourism Day, which was later followed by the messages of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People. Research aim of the paper is establishing how the religious perspective expressed by the Holy See relates to the concept of sustainable tourism in terms of raising awareness and influencing behaviour change of its followers towards sustainability. Research questions posed are:

1. What are the views of the Holy See on issues related to sustainable tourism?
2. Which stakeholders is the Holy See addressing to encourage changes in behaviour and practices towards the transition in tourism, and with what messages?

1. SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

1.1. Sustainability and tourism

Sustainability became an important topic in the political and economic discourse on tourism development in the early 1990s (Saarinen, 2006). Today, after four decades of development, it is still considered as important for tourism as for any other economic sector, but also as difficult to achieve (Hunter, 1997). While Our Common Future (The Brundtland Report) (World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), 1987) with its definition of sustainability as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” and the subsequent UN Earth Summit in Rio (1992) are usually seen as milestones in directing the attention of political and other relevant actors to sustainability issues (Hardy et al., 2006; Saarinen, 2006; de Bruyn et al., 2023), a longer timeframe is now regularly used to follow its evolution (Buckley, 2012). In the policy context, the Stockholm Conference on Humans and the Environment in 1972 marked the beginning of a series of major UN conferences examining the relationship between economic development and the environment (Hardy et al., 2006).

In the academic context related to tourism, sustainability issues are usually traced back at least to the 1960s and associated with the study of carrying capacity or the limits of growth (Hardy et al., 2006; Saarinen, 2006; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2023). Although both carrying capacity and limits of growth have been useful concepts for a deeper consideration of the multiple and diverse impacts of tourism, first by academics and later by decision-makers, they have also been criticised for missing the link between “human values and (changing) perceptions concerning the resource, indicators, criteria and impacts”, among others (Saarinen, 2006:1126).

1.2. Sustainable tourism - concept and indicators

Inspired by the paradigm of sustainable development, the concept of sustainable tourism development emerged alongside or even replaced the model of carrying capacity.

Already in 1990s it evolved into an umbrella term that encompasses “a set of principles, policy prescriptions, and management methods which chart a path for tourism development such that a destination area’s environmental resource base (including natural, built and cultural features) is protected for future development” (Hunter, 1997:850).

What was initially intended as a concept was put into practise relatively quickly. As early as 1993, the World Tourism Organisation (nowadays UN Tourism) developed “Indicators for the sustainable management of tourism” on both national and local levels (critical area), covering 11 different and diverse categories, but primarily measuring environmental impacts. This was followed by the much better known UNWTO (2004) “Indicators of Sustainable Development for Tourism Destinations”, which contains a fairly exhaustive list and is considered as a valuable starting point for aligning the selected indicators with the policy objectives of a particular destination (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2023). A decade later, the “European Tourism Indicator System” (European Commission, 2016) was developed to help European destinations collect the data they need to understand and address key social, cultural, economic and environmental challenges. These examples could also be seen as a response to the often-cited criticism of sustainable tourism as a weak concept in terms of analysis and application (Saarinen, 2006; Buckley, 2012; Niewiadomski and Brouder, 2024).

At the same time, researchers warn against an overload of choice resulting from being overwhelmed by indicators. Agyeiwaah et al. (2017:30), for example, argues that “an overabundance of non-alignable and non-dominant indicators leads to choice overload, inaction, selective action or justification of continuation of existing practices” and she even sees this as the most important obstacle to greater sustainability in tourism. Another direction in pursuing sustainability in tourism and thus strengthening its contribution to society has been to link it first to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and later to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG target all aspects of sustainability, namely ending poverty, promoting prosperity and well-being for all and protecting the planet. They are considered a more universal agenda as they apply to all countries and are not primarily focused on developing countries like the MDGs (Hall, 2019; Rasoolimanesh et. al, 2023).

In his analysis of the expected contribution of tourism to the SDG, Hall (2019) noted the great political importance of sustainable tourism, which was even symbolically promoted by the United Nations’ proclamation of 2017 as the official International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. Nevertheless, he concludes that empirical measurements indicate that “tourism is actually less sustainable than ever at the global scale” (Hall, 2019:1044).

1.3. Rethinking sustainable tourism development

This may bring us back to questioning the concept of sustainability and sustainable tourism itself. What changes has it undergone since its inception and how well do they respond to the shortcomings identified, especially when considering Hall’s (2019) conclusion about the unsustainability of tourism on a global scale? Perhaps foremost is the fact that there is a visible shift towards greater recognition of the needs of local communities. Already Our Common Future (WCED, 1987) defined sustainable development largely in terms of a process in which the subjective needs of local communities should be met.

But especially in the first decade this seems to have been neglected (Hardy et al., 2002) by focusing on the environment. More recent conceptualizations recognize social and cultural issues as well as economic and political alongside environmental. Secondly, sustainable tourism objectives are increasingly seen as adaptable to different socio-economic contexts and spatial scales (Bramwell et al., 2016). This transforms the concept from one based on finding a balance to accepting trade-off decisions between demand and supply side (Bramwell et al., 2016).

Thirdly, sustainability is increasingly perceived as value-laden, which means that a single perspective is not sufficient to analyse or address it. Therefore, sustainable tourism can be understood in different ways by different groups of stakeholders (visitors, governments, businesses, NGOs) (Xu et al., 2019).

Fourth, and closely related, is the fact that sustainable tourism is now often seen as a normative orientation that aims to steer societal systems and behaviours towards a broad and integrated path towards sustainable development (Bramwell et al.,

2016). It is precisely the growing recognition of multi-stakeholder involvement and the importance of influencing behaviour to support sustainability transitions (Wilkinson and Coles, 2023; Niewiadomski and Brouder, 2024) that we now turn briefly as an introduction to analysis of the Catholic Church's messages on tourism.

The Transition Agenda recognises that complex and multidimensional changes are necessary to transform the current socio-technical system towards sustainability. As Niewiadomski and Brouder (2024:143) summarise in a very normative way, the transition to sustainability "must go beyond technological fixes and infrastructural improvements" and include shifts in the political spheres (governance, institutions, legal regulations), the market structure and also in consumption patterns and cultural discourses in order to be successful.

It is consumption patterns and cultural discourse that are often on the agenda for the transition to sustainability, as it is increasingly recognised that changes are needed on the demand side (Niewiadomski and Mellon, 2023; Wilkinson and Coles, 2023). To achieve behavioural change towards more sustainable consumption, tourists' awareness of their impact on the natural environment and the socio-cultural wellbeing of destination communities needs to be raised (Choi and Sirakaya, 2006; Miller et al., 2010).

However, studies have also shown that information might not necessarily bring increased awareness and even if achieved that does not necessarily means taking an action (Miller et al., 2010). Based on their own and other studies, authors argue in favour of the concept of reciprocity by encouraging tourists to think about the responsibility that comes with the right to holiday.

Increasing personal responsibility brings into question issues of equity, ethics and integrity, which have already been recognised as important in co-designing sustainable tourism (Liburd et al., 2020). Personal responsibility is also encouraged by connecting with others and being part of a community that shares values and norms that guide the new behaviour and help to overcome "the social dilemma of what is best for society in the long term and what is best for the individual more immediately" (Miller et al., 2010:642).

This brings us to the potential role that the Catholic Church, as a religious community based on shared beliefs and values, could play in raising awareness and initiating behavioural change in relation to tourism. In this context, theories of human behaviour that are directly aimed at solving individual problems gain great importance (Dolnicar et al., 2017). Theories of particular importance within which, at least at the reflexive level, the Holy See's work on sustainability in tourism can be observed would be social identity theory, cognitive dissonance theory and equity theory. Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1979) is based on belonging to a particular social group that influences changes in behaviour by communicating its norms in order to conform to the group's expectations. The theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) is based on the theory that tensions (cognitive dissonance) arise when a person's behaviour and cognition are not aligned. To restore balance, a person has the choice to adjust their behaviour or beliefs. A subtype of cognitive dissonance theory is equity theory (Adams, 1963), which is based on the theory that an individual must establish a balance in social exchange and that tensions arise when the ratio of taking and giving in relation to the exchange partner is not approximately equal (Dolnicar, 2020).

This article focuses on both 1. the more general awareness-raising aspect of the messages of the Catholic Church and the Holy See published on the occasion of World Tourism Day (chapters 3.1-3.3), and 2. the more specific recommendations aimed at promoting behavioural change among recognized tourism stakeholders (chapter 3.4).

2. METHODOLOGY

Content analysis, a research method for systematically analysing the content of different forms of communication, was used to examine the 26 publicly available messages published by the Holy See between 2000 and 2024 on the occasion of World Tourism Day (Table 1). The first message of St John Paul II (1982) was also included due to its symbolic significance. Rather than focusing on counting the frequency of certain words or phrases (quantitative content analysis), the study uses a qualitative approach, i.e. understanding and interpreting the underlying themes and meanings. This allowed for a deeper reflection on the topic while avoiding the potential methodological pitfall of drawing conclusions on importance of particular themes since each World Tourism Day has a specific theme and thus influences their numerical occurrence. As part of the analysis, inductive coding approach was used to identify the Holy See's recommendations to tourism stakeholders. In order to distinguish recommendations aimed directly at behavioural change, particular attention was paid to the use of active verbs and phrases in the messages analysed (e.g. need to, encourage, support, must, to promote, it is necessary, it is required, it is imperative, it is essential, we are asked to, etc.).

Table 1: **Themes of World Tourism Days 2000-2024 / Titles of respective messages published by the Holy See**

| | | | |
|------|---|------|--|
| 2000 | Technology and nature: two challenges for tourism at the dawn of the 21st century | 2013 | Tourism and Water: protecting our common future |
| 2001 | Tourism, a tool in the service of peace and dialogue between civilisations | 2014 | Tourism and Community Development |
| 2002 | Ecotourism, key to sustainable development | 2015 | One billion tourists, one billion opportunities |
| 2003 | Tourism as a driver for poverty alleviation, job creation and social harmony | 2016 | Tourism for All – Promoting Universal Accessibility |
| 2004 | Sport and tourism: two vital forces at the service of mutual understanding, culture and the development of countries. | 2017 | Sustainable Tourism – a Tool for Development |
| 2005 | Travel and transport: from the imaginary world of Jules Verne to the reality of the 21st century | 2018 | Tourism and digital transformation |
| 2006 | <i>Tourism is wealth</i> | 2019 | Tourism and Work: a better future for all |
| 2007 | Tourism, an open door for women | 2020 | Tourism and rural development |
| 2008 | Tourism faces the challenge of climate change | 2021 | Tourism for Inclusive Growth The person beyond statistics |
| 2009 | Tourism, a celebration of diversity | 2022 | Rethinking Tourism |
| 2010 | Tourism and Biodiversity | 2023 | Tourism and Green Investment |
| 2011 | Tourism and bringing cultures closer together | 2024 | Tourism and Peace |
| 2012 | Tourism and Sustainable Energy: Powering Sustainable Development | | |

Source: Messages for World Tourism Day issued by St. John Paul II, the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and the Dicastery for Evangelization (various years)

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In 1988 the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (PC later in the text) was established by Pope John Paul II who wrote messages for the World Tourism Day until his death in 2005. In 2017 PC became part of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development (DPIHD later in the text), while in 2023 and 2024 topics of tourism were dealt by Dicastery for Evangelization (DE later in the text). The PC recognised the need for critical reflection on tourism but placed particular emphasis on its spiritual and social dimensions. It is precisely these aspects that are increasingly coming to the fore in discussions about sustainable tourism today (Bramwell et al., 2016; Hall, 2019; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2023; Niewiadomski and Brouder, 2024).

Since its beginnings, the PC (and later DPIHD and DE) has closely accompanied the work of the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (nowadays UN Tourism). Since 1980, the UNWTO has celebrated World Tourism Day on 27 September and dedicates it each year to a specific theme, which is actively discussed in expert conferences and other events. St John Paul II joined this tradition in 1982 by publishing an annual message on the theme chosen by the UNWTO for World Tourism Day. However, his predecessors, Popes Pius XII, John XXIII and Paul VI, were already known for their interest in tourism and its influence (Dziubiński, 2009).

The structure of these messages usually contains a welcome to participants, particularly tourism professionals from the private and public sectors, journalists and others. This is followed by an introduction to the theme set by the World Tourism Organisation (nowadays UN Tourism), often accompanied by a short reflection from an expert. A theological perspective is then presented along with relevant recommendations. The Holy See refrains from delving into technical details, but instead proposes a direction and offers a Christian perspective on tourism, which it regards as one of the “signs of the times” (Giovanni Paolo II, 1982) — a phenomenon so significant that it has the power to change the social conditions of many people.

Although the messages are thematically very different, they can be categorised into three main groups: social and economic issues, environmental issues and technology-related issues, reflecting their relation to the original concept of sustainable development in Our Common Future (World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), 1987).

Social and economic issues include topics such as poverty reduction and social justice, decent, fair and free work for all, gender equality, development of local communities, accessibility of tourism for socially disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, peace and dialogue between nations, celebration of diversity, cultural exchange, opportunities arising from encounters and the relationship between tourism and sport.

Environmental issues include climate change, biodiversity, water resources, sustainable tourism and ecotourism.

Technology-related topics examine the relationship between technology and nature, tourism and sustainable energy, and tourism and digital transformation.

3.1. Social and economic issues in tourism

The most comprehensive theme that runs through almost all the World Tourism Day messages is the opportunity to meet others, which is in many ways an essential element of tourism itself. In this regard, the Holy See views tourism with particular optimism, emphasising the many positive impacts it can have on individuals and communities. At the same time, it makes recommendations to improve aspects that require further attention in order to mitigate the negative effects that tourism can sometimes have on society.

The positive contributions of tourism that can be derived from the World Tourism Day messages, together with the recommendations for further development, can be categorised into several key areas, which are explored in the following sections: Cultural exchange between nations and openness to diversity; The fight against poverty and the right to tourism; The Christian dimension of hospitality and the use of leisure time.

3.1.1. Cultural exchange between nations and openness towards the Other

Encounters between people of different nationalities, whether between tourists and hosts or among tourists themselves, can have a significant impact on the perception of the Other, which subsequently leads to profound effects on international relations in the form of increased cooperation, cultural exchange, greater solidarity, peace-building and deeper understanding (DPIHD, 2022; DE, 2024).

The fact that people of different nationalities meet during tourist visits, free from daily obligations and in circumstances that emphasise mental and physical relaxation, contributes to building higher quality relationships between people. This is why World Tourism Day messages often state that tourism is a factor of peace. Peace, as is repeatedly emphasised, is the fruit of respect and love (Giovanni Paolo II, 2000), and love comes from knowing the other, from opening up to the other, which frees us from the danger of withdrawing into ourselves.

By adopting an attitude of openness towards the other, facilitated by the circumstances in which tourism places us, we free ourselves from the ignorance which otherwise leads us to reject the values and identity of another people, which is often the cause of violence. Living together in harmony during a tourist visit creates a phenomenon of spiritual fraternity on an individual level (Giovanni Paolo II, 1982), which leads to the construction of a world based on grace, justice and peace, i.e. the construction of the civilisation of love, as Saint John Paul II called it (Giovanni Paolo II 1982, 2003, 2004; DE, 2024).

At the centre of everything which is repeatedly emphasised in almost all World Tourism Day messages is the dignity of the human person, created in the image of God, and the integral development of the person that this entails. The person and their development should take precedence over the economic importance that tourism has (DPIHD, 2021).

However, the reality is often quite different, as evidenced, for example, by major social and economic disparities between hosts and tourists, the excessive exploitation of natural resources and the exploitation of women and children for sex tourism and cheap labour. Behind all this there is almost always a private interest that prioritises the pursuit of high profits and consequently a higher level of luxury and (apparent) quality of life over the livelihood and well-being of a large number of people. Such critics can also be found in academic discourse. Take, for example, Higgins-Desbiolles (2018) critical treatise on what is actually sustained in sustainable tourism, where she delves deep into the dark side of both over- and luxury tourism, reflecting similar thoughts by St John Paul II.

In the context of the negative effects of tourism, St John Paul II referred in particular to mass tourism, which leads to the creation of segregated, almost ghettoised resorts intended exclusively for tourists. In these places, tourists have almost no contact with the local population, except in carefully staged performances in which they are presented as a kind of exotic product that only serves to satisfy the superficial curiosity of visitors (Giovanni Paolo II, 2001).

The other extreme in the relationship with other cultures is the rejection and denial of their value, usually due to one's own fear of the Other. As already mentioned, tourism is an excellent means of combating the spirit of rejection—that leads to discrimination, intolerance and xenophobia (PC, 2009).

In addition to the opportunity to meet people from other nations, tourist visits offer the chance to get to know the culture of another country: its civilisational achievements in terms of art, architecture, literature, customs, social and spiritual traditions and practises. By encountering a country's culture, individuals gain an insight into its living conditions, problems and aspirations on an individual and collective level, creating a greater sense of closeness and fraternity—something the Church tirelessly advocates (DPIHD, 2019).

The Holy See conveys an important message about the value of encounters with other cultures. Thanks to these encounters, we not only accept diversity, but adopt an attitude in which the other can enrich us intellectually and spiritually, both as individuals and as humanity as a whole (Giovanni Paolo II, 2001; PC, 2006, 2011).

Saint John Paul II expressed this idea: "Diversity, which some find frightening, can become a source of deeper understanding of the mystery of human existence through respectful dialogue" (PC, 2011).

The messages emphasise in many ways that the tourism industry must build on the cultural heritage of the host country in order to create a fruitful cultural exchange and the conditions for dialogue. They point out that the most important thing for a productive dialogue is to know how to listen to what the other person has to say about their monuments, culture, customs and lifestyle (PC, 2011). Step by step, this approach builds trust and respect and breaks down prejudices and stereotypes that divide nations.

In the message dedicated to women in tourism, the role of women in building such dialogue and reducing the distance between people is particularly emphasised. Thanks to their heightened sensitivity to the needs of others, their warmth and hospitality, women are uniquely able to contribute to the development of a new humanism in which each person is seen as a brother or sister — something that is of particular importance in the context of tourism activities (PC, 2007).

3.1.2. The fight against poverty and the right to tourism

In a number of messages on World Tourism Day, the social component of tourism was emphasised as one of the most important. This is reflected in several areas where tourism can make a difference: decent, fair and free work for all, centred on the person and their basic needs (DPIHD, 2019); the fight against poverty (DPIHD, 2017); development at the local community level (DPIHD, 2020); the active involvement of local people in tourism planning and the development of social and accessible tourism (PC, 2016). This is particularly important because Bramwell et. al (2016) in their review of 25 years of sustainable tourism emphasised that the community perspective has until recently often been subordinated to the environmental aspects, although it is an integral part of the concept.

The Holy See always seeks to share responsibility between those who create the tourism offer and provide services to tourists and those who are in the role of visitors to a given area. While the hosts are advised to build a fraternal relationship with the tourists, keeping Christ in mind to minimise the harmful effects of tourism on the local community, recommendations are also given to the tourists. This refers in particular to the significant social differences that often exist between visitors and hosts.

Therefore, visitors are encouraged to actively observe the social conditions in which they find themselves during their tourist visit, without turning a blind eye to the very difficult living conditions of people in developing countries caused by structural injustices and various interests from within and without that undermine the possibility of equitable development (Giovanni Paolo II, 2000, 2002). In all this, the Church recalls that responsibility is a personal category and cannot be bypassed when it comes to the suffering and poverty of the people they come into contact with and their exploitation, whether as cheap labour without human rights or for inhumane purposes, such as women and children subjected to sex tourism (Giovanni Paolo II, 2003).

It is also emphasised that private interests and greed, driven by the desire to accumulate wealth, prevent individuals from truly listening to those in need. The Church sees such behaviour as a consequence of separation from God and His plan for creation, which leads to a loss of sincere care for brothers and sisters and for the environment (Giovanni Paolo II, 2002). The fact that, despite the great advances in technology and science that have occurred in modern times, poverty continues to spread, as does the disparity between the extremely wealthy and the needy, is an alarming call for a change in mentality and lifestyle urged by the teachings of the Church. Instead of privileging a few, the aim at individual and societal level must be to improve the living conditions of all (Giovanni Paolo II, 2004). Christians in particular have a role to play in this by showing that it is possible to be content with less, and that this contentment cannot be complete while someone next to us is struggling for basic living conditions. This resonates strongly with the SDGs (UN, 2015), which are now recognised as the key lenses through which to examine tourism's contribution to sustainable development (Hall, 2019, Rasoolimanesh et al., 2023). The SDGs aim to address all aspects of sustainability, namely ending poverty, promoting prosperity and well-being for all and protecting the planet.

As one of the ways in which the local population can benefit more from tourism, the Holy See underlines the need for their active participation in tourism planning, either through participation in local government bodies or through participation in the work of civil organisations and associations. This would confirm that tourism development plans are centred on the needs of the local population (Giovanni Paolo II, 2001). This is in line with the recommendations of the UNWTO "Global Code of Ethics for Tourism" (2001), which states that the local community should derive the greatest economic, social and cultural benefit from tourism activities.

Pope Francis particularly focused on the importance of work for the preservation of human dignity, which is why he calls for the means of creativity and solidarity to be used so that tourism can create the necessary jobs for people all over the world (PC, 2014).

Furthermore, it is necessary to develop social and accessible tourism, i.e. tourism activities aimed at socially vulnerable groups of people, such as low-income families, orphans, the elderly and, in the case of accessible tourism, people with physical and mental disabilities who require adjustments in getting around destinations, accommodation and the way in which natural and cultural monuments are visited (PC, 2016).

In order to include as many socially sensitive groups as possible in tourism flows and reduce all forms of discrimination, from physical to economic and social discrimination, the Church's teaching calls for cooperation between politicians, entrepreneurs, organisations and other tourists (PC, 2016).

3.1.3. The Christian dimension of hospitality and leisure

For sustainable, ethical and responsible tourism, contributions from both sides are equally important. It is just as important to know how to welcome tourists responsibly as it is to travel responsibly (PC, 2005, 2011). For hosts, this means in practise that they must endeavour to study the customs, laws and culture of the sending countries in order to adequately prepare for encounter with others. It is also advisable for tourists to familiarise themselves with the customs, laws and culture of the country they are visiting before departure to prevent their stay from causing shock and discomfort among the local population (Giovanni Paolo II, 2001).

As has already been emphasised, leisure and tourism can compensate for the lack of human contact that is often felt in daily life (Giovanni Paolo II, 2002). In this context, the Church points out that the focus of tourism activities must not be exclusively on profit and that tourists must never be reduced to statistics that measure the success of the tourist season. Human beings and their dignity must be at the centre of all tourism offers, with the aim being the integral development of human beings and not their degradation in any form (PC, 2015; DPIHD, 2021; DPIHD, 2022). The teachings of the Church encourage tourism professionals to be guided by the idea of the common destiny of humanity, its inseparable connection and the need for mutual solidarity and mercy (DPIHD, 2017). Furthermore, a different perspective on tourism is offered, viewing it as a particular expression of social life in which we have the opportunity to use our innate creativity to achieve greater equality and reduce the suffering of our fellow human beings, through sharing rather than charity (Giovanni Paolo II, 2003).

Since the Church's fundamental mission is evangelisation, she is the first to be called to reach out to humanity and contribute to initiatives that truly place tourism at the service of the integral development of the human person (DPIHD, 2017). These are human initiatives based on solidarity and cooperation, volunteering, the involvement of the local community and socially vulnerable groups, expressing openness to the person who seeks God's presence in their lives (PC, 2014; DPIHD, 2017). In addition to working with tourists, the pastoral care of tourism should also include work with the local community, which should be educated about the Christian dimension of hospitality. In this way, the encounter with tourists should be understood as an opportunity to encounter others, God and ultimately oneself (PC, 2011). These activities are particularly welcomed in today's world, where the emphasis in tourism is on the tourist experience, dialogue and direct contact with the local community, where tourists want to feel like temporary residents rather than strangers (PC, 2014).

Cultural heritage, especially sacred heritage, plays an important role in evangelisation and pastoral care for tourists. The Church is particularly supportive of the development of cultural tourism as it believes that understanding cultural heritage is the best way to have a genuine encounter with the local community (Giovanni Paolo II, 2001). In addition, interest in a country's culture has a positive impact on the local community, which manifests itself above all in the strengthening of social cohesion through increased self-esteem and pride in one's own identity and heritage (PC, 2015). The cultural heritage of the Catholic Church is particularly rich and can play an important role in communicating Christian values and evangelising visitors. For this to be possible, the Church must utilise all available modern means of interpretation and presentation of cultural heritage to reveal the meaning and significance of the culture that has emerged as a product of faith and the desire to glorify God (PC, 2011).

The Church's teachings contain very concrete advice for tourists, such as choosing accommodation that has the least impact on the environment, consuming local rather than imported products to stimulate the local economy, complying with local laws and positively appreciating and respecting the culture of the host country (PC, 2008). In all of this, tourists are encouraged to change their mindset in line with what Pope Francis expressed in his encyclical *Laudato si'* - "moderation and the ability to be content with less" (PC, 2015). The idea of personal responsibility based on rising awareness and changing behaviour is now very often promoted as a step forward in sustainability transition literature (Choi and Sirakaya, 2006; Miller et al., 2010).

3.2. Environmental issues in tourism

In recent decades, tourism has increased significantly, which inevitably leaves a considerable mark on the environment, especially in the form of increased waste, pollution, over-exploitation of natural resources, destruction of entire ecosystems and the extinction of numerous plant and animal species, leading to a loss of biodiversity. The clear consequences are becoming more visible every day, forcing us to think seriously about human existence and the quality of life in such a disturbed environment.

The Church believes that the main cause of the increasing ecological problems is humanity's distance from God and His plan of creation, which at the same time leads to a distance from other people and a loss of respect for nature and the plant and animal world (Giovanni Paolo II, 2002; DPIHD, 2022).

Pope Francis, who was particularly sensitised to environmental issues and has dedicated an encyclical to them, sees humanity's relationship with nature as the responsibility of each individual: "Cultivating and preserving creation is a task entrusted by God

not only at the beginning of history, but to each and every one of us; it is part of His plan, which means growing the world responsibly and transforming it into a garden, a place of life for all (...). Instead, we are often driven by pride and the desire for domination, ownership, manipulation and exploitation; we do not “conserve”, we do not respect, we do not see creation as a free gift to be cared for. More and more we are losing the attitude of wonder, contemplation and listening to the whole of creation.” (Pope Francis, General Audience, 5 June 2013 in PC, 2013).

The Church, whose fundamental task is to care for humanity, is committed to a radical change in mentality and lifestyle, which should not be characterised by hedonism and consumerism, but by moderation, sobriety, modesty and self-discipline, bearing in mind other people and the generations that follow us (DPIHD, 2022; DE, 2023).

It is important that these basic ideas are translated into concrete actions. For this reason, and with the aim of making tourist destinations sustainable, it is necessary to promote and support all initiatives that are energy efficient, have the least possible impact on the environment and lead to the use of renewable energies in order to promote the conservation of resources and the prevention of pollution. In this respect, it is essential that tourism and the holiday offers promoted by the Church are characterised, among other things, by respect for the environment (PC, 2012). Water is particularly emphasised as a symbolic natural resource that is of great importance in Christianity (PC, 2013).

The Holy See recognises that it is high time for the development of an ethic of responsibility, from which more concrete steps must emerge, such as a more moderate use of natural resources and the development and consumption of forms of tourism that show greater respect for the environment (Giovanni Paolo II, 2002; PC, 2008). The Holy See calls on public authorities to protect nature and biodiversity by law and to monitor compliance with legal standards (DE, 2023). The Holy See reminds the private tourism sector to conduct its business in a way that minimises harm to the environment and the local population, which must be involved in the planning of all major projects (PC, 2010).

Pope Francis remind us of the responsibility that each of us has, both towards humanity and towards the planet, which is our common home: “The common home of all men and women must rest on the foundation of a proper understanding of universal fraternity and respect for the sacredness of every human life, of every man and woman (...). This common home of all men and women must also be built on an understanding of the certain sacredness of the created natural world.” (Pope Francis, Address to the members of the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization, 25 September 2015 in DPIHD, 2017).

The sustainability literature often points out that the value-based nature of sustainable tourism needs to be recognised in order to fully support social change (Hardy et al., 2002; Saarinen, 2006; Bramwell et al., 2016; Liburd et al., 2020). The Church with its messages clearly provides such dimension.

2.3. Tourism and technology

While recognizing the benefits of modern technology in relation to sustainable tourism (DE, 2024), one of the most important messages concerning the role of technology is to avoid the danger of its ubiquity. The Holy See's message, published in 2018, cites a document entitled *Instrumentum Laboris*, prepared for the 15th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on Young People. It emphasizes the need for young people “to live their digital life without separating online and offline behaviour” and to be aware of the fact that the virtual world can have an impact on distorting the perception of reality. Furthermore, Pope Francis warned that “it is not enough to be a passerby on the digital highways, simply ‘connected’; connections need to grow into true encounters. We cannot live apart, closed in on ourselves. We need to love and to be loved” (DPIHD, 2018).

Finally, regarding the interactions between development and digital transformation, technologically advanced societies should be willing to prioritize sobriety and reduce their own consumption to enable healthy growth in other parts of the world. The theme of World Tourism Day ‘Tourism and the Digital Transformation’ calls for harnessing the benefits of digital innovation while ensuring sustainability and a respectful approach to the world around us (DPIHD, 2018).

2.4. Encouraging behavioural change of tourism stakeholders towards sustainability

The last part of the analysis is dedicated to 1. the tourism stakeholders identified in the messages and 2. the recommendations to encourage their behavioural change towards sustainability. The analysis was conducted in response to the acknowledged need to understand the involvement of different stakeholders and influence their behaviour to support the transition to sustainability (Wilkinson and Coles, 2023; Niewiadomski and Brouder, 2024). This is clearly reflected in the Holy See's messages, which identified numerous stakeholders from the public, civil and private sectors, as well as the tourists themselves (Table 2).

Table 2: Tourism stakeholders identified in the messages published by the Holy See on the occasion of World Tourism Days 2000-2024 (alphabetical order)

| Tourism stakeholders |
|---|
| 1. All actors in tourism sector |
| 2. Christians |
| 3. Church (including authorities, ecclesial tourism structures, parish communities, pastoral care of tourism) |
| 4. Decision-makers and political leaders, governments (national and international levels) |
| 5. Humanity |
| 6. Local authorities |
| 7. Local communities and hosts |
| 8. Professional associations and NGOs in the tourism sector, sport associations |
| 9. Researchers |
| 10. Tourism operators and entrepreneurs |
| 11. Tourists, travelers, pilgrims |
| 12. Women |
| 13. Workers |

Source: Messages for World Tourism Day issued by St. John Paul II, the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and the Dicastery for Evangelization (various years)

Inductive coding was used to identify numerous and thematically very different recommendations (see Appendix). All recommendations are directly addressed to the specific stakeholder(s), are related to the concept of sustainable (tourism) development and call on stakeholders to change their behaviour. The number of recommendations for specific stakeholders varies greatly due to the topics specified by the World Tourism Days, which is also one of the reasons why we avoid a numerical statistical analysis. Instead, we want to show the diversity of the Holy See's recommendations to stakeholders in the tourism sector.

We will now briefly present the recommendations addressed to the two groups of stakeholders selected for more detailed analysis. The first group is the "demand side" (tourists, travellers and pilgrims), which is often highlighted in the studies because it has an important impact on the transition to sustainability by changing their consumption behaviour (Niewiadomski and Mellon, 2023; Wilkinson and Coles 2023) (Table 3). The second stakeholder group analysed consists of local communities and hosts (Table 4), a logical choice to complement the "supply side".

Table 3: Recommendations by the Holy See to tourists, travellers and pilgrims encouraging their behavioural change towards sustainability

| Inductive codes derived from recommendations by the Holy See | |
|--|--|
| Support tourism in rural and marginalized areas | Promote culture of encounter, dialogue and sharing |
| Support slow tourism | Promote responsible and ethical tourism |
| Encourage shift in mentality and more responsible and sober lifestyle (decreasing pollution, energy consumption and consumerism, preferring local products, respecting local laws) | Respect economic justice (labour rights, sharing profits fairly, person and nature before profit, wealth redistribution between nations) |
| Educate for sustainability, against discrimination, intolerance, xenophobia, racism | Support those in need, protecting poor, vulnerable and disadvantaged |
| Protect /respect the environment/biodiversity/natural resources (water) | Respect social justice |
| Promote sustainable tourism | Confront violence, creating peace and justice |
| Preserve/respect others, cultural identity/culture, customs, traditions | See reality beyond superficial level |
| Protect dignity of individuals and communities, in context of searching for common good | |

Source: Messages for World Tourism Day issued by St. John Paul II, the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and the Dicastery for Evangelization (various years)

Personal responsibility is one of the aspects highlighted as important for behaviour change (Liburd et al., 2020; Miller et al., 2010). It also plays an important role in the messages analysed (codes: *Promote responsible and ethical tourism*; *Encourage a change in mentality and a more responsible and sober lifestyle*) as showed in the message from 2013: “We must ensure that tourists are aware and reflect on their responsibilities and the impact of their trip. They must be convinced that not everything is allowed, although they personally carry the economic burden” (PC, 2013).

In the same line, there are numerous quotes such as “Finally, tourists must be aware that their presence in a place is not always positive. To this end, they must be informed about the real benefits that the conservation of biodiversity brings and be educated in methods of sustainable tourism. Likewise, tourist should demand tourist business proposals that truly contribute to the development of the place. In no case, neither the land nor the historical-cultural heritage of the destination should be damaged in favour of the tourist, adapting itself to their tastes and desires.” (PC, 2010).

A very interesting aspect of influencing tourist behaviour is the promotion of destinations that are different from the usual ones (code *Support tourism in rural and marginalized areas*) or, equally important, different ways of being a tourist (codes: *See reality beyond superficial level*; *Support slow tourism*). “So why should we not encourage a tourism that makes us appreciate rural and marginal areas by encountering them on foot? This will allow us to slow down and avoid the risk of frantically rushing from one thing to another” (DPIHD, 2020).

Table 4: Recommendations by the Holy See to local communities and hosts encouraging their behavioural change towards sustainability

| Inductive codes derived from recommendations by the Holy See | |
|---|--|
| Encourage participative approach in tourism planning and development, involvement in tourism practices | Put local host community first (involvement in decision-making, experiencing economic gains from tourism, improving social conditions, and an appropriate valuation of local natural and cultural development sources) |
| Express sense of welcome to tourists, giving hospitality | Respect economic justice (labour rights, sharing profits fairly, person and nature before profit, wealth redistribution between nations) |
| Promote responsible and ethical tourism | Promote culture of encounter, dialogue and sharing |
| Preserve/respect others, cultural identity/culture, customs, traditions | Promote sustainable tourism |
| Collaborate, favor positive interaction between actors (tourism industry, the local community and travellers) | |

Source: Messages for World Tourism Day issued by St. John Paul II, the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and the Dicastery for Evangelization (various years)

The messages addressed to local communities and hosts also emphasize the importance of personal responsibility and necessity for sustainable tourism in general (Table 4). In addition, the recommendations are particularly sensitive to promoting the central role of the local community in tourism development as well as securing the benefits from tourism (including financial benefits) (codes: *Put local host community first*, *Encourage participative approach in tourism planning and development*, *Respect economic justice*).

One of the exemplary quotes on the issue is the one from the message from 2014: “The local community must be the main actor in tourism development. They must make it their own, with the active presence of government, social partners and civic bodies (...). Tourism development is not to do something “for” the community, but rather, “with” the community.” (PC, 2014).

Another important aspect strongly promoted by the Holy See is respect for tourists in the sense of an open welcome and using every encounter as an opportunity to enrich personal integral development (Codes: *Express sense of welcome to tourists, giving hospitality*; *Promote culture of encounter, dialogue and sharing*; *Preserve/respect others, cultural identity/culture, customs, traditions*). One of the exemplary quotes on the issue is the one from the message from 2015: “From this viewpoint, also the local communities are called to open up their borders to welcome those who come from other countries moved by a thirst for knowledge, a unique occasion for reciprocal enrichment and common growth. Giving hospitality enables the environmental, social and cultural potentialities to bear fruit, to create new jobs, to develop one’s identity, and to bring out the value of the territory” (PC, 2015).

Some previous studies have empirically investigated the behavioural change of tourists. Baca-Motes et al. (2013) successfully increased the reuse of towels in hotels using Tajfel's (1979) social identity theory, which focuses on belonging to certain social groups as the main driver of behaviour. Dolnicar et al. (2017) have summarized further examples of inducing behavioural change in relation to specific environmental aspects. Cognitive dissonance theory has been used to induce a reduction in shower times at home or energy and water consumption in the household, and similar examples have also been found in tourism (Dolnicar et al., 2017).

In contrast to these examples, the methodology of this study was not designed to empirically test the impact of the Holy See's messages on the behavioural change of tourists or any other group of tourism stakeholders. Rather, it focused on presenting the Catholic Church's view of tourism stakeholders and actors on the one hand and the Holy See's expectations in the context of sustainable tourism development on the other. Our analysis clearly shows the great complexity and multidimensionality of both the actors and the messages. In this way, it contributes directly to the growing body of research on the Transition Agenda (Wilkinson and Coles, 2023; Niewiadomski and Brouder, 2024).

Furthermore, considering theories of human behaviour, Dolnicar et al. (2017) have pointed to the consensus on four types of interventions that have the potential to bring about change: Leveraging people's beliefs, leveraging people's social norms, increasing pleasure or instant utility, and altering the decision architecture. We believe that this study could serve as a useful starting point for empirical research examining the influence of the Holy See and the Catholic Church as a religious community based on shared beliefs and values on two of the above change factors: the leveraging of people's beliefs and the leveraging of people's social norms.

CONCLUSION

By analysing the messages of St John Paul II, the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People (and subsequently the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and Dicastery for Evangelization) this paper has presented the issues that most concern the Church in relation to sustainable tourism. The common thread of these themes is the encounter, be it an encounter with God, with oneself, with others or with nature. Furthermore, by identifying the tourism stakeholders and the recommendations to promote their behavioural change towards sustainability it contributes to numerous research emphasizing complexity of transition paths towards sustainability.

Despite the negative aspects that also characterise it, the Church makes it clear in its messages that she experiences tourism primarily as a phenomenon that humanises, be it as an opportunity for recreation, mutual understanding between peoples and cultures or as an opportunity for education and personal growth, as an encounter with nature, as an instrument of economic development and as a promoter of peace and dialogue. Thanks to this fact, the Church recognises the significant power of tourism in transforming opportunities and relationships at a broad social level and gives it a proper place in its reflections and actions. Taking into account the importance and impact of tourism in today's society, it is concluded that the phenomenon of tourism can serve as a point of encounter between the Church and society. The Church's recommendations for a more humane and spiritual tourism overlap with modern trends that consider tourism as something that should offer much more than just leisure. Therefore, the messages analysed in this paper can not only be a direct guide for believers on how to embody the role of host and tourist in a Christian way, but also serve as one of the foundations on which the Church can build a dialogue with today's society.

By systematically and critically analysing the Holy See's messages on tourism from a sustainability perspective, this study contributes to the growing body of research on the future paths of tourism and hospitality. Apart from the fact that, to the author's knowledge, no previous study has systematically analysed the Holy See's messages on World Tourism Day, its novelty lies in the fact that it brings to light a surprisingly "up-to-date", holistic and comprehensive view of the Catholic Church on modern tourism, both in terms of theoretical considerations and practical implications.

The study has two limitations. First, the messages published by Holy See reflect the themes set by World Tourism Day. In other words, Holy See's messages cannot be examined as 'independent' of the above context. Secondly, the study suggests a possible change in behaviour and did not empirically test whether the recommendations led to a change. On the other hand, this could certainly be a stimulus for future research.

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APPENDIX

Inductive codes derived from recommendations by the Holy See to tourism stakeholders

Support for specific types of tourism and similar aspects

- Promote sustainable tourism,
- Promote responsible and ethical tourism,
- Support slow tourism,
- Promote ecotourism,
- Promote healthy “social tourism” for young, economically disadvantaged, handicapped.

Socio-cultural and economic issues

- Promote integral human development,
- Educate for sustainability, against discrimination, intolerance, xenophobia, racism,
- Protect dignity of individuals and communities, in context of searching for common good,
- Encourage shift in mentality for more responsible and sober lifestyle (decreasing pollution, energy consumption and consumerism, preferring local products, respecting local laws),
- Safeguard the freedom of choice of individuals,
- Respect economic justice (labour rights, sharing profits fairly, person and nature before profit, wealth redistribution between nations),
- Support those in need, protecting poor, vulnerable and disadvantaged,
- Provide jobs with dignity,
- Support tourism in rural and marginalized areas,
- Support tourism as a resource in the fight against poverty,
- Build friendship and fraternity through jobs,
- Encourage less consumerism in tourism,
- Overcome inequalities, sharing responsibilities,
- Help overcome dangerous from tourism,
- Respect social justice,
- Resist individualism and nationalism,
- Put local host community first (involvement in decision-making, experiencing economic gains from tourism, improving social conditions, propiate valuation of local natural and cultural development sources),
- Confront violence, creating peace and justice,
- Promote culture of encounter, dialogue and sharing,
- Preserve/respect others, cultural identity/culture, customs, traditions,
- Value, protect and show works of art and nature (often in its religious context),
- See reality beyond superficial level,
- Express sense of welcome to tourists, giving hospitality,
- Support tourists and travellers.

Environmental issues

- Protect /respect environment/biodiversity/natural resources (water),
- Promote integral ecology.

Technology-related issues

- Enable access to digital technologies for all.

Tourism planning and development

- Ask for more commitment and determination in transition towards sustainability,
- Encourage participative approach in tourism planning and development, involvement in tourism practices,
- Collaborate, favour positive interaction between actors (tourism industry, the local community and travellers).

Religious aspects

- Provide pastoral care, spiritual and liturgical service for travellers and tourists,
- Educate to living free time as personal enrichment,
- Potential for evangelization,
- Create better religious tourism offer (tourist itineraries, educating Catholic guides, information sources e.g. web pages, brochures),
- Tourism supporting encounter with God.