Exploring Sustainable Tourism through Semio-Linguistic Analysis: The Case of Europe's Top Destinations

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Abstract

The ubiquitous presence of the term "sustainability" in the "semiosphere" explains why it has acquired multiple meanings in common usage, depending on the domain of discourse within which it happens to occur. The present contribution seeks to explore the semantics of sustainability within the specific discourse domain of tourism, where it is largely addressed and exploited for promotional purposes. Considering the key role played by sustainability as a determining factor in the choice of a tourist destination, many countries' institutional tourist websites include a section dealing with sustainable travel. Drawing on quantitative and qualitative analysis, this study investigates the semio-linguistic mechanisms by means of which a locality aims to build up an image of itself as a sustainable destination. The examples discussed are taken from a corpus of promotional institutional webpages and selected to best represent how the promotors of destinations entrust discourse with the task of creating meanings capable of influencing tourists' perceptions and choices. The semio-linguistic analysis will reveal the presence of a series of narrative constants and valorisation strategies beneath the apparent diversity of the discursive surface of the promotional webpages investigated. It will also help outline the profile of the potential "sustainable" tourist inscribed in the texts under consideration.

Introduction

In a world facing unparalleled challenges at global and local levels, from environmental hazards to climate change, from food insecurity to social injustice, the term "sustainability" has become a buzzword that circulates increasingly in contemporary discourse. Many companies and numerous people, along with political and cultural institutions, frequently address this

topic and commit themselves to favouring and promoting ethical and sustainable practices. The ubiquitous presence of the term in the "semiosphere" (Lotman 1990: 125) explains why it has acquired multiple meanings in common usage, depending on the domain of discourse within which it occurs. The word "sustainability", therefore, can be viewed as a "floating signifier" (Laclau and Mouffe 2001) whose signified is non-fixed since the fixation of its meaning depends considerably on the context of occurrence within a given discourse. To limit ourselves to a few examples only, in biology sustainability refers mainly to the protection of biodiversity, in economics to environmentally and socially responsible growth, in sociology to social justice, equity, and inclusion, while, in the field of culture, it involves, primarily, the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage, diversity, and identity. A widely accepted conceptualization of the term is based on three interconnected "pillars": economic, social, and environmental (Pope *et al*. 2004; Schoolman *et al*. 2012). Although the "three-pillar" definition has gained traction in much literature, the term "sustainability" is still "an open concept with myriad interpretations and context-specific understanding" (Purvis *et a*l. 2019: 681).

In an attempt to make sense of this floating signifier, the present contribution seeks to explore the semantics of sustainability within the specific discourse domain of tourism, where it is largely addressed and exploited for promotional purposes. The United Nations World Tourism Organization defines sustainable tourism as: "Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities"[1]. According to Booking.com's 2022 Sustainable Travel report,[2] almost three-quarters (71%) of the prospective tourists they consulted expressed a desire to travel more sustainably over the following twelve months. Considering the key role played by sustainability as a determining factor in the choice of a tourist destination, many countries' institutional websites include a section dealing with sustainable travel. Drawing on quantitative and qualitative analysis, this study investigates the semio-linguistic mechanisms through which a locality aims to build up an image of itself as a sustainable destination. It also seeks to outline the profile of the potential tourist[3] inscribed in the texts under consideration.

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[1] https://www.unwto.org/EU-guidebook-on-sustainable-tourism-for-development.
[2] Downloadable at
https://globalnews.booking.com/download/1161485/booking.comsustainabletravelreport2022final.pdf
[3] Although words like "tourist", "traveller" and "visitor" convey different nuances of meaning, in this study they are considered synonymous.

Corpus and Methodology

In 2023, the global market research company Euromonitor International developed a Sustainable Travel Index[4] identifying the world's leading destinations based on their approach to sustainable travel and tourism. According to this report, twenty European countries topped the list as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: The top sustainable destinations

1	Sweden	6	Slovakia	11	Switzerland	16	Germany
2	Finland	7	Iceland	12	Lithuania	17	Belgium
3	Austria	8	Latvia	13	Croatia	18	Denmark
4	Estonia	9	France	14	Czech Republic	19	Netherlands
5	Norway	10	Slovenia	15	Ireland	20	Portugal

Except Slovakia, all the countries mentioned in Table 1 present a dedicated "sustainable travel" or similar section on their promotional websites. The written texts included in all these sections were downloaded and cleansed of unnecessary material, like links to other webpages or repetitive phrases such as "read more" etc., before being included in a corpus and then subjected to semio-linguistic analysis. The details of the corpus are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Corpus details

Time span	December 2022 – January 2023
Documents[5]	19
Tokens	118,910
Words	105,133
Sentences	5,129

To explore the mechanisms using which promotors of localities aim to convey images of these destinations as sustainable, it may be useful to seek semantic invariants, that is, to grasp the plurality of redundant meanings found both at a syntagmatic level, i.e. in web pages devoted to a single destination, and at a paradigmatic level, that is, in the entire corpus. This process of semanticization occurs through a reiteration of meanings along the chain of discourse in such a way as to create semantic domains that ensure a "uniform" reading of the discourse regarding a sustainable tourist destination that is

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[4] Downloadable at https://go.euromonitor.com/white-paper_Travel-and-Tourism-21-03-12_Top-Countries-for-Sustainable-Tourism.html?utm_source=blog&utm_medium=blog&utm_campaign=CT_SB_21_03_12_Sustainable_Travel_Index and at https://www.themayor.eu/en/a/view/sustainable-travel-index-european-countries-rank-highest-7416.

[5] By "documents" here we mean sections from the countries' tourist websites devoted to "sustainability". All the links are provided at the end of this work's reference section. Slovakia does not present a specific section devoted to sustainability and, therefore, is not included in the corpus.

invested with values believed to attract visitors. In semiotics, the recurrence in a text of semes belonging to the same semantic domains is usually referred to as "isotopy", a phenomenon "which guarantees the semantic cohesion and the homogeneity of a discourse" (Bertrand 2002: 118).[6]

To substantiate the analysis with quantitative data, I opted for the UCREL Semantic Analysis System (USAS), one of the tools of the WMatrix4 package (Rayson 2008). This software has the advantage of assigning a semantic domain tag to words that share a common semantic property and are "connected at some level of generality with the same mental concept" (Archer *et al*. 2002).

The semantic domains presenting a frequency within the corpus significantly higher than that of the reference corpus (in this case the BNC Written Sampler)[7] are key semantic domains deemed to be reliable indicators of the prominent topics dealt with in the texts under investigation. The significance threshold was set at a log-likelihood-score of >15.13, meaning that a semantic domain occurs at a statistically significantly different frequency in my corpus compared to the BNC Written Sampler, at p <.0001.

The semio-linguistic analysis carried out here is based on the Greimasian narrative structure (Greimas 1966, 1970; Greimas and Courtés 2007) which underlines any kind of story. According to this storytelling model, an Enunciator[8] tells an Enunciatee the story of a Subject who strives to conjoin with (or disjoin from) an Object of Value. In this attempt, the Subject carries out a series of actions that constitute the Narrative Programme. This follows a recurring structure called Canonical Narrative Scheme which includes four narrative phases: Manipulation, Competence, Performance and Sanction. During the Manipulation phase, the Subject is convinced ("manipulated" in semiotic language) to undertake a series of actions to achieve a goal represented by the Object of Value. The Competence phase requires the Subject to acquire the competences indispensable to carry out the actions s/he needs to undertake. The Performance consists in the actual realisation of these actions, while the Sanction has to do with evaluating whether the actions have truly achieved the established goal. Although the phases of the Narrative Scheme are virtually present at the deep level of any kind of story, not all of them are necessarily actualised and, more importantly, they can be linguistically realised in various ways.

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[6] My translation.

[7] The BNC Written Sampler is a one-million-word sample of written British English as collected for the British National Corpus.

[8] Here and elsewhere, the terms referring to Greimas's narrative semiotics are written in capital letters because they correspond to technical terms, namely to actants in the narrative schema.

Another useful theoretical tool employed to explore the semiotic construction of a sustainable destination is that of "space" as a terrain of syntagmatic transformation that moulds the physiognomy of those who experience it. As de Certeau (2005: 176) puts it, "Space is a crossroads of moving beings. It is somehow animated by the set of movements that take place there".[9]

The examples discussed in the following analysis are chosen to best represent how the promotors of destinations entrust discourse with the task of creating meanings capable of influencing tourists' perceptions and choices.

Results and analysis

The present study, which is part of a broader project dealing with the conceptualization of sustainability in different fields, takes into consideration four of the ten key semantic domains (Table 3) that surfaced during the investigation: "Green issues", "Vehicles and transport", "Food", and "Moving, coming, going".

Table 3: The top ten key semantic domains[10]

Item	O1	%1	O2	%2		LL	LogRatio	
W5	656	0.65	225	0.02	+	2141.31	4.81	Green issues
W3	1581	1.57	3466	0.36	+	1877.47	2.13	Geographical terms
M3 land	1214	1.20	2171	0.22	+	1744.73	2.42	Vehicles and transport on
F1	1251	1.24	2974	0.31	+	1363.33	2.01	Food
M7	1733	1.72	5888	0.61	+	1178.91	1.50	Places
M1	2198	2.18	10157	1.05	+	822.77	1.06	Moving, coming and going
T2	790	0.78	2162	0.22	+	729.51	1.81	Time: Beginning
M6	1956	1.94	9859	1.02	+	585.86	0.93	Location and direction
O4.2 Positive	561	0.56	1604	0.17	+	489.66	1.75	Judgement of appearance:
H4	537	0.53	1592	0.16	+	446.50	1.70	Residence

I decided not to include in the scrutiny the two semantic domains of "Geographical terms" and "Places" on the grounds that they are likely to be a mere given when dealing with a specific tourist destination.

To go more deeply into the analysis, a close reading of the results of the tagging procedure was required to pinpoint the most frequently occurring words tagged under each semantic-domain heading regarding the way they may contribute to the conceptualisation of sustainable travel and their exploitation for promotional purposes.

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[9] My translation.

[10] Key: O1 is observed frequency in the corpus compiled for the present study, while O2 is observed frequency in the reference corpus. %1 and %2 values show relative frequencies in the texts. + indicates overuse in O1 relative to O2.

Narrative programmes

The semantic domain that appears most frequently in the corpus is "Green issues" (Table 3 above) and this contributes significantly to the delineation of the "field of discourse" (Halliday and Matthiessen 2007). This may be no surprise given that the topic covered by the texts under examination deals with eco-friendly travel. As Table 4 below shows, this semantic domain includes words such as *nature*, *environment*, *ecological* employed to convey the contents and purposes of sustainable tourism:

Table 4: The semantic domain of "Green issues"

Word	Semtag	Frequency	Relative Frequency
nature	W5	310	0.31
environment	W5	96	0.10
environmental	W5	69	0.07
environmentally_friendly	W5	38	0.04
Eco	W5	32	0.03
ecological	W5	28	0.03
conservation	W5	22	0.02
environmentally	W5	15	0.01
ecology	W5	10	0.01
ecologically	W5	8	0.01
ecosystem	W5	7	0.01
ecosystems	W5	4	0.00
pollution	W5	3	0.00
nature_lovers	W5	3	0.00
polluting	W5	3	0.00
conservationists	W5	2	0.00
environments	W5	2	0.00
greening	W5	1	0.00
ecology_courses	W5	1	0.00
conservationist	W5	1	0.00
nature_lover	W5	1	0.00

The discourse contained in the websites under investigation presents the Basic Narrative Programme whose final success, or to put it in semiotic terms, the Performance phase, consists in the conjunction of a Subject, the potential tourist, with a Valuable Object, the place to be visited, or the full enjoyment of a place by travellers [*intense* (1), *memories for life in* (4)] determined to have the least possible impact on the environment and achieve the maximum reduction of the traces of their presence:

1. It's basically the counterpoint to mass tourism. When you travel slower, not only do you relax more, you get to know the local culture better, and your experiences and memories are simply more *intense*.

Moreover, you'll *eliminate the negative impacts* of travel and your ecological *footprint* (Czech Republic).[11]

2. This page brings together green companies that consider the principles of environmental protection and sustainable tourism in their daily activities. You *will* find companies offering green accommodation, seminar services and active holidays, as well as organic farms. Even when actively resting, you can choose *a responsible entrepreneur* in favor of services and activities that have *a lower impact* on nature (Estonia).

3. With some of the cleanest air in the world and over half of the landscape forested, sustainable travel is part of the Estonian ethos. Every year, Green Traveler highlights places worth visiting because *they care* about the environment and *strive* to *reduce their ecological footprint*. This year, the following places in Estonia were *recognized as the top destinations for sustainable tourism* (Estonia).

4. If you're eager to experience a unique destination that can give you *memories for life*, visit places in Norway that are labelled by the Sustainable Destination scheme. These destinations have c*ommitted* to *work systematically* towards a more sustainable tourism development, preserving local communities and cultural heritage, and *reducing the environmental footprint* from tourism (Norway).

This type of discourse takes place in a state of communicative felicitousness since the Enunciator addresses an Enunciatee who has almost certainly activated the frames deemed necessary for the transmission of a certain type of information and is likely to have delved more deeply into the text dedicated to sustainability. Notwithstanding this, the Enunciator constructs the text using a series of statements aimed at informing but also at manipulating the Enunciatee, by producing a credible interpretative vision, a model of life to which to adhere. "Manipulation" in semiotics is not negative in connotation but means convincing someone to do something. As the above examples (1-4) illustrate, the Enunciator displays great confidence in what is asserted. This is linguistically conveyed through the present tense of certainty and the exploitation of a dynamic modality, which covers volition and ability (Palmer 1990). The modal operator *will* (2) conveys both a sense of futurity and commitment to the implementation of the conditions promised. To this end, the lexis is carefully chosen to delineate an Enunciator that may be trusted thanks to a strong degree of both commitment [*a responsible entrepreneur* (2), *they care*/*strive* (3), *committed*/*work systematically* (4)] and public recognition [*recognized as the top destinations* (*3*)]. What stands out here is the linguistic

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[11] The italics in this and all the other examples is mine.

expression of the final step of the Basic Narrative Programme, the semiotic Sanction, which is conveyed through the terms *impact* (1-2) and *footprint* [(1) and (3-4)]. The Performance will be positively sanctioned by the recipient of the communication if the conjunction with the Object of Value leads to the cancellation [*eliminate the negative impacts…footprint* (1)]; , or the maximum reduction of the traveller's presence [*a lower impact* (2); *reduce their ecological footprint* (3); *reducing the environmental footprint* (4)] in order to preserve local communities, their cultural heritage, and the environment so that future generations will still have the chance to experience them.

The construction of space

As already stated, meaning is organized narratively, that is, as the transformation of a Subject separated from an Object of Value to which s/he wishes to be joined. Narration cannot occur in a condition of complete stasis, that is, in the absence of change. As Violi points out, "The very scheme of narrativity, which implies an initial state, its modification, and a final state, is nothing but an expansion of the 'modification scheme'" (1996: 100).[12] The pragmatic dimension of the narrative manifests itself in a series of operations, or Narrative Programmes of Use, which are functional to the achievement of the Basic Narrative Programme. As the Subject progressively joins the Object of Value, s/he undergoes modification. This experience of change is mainly linked to the perception of a body that inhabits a space, moves within, and passes through it. To construct a narrative space, the Enunciator selects a series of verbs typically attributable to the semantic domain labelled "Moving, coming, going" (Table 5):

Table 5: The semantic domain of "Moving, coming, going"

Word	Semtag	Frequency	Relative Frequency
travel	M1	197	0.20
explore	M1	89	0.09
go	M1	88	0.09
walk	M1	77	0.08
trip	M1	74	0.07
walking	M1	57	0.06
hiking	M1	52	0.05
journey	M1	49	0.05
tour	M1	44	0.04
access	M1	43	0.04
travelling	M1	41	0.04
tourist	M1	38	0.04
walks	M1	35	0.03
explorin	M1	32	0.03
get	M1	32	0.03
run	M1	31	0.03

[12] My translation.

tourists	M1	27	0.03
leave	M1	27	0.03
tours	M1	27	0.03
reach	M1	24	0.02
mobility	M1	23	0.02
hike	M1	22	0.02
stroll	M1	21	0.02
follow	M1	19	0.02
going	M1	19	0.02
come	M1	18	0.02
roam	M1	18	0.02

As the discourse unfolds, verbal processes such as "walk", "hike through", "poke around" (5), or "wander", "stroll" (6), or "hike", "traverse" (7) which include in their semantic potential the component of a "change of position", reiterate the semes "move" and "route".

1. Simply by visiting Estonia, you've already gone off the beaten path. But once you're here, it's easy to lose track of time and spend days *walking* deserted beaches, *hiking through* untouched forests with only the birds for company, or *poking around* quaint villages without another tourist in sight (Estonia).

2. *Wander* through tranquil and scenic landscapes in Derrycassin Woods in Longford on any of the three amazing walks ranging from 1.2km to 3.2km long. Perched on the edge of Lough Gowna, the trails in Derrycassin Woods have over 20 varieties of tree species making it a fantastic place to *immerse yourself* in nature. *Stroll* under canopies of red cedar, oak and ash as squirrels and birds scurry through the branches above (Ireland).

3. A sustainable tour around Estonia gives you the chance to experience nature *up close*. *Hike* through the expansive forests or *traverse* the wetlands with bog-shoes. (Estonia).

As Violi observes, "within the verbal category as a whole, motion verbs constitute the typical instance of change which in its first determination is spatial change" (Violi 1996: 86).[13] The lexicalisation of some actions that the destination permits visitors to perform activates a set of perceptual-motor routes that semanticize the place, transforming it into a space experienced by a subject: a series of bodily operations aimed at construing a tourist space and attributing meanings to the destination. More precisely the motion verbs selected succeed in inscribing a sustainable mode of living into the place. They are part of an "enactive" dimension. The term "enaction", equivalent to the verb "enact", literally means "to produce on stage" or "to represent through

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[13] My translation.

action". According to the enactive approach, "our construal of reality is likely to be mediated in large measure by the nature of our bodies" (Evans & Green 2006: 45). Perception is not something that "happens to us" or that happens "within us", it is, rather, something that "we do". In keeping with Greimas, "extension [...] once informed and transformed by man, becomes *space*, that is, *form*, capable (through the fact of its articulations) of serving the purpose of signification" (Greimas 1986: 27). As Bergen (2012) points out, our understanding of language is not only grounded in bodily experience, but we tend to simulate subconsciously what is encoded linguistically. The text prefigures, therefore, a series of actions which provide potential travellers with a "sense" of a tourist space and a foretaste of an embodied experience the sustainable destination promises to provide. The valorisation of how to cross the tourist space implies a direct relationship with the locations and a deep involvement on the part of the traveller in the experience of the places proposed, as explicitly lexicalised in (6) and (7) above (*immerse yourself/up close*).

The value of access to places
　　　　While in other forms of tourism the means of transport are functional to the visit itself, in sustainable tourism they are represented as an added value of which the locality can boast. Therefore, the recurrence of terms related to "Vehicles and transport" within the fabric of the text creates a semantic domain (Table 6) exploited to frame a destination in an environmentally friendly way.

Table 6: The semantic domain of "Vehicles and transport"

Word	Semtag	Frequency	Relative Frequency
cycling	M3	114	0.11
car	M3	78	0.08
train	M3	76	0.08
bike	M3	70	0.07
bus	M3	62	0.06
cycle	M3	53	0.05
public_transport	M3	41	0.04
transport	M3	41	0.04
bicycle	M3	37	0.04
stations	M3	31	0.03
cyclists	M3	29	0.03
railway	M3	26	0.03
path	M3	25	0.02
bikes	M3	23	0.02
roads	M3	22	0.02
cars	M3	21	0.02
bicycles	M3	20	0.02
road	M3	18	0.02
trains	M3	18	0.02
station	M3	17	0.02

A sustainable journey is, therefore, one where the mode of transport used to reach the destination and during the visitor's stay has the lowest possible impact on the environment. The choice of sustainable modes of transport enhances the ecological value of access to places to visit or, semiotically speaking, permits the Subject to acquire the "modal" Competence necessary to implement the Performance. Riding bicycles seems to be the favourite mode of travel to or within the areas visited. Those who may be unfit for or unused to cycling are free to opt for another less hazardous and fatiguing form of sustainable locomotion, like "wandering around":

1. Want to explore the local area? There are bikes available for guests to use, so you can cycle over to Lahinch without getting in the car. But if that seems like a bit too much effort, you can wander around the wildflower garden, or get a cup of fairtrade tea in the bar (Ireland).

Cycling is deemed more eco-friendly than driving, travelling by train more than flying. Although the word "car" occurs very frequently (see Table 6 above), it is typically mentioned as a rule to suggest alternative modes of transport to driving as in(8) above (*without getting in the car*). For longer overland distances, the train remains one of the best solutions to use to begin to explore places, for several reasons (9-10):

2. Swiss train stations are located in the city centres. This is another benefit, as it saves you lots of time compared to air travel. Simply step off the train, store your luggage in a locker, and start exploring (Switzerland).

3. 70 to 80 per cent of the pollutants created through travel arise during arrival and departure. All the more important, then, to start your sustainable holiday by choosing the most environmentally friendly mode of transport. The range of comfortable sleeper trains is constantly increasing, meaning that Switzerland will soon be connected to even more European cities (Switzerland).

In any case, local, or public, transport with *a small ecological footprint* (11) is always preferable even when access to a destination includes alternative and faster modes of travel:

1. Local transport to and around Saaremaa also has a small ecological footprint. The most common way to get to Saaremaa is by ferry, which you can board on foot, with a bicycle, car or even as part of a long-distance bus ticket, though there are direct flights from Tallinn airport (Estonia).

The Food experience

The food experience is another asset to the sustainable destination contributing to the creation of a core of values upon which the promotional discourse relies. The semantic domain of "Vehicles and transport" which functions as a gateway to the meaning of the place is often intertwined with that of "Food":

1. Discover the secrets of Copenhagen's green lifestyle, where local chefs harvest mussels in the city centre harbour, restaurants have *their own farms* and cycling is more than a mode of transport - it's a way of life (Denmark).

Food and the places where it is consumed constitute a privileged point of access that permits visitors to savour the most authentic flavours of a locality. The fact that some restaurants run their *own farms* (12) is beneficial to sustainable tourism and represents a value used to underscore the idea of their location's sustainability even further. The expression *it's a way of life* (12) should have a similar impact on prospective visitors and, though it refers syntactically to locomotion, it also relates obliquely to the traditions and customs, the overall cultural texture of the space to be visited, including the dishes and food typical of the destination. Lexemes like "chef", "restaurants", "vegetables", "cuisine", etc. create the semantic domain of "Food" functional to the immersion of the tourist in the specificity of the place being promoted (Table 7):

Table 7: The semantic domain of "Food"

Word	Semtag	Frequency	Relative Frequency
food	F1	112	0.11
restaurant	F1	64	0.06
restaurants	F1	58	0.06
chef	F1	34	0.03
eat	F1	31	0.03
cuisine	F1	31	0.03
bread	F1	29	0.03
vegetables	F1	26	0.03
cheese	F1	26	0.03
culinary	F1	25	0.02
produce	F1	22	0.02
vegan	F1	21	0.02
chefs	F1	21	0.02
meal	F1	19	0.02
vegetable	F1	18	0.02
gastronomy	F1	17	0.02
eating	F1	16	0.02
menu	F1	15	0.01
fruit	F1	14	0.01
lunch	F1	13	0.01

Food, its production, and consumption, like all the other elements concerning the journey, mentioned above make a significant contribution to the realisation of the Subject's Performance. In this case, too, the presence of the tourist needs to avoid jeopardising the harmonious balance of the places visited. Even when savouring food, visitors should leave a mark as close as possible to zero on the locality:

1. One of the most important pillars of sustainability is the food we eat. Which is why the Lodge at Ashford Castle gets much of their produce from the estate gardens, which provide fruits, vegetables and herbs for both the lodge and the castle. The garden team grows everything using organic methods, and they also make their own compost from kitchen waste, as well as homemade fertilisers for the plants using fermented nettles. They have a seed-saving system and several bee hives on the estate that provide honey for guests (though they only take a small amount, so the bees have enough stored for winter) (Ireland).

When enjoying the honey produced in the hives belonging to Ashford Castle (13), for instance, the amount of ambrosia offered to visitors and taken from the bees who produce it, will not be such as to affect their survival during the winter. This strategic choice prompts the promotors to emphasise this detail as they endeavour to convey the image of Ashford Castle as a sustainable venue.

From the perspective of sustainable tourism, reference to food is never self-referential and an end in itself but assumes a semantic investment firmly anchored in the valorisation of the sustainability of the tourist destination (14-16):

1. Travelling responsibly also means trying out fresh local delicacies. Sample wild berries and the rich taste of slow-growing vegetables. Taste milk, cheese, and meat from sheep, goats, and cattle that freely graze the mountainsides every summer. Catch your own fish or enjoy seafood that has been prepared by renowned chefs (Norway).
2. Enjoy the wonderful atmosphere of the farmers' market and treat yourself to the best! Fresh, seasonal fruits and vegetables, homemade jams, syrups, cakes... We could go on and on. What could be more authentic? (Czech Republic).
3. Sit down for a meal in Aileen's Restaurant or the Ocean Bar, and the ingredients on your plate will likely come from the hotel's Armada Farm just up the road, where they grow much of the produce for the dining rooms. They use local seaweed as a natural fertiliser, and you'll also find it in their own brand of gin (Ireland).

Food is valued as an expression of territorial identity. Whether it be a product of nature or actual dishes resulting from human work and expertise, food always takes on a double semantic investment: on the one hand, the respect for the environment, on the other hand, the valorisation of local authenticity. Examples (14-16) above teem with references to local produce and its production *in situ*, implying that the footprint of these foods is minimal because they are not transported from another location. They are actually Km0 foods. What is highlighted here, although attractive *per se*, is not so much the flavour of food as its ecological characteristic.

The explorer

The construction of the narrative space marches, therefore, hand in hand with the construction of the identity of those who "live" it and experience it. Crucially, what bestows meaning on the destination is not only a set of pragmatic actions inscribed in the text. In actual fact, besides the pragmatic dimension, there are another two levels that traverse the discourse used to present the destination: cognition and feeling. What the discourse construes is, in fact, not only a body that carries out operations but also a body that discovers, knows, and perceives. These three dimensions are lexicalized in various ways.

1. Estonia is a prime location for birdwatching, and its forests are also home to lynxes, wolves, and brown bears, so keep *your* eyes peeled and *your* binoculars ready! (Estonia).
2. How about exploring a new, uncovered side of France? *Meet* passionate chefs who serve seasonal dishes using local ingredients. *Discover* the urban green city. A winemaker who switched to biodynamic farming. A myriad of itineraries that promote soft mobility. Accommodations that take an eco-friendly and supportive approach. There are a thousand and one ways to travel sustainably in France, as well as simply going out of season, while respecting the inhabitants and the environment (France).

The Enunciatee is discursively present in the possessive *your* (17) and implied in the frequent use of the imperative mode with the illocutionary value of invitation [*keep* (17); *meet*/*discover* (18)]. However, even where the Enunciatee is not explicitly present, we can detect traces of her/his presence in how the space is utilised to provide information regarding her/his physiognomy inscribed in the enjoyment of the visit. We have seen that motion verbs denote a route intended as movement across the space of the destination, but they also imply an implicit temporality that specifies the pace of the traveller's visit. The Narrative Programmes of Use indicated by the verbal processes all seem to be an expansion of the frequently occurring verb

"explore" meant as "travel to or around an area or a country in order to learn about it [or] to feel something with your hands or another part of the body" (Hornby: 537). Verbs like *meet* and *discover* (18) can be seen as subsets (or "sub-regions" in cognitive terms) of "explore". All these verbal processes are a sort of "instructions for use" regarding the places being promoted. The potential tourist is an ecologically-sensitive traveller who is part of the ecosystem, a traveller who loves getting lost in the specificity of the places visited. The traveller follows the leisurely pace of a walk, a stroll or a hike or that of the iterative rhythm of cycling, without being advised to pay attention to predefined attractions, as s/he travels along a route inscribed in the topography of the place which is, at the same time, modulable according to the physical and psychological disposition of the visitor.

The aesthete

Sustainable travel enhances access to places to visit both on cognitive and sensorial grounds.

1. Through sustainable tourism, you can travel through Croatia in an environmentally friendly way that has as little impact on the environment as possible. Sailing the Adriatic, engaging on a cycling tour of Međimurje, riding on horse back through the wide Slavonian plains, hiking the Istrian vineyards or hiking Velebit will *allow* you to *experience the harmony* of man and the luxurious nature, while *learning* about local customs and tasting organically grown food will give you a spectacular vacation in a green way (Croatia).

In (19) the modes of transport permit (*allow*) a knowledge of places (*learning*) and of the people who live there but they also invite potential tourists to savour local products (*tasting*) and feel part they are at one with nature (*experience the harmony*). Notice also how grammar is central to cognition and influences "the way we perceive and understand the world" (Langacker 2013: 3-4). The use of the *-ing* forms underlines the process of total involvement of the potential tourist in a kaleidoscope of actions and perceptions that establish her/his adaptation to the physiognomy of the places visited. The multiple presence of participles invokes a special kind of viewing technique, namely that of "summary scanning". This is a strategy that imposes on the Enunciatee the impression that all the individual processes are occurring at the same time, thus creating a single holistic entity or, as Langacker puts it, "a single Gestalt" (2008: 111). This mode of "visualising a scene" highlights an intimate relationship between the visitors and the places visited, a deep, full immersion into the surrounding environment, an all-encompassing experience that is pragmatic, cognitive but also sensorial. Space is inhabited, crossed, and experienced by a sentient body, as in (20):

1. You'll benefit from the healing powers of nature even if you just sit on a rock and breathe in the pine-infused air. It's a most sustainable way to enjoy nature with all your senses. Listen to the wind in the trees, discover the scent of moss, and watch the sun's rays move slowly over rocks, stones and water. You might even refuel with a handful of blueberries that thrive here in late summer – Mother Nature's pantry is free for all to enjoy in Sweden (Sweden).

When these perceptive stimuli strike the subject, his/her relationship with places undergoes a transformation, a "sea change" as it were, which leads him/her to enter into a state of intimacy with the place visited. The identity of the potential tourist is also outlined in terms of pathos, based on the sensations and emotions that he/she is invited to experience bodily. A tourist is, therefore, very much akin to the type of traveller whom Landowski calls an "esthete", that is, a traveller who is animated by the hope "of testing himself her/his sensitive relationship with a different world [...]. By simply passing through, s/he will not disturb anything or anyone; s/he will not change the order of things - not even the order of meaning. S/he will not destroy anything and remake it to her/his liking" (Landowski 1996: 73).[14] But sustainable travellers are also "aesthetes" in the etymological sense. "Aesthete" is a derivation from the Greek substantive "aisthētēs", meaning a person capable of perceiving things through the senses and referred to the verb "aisthanesthai", meaning "to perceive" (through the senses or by the mind), "to feel". All told, the text semiotically construes the prefiguration of an all-encompassing experience of the tourist space that affects the traveller's entire sensorial system.

Discussion

Potential sustainable travellers do not look so much for "logo monuments", i.e. those elements, plastic or figurative, that create the visual identity of a place (Pezzini 2006), as for ways of experiencing tourist spaces authentically and intensely, seeking mainly "utopian values" (Floch 1990) in a destination. To better understand the semiotic construction of the value of a sustainable destination, it may be useful to resort to a scheme used in semiotics with particular reference to consumption and advertising. This is the semiotic square, namely a heuristic tool used by Floch (1990) to define ways of valorising advertising:
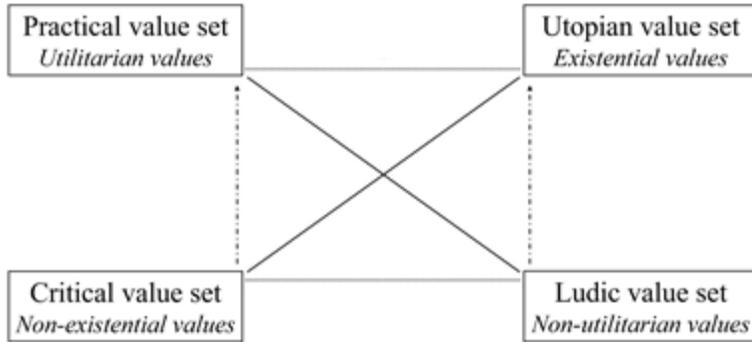
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[14] My translation.

Figure 1: Floch's semiotic square of value sets in advertising

While the Practical value set includes utilitarian values such as comfort, the contrary Utopian value set focuses on existential values such as identity, life, and adventure. On the opposite side, the Critical value set relates to values such as good quality at a cheap price, while the Ludic value set deals with fun, luxury, and refinement. The results analysed above show that the set of values that come into play in the presentation and promotion of sustainable tourism is oriented, mainly, towards a utopian dimension. These are utopian values as intended by Floch, meaning expectations that are not illusory but ideals like authenticity, discovery, contact with local communities, and harmony with the environment. These values are assumed by the Enunciator who disseminates them within her/his discourse, inscribing them within the destination s/he aspires to present as sustainable.

From this orientation of value arise both the physiognomy of the Enunciator and that of the Enunciate, namely the textual figure of the potential tourist, who acquires her/his own identity derived from the time and duration of her/his stay, the pace of the visit, the purpose of the journey, the modality of presence, the relationship established with the places visited, and the patterns of behaviour suggested. The promotional discourse shifts its attention to the Subject-tourist who, by joining with the Object-destination, aims to realize her/his own profound identity by impregnation, that is, by adapting to the specific dimension of the place visited, immersing her/himself in the space-time of a destination to the point of establishing a harmonious relationship with what surrounds her/him by reducing the traces of her/his presence to a minimum and enhancing a series of anonymous elements of the natural and human landscape, such as the routes and how the destination is reached and "used".

In other forms of tourism, promotional discourse magnifies details and minimizes the totality and so, a key element (a church, a castle, etc.) of a location becomes, by synecdoche, the symbol, or marker, of a much larger space. This way, the overall meaning of a destination comes to coincide with

a single element of a place, a *marker*, that ends up embodying the entire identity of the destination (Brucculeri 2009; Pezzini 2006). On the contrary, travelling sustainably means enjoying an all-encompassing experience or maximizing the totality of which the tourists endeavour to feel a part through their own cognitive, experiential and somatic transformation. Still in the wake of De Certeau (2005), we can say that the sustainable tourist space is no mere aseptic set of points represented on a map but a pathway of transformation of the subject using the kinaesthetic and aesthetic apprehension of the places visited. In keeping with Landowski, we can state that the sustainable destination constructs its meaning through a narrative modality based on the logic of "acclimatization". Far from taming, dominating or moulding a place to her/his own likeness, the sustainable tourist:

> will learn to discover himself as partially other by letting himself be taken over by a new form of self-presence, of which the place will little by little provide him with the points of crystallisation [...]. Visitor for principle respectful of the balances that underpin the specificity of a place or a foreign environment, he rejects the idea of disturbing them with its presence or action. He knows, the landscapes he admires, just like social spaces, each distils their own peculiar temporality for those who know how to 'read' them: look, listen; therefore nowhere would he want to risk intervening inappropriately (Landowski 1996: 75).[15]

Conclusion

The semio-linguistic analysis conducted here attempted to find, beneath the apparent diversity of the discursive surface of the promotional webpages analysed, a series of narrative constants and valorisation strategies that express the concept of sustainable tourism appealingly. The identification of the most frequent semantic domains permitted us to select and render pertinent some of the most relevant aspects of destinations upon which the promotional discourse of sustainability is based, as expressed in the promises made regarding the reduction to a minimum of the traces left behind by visitors after their departure.

The value core assumed by the Enunciator and moulded into a narrative form involves a spatial arrangement that foresees the fruition mode which the Enunciatee, summoned into the narration, may choose. Places are continually rendered dynamic by the Subject who immerses her/himself into them and who, by doing so, endows them with meaning and value. Crossing a tourist space changes the Subject, redefines her/his profile, and, therefore,

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[15] My translation.

her/his sense of self. The act of moving through these locations has existential consequences, transforming the identity of travellers and reshaping their understanding of the environment they explore

A notable finding is the recurring use of semantic fields such as Green Issues and Vehicles and Transport, which reflect a clear intention to present destinations not only as eco-friendly but also as accessible through environmentally sustainable means, such as cycling or public transport. Frequent references to reducing environmental impact and promoting green activities underscore the effort to align tourist behaviour with ecological responsibility. The emphasis on locally sourced food and sustainable experiences reinforces the idea that sustainability is not merely a marketing tool, but a core value embedded within the overall tourist offering.

In essence, sustainable tourism is fuelled by a paradox: on the one hand, it involves pragmatic, cognitive and sensorial adherence to the places visited, on the other hand, it is oxymoronic in that it implies a traceless form of contact, which is humanly impossible.

Declarations:

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